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## **Time, Space and the Self in Petrarch's Narration of Conversion**

**Coordinator:** Prof. Rocco Coronato

**Supervisor:** Prof. Guido Baldassarri

**Ph.D. student :** Bili Zhong

## **Abstract**

The work detailed in this thesis stems from one specific question: why could Petrarch never accomplish his conversion like Augustine and Dante? The research aims to shed light on the conflicts and contradictions between the narrative self and the real self, between micro-history and macro-history, regarding the problem of existence of the self in time and space. Meanwhile, it projects a new set of inquiries relating to Petrarch's consciousness and his philosophy of time based on the understanding of the Christian historiography and his concept of individualism. The hypothesis is that the irreparable rupture sensed by Petrarch between the Medieval-Christian historiography and the private history of self leads to a new outlook on selfhood. The Medieval-Christian historiography highlights a human history with a transcendental purpose accompanied by a progressive, linear timetable and development, while Petrarch viewed life as something circular, consisting in aimlessness and discursion. Not only cyclical, time for Petrarch is scattered and discursive, refusing to follow a linear progress.

To explain Petrarch's failure at his own conversion, previous studies have intended to give answers from the perspectives of linguistics, history or literature. They understand Petrarch in an atmosphere favoring the interpretation of Renaissance humanism as a culture with a deep affinity to rhetoric. Therefore, they fail to offer a philosophical interpretation to Petrarch's intentional failure to convert. Stepping out from the "rhetorical" and "literary" viewpoints, this thesis will focus on (1) the contradictions between Petrarch's consciousness of time and time in Augustinian conversion; (2) his awareness of languages, concerning the problem of existence of the

self in time and space, that raises severe challenges concerning any and all literary representations of the self. To scrutinize both points will eventually bring us to a concern at stake: the relationship between narration of self and individual existence. It is found that Petrarch's suspects on the nature of language and his acknowledging of the crisis of meaning have threatened his authorship and confidence on the autobiographic project.

Moreover, this thesis, through the comparative study of the works of Petrarch, Augustine and Dante, will give a new outlook on the research on (1) the problem of individual existence that anticipates the future phenomenology and deconstructionism. (2) the evolution and transformations of fabric of the self in the manner of narrative from the Augustinian conversion to the new humanistic discourse. Through my research on Petrarch's philosophical thinking on matters of time, space and the self, I argue that Petrarch's failure to convert is actually an attempt to create a new narrative self in the field of autobiographic writings that can reflect on one hand the flexibility of personality in the Renaissance; on the other hand the multi-dimensioned image of a new epoch. Thus, the examination of the failures, besides offering a deeper understanding of Petrarch's rhetorical strategies and literary enterprises in establishing the self, invites a broader re-valuation of the philosophical nature of humanism in early Renaissance.

## Sommario

Il lavoro dettagliato nella questa tesi si devira da una questione specificale: perché Petrarca non mai poteva realizzare la sua conversione come Santo Agostino e Dante? La ricerca si rivolge a gettare luce sui conflitti e contraddizioni fra il sé narrativo e il sé reale, fra la micro-storia e la macro-storia, rispetto al problema dell'esistenza dell'io nel tempo e nello spazio. Al frattempo, la tesi progetta una nuova seria delle indagini rispetto alla coscienza di Petrarca e la sua filosofia del tempo is basa sulla conoscenza della storiografia cristiana e della sua concetta di individualismo. L'ipotesi è che l'indagine sulla rottura irreparabile fra la storiografia medievale-cristiana e la storia privata del sé in Petrarca può portare delle nuove prospettive all'egoismo. La storiografia medievale-cristiana mette in evidenza una storia umana con uno scopo trascendentale, che è caratterizzato da uno sviluppo progressivo e lineare; tuttavia, Petrarca considerava la vita un processo circolare, si sviluppando in discorsione ed è perciò priva di alcuno scopo. Per Petrarca, il tempo è non solo ciclico, ma sparso e discorsivo, rifiutando a seguire il processo lineare.

Per spiegare il fallimento della sua conversione di Petrarca, gli studi precedenti si hanno rivolto i suoi argomenti dalle prospettive linguistiche, storiche e letterare. Essi hanno messo le sue risposte in una atmosfera favorendo l'interpretazione che l'umanismo Rinascimento è una cultura fondata profondemente sulla retorica. Dunque, non riescono in dare una interpretazione filosofica che è in grado di spiegare il fallimento intenzionale della conversione di Petrarca. Scostandosi dai pareri retorici e letterari, la tesi si concentra : (1) sulle contraddizioni tra la consapevolezza del tempo di

Petrarca e la concezione del tempo nei *Confessioni* di Agostino; (2) sulla sua consapevolezza della lingua umana rispetto al problema che rivela l'esistenza di sé nel tempo e nello spazio, che sfida severamente tutte le scritture autobiografiche precedenti. Il scrutinio dei entrambi i punti ci porterà eventualmente ad un'interesse centrale: la relazione fra la narrazione di sé e l'esistenza individuale. È trovato che sia i dubbi di Petrarca sulla natura della lingua umana che la sua conoscenza della crisi di significazione hanno minacciato la sua autorialità e smorzato la sua confidenza nel progetto autobiografico.

Inoltre, la tesi, attraverso gli studi comparativi dei lavori di Petrarca, Agostino e Dante, darà una nuova prospettiva alla ricerca. Da una parte, lo studio passerà dal problema dell'esistenza individuale all'anticipazione del futuro fenomenologia e del decostruzionismo; Dall'altra parte, lo studio dilineerà l'evoluzione e la trasformazione della composizione di sé nel modo di narrazione, tracciando la storia dalla conversione Agostiniana al nuovo discorso umanistico. Attraverso la ricerca sui pensieri filosofici di Petrarca che si concentrano le meditazioni del sé, del tempo e dello spazio, ritengo che il fallimento della conversione di Petrarca è, di fatto, il tentativo dell'autore di creare un nuovo sé narrativo nel campo della scrittura autobiografica che può riflettere, da un lato, la flessibilità della personalità in Rinascimento; dall'altro, l'immagine multi-dimensionali dell'io nel nuovo conteso sociale e culturale. Perciò, l'investigazione sul fallimento, oltre a fornire una comprensione di sé più profonda in Petrarca costruita dalle strategie retoriche e fondata sulla sua impresa letteraria, richiede una rivalutazione più ampia della natura dell'umanesimo nel modo filosofico nel primo Rinascimento.

## List of Abbreviations

<i>Can.</i>	<i>Canzoniere</i>
<i>Conf.</i>	<i>Confessions</i>
<i>Fam.</i>	<i>Le Familiari</i>
<i>Inf.</i>	<i>Inferno</i>
<i>Purg.</i>	<i>Purgatorio</i>
<i>Par.</i>	<i>Paradiso</i>
<i>TE</i>	<i>Trionfi Eternità</i>
<i>Sec.</i>	<i>Secretum</i>

# **Time, Space and the Self in Petrarch's Narration of Conversion**

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# Introduction

The words like time, space, self and narration as they appear in my title, and as the core of my readings of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, *Le Familiari* and *Secretum*, requires some explanation. "Time" is the main topic of this thesis, and the role of "Space" in this study is more like a foil to time, a significant companion that helps to clarify the other main topic of the thesis, the "Self" and its evolution in the narrative.

When I was probing over books of studies on Petrarch, one particular passage caught my eyes:

A Padova, la città dove vivo e insegno, mi accade da molti anni di passare ogni giorno per necessità topografica sotto l'arco che separa la municipale piazza Capitaniato dalla veneziana piazza dei Signori, e di alzare gli occhi sul bellissimo orologio il cui meccanismo orario, planetario e zodiacale, è ormai immobile, con l'unica grande lancetta che percorreva un solo giro di ventiquattr'ore, mentre i minuti e le ore scattano modernamente entro finestrelle, marginali come nei moderni orology numerici che in inglese si chiamano *digital clocks*. Quell'orologio mi attira e suscita sempre qualche riflessione.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gianfranco Folena, "L'orologio del Petrarca", in *Textus testis: lingua e cultura poetica delle origini*, Bollati Boringhieri, 2002, p. 266.

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## **Fragmental “I” in Time and Space**

This passage was written when the venerable Professor G. Folena discussed the fleeting sentiments in Petrarch: the delicate, beautiful mechanical structure of the great clock built on the arch drew him into thinking about the problem of redefinition of time, which is not surprising as the 13th Century was the era that first witnessed the earliest appearance of mechanical clocks. They were seen on the bell towers and in the main squares of cities across the lands of Europe: Milan, Paris, Padua, Bologna, Florence just to name a few. Since the initial appearance of mechanical clocks, the experience of time has been gradually and entirely changed: the time of the church has been slowly substituted by the time regulated by machine. Everyone equally has 24 hours per day, 60 minutes per hour, and 60 seconds per minute, and every partial measure of time is equal and the same. Such change, while providing a new way to measure time, has, according to Professor Folena, stirred up people's minds and challenged traditional costumes. I cannot imagine a sensitive person like Petrarch would fail to notice such stunning phenomena; in fact, he could not have missed it since one of his closest friends, Giovanni Dondi, is a pioneer of clock design and construction. A picture comes up to my mind: Petrarch, hearing the sound of the clock signifying the passing of hours,

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<sup>2</sup> Gianfranco Folena, "L'orologio del Petrarca", in *Textus testis: lingua e cultura poetica delle origini*, Bollati Boringhieri, 2002, p. 266.

meditated upon the irreversible fleeting of time and wrote: “I feel that each day, each hour, and each minute propels me towards the end; each day I proceed toward death, indeed.”<sup>3</sup> (*Fam.* XXIV, 1) His sentiment and complicated emotions about time, which are configured as anxiety about identity and self-existence — the desire for fame, the sense of fragments, the great concerns about life and death, and the attention to the city of Rome — reveal Petrarch’s consciousness of how the self is established, recognized and articulated through time and space in the form of narrativity.

The Petrarchan time, unprecedentedly, is scattered, divided and made marginal, which may be reinforced by the invention of mechanical clock. Through the scattered time, Petrarch sees himself: “time’s ruptured dimensions are internalized within the self, and they are even identified as the constitutive, broken pieces of self.”<sup>4</sup>, writes Mazzotta in his analysis of Petrarch’s poetics. Indeed, the discussion of the problem of time is inseparable from the discussion of the Petrarchan self and from the concern of self-existence. Realizing the fleeting nature of the world, men are driven to, like Francis of the *Secretum*, meditate upon the death, striving after something *eternal* and *unmoved*. Temporal and spatial confines are dominating symbols of men’s mortality, and are configured as the living experiences of men, who live with and live in time and space. However, a force of “scatterment”, which empowers emotions such as the demystification of ontology, the sentiment of detachment and of indifference, the shiftiness of self, and the sense of homelessness, starts to erupt the beginning of the so-called modern society. The anguish generated from the heaviness of individual existence—that one must be responsible all for his own and for the whole world—symbolizes the universal sentiment of modern people. Petrarch, being labeled as the first modern man, displays all these emotions in his letters of *Familiari* and *Senili*, and in his poetry of *Rime Sparse*, *Trionfi* and *Africa*. His spirit ambiguously haunts in the works of Proust, Joyce, Kafka, Hölderlin and the thoughts of Heidegger, Foucault,

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<sup>3</sup> The English version of *Familiari* is from Francis Petrarca, *Letters on Familiar Matters*, trans. by Aldo S. Bernardo, Italica Press, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch*, Duke University Press, 1993, p.20.

Derrida and Paul de Man. Here, conversion bears a significant meaning for those who face the “anxiety of existence”. The most prominent characteristics of conversion is that it, based on a breaking point of turning, pre-supposes an advancing process of intellectual and spiritual development in men. It takes credit in the belief that man, through his bittersweet endeavor to accomplish conversion, can reach a status of transcendence that is higher than his mortality. Such transcendental achievement is of extreme importance because it directly addresses the anxieties and pressure brought by individual existence.

Inspired by the works of John Freccero, Robert Durling, Thomas Greene, Albert Russell Ascoli, *etc.*, this dissertation attempts to shed light on various aspects of Petrarch’s portrayal and recognition of self in a manner of narrative and the crisis of narration of the self in Medieval allegory. Our author collects all his life experiences, articulating them into words and books that build up the narrative “I”s that overcomes time and space. However, his ambition to create a “self” immune from time and history is, from time to time, frustrated by his ironic awareness of the finiteness and limitations of human language, as well as by his profound realization that every individual, including him, must live within time’s inexorable devastations and takes on the journey toward death. In the age when Petrarch was living, the burgeoning of commerce provides the religious-dominating society with economic developments, a more solid affirmation on the status of laymen, and of course, a new lifestyle based on the new regulation of time.<sup>5</sup> Our modern motto “Time is money” can be traced back to these changes. Both the increasingly heating of the trading atmosphere and the emergence of

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<sup>5</sup> The changes of the society brought by economy and trading have greatly influenced people’s life, their view of death and the status of church, which have been argued strongly by Charles Trinkaus. In his article “Petrarch’s Views on the Individual and His Society”, he said: “Death was therefore a competing ‘reality with the absorbing realities of commodity production, commerce, exchange, finance, political intrigue, office-seeking and war.”(p.173) “As the Church stands as guardian to the entrance to the next world it loses interest in its goals of moral reform in this life...they are...more a mechanized alternative to the increasingly mechanized social world of rewards and punishments, profit and loss.”(p.174) “Now freedom of choice in settling one’s goal is seen as narrowed down and even cancelled out by the bonds of habit and by the economic compulsions that link the individual to society.”(p.176), from *Osiris*, vol.11, 1975, pp.168-198.

the mechanical clock bring profound influences on people's view of life and death: People started to pay attention to economic efficiency, and they were paid according to the now regulated working hours. The fleeting of time ages people, bringing them, one day after another, to the port of the grave: every sound of the clock signifies the elapse of time and the impending death that keeps frightening Petrarch.

Within the scattered time, it is felt a sense of detachment and homeless. Exile is a fate taken by the whole of mankind since Adam and Eva fell and were expelled from Eden. Like Francis tells Augustine in the *Secretum*, he wishes to “die in port after living on the open sea”<sup>6</sup>, Petrarch is ceaselessly searching for a safe haven to “stand still”. However, his life trajectory has revealed to us a picture of restlessness and oxymoron: born and brought up in exile, he has been travelling to different cities and countries, told by Petrarch himself in the first letter of *Familiari* and the letter to posterity. Paradoxically, he seemed to desire this shifting of places: “ I was never able to stay still;...as sick men do, endeavoring to cope with tedium by a change of scene.”<sup>7</sup> Standing at the crossroads, he is unable to find a stable place for his unsettled soul. The hesitation between two kinds of lives—monastic life or the life of a layman—has become the principle source of Petrarch's anxieties: in his letter to Gherardo, who exceptionally converts to be a monk, Petrarch envies his little brother for having found a “safe port”. Satisfied in his little monastic cell, Gherardo can devote his whole heart wholly and attentively to God rather than wandering around aimlessly like Petrarch. The peace and tranquility enjoyed by Gherardo is what Petrarch's life has been deprived of. Unsettled in the frequent changes of space, Petrarch feels more deeply about the cares generated by the passage of time: time elapses, but Petrarch finds himself wandering and returning to the same old status. He keeps turning, but is aware that he is not turning at all! Not only does Petrarch fail to find an immobile *logos* he can rely upon, but he is aware that his life, his existence and his self are scattered and dispersed: bear within time, he cannot reach an Augustinian unity that will bring together his

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<sup>6</sup> Petrarch, *My Secret Book*, trans. by J. G. Nichols, Hesperus Press Limited, 2002, p.22.

<sup>7</sup> Francis Petrarch, “A Draft of a Letter to Posterity”, from *My Secret Book*, p.103.

erroneous past, unsteady present and ambiguous future into united *one*; wandering within space, he always finds himself in the turbulence of exile and feels restlessness that there is nowhere to safety harbor his anxious soul.

## **Petrarch and His Representation of the Self**

Petrarch is an author obsessed with autobiographical writing. It is no exaggeration to say that almost all the works of Petrarch are about writing about himself. Celenza has noted: “unlike many medieval thinkers, Petrarch took great care in shaping his own identity, often openly and unashamedly taking his own life as his subject-matter.”<sup>8</sup> Narration internalizes time and space. As Ricoeur has said: “Time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative.”<sup>9</sup> More importantly the narrative addresses to the concern of self-existence: the representation of the self in a literary form is able to break the temporal and spatial boundaries. Due to its material form, narration of self helps to preserve to the greatest degree the outlook of the “self”; configured in the form of words, it transfers the invisible to visible, a movement from the inside to the outside that activates communication with others. Petrarch has a penetrating awareness to the affinity between narration and self-existence, which is displayed through his evident ambition for long-lasting fame through his writing of the epical *Africa*. As stated in the *Africa*, this third death of Scipio would occur when Petrarch’s books would perish; thus, to think reversely, the third death may be avoided if our poet’s books, along with his literary fame, survive through the ages. In this way, Petrarch’s self, in the form of autobiographical writing, obtains immortality to a certain degree. The narrative “I”, being able survive much longer than its corporeal twin, seems to be the only way to extend the existence of self although it still cannot escape from the erosion of time.

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<sup>8</sup> Christopher S. Celenza, *Petrarch, Everywhere a Wanderer*, Reaktion Books Ltd, 2017, p.10.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, The University of Chicago Press, Vol.I, 1984, p.3.

Writing and reading provides us with fundamental ways to deepen our understanding of selfhood, while the knowledge of the self serves as the ethical purpose for such a literary construction. However, the intimacy between the writing of the self and the knowledge of the self is not spontaneous. In general, ancient authors did not regard the writing as an essential way into the study of self. There was nearly no connection between narration and the self. Medieval authors, too, did not have the consciousness to write about themselves. According to Brian Stock, Augustine might have been the first person to suggest that the self can be “read” as a literary text, and by examining this text, one can accomplish the process of soul-searching.<sup>10</sup> Stock suggests that it is Augustine who incorporated the ethical dimension into his autobiography—the *Confessions*. It is this ethical dimension that through he justifies the intention of writing in the first-person: writing about oneself is intended to: (1) compel one into profound probing of soul; (2) show to the other people how one could become a better man. The writing of the self, by offering readers the austere reality and the whole truth about a man, obtains the value of an education as well as the goal of instituting ethics and morality. It was not until the late Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance that the custom of writing in the first-person emerged and bloomed, which can be seen in the works of Petrarch, Jerome Cardano, Benvenuto Cellini, *etc.* The real autobiography, universally established as a literary genre, did not appear until 17th century.

It should not be forgotten that the foundation on which such a narration is based — the human language, which is by itself a shifty substance susceptible to alienation, twist and falsification. Like all mortal matters, human language cannot survive the fate of devastation brought on by time and history even though its permanence is rather promising. The discredit of human language can be traced back to Plato and other Hellenic thinkers, who displayed a skeptical attitude to literary and artistic activities. As an example of this, we need to look no further than Plato, with his suggestion to

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<sup>10</sup> Brian Stock offered his comprehensive studies on the problem of representation of self and self-knowledge in his book *After Augustine, the Meditative Reader and the Text*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.



expel poets and his condemnation of written letters:

If the self was not represented in the literary or artistic manner the writing of a first-person life-history necessitated, then these types of representation could not be criticized for their inadequacies. *Autobiography could remain a problem in the field of self-knowledge rather than pretending to be the solution.*<sup>11</sup>(the italic is mine)

The foundation of writing of the self, after all, is considered to be rhetoric rather than philosophy, language rather than truth.<sup>12</sup> For Christian authors, human rhetoric is even more degraded and easily corrupted when compared to God's Word. Truth, in their views, should be revealed in silence rather than by the performance of rhetoric, from which we can see how the contempt is waged towards the urbanity of the literary enterprise. Thus, Augustine's *Confessions*, from this point of view, should be considered as an exception: this book witnesses the shift of self-acknowledgement from the traditional contemplative practice to an openly literary activity, from heart to letters, and from internal to external.

Although Augustine genuinely bridges ethics and literature that later justifies the practice of literary construction of the self, he does not forget the distrust of language inherited from the Christian tradition. For him, the writing of his own stories, the *Confessions*, is an oxymoron: on the one hand, he asks us to think of the self as inconceivable unless it is narrated "out" by language. Narration, by transforming the inner thoughts into tangible words and by dressing the invisible words of mind in a material coat, makes the abstract thoughts of mind perceivable to others. He knows that, only by speaking "out" what he is like, he would be able to accomplish his confessions

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p.14.

<sup>12</sup> Stock also wrote that "It was not clear to ancient thinkers that the writing of an autobiography could advance this program, since the distant origins of autobiography were in rhetoric rather than philosophy. The literary or pictorial presentation of the person could even create illusions about what was essential to the self, as Plotinus observed in his trenchant refusal to have his portrait painted or his life-history set down by his students.", *ibid*, p.15.

to God and to make himself an example to other Christians. During the process of writing of the self his mind has been elevated to a new level, permitting him to discover what remained undiscovered within himself. On the other hand, Augustine denies that the narrative can obtain any “truth”: the narrative “I”, if it ever existed, is only an invention based on the corrupted human language or on an inferior image compared to the *origin/archetype*. The literary self, living upon the nutrition of words, is disappropriated of the real, existing self due to the limitations of human language and intellect. Now we must ask: how much credit should we give to the narrative “I” as is established in a text? Is the knowledge of “I” drawn from textual experience trustful in any meaningful sense?

Such distrust of narrative over the issue of self-establishment carries on and finds its highest expression in the works of Petrarch: his radical suspicious on the nature of language and his awareness of the problem of signification become great threats to his authorship and identity, which is further reflected in his discursive discourse, various writing styles and fragmented selves—his penchant for adopting images of metamorphoses and labyrinth, his idolatrous, fragmented portrayal of Laura, his collections of disparate letters in *Familiars*, his unfinished *Africa* and the never-completed *Trionfi*...All these counter Petrarch’s desire to create a stable, substantial and unified self. Petrarch’s poetry, which highlights the fragmented sense of time and restless changes of locations, is external representation that mirrors his selfhood, displaying a portrait of scattered, dispersed selves instead of a unified one. Greene, in *Light in Troy*, sharply grasped Petrarch’s sense of insecurity towards poetic language: that is, the anxiety caused by the “recognition of linguistic mutability”.<sup>13</sup> Once the thoughts are transformed into language, they are trapped in a condition of temporality, which exposes them to mutation and falsification. Produced by mortals, they are denied to the eternal permanence that the Word of God alone can enjoy.

No wonder Petrarch writes: “from the moment we decide to speak, some alternation

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas Greene, *Light in Troy, Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry*, Yale University Press, 1982, p.6.

intervenes and as we pronounce each single syllable, some part of our life slips away.”<sup>14</sup>. This passage deeply reveals his anxiety generated by the fleeting nature of his own language. His awareness on that mutability also makes him realized that the lifespan of a literary production depends on time. The frustration and feebleness resulted from the difficulty to preserve and recover the lost manuscripts have been given a vivid description in the XXIV book of *Familiars*, in which Petrarch constantly expresses deep sympathy towards the lost masterpieces. Unable to recover the originals, Petrarch feels a never-fulfilled vacuum in his heart and a sense of separation that departs him from those great authors. He attempts to sketch the equivocal faces of distant authors, summoning their ghostly souls for communication from the fragmented pieces of texts he could manage to reach. However, it is in these broken, incomplete works of the ancients that Petrarch recognizes that he can never encounter the real authors but only their textual selves. The letters written to them, in the tone of speaking lively to ancient authors, ironically signify an eternal absence of the real selfhood. In a deconstructive tone, Greene says:

Derrida insists on the absence in all writing of the original context, which includes the intention of the supposed author. “Pour qu’un contexte soit exhaustivement déterminable...il faudrait au moins que l’intention consciente soit totalement présente et actuellement transparente à elle-même et aux autres.” Since the full intention behind any given text is unknowable, the original context necessarily subject to loss: “Il n’y a que des contextes sans aucun centre d’ancrage absolu.” The force of history is a force that deracinates, a “force of rupture” that privileges no context and blurs all intention.<sup>15</sup>

Once uttered or written, words are thrown under the force of history that would deracinate them: “the drift not only from its original speaker and social context but also

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<sup>14</sup> *De remediis utriusque fortune*, 1.1, the English is from Thomas M. Greene’s *Light in Troy, Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry*, Yale University Press, 1982, p.126.

<sup>15</sup> Greene, *Light in Troy*, p.18

from its original referent and signified.”<sup>16</sup> The text does not record the past, it only writes down men’s later appropriation of the past based on the signifying system in which the words interplaying and functioning.

The lacking of a center in Petrarchan texts, argued by Freccero and later by Mazzotta and Marguerite R. Waller, has well explained the indeterminacies Petrarch feels in language. In Freccero’s studies of Petrarchan poetics, he pointed out the danger of idolatry in Petrarch’s poetic creation, which attempted to make Laura—a linguistic product of the poet himself— as the ontological being. Mazzotta even frankly admits that to read Petrarch in a united way is almost an impossibility. R. Waller, following Freccero’s logic, further claimed that Petrarch’s poetic making is analogous to his historical making: Laura is made the center of Petrarchan literature, while in Petrarchan history, the city of Rome is appointed as the center. Both of them, however, as argued by R. Waller, are unable to stand outside and transcend their own systems: the image of Laura remains in the realm of literary creations, while Rome is still situated in the logic of history, therefore they can never be an ontology like God.<sup>17</sup> If they are unable to transcend the systems, like the all-mighty God who stands outside the world, they cannot escape the temporality. R. Waller continues to explore the indeterminacies of Petrarch’s language through which she would like to show “Petrarch’s refusal to ‘believe’ language and his demonstrations of the ways in which it is not to be believed.”<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, Petrarch’s consciousness of inadequacies and indeterminacies of language is highlighted by his ambiguous use of it. Waller finds out that Petrarch’s homonymic use of certain term, such as Laura, leads to a situation of Derrida’s endless play of signs—Laura can be referred to either as secular fame or as poetry itself, or both.

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p.11.

<sup>17</sup> Marguerite R. Waller, *Petrarch’s Poetics and Literary History*, The University of Massachusetts Press, 1980. “Like Petrarch’s comments on the history of the world, his history of the self lacks the ontological grounding, the center, which would allow relationships between events, or even between moments, to emerge. Laura, as the desired center of the lover’s existence, manifests the same inadequacies as Rome, taken as the center of human history. She is mortal and she is absent” p.21.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p.58.

By playing with sound and signs, the epistemological meanings of Laura become blurred and equivocal — readers cannot easily distinguish if Petrarch is talking about a tree, a woman, or his literary ambition; now it is subjected to endless interchanges between signifiers and signified that will lead to the limitless proliferation of signifiers, with the signified/center itself always absent and lacking. The vertigo produced by numberless signifiers in the end engulfs the original intention of the author. Even Petrarch himself is not sure what he is talking about, but he seems not to resist the equivocality in the true meaning of the word “Laura”.

Such ambiguity, when applied to the narrative self in poetry, has posed a severe threat to the real self because the confusion between signified and signifier blurs the boundary between subject and object. R. Waller observes that in the sestina 30 Petrarch plays with the images of “snow” and “sun”: “With this chiastic exchange, the system of differences, which has already become suspect, threatens to collapse into a series of identities which makes our ‘understanding’ of this web of significance even more problematic. We no longer have the means of keeping separate the two terms—poet/ Laura or I/you—which seem to have been the occasion for this discourse.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, it is not easy for readers to distinguish who is the writer and who is the object being written about by the writer, for the differences between the words and the creator of the words have been blurred. The narrative self, potentially serving as the center of this linguistic universe, fails to find an appropriate literary correspondence in a context where our own interpretation of the narrative self is distorted. The distortion of the narrative self, moreover, eventually leads to the destruction of the real self and of the identity of the author.

The unsteadiness of Petrarchan language is most highlighted in the comparison between the texts of two poets—Dante and Petrarch. Waller has proposed that Dante also senses the danger embodied in the linguistic mutability; however, he wisely refers all back to God, letting Christ—Word of God become the guarantee and safeguard for

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p.51.

his writings, uniting all the discursive words back into the *logos*. Contrarily, Petrarch's language does not resort to such guarantee; instead, he prefers to leave his poetic creation as it is, avoiding depending it on the "divine grounding".<sup>20</sup> Petrarchan poetics, according to Freccero, have a potential of self-reflection and self-reference that creates an ironic closure entirely opposed to the ontology of God. However, as has been said above, Laura, his literary invention, standing within the poetic web, fails to make herself transcendental. In a loop of self-reference, we can see that the poet himself becomes identical with what he created: laurel/Laura. He is the Apollo who chased Laura, while Laura also becomes the sun—symbol of Apollo the chaser to his desiring eyes. The intentional ambiguity and unsteadiness of Petrarch's language thus creates a narrative "I", being a textual product that is subjected to temporality and the spatial limitation, is too shifty and fleeting to define, which counters Petrarch's ambition to prolong his real self in the form of narrative.

## **The Petrarchan Representation of the Self in Conversion**

Petrarch's individualism—his consciousness of his self—is mostly characterized in his discourse of conversion, where time, space, self and language converge. Petrarch has created a series of images that the self fails to accomplish conversions, the most prominent of which is the figure of Francis in the *Secretum*. Meanwhile, his self-portrait as a deviated wayfarer in *Canzoniere* and as a sailor lost in the storm of a sea in letters in *Familiari* are remarkable as well. To answer why Petrarch has portrayed himself as a failure in these conversions, or why he would like readers to consider him as a failure, one presupposition we must stick to is that what is truly at stake here is the conflicts and contradictions between the narrative self and the real self.

But first let's scrutinize what makes the theme of conversion different from other autobiographic narrations. It possesses several unique characteristics that other

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<sup>20</sup> Greene, *Light in Troy*, p.13.

autobiographic writings do not have. First of all, it is an autobiography of Christian allegory that focuses on narrating the elevation of the self from good to better, and from better to best. In this narrative scheme, the self undergoes a series of spiritual transformations that will eventually lead to a transcendence. The model of time in conversion, therefore, is linear and progressive. There would be, inevitably, relapses or fall backs; however, on the whole, it is linear. One must undergo all these “turning backs” before “turning forward”. Secondly and more importantly, its happening is based on a temporal structure somewhat dramatic — “dramatic” referring to a special, mystic instant of “turning”. Such an instant is so unprecedented and drastic that it creates a complete rupture in the individual time. Based on this instant, the past is entirely separated and distinguished from the present: The Augustinian conversion narrates the process of how an old self is abandoned and a new one is born, and how the moment of conversion separates the two “selves”. Actually, there is no such division that can entirely abandon the past and there is no such new self that can be immune from changes. From the perspective of personal history, the Augustinian conversion has cut the two selves apart, putting them in a rigid scheme that stands outside of time and space, as if the pre-conversion self no longer lives; from the perspective of human history, the saint argues about the principal differences between the city of God and the city on earth. The Augustinian dichotomy, putting all its weight on the heavenly life, chooses to devaluate the lively, everyday life of mankind. Standing on the present—the *present* of God—one is allowed to review his past, interpreting it as prefiguration of the *nunc*, through which God’s Providence is shown. In the context of conversion, the space that contains the narrative self becomes frozen. The post-conversion points to the status of stagnancy which symbolizes the ceasing of change and the termination of progress: it indicates a summit point of perfection.

Based on this point-like instant and the immediacy, the Augustinian conversion actually requires no space. The narrative self, plotting previously in certain background, is suddenly centrifugalized from its space, then being thrown and projected into somewhere that terminates every movement, as said by Augustine: “That way we go

not in ships, or chariots, or upon our own legs,...For, not to go towards only, but to arrive fully at that place, required no more but the will to go to it,”<sup>21</sup>(*Conf.* VIII, 8). Thus, the role of space, in the instant of the accomplishment of a conversion, has been erased to a point of nothingness. Dante’s *Purgatorio*, however, tries to re-introduce space into his narrative, in which it shows how the spiritual process is spatialized and geometrized: the pilgrim travelled in a spiral path “to the right” down from the underground world to heaven. Dante’s geometry is a kind of moral geometry which shows Christian adaptation of pagan cosmology, mainly drawn from Plato’s *Timeus* and Aristotle’s convention of movement.<sup>22</sup> It is, principally, a linear, ascending movement; however, it is also accompanied by circular movement—clockwise and counterclockwise. If we see illustrations of the *Comedy*, for example Botticelli’s map of Dante’s *Inferno*, it is clear that the structure of the underground world is like a conical funnel, and the pilgrim had to walk in gyre.

The demarcation of two selves, according to Ascoli, is arbitrary since it means the death of the old self and a new self no longer subject to spiritual change. Obviously, this does not happen to Petrarch, who fails to gain “a view from ending”<sup>23</sup>: for Petrarch, the past is never an ending story but an echo that always goes back to him. When Petrarch confronts such a dichotomy, he finds it hard to apply it to his own understanding of a self that is nourished from the varieties of human life, he also finds it going against his experience of fragmented souls and life. Petrarch’s understanding

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<sup>21</sup> “et non illue ibatur navibus aut quadrigis ant pedibus,...nam non solum ire, verum etiam pervenire illue, nihil erat aliud quam velle ire,”*St. Augustine’s Confessions, with an English translation by William Watts*, Harvard University Press, 1912, p.444.

<sup>22</sup> For Dante’s travelling trajectory and its behind significance, please see Freccero’s “Pilgrim in a Gyre”, from *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, edited and an introduction by Rachel Jacoff, Harvard University Press, 1986. In this article, Freccero comprehensively studied Dante’s movement in three spheres, and he found that Dante’s spiral movement alluded to Plato’s “World Soul” in *Timeus* and Aristotle’s convention of movement and intelligence. Dante’s novel movement, according to Freccero, shows the Christianized microcosmic myth and the Christian moral of individual existence.

<sup>23</sup> Albert R. Ascoli, “Petrarch’s Middle Age: Memory, Imagination, History, and the ‘Ascent of Mount Ventoux’”, *Stanford Italian Review*, vol.X, no.1,1991, pp.5-44.



of the self, in this way, is contradicted by that of the Augustinian conversion, for he is aware that self is constantly influenced by both the past and the future, and that one, as long as is living, could never gain the vantage point *ex tempore*—one needs to know the end of the story, from which he can decide which changes are essentially important.

Before discussing Petrarch's understanding of the self, we need to know how he regards "unity". As was suggested by Mazzotta, unity is "a concept Petrarch's diverse writing strongly resist."<sup>24</sup> In the Petrarchan dictionary, unity is not one entity without internal differences, but a group consisting of various fragments: this new concept of unity teared off the collective veil mentioned by Jacob Burckhardt, leading us to focus on his concerns about the centrality of the individual.<sup>25</sup> Such concern, in the meantime, has triggered Petrarch to discover the subjectivity of every man and to probe each man as a unique individual that has different beliefs, values and faiths: as an independent individual, and meanwhile as a member of the whole of mankind, he has his own memories, emotions, impulses and desires, loves and hates, fears and excitements that single him out from the vexed, equivocal word "man"—"equivocal" here meaning that it puts the whole of mankind under a certain universal, unified scheme.

Not only his concept of unity influences his look on man as a whole, but it also has a great impact on his regard of selfhood. The self is made of many fragmented "selves": it is one of the characteristics most prominent in Petrarch which reveals his diverse roles as a poet, a book collector, a court *literati* and a spokesman for antiquity, named by Greene the "flexibility of individual".<sup>26</sup> The varieties and new possibilities springing from the individual life make it hard to put any clear demarcation within the self. In other words, the dichotomy of Augustine seems to be too rigid when it encounters various subjects.

Petrarch's problem in adapting his "self" into the narration of the Christian

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<sup>24</sup> G. Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch*, Duke University Press, 1993, p.18.

<sup>25</sup> Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, Bibliobazaar, 2008, p.3.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Greene, "The Flexibility of the Self in Renaissance Literature", in *The Disciplines of Criticism: Essays in Literary Theory, Interpretation, and History*, ed. Peter Demetz, Thomas Greene and Lowry Nelson, Jr., Yale University Press, 1968, pp.241-264.

conversion lies in his difficulty in entering the temporal and spatial modes of Christian macro-cosmos. From the macroscopic perspective, the entire human history could be reviewed as a grand conversion: like the personal conversion, Christian history is characterized by an “instant of turning”. The Advent of Christ, by drawing an arbitrary line on history, actually creates a brand new age that can be distinguished totally from the old one: the dark age is separated from the age of light. Christian history has claimed that the pass, old history, like the corrupted, old self, is an age of darkness, obscurity and blindness, and that no one has any hope for salvation, just like the souls in Dante’s Limbo whose only sin is that they were born before Christ. Before the Incarnation, human beings had no hope of salvation, for the original sin was passed from blood to blood, and no one could be exempted from the misfortune inherited from Adam and Eva.

The blood of Christ has repaid the heavy price of men’s crimes. From then on the human history has converted, since this breaking point of turning has completely reoriented the progress of history after the fall, from the moment of which mankind has been promised the hope *ad cielo*, rather than being imprisoned in the circular, repetitive torture of mundane “life and death”. From the microscopic perspective, the individual conversion operates within the same scheme: the event of conversion has divided man’s life into two similar parts—the corrupted period and the blessed period, and it has rechanneled the route of the individual’s life. Because of the conversion a person, after abandoning his corrupted, fallen self, can enter into God’s light with a new, blessed self. Like Christ who undergoes death and re-correction, a man also experiences a spiritual death and comes back to life with a new “self”. For Augustine and Dante, their understanding of the micro-cosmos closely corresponds to the macro-history of Christianity: the individual existence, restricted in time and space, can only be liberated under the Grace of God, where the individual is given a promise to turn from temporality to eternity, from space to infinity and from the *letter* to *spirit*. All these happenings, I must emphasize again, depend on a belief that history (macro or micro) is *progressing and linear*, following a trajectory from earth *ad cielo*.

The narrative self of Augustine's conversion commands two prerequisites: (1) the self—the micro-history — is an advancing process that would ultimately reach a transcendent goal, the perfection after the accomplishment of conversion; (2) After the conversion, the new self is immune to significant changes that permit it to review the old, corrupted self objectively from a vantage point as an external observer. In this way, the new self is entirely separated from the old one. Conversion becomes a “once for all” action. To write/to accomplish a successful conversion, one must accept this presupposition of time and space. Nevertheless, for Petrarch, his own life experience seriously contradicts such presupposition, which leads him to find that his real self cannot be fitted into the mode of the narrative self in the Augustinian conversion, whether on the level of text or on the level of experience.

Petrarch projects himself into a cyclical time, in which he, imprisoned in a weird loop, is constantly leading himself back to the previous status. Relapses are not something temporary but become the norm for him. Not only cyclical, Petrarch's time is scattered and discursive, refusing to follow a regular, linear process, and his past keeps haunting him and puts his present self in a shaky, fleeting status which reminds readers of the Ovidian *metamorphose*—a situation in which it is difficult to obtain a steady image of the self. The endless circulation of Petrarchan time is powered by his inextinguishable desire, and it is in the endless pursuit of his desire that Petrarch finds himself being suspended in the past, able neither to reach the present nor the future. These prerequisites, therefore, confront severe challenges in facing with Petrarch's individual experiences of existence. First of all, Petrarch, instead of finding his micro-history as an advancing process, constantly views the life as a product which is consisted of relapses, fallbacks and recession under the mutable, fugitive wheel of Fortune. This instability has severely shaken the solid grounding of God's grace: “There is a pathos in Petrarch's lifelong wait for that decisive event, in his growing fear, his growing realization that the miracle of will and grace was not to be vouchsafed him.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Greene, “The Flexibility of the Self in Renaissance Literature”, p.247.

Secondly, the new-emerging civic life brings Petrarch and his contemporaries into an epoch of multi-dimension — “multi” by a variety of one’s social identities and the richness of one’s personalities molded and remolded by will. As Thomas Greene noted: “Petrarch’s scale is *lateral*; he demonstrated how rich a human life could be at a single rung of the metaphysical ladder.”<sup>28</sup>

For Augustine and Dante, as well as for Petrarch’s brother Gherardo, the way to God is *one and only*, and everyone takes the same road: under the guidance of faith, one undergoes from corruption to purification, raising from low to high. That is why Augustine decides to write down his conversion for those who suffer the same spiritual sickness as him; and that is why CacciaGuida tells Dante to reveal his pilgrimage to the people on earth: “putting aside every falsehood, make manifest all your vision, and let them still scratch where the itch is.”<sup>29</sup> (*Par.* XVII, 127-129) Petrarch, stepping out from this monotony, reveals a new way to God: in the *Secretum*, Francis argues that by loving Laura and her beautiful soul, he learnt how to love God. His journey of pilgrimage, instead of manifesting a linear track, displays a circular and even divergent route whose center is Petrarch’s self.

The medieval rigidity is shattered by the complexities of a new age, and thus it is easier to understand why the assumption of two separated selves, with the new overwhelming the old, is no longer convincing. The narrative self in the Augustinian conversion now can no longer harbor the new “metamorphosis” of the self. The varieties of one’s life, personalities and identities make it impossible to draw an arbitrary line within on the self. Therefore, Petrarch’s failure to convert actually turns out to be an attempt to create a new narrative self in the field of autobiographic writings

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.249.

<sup>29</sup> All English translation of The Divine Comedy is from Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, ed. Durling, M.Robert Volume I-III, illustration by Robert Turner, Oxford University Press, 1996(*Inf.*), 2003(*Purg.*), 2011(*Par.*)

that can reflect these stunning changes. Unable to find harmony between the Christian macro-cosmos and his personal self, Petrarch chooses to write down his failed experience of conversion. It is in Petrarch's literary enterprises that we perceive how his *ego*, articulated in words, evolves and exists through time and space that makes his "modernity" even more prominent.

Also, unlike the Augustinian narration of conversion, the role of space never recesses in the Petrarchan narrative. Instead of ending at one specific point, Petrarch is always on the drift, wandering from one place to another. His spiritual detachment to a certain fixed *locus* resonates loudly with his experience of exile. Therefore, Petrarch realizes that his experience in reality—his existence—is radically different from the narrative self of conversion; if he were to write a successful story of a conversion, that would mean he would have to "lie" to himself. Rather than following the Augustinian narrative self, Petrarch would like to make his narrative self authentically reflect his real self.

However, another question should be asked: why can't Augustine and Dante, especially Dante, who is only one generation older than from Petrarch, see the illusive side of the narrative self in the narration of conversion? And why does Petrarch become the one to point it out? Examining these two questions would, eventually, lead us to see why Petrarch is viewed different from his medieval companions. Christian history, or the philosophy of Christian history, claims that "that history has an ultimate meaning implies a final purpose or goal transcending the actual events."<sup>30</sup> The salvation and promised happiness suggest that Christian history progresses to a "better world". The messianic monotheism, if not excludes, at least refuses to admit the varieties and multiple-lined developments of history that will lead to a much more complicated outlook of the whole story of mankind. The narrative self of conversion, in parallel, only admits singularity of personality, while Petrarch's scattered selves seem to be an overt betrayal of the medieval stasis. Moreover, to draw such a line, whatever on the micro-history (self) or on the macro-history (Christian history), is something invented

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<sup>30</sup> Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History*, The University of Chicago Press, 1949, p.6.

rather than solidly objective, a trope rather than a truth. Petrarch's new narrative self finds itself unsuitable to fit into Christian historiography: its variety is no more consistent with the medieval monotonicity. In another more important sense, his real self finds incompatible with the narrative self of the Augustinian conversion: the cyclical, repetitive movement of the soul radically contradicts the linear, progressive advancement of Christian history.

However, the Province of God, which both Augustine and Dante have believed, makes the trope a reality—the scattered time and space are united into a now, *nunc* and *eternity*, in God's realm. Dante said in his *Paradiso* that God's love unites the whole universe: "In its depths I saw internalized, *bound with love in one volume*, what through the universe becomes unsewn quires:" (*Par.* XXXIII, 85-87)<sup>31</sup> Following our arguments, we can see that the narration of conversion is perfectly compatible with the narration of Christian history: both have a decisive point of demarcation, and both follow a progressive line leading to a transcendent goal to fulfill their meaning. Medieval pilgrims like Augustine and Dante recognize and confirm the compatibility between their selves and Christian history, and they find their selves well fitting into the narrative pattern of conversion.

Petrarch's view on human history, according to Mommsen, actually reverses Christian historiography; however, what he reverses is not as important as the reason *why* he does such a reversion. Any concern of historiography must be also a concern of time. Here we have to ask, what kind of consciousness about time and space that makes Petrarch have such exceptional reversion? And the answer of this question could be a key to Petrarch's incomplete conversions. First of all, his reversion marks the substitution of the old pattern of division with his new one by replacing the traditional "turning point"—the Advent of Christ—with the decline of ancient Rome. This replacement signifies that the human history has been introduced into the literary,

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<sup>31</sup> "Nel suo profondo vidi che s'interna, legato con amore in un volume, ciò che per l'universo si squaderna" Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Paradiso*, ed. by Robert M. Durling, introduction by Robert M. Durling, notes by Ronald L. Martinez and Robert M. Durling, Oxford University Press, 2010.

humanistic realm, in which the secular life begins to share with the territory of religion. That partly explains why the traditional Christian allegory of self becomes inappropriate for Petrarch, whose focus is “Rome”. His concept of history is different from that of Medieval historians who like to consider universality and continuity of history: his clear awareness of the rupture in history has distanced him from his Medieval predecessors. The “Dark Ages” are considered by him a period that has been cut off the splendor of antiquity and a barbarian disturbance to classical spirits, while the age of light is the revival of classical culture. Such reversion of the significance of history is unbridled even from today’s perspective.

Nevertheless, there is another thing we should note: although Petrarch seems to create a “new” history, he is, by nature, a faithful Christian, because his method of division is still based on the Christian one: by dividing history with an arbitrary point. His longing for the revival of the classical culture can be viewed as a transcendental goal clothed within secular surface. He alternates Christian history rather than breaking away from it. All in all, Petrarch still believes in an ultimate goal that can lead to eternity, and he also recognizes that life is no more than a transitory dream that cannot be compared with the heavenly happiness—this is the “true” happiness that everyone should pursue.

Petrarch always does things in a way that is paradoxical—“paradoxical” because he is able to see all these conflicts and contradictions within the selves and the arbitrary aspect of the trope of Christian historiography. He is by no mean the first man to do so, but he is definitely the man who brings these conflicts into the field of literature that creates an unprecedented impact on later Renaissance culture. It is through his letters and works that our concept of a new epoch is formed, it is through his contradicted selves that our view on individualism is slowly developed, and it is through his sentiments that we start to think seriously about individual’s experiences of existence in time, space and narrativity.

## Structure of this Thesis

In this thesis I will firstly present the essential role of the Augustinian mode of conversion in Petrarch's narration of the self. Petrarch's individualism is best grasped through the intertextual study of Augustine, Dante and Petrarch's descriptions of spiritual "turnings". Augustine's *Confessions* and Dante's *Divine Comedy* become the best referential textual examples where readers can observe the points of conflicts between Augustine, Dante and Petrarch.

Second, I will argue that Petrarch's self is best portrayed and made real through his never-accomplished, failed conversion. Such process is just like the concept of in mathematics in that a number can approach the limit but can never reach it. Petrarch's intentional lingering at the bifurcation of two roads actually witnesses his treatment of an individual's status influenced by both God's Providential and Fortune's wheel. Particularly, the development and transformation of selfhood in time and space in the scene of conversion is central in the understanding of Petrarch's perception of language and of the fabric of self with language. The consciousness of telling a story accompanied by the consciousness of the vicissitudes of time and space, and the desire to narrate a story about "I" is the best proof that one can realize the existence of the "self". Without such solid awareness, the Petrarchan narrative of the self would never come into being written.

Chapter 1 of this thesis will explore two modes of time regarding the view of historiography, of personal history and of the development of selfhood within the narrative time. Two modes of time, generally, refers to (1) the linear, progressive time; (2) the circular, repetitive time. Firstly, I will discuss briefly Karl Löwith's opinions on these two modes and the two historiographies link respectively to them. We will find that it is within the Christian horizon that the linear, progressive time becomes mainstream that permeates public conscience. In pre-Christian historiography, history is not considered as something advancing forwards but something that repeats itself according to some universal norm. This norm is a law that regulates the whole universe:



men, animals, plants, celestial objects, and even gods must follow it. Pre-Christian culture is more interested in discovering the norm than in looking forwards to the future. This detached view of the future tends not to have an ultimate, transcendental aim for history. It is Christianity that has exclaimed that history, instead of evolving in blindness and repetition, makes progresses which lead to the fulfillment and revelation of the significance of Providence.

Having clarified the essential differences between these two modes, I will then discuss the concept of time in Augustine and in Dante. It is found that their concept of time is actually the epitome of Christian time: their conversion follows the linear, progressive time, and their personal history is an advancing movement to fulfill their ultimate aim—to return to the image of God. For Petrarch, the case is more complicated. I will show how the linear and circular time tangle with each other in the Petrarchan concept of time. I would like to suggest propose that Petrarch's spiritual relapses reflect his circular, repetitive personal history, so does his view of the history of Rome in which he holds brief that the ancient glory will make a revival in circulation. However and paradoxically, his obsession with certain Christian dates in narrating his personal life reflects the fact that he modes the concept of time within the Christian scheme, and his demarcation of history does not betray the Christian tradition but proves to be a more secular interpretation of it.

Chapter 2, “The Delayed Time and Three Conversions”, begins by sketching his three failed conversions, with the aim of showing a clear outlook of Petrarch's self-portrayal in his experience—mostly anguish, disappointing, desperate and anxious—of these spiritual failures. These three failed conversions serve as concrete examples to display Petrarch's consciousness of time and space. This chapter consists of three parts: the final confessions to the Virgin Mary in the *Canzoniere*, the lingering, hesitated pupil in the *Secretum* and the ironic imitator of the *Confessions* in “The Ascent of Mount Ventoux”. All three personages of Petrarch will be compared with the pilgrim in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the successful wayfarer who returns to earth and becomes the poet of God.

The first conversion I am going to discuss is Petrarch's final confessions to the Virgin in the last poem of his *RVF*, that is, the canzone 366. The penitent tone in the 366 makes him appear to be a person who decides to take his turning to God. It seems that Petrarch would like to correct his youthful errors before his final departure from the world. However, his confessions do not lead to the conversion that many readers have expected, or, put in other words, his confessions aim not at the conversion but at a mourning for his loss of Laura and a self-consolation when facing the approaching death at his old age. The horrifying Black Death has taken away his beloved woman, friend and son, from which he feels unprecedentedly the force of death. He is constantly struggling with the problem that how he deals with death, and he seems hard to handle the fact of men's mortality many times. On the one hand, he wishes to die as a faithful Christian, who embraces his death in peace and in content, but his thirst for earthly glory and his ambition for obtaining the eternal literary fame counters his wish. Since he is always restless, always on the road—like the wandering Ulysse—, he does not have a stable center—for many, it is God—in his life. Inevitably, Petrarch finds himself, from time to time, facing the arbitrary of Fortune and the misery brought on by death by himself, alone.

The second failed conversion happens in the *Secretum*, where Petrarch divides himself into two roles—Francis and Augustine—among whom the problem of divided will and sins for unjust love were discussed. It is hard to tell which personage reflects the real Petrarch; however, the theme is clear: how should one love rightly so that he can collect up his divided selves and avoid the miseries of earthly life. During their three-day conversation, Francis the pupil seemed to be “defeated” by Augustine, who makes him admit that he should love God instead of Laura and earthly fame. Ironically, though he realized his essential fault, Francis refuses to converse immediately. He already knows the truth, but fails to do the good: Petrarch has pictured a Francis lingering at the door of conversion, but who never stepped in. The scene of deviation appears again in “Ascent of Mount Ventoux”—the third failed conversion. The climax comes when Petrarch suddenly takes out his *Confessions* and starts to read. He, with

full intention, tries to replicate the experience of the saint, but his deliberation seems not to have reached its aim: the ascent of the mountain does not bring about ascent of the mind; rather, Petrarch deliberately breaks the natural connection between time and space, driving himself to a status of circular stagnation. This moral dilemma calls to mind the pre-conversion Augustine in the garden of Milan. Different from Augustine who happens to hear the secret voice and committed the final step, Petrarch falls into silence. After this I will analyze the connection between time and space in the *Confessions*, and then compares them to the texts of *Mount Ventoso*, in an effort to see how Petrarch's scattered self fails to gain unity within these two narrative elements.

Chapter 3 will focus mainly on the consciousness of time in Petrarch's narration of conversion, which is a further inquiry based on Chapter 2. This chapter begins with the exploration of the temporal structure in conversion and its innate, unavoidable conflicts with narration. It is found that the temporal structure in conversion is self-contradicted, because (1) it happens in an instant; (2) it requires a thorough rupture between the past and present selves. These elements determine that one is hardly to undergo a true conversion while the life is still ongoing since he can never obtain a vantage point to gain a full review of his past. To state it more plainly, how does one know this is "the moment"?

The problem of conversion is not only about time, but about space. Narration is a literary layout of time which uses the textual extension to represent the extension in time, while conversion, happening in an instant, does not have any extension. That is to say, it is almost impossible to "narrate" a conversion. If one must do so, he has to write like Augustine. There are two main characteristics in the narration of *Confessions*. First, in order to narrate the conversion, Augustine must prolong artificially his miracle "moment", the shifty *nunc* (now), into an extension, which is, as is known to all, the extension of our soul. The instant of conversion, in other words, has been transformed into the *present* that is presented in the measurement of soul. Secondly, in order to narrate this very moment, Augustine has to put himself not in the *present*, but in the past since the *nunc*, lacking of extension, cannot satisfy the requirements of narration.

In fact, narration is by nature referring to the past because things, literally, have to “already happened” in order to be narrated. Thus, we find that the larger part of the *Confessions* is in the past tense, starting from Augustine’s youth to his pre-conversion moments. Once the conversion is accomplished, Augustine claims that he is going to tell about his *present*; but surprisingly, instead of telling readers about how he *is*, he turns abruptly to discuss the genesis of God. Such an abrupt turning in the narration actually indicates that Augustine’s incapacity in grasping the *nunc* in reality, so he has to retreat to the shadow of the past for resolution. Petrarch, on the contrary, confirms the un-graspable nature of the instant. His consciousness of time, instead of treating personal life as an imitation of God’s eternal *present*—an extension of “now”, regards the self as scattered pieces in the temporal-spatial dimension. These fragments of experience, projecting selfhood in the past, present and future, interplay and tangle with each other but never promise a unity.

More importantly, this chapter attempts to investigate the connection between Petrarch’s consciousness of time and his desire of narration. We find that it is in the writing that Petrarch senses most intensively the un-graspable nature of *nunc*. He once wrote in the *Familiare* that we are dying when we are writing each word; time is slipping away when we are writing each syllable. Petrarch, rather than considering time as an extension of our soul that ultimately achieve unity in God, regards every instant as irreversible and scattered, here he experiences the deepest vulnerability in confronting with time, that leads him to pursuit an eternal fame—the glory of poetics and a stable identity—for being the poet of Rome.

Chapter 4, the final chapter will try to solve the problems left by chapter 3. This chapter will focus chiefly on the *Secretum* and some selected poems from the *Canzoniere* for the problem of establishing the self on language confronted by our poet. It consists of two parts: (1) the way Petrarch treats his writing and rhetoric and his attitude towards the two ways of life. With words, he can obtain the crown of laurel and be recognized as the poet of the Rome. With words, he is entitled to a solid identity, through which his self is constructed, recognized and confirmed. (2) the problem of

language regarding the problem of literary establishment of selfhood. Is language itself sufficient to construct and to represent the self? Or, to put it in another way, is the narrative “I” a proper image for reflecting the authentic “I”?

For Augustine and Dante, they have already known the insufficiency of language to bear the selfhood; however, with the aid of Word—Christ, they are able to skillfully bypass this dilemma: they know clearly that they cannot change the fatal weakness of human language, but their writings, guaranteed by God’s Word, are endowed with legitimacy and justification. In this kind of writing, however, the human language eventually are to be transcended and becomes a sign referring to God’s Word. In other words, no matter Augustine or Dante, they choose to discard the human language at the end of their writings. Dante, who writes the *Divine Comedy* with the identity of God’s poet admits in the last songs the failure of his poetry to write the heavenly visions; while Augustine, as a belonging member of the Christian brotherhood, writes his *Confessions* to share with people who also lead an earthly life in this world, but he recognizes that truth should fall into silence since the human language is only for “use” not to “enjoy”. Their narrative “I”, under the security of God, is successfully united with the authentic “I”. But in Petrarch’s case, it seems that he would rather wish to reply on the language itself, rather than resorting to external ontology. In the Petrarchan writing, language has been endowed with a place unprecedentedly high because our author wishes to make his poetry an ontological like subject. Doubt as he holds towards human language, Petrarch also displays a strong belief in it: he is confident in his poetic creation—Laura. Like Freccero has said, Petrarch’s poetics is idolatrous and self-referential: it creates a circulation that generates the highest autonomy for its author. And he believes the practical effect language could produce upon worldly matters and human lots. If Petrarch can still be regarded as a man of the Middle Ages, his poetics has already made a further step than its author at the door of modernity.

# The Literature Review

This thesis approaches Petrarch's humanism through a more philosophical and metaphysical perspective. With the word "philosophical", I mean that my intention is to investigate some metaphysical problems in Petrarch, for example the concepts of "self", time and existence, and how the selves—both the authentic self and the narrative self— evolve within time and space in the context of narrativity. The most important thing we should bear in mind is that, despite the rich literature materials that Petrarch has left us, we can never touch the real Petrarch but only his textual selves. Therefore, if we were to investigate Petrarch's selves, we must re-place them in his writings in order to get the complete image of his authentic self. The distances between the narrated "I" and narrating "I", between fable and history, between object and subject are not only produced by the problem of human language—distortion, re-edition and falsification—but also are resulted from the very consciousness of authors themselves because when the narrated object coincides the author, this can never avoid thinking himself/herself as an "independent object" that uniquely exist in the world. In his letter to Boccaccio, Petrarch, referring to the draft *Posteritati*<sup>32</sup>, claims that the way he writes about himself is totally "new": "Quod ante me, ut arbitror, fecit nemo"<sup>33</sup> (no one before me did it). Petrarch's intensive consciousness of self and his identity of author is also reflected in his first mention of his own name in *Le familiari*: "Otherwise Our Lord Christ, who sees all things, will join the present letter to attest for all time that in the destruction of Italy not only did you not follow the advice of its *author, Francis*, but you opposed it," (*Fam.* XVIII, 16, the itatic is mine). Roberta Antognini has sharply noticed that Petrarch's mention of his own name, contradicted by the fact that in his later letter to

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<sup>32</sup> Which works Petrarch had actually referred to is still in much dispute, some Petrarchan scholars would think Petrarch meant both *Le Familiari* and *Posteritati*, while others would tend to think it was exclusively *Posteritati*, About the discussion on this problem, see Roberta Antognini, *Il Progetto Autobiografico delle Familiars di Petrarca*, Chapter 2 and 3, LED edizioni universitarie, 2008.

<sup>33</sup> In *Dispersa* 46 (*Var.*25), Petrarch wrote this to Boccaccio, now it is re-conducted in the draft of *Letter to Posterity*.

Socrates he explicitly asks to conceal his name, reveals an awakened recognition of his own identity as *the* author: "...dimostrando la consapevolezza che l'opera che ancora nessuno aveva scritto era stata scritta e poteva essere collocata sull'alto di una Rocca, rivelandone l'autore."<sup>34</sup>

To investigate Petrarch's textual selves leads inevitably to the problem of time: nearly every work of Petrarch ponders over the transience of life, the decay and revival of culture, the duration of one's traces in the world as well as the difficulties of reaching a faded epoch. However, previous research only focused on Petrarch's personal attitude towards time, which was mostly related to the concern of death, but what most scholars did not realize is that there was something more metaphysical behind. Also, they often did not succeed perceiving the close relationship displayed between Petrarch's view of time and his views of Christian historiography, nor did they relate Petrarch's personal time with historical time in his scheme of re-presenting the self. But "philosophy" always seems remote to Petrarch: due to his scattered and inconsistent writings, scholarly views used to take metaphysics merely as a ghostly shadow hovering above Petrarch's humanism. Petrarch, considered the "Father of Humanism", was regarded as a poet who only focused on literary and poetic enterprises, and whose passion for classical literature and aversion to scholasticism confined his real interests to philosophy.

The earliest scholars of Renaissance, for example, Ugo Foscolo and Jacob Burkhardt, tended to portray Petrarch as an emotional, sensitive poet, a rhetorician and a stylist of literature. This narrow understanding of Petrarch's humanism circumscribes a broader horizon which invites us to think Petrarch's humanism in both contexts of classics and modernity; in fact, only by scrutinizing the relationship between Petrarch's personal time and Christian historiography, can we clearly see the uniqueness of Petrarchan autobiographies, separating it from Dantesque and Augustinian ones. Moreover, only by examining Petrarch's view on time, can we understand his obsession with space that

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<sup>34</sup> Roberta Antognini, *Il progetto autobiografico delle Familiars di Petrarca*, p.93.

further reveals the connection between identity and geography. Actually, Petrarch's biographical space is founded on his meditation of time: it is the slippery nature of time that gives Petrarch the deepest feelings about exile, which are further intensified by his actual exile—the dislodge from hometown and the frequent changes of places in his life experience. These two exiles, both in time and in space, bring to a crisis of the recognition of identity, and become the biggest threats to the confirmation of selfhood. The vulnerability and sense of detachment generated by exile drives Petrarch to pinpoint a place that can settle down his identity, and this is where Rome comes into the scene. Not only providing a geographical comfort for him, Rome also makes him a crowned poet whose fame can transcend the erosion of time, an effective way to counter with the exile in time. The search for geographical fixation proves to be a compensation for the transiency of time in one's life.

Previous scholars have mainly two approaches to Petrarch's works: the historical and philological one, and the one based on contemporary literary theory. Up to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Petrarch continued to be portrayed as “a humanistic poet who was immune both to consistent moral thought and to the deeper theological influence of Augustine”<sup>35</sup>, in the context of which philosophy plays a rather minimal role. Thus, traditional Petrarchan studies cluster around the historical and philological side, whose representative works are those written by Pierre de Nolhac, Giuseppe Billanovich, James Hankins, Francisco Rico, Vittorio Rossi and Hans Baron, just to name a few. Their analysis of Petrarch's works displays to readers a panorama of the literary tradition that Petrarch was in, so that the poetic novelty of Petrarch's own writings is highlighted. For example, in his extraordinary work *Plato in Italian Renaissance*, James Hankins clarified the Plato-Augustine origin of Petrarch's works, which vividly restored the context in which humanist scholars lived and thought. If Hankins' focus was on linearizing the history of philosophy, then Hans Baron's *Crisis of Early Renaissance* attempted to outline the political landscape of Italy. He traced

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<sup>35</sup> Alexander Lee, *Petrarch and St. Augustine, Classical Scholarship, Christian Theology and the Origins of the Renaissance in Italy*, Brill, 2012, p.6.



the transformation of the concept of Republican in various authors and scholars in which he found Petrarch's contradictory attitudes towards the Florentine Republic government in *Africa* and in his letters to Cicero. Baron, as well as Garin<sup>36</sup>, agreed that Petrarch's humanism is an expression of the new age produced by the needs of civic life and by the rise of layman interests.

Apart from the general studies of Renaissance that include Petrarch, there are also studies on specific work by our poet. For example, Francisco Rico, Enrico Fenzi and Hans Baron made great contributions to the chronology of *Secretum*<sup>37</sup>. The philological approach, by digging deep into Petrarch's extant versions and manuscripts and by studying Petrarch's etymological habits, has revealed how Petrarch, as an author, processed his works, which helps us to form a clearer understanding of his position in the cultural movement he himself initiated. Pierre de Nolhac, the representative of philological studies, opened up a new way to read Petrarch in his classic work *Pétrarque et l'humanisme*. He and later Giuseppe Billanovich used Petrarch's marginal notes on his manuscripts to reconstruct his complex attitudes towards the classical works, and these attitudes further explained how Petrarch dealt with antiquity and Christian. Marco Santagata chose to focus on analysis of *Canzoniere* and its structure in his classical work *I frammenti dell'anima. Storia e racconto nel Canzoniere di Petrarca*<sup>38</sup>. Through meticulous comparisons between different extant versions, he tried to give a comprehensive explanation to the division in two parts—"life" and "death"—of the *Canzoniere*. As is indicated in the title, Santagata proposed that the collection of soul's fragments was the theme that dwelled within the whole structure of *Canzoniere*, and he backed up his assumption with further analysis of text of *Secretum*<sup>39</sup>. He believed that

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<sup>36</sup> Eugenio Garin, "Interpretazioni del Rinascimento", in *Medioevo e Rinascimento*, Laterza, 1976, pp.85-100.

<sup>37</sup> See Baron's "Petrarch's *Secretum*: Was it Revised—and Why? The Draft of 1342-43 and the Later Changes", *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, T.25, no.3, 1963, pp.489-530; Enrico Fenzi's introduction on Francis Petrarca's *Secretum, il mio segreto*, Mursia, 2015; and Francisco Rico, *Vida U Obra de Petrarca: Lectura del Secretum*, University of North Carolina, Department of Romance Languages, 1974.

<sup>38</sup> Marco Santagata, *I frammenti dell'anima, Storia e racconto nel Canzoniere di Petrarca*, Il Mulino, 2002.

<sup>39</sup> The third book of *Secretum* showed that at the end of their conversations, Francis told his teacher that: "I shall gather up the scattered fragments of my soul and live to myself." ("et sparsa anime fragmenta recolligam,

it was the moral and cultural crisis confronted by our poet that drove him to put all his discursive experiences in order. Such order gave significance to all the fragmental events, making them an entity whose center was the “*Io*” of Petrarch. However, he also believed that Petrarch’s re-ordering of his poetry was a correction of his youthful mistakes. For me, I cannot readily accept his conclusion since I do not find Petrarch’s re-ordering to be a compromise with his past, nor do I view it in the sense of confession. Petrarch’s re-ordering of his *rime sparse* cannot conceal his inextinguishable desire that follows him till the late stage of his life. His literary “*Io*”, instead of reaching the present like Augustine did, is trapped in his past sufferings and regrets.

The historical and philological methods on Petrarchan studies offer a broad horizon with meticulous analysis on etymological details that clarifies: (1) the life of Petrarch—when did he write those works, where did he live, what events were memorable, *etc*; (2) Petrarch’s contribution to writing styles, his endeavors in mediating the conflict between theology and rhetoric and his passion for the revival of antique culture. Petrarchan scholars attempt to relate each Petrarch’s work with his real life, and they attribute the writing of *Secretum*, the intention to re-order of *Le Familiari* and other letters, the making of structure of *Canzoniere*, his ambiguous attitude in portraying the personage Francis and his mimic of conversion on the peak of Mount Ventoux to certain special events in Petrarch’s life. These events—the death of Laura and friends, the sudden conversion of Gherardo, the determination to live in solitude in Vancluse, the change of interest from classical literature to Christian works in his more mature age and the decision to receive the poetic laurel—turn into crisis in his thoughts, putting Petrarch in a status of restlessness and anxiety. They conclude that the crisis in Petrarch’s mind is the explanation for all these; however, they fail to see what fundamentally causes the crisis, nor do they see these actions of Petrarch are responses to his own meditation of time, space and the self. In other words, they seemed not to be interested in finding out why Petrarch felt the impulse to write such a work that

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moraborque mecum sedulo.”)

displayed his inner conflicts which were reflective of his meditation on individuals' making of time and history.

The late 1920s witnessed changes in Petrarchan studies due to the fact that Petrarch's humanism was no more regarded as being confined to the love of classical antiquity and literature, nor did it preclude engagement with moral questions and Christian theology. These changes resulted in a more careful "philosophical" scrutiny, which had brought Petrarch's thought closer to that of St. Augustine. It has been agreed that Petrarch, despite his great devotion to the study and imitation of classical literature, drew large inspiration from Christian thought in treating the problem of identity as an ethical dilemma. Under the anxieties of these influences, quoting from Thomas Greene's words, Petrarch's thought came to be seen as having undergone considerable changes, which led gradually to the discoveries of his more "philosophical" and metaphysical side. The notion that Petrarch's humanism was by nature of philosophical disinterest has been replaced by studies that revealed more and more intimacy with St. Augustine and other philosophers, such as Plato and Seneca. However, the main interpretation of Renaissance humanism still lay in its connection with rhetoric, which has been initiated by P.O. Kristeller, who contended that rhetoric was the essential element of humanism. Kristeller admitted Christian influences, especially of Augustinian thought on Petrarch; nevertheless, he did not think the resonance between Augustine and Petrarch was about philosophy and theology, but literature: in his view, Augustine was seen as a rhetoric model for Petrarch to adapt and study classical antiquity. It was the practice of rhetoric that drives Petrarch to pursue and to mediate between classical and medieval culture.

Garin, in his grand work *History of Italian Philosophy*, has displayed a list of authors and scholars that are representative of different branches of philosophy. It is notable for his completely different attitudes towards Dante and Petrarch when treating the subject of philosophy. Obviously, he thought Dante to be more philosophical than Petrarch. In Dante's works, Garin discovered the traces of Aristotelian-Thomastic tendencies and the Franciscan spirit, which Dante fused with Christian thoughts. Dante's philosophy is

not Socrates' *sapienza*, but the human reflection of the divine Word: the whole *Divine Comedy* is systematic theology of Christianity showing the hierarchies of Empyrean, Ethics and Reason, in which Beatrice is the philosophical and theological personification of Ethics and love, an archetype opposite to Laura, Petrarch's beloved:

Dante, who has found consolation after the death of Beatrice in *la donna gentile*, discovers, as he gradually penetrates the significance of *Sapienza*, that *la donna gentile* is now assuming semblances similar to those of Beatrice. She brings him to the Empyrean where he finds the deceased maiden, who is in eternity alive and the first cause of his moral redemption and intellectual ascent. Where *Convivio* ends, *Comedy* begins.<sup>40</sup>

While Beatrice represents the ontological highness, Laura's image is, according to the observations of Santagata, more related to trivial things, *le bagatelle*, a term frequently appearing in *Canzoniere*, and which also refers to the fragments. That explains why Garin's writing, after having reached the age of humanism and Petrarch, did not discuss Petrarch's "philosophy" like he did with Dante: he wrote about Petrarch's works that were reflective of Cicero, Augustine, and Plato, but concluded that Petrarch's intimacy with Augustine was more a case of emotion than of serious philosophical consideration. As for Plato and Aristotle, Petrarch was never an expert: "If of Plato, whom he loved much but knew little, Petrarch studied little more than *Timaeus* (and *Phaedon*), toward Aristotle, coarse and difficult, he was never particularly inclined."<sup>41</sup> More than a serious philosopher, Petrarch appeared to be a medium, a bridge towards those who would later be engaged on philosophical work such as Luigi Marsili, Coluccio Salutati, or Ficino. However, Garin tried to contribute the philosophy of "solitude" to Petrarch, but his analysis only showed his dimensions of life style—how Petrarch's life reflected a philosophical tendency—while avoiding to discuss his systematic philosophy.

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<sup>40</sup> Eugenio Garin, *History of Italian Philosophy*, trans. from Italian and ed. by Giorgio Pinton, Rodopi, 2008 p.107. By the configure of Laura, see Freccero's article "The Fig Tree and the Laurel".

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p. 147.

Charles Trinkaus appeared to be more comprehensive by looking into both the religious and economic sides: on one hand, he focused on the Christian influence on humanistic understanding of man, emphasizing that the new outlook of man is inseparable from the traditional medieval brief “man is the image of God”; On the other hand, he contributed the transformations of the concept of man to the increase of economic need and the rise of commercial activities in civic life. He attempted to show the process of secularization in religion and the changes Christian underwent through this process. Trinkaus’ works—both *In Our Image and Likeness* and *The Poet as Philosopher*—make explicit the Christian influence over Petrarch, through which a philosophical consideration of Petrarch’s thoughts began to form. He sharply captured the smell of philosophy from Petrarch new mode of thinking, and claimed that: “Petrarch’s kind of poetry had a special relationship to the new mode of philosophical consciousness that was emerging in the Renaissance to which he made so important a contribution.”<sup>42</sup> But Trinkaus never took Petrarch as a philosopher like he did to the Neo-Platonist Ficino: his final emphasis highlighted Petrarch’s identity as “a poet” who treated different schools of philosophies with an eclectic attitude. He attributed Petrarch’s inconsistency in his philosophical thought to the “humanistic rhetoric”. Therefore, Trinkaus, like Kristeller, proposed that Augustine was an example, by following which “Ancient literature and philosophy,...could be discussed calmly and rationally, but seriously and intently in a Christian context.”<sup>43</sup> Stopping at the fact that Petrarch and Augustine share some mental affinities, neither Kristeller nor Trinkaus continued to analyze Petrarch’s views on individualism, selfhood and narrativity more deeply, if they had done do, they would not have missed these views’ allusion to St. Augustine, Dante and even Plato.

Recent years have seen the upsurge of interest in applying literary theories to Petrarchan studies which triggers many new studying methods, for example, reader-

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, p.2.

<sup>43</sup> Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, Constable, 1970, p.20.

reception theories, Deconstructionism, post-modernism and theory of narrativity. These new methods, focusing principally on narration, open up great possibilities to form different views regarding the relationship between narrative and the self. Moreover, the method of literary theory, combined with philosophical studies on the self and with modern psychological research on consciousness, contributes to re-portray Petrarch's image as a humanist in the context of post-modernism and post-human. For example, scholars of literary theory tend to view Petrarch's scattered, discursive styles and selves through the lens of Derridan deconstructionism and de-centerism. Freccero's representative study, "The Fig Tree and the Laurel", emphasizes Petrarch's creation of Laura as a way to gain an autonomy that attempted to rival God. Such is the sin of idolatry, the opposition to Augustine's fig tree image:

...the poetic lady created by the poet, who in turn creates him as poet laureate. This circularity forecloses all referentiality and in its self-contained dynamism resembles the inner life of the Trinity as the Church fathers imagined it. One could scarcely suppose a greater autonomy.<sup>44</sup>

Using theories from Saussure and Pierce, Freccero tried to prove that Petrarch's Laura-*Lauro* is an "autoreflexive sign without reference to an anterior *logos*"<sup>45</sup> that leads *absence* of the Christian center—God—to the infinite referentiality of signs, "a plethora of signifieds"<sup>46</sup> in Derrida's words. This well explains Petrarch's fetishistic description of Laura. Freccero's novelty lies in the fact that by combining theology and linguistics, he found an explanation to Petrarch's autotomy as *the* author, while referring to theories

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<sup>44</sup> John Freccero, "The Fig Tree and the Laurel: Petrarch's Poetics", *Diacritics*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring, 1975), 34-40, p.37.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, p.35.

<sup>46</sup> For the sign and play in the discourse, see Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", in *Writing and Difference (L'écriture et la différence)*, trans. by Alan Bass, Éditions du Seuil, 1967.

by C.S Pierce, Derrida, Paul de Man, which inspired many later studies.

Robert Durling is with Freccero in his view of Petrarch's literary fabric of the self, but his emphasis was on showing Petrarch's vulnerability in realizing the establishment of self when faced with the problem of human language and the crisis of Christian allegory. He carefully examined the text of Mount Ventoux<sup>47</sup>, and argued about the problematic reading of the ascent as a spiritual conversion, which further casted light on the problem of allegorical interpretation of the self. Thomas Greene and Ronald Witt analyzed Petrarch's self through the idea of literary imitation, through which they demonstrated the problems of representation and authorship as well as the anxieties over identity in Petrarchan texts. Greene, for example, by examining the subtexts and allusions in *Canzoniere* in his *The Light in Troy*, showed Petrarch's effort to build a sort of intimacy between himself and ancient authors. Such intimacy, however, while legitimatizing Petrarch's position in the literary genealogy, also put him under the anxieties of influence. He discovered that, while facing ancient examples, Petrarch expressed a sense of alienation, vulnerability and worry which turned into the alienation of the self. Petrarch's desire in the narration of the self is frustrated by such alienation and deracination. Witt, on the other hand, would like to emphasize Petrarch's connection with his predecessors by putting him as the third generation of humanists who followed Lovato and Mussato.<sup>48</sup> Instead of exaggerating Petrarch's position as a humanist, he preferred to see him as one among many humanistic harbingers, but not "father". However, Witt also recognized the uniqueness of Petrarch's humanism<sup>49</sup> compared to that of Lovato: Petrarchan humanism balanced a passionate classicism

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<sup>47</sup> Robert Durling, "The Ascent of Mount Ventoux and the Crisis of Allegory," *Italian Quarterly*, vol.18, 1974, pp.7-28.

<sup>48</sup> Ronald G. Witt, "*In the Footsteps of the Ancients*", *The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruini*, Brill, 2001.

<sup>49</sup> "Petrarch, growing to manhood in southern France at the papal court, developed humanism in a different milieu and endowed it with a Christian conscience destined to play a role in its evolution ever afterwards." *ibid*, p.290. Witt thought this information was very important, and argued that Petrarch's interest in Rome was not inspired by Italian humanism (Lovato) but from the universalistic scholarship in France.

with a traditional Christian devotion,”<sup>50</sup> which well showed Petrarch’s cultural eclecticism between ancient and modern. The most important aspect of Witt’s studies lie in the fact that he confirmed the Christian influence, especially Augustine’s authority on Petrarch. Among the numerous Christian works, Witt pointed out the essential importance of *Confessions* to our author: “the touchstone for Petrarch’s belief that pagan literature was relevant to Christian faith was Augustine’s avowal in the *Confessions*...”<sup>51</sup> which highlighted the motif of conversion in Petrarch’s narration of the self. Though having different opinions on Petrarch’s status in humanism, both authors have shown us how Petrarch recognized his identity and authorship within the Italian literary tradition, and such a recognition provides historical context for his autobiographic writings.

The Petrarchan language of narrating the self harbors in itself a theological problem. For Augustine and Dante, language serves as a sign that refers to an anterior *logos*, leading ultimately to God; for Petrarch, on the other hand, language is the tool to let men know themselves. As put by Moevs, language is “the medium through which human express their nature and come to know what they are;... it is also the means of persuasion, through which humans can be moved to develop the potential of their nature, and through which one can become a moral counselor to another.”<sup>52</sup> However, self-knowledge, based on narration, cannot lead to a conversion that transcends oneself, but only leads to the knowledge of one’s incapacity and vulnerability, which further produces more unfulfilled desires.

The most striking impact on Petrarch’s self is brought by Giuseppe Mazzotta’s studies. With his post-modern and deconstructive tone, Mazzotta described a Petrarch of “scattered selves.” He said, Petrarch’s understanding of unity was entirely different from his medieval predecessors who had faith in an ontological existence. For Petrarch,

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, p. 290

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, p.254.

<sup>52</sup> Christian Moevs, “Subjectivity and Conversion in Dante and Petrarch”, in *Petrarch and Dante: anti-Dantism, Metaphysics, Tradition*, p.242.



Mazzotta argued, unity was made of fragments, a scattered entity. Unlike Dante, a faithful pilgrim who ascended from low to high, Petrarch “maps the route of an existence caught up in the tortuous wanderings of history as a great venture unfolding over the seemingly random twists and turns of his wayward imagination.”<sup>53</sup> Dante’s two personages: the poet and the pilgrim, finally converged at the moment when he perceived the figure of God’s face; Augustine’s divided selves eventually were unified after he heard the mysterious sound and read the Bible, while Petrarch remained in a situation of fragments, and his divided selves failed to reach a conversion point leading him to the transcendence. This determines Petrarch’s predicament—the inability to reach a unity in the self.

Based on the consensus of Petrarch’s “scattered selves”, Christian Moevs continued to indicate the unsteadiness of Petrarch’s self: “while for Dante the self is metaphysically rooted in a non-contingent reality, for Petrarch it is an evanescent locus of thought and desire, irreducibly other than both God and the world.”<sup>54</sup> . The failed conversion, according to Moevs, is due to Petrarch’s refusal of the Aristotelian-Neoplatonic understanding of the fundamental metaphysical relations that link the individual, the world and God as an ontological unity. The ontologically deracinated self, therefore, is “in existential crisis; it is a fragile and illusory postulate, an evanescent tissue of thought, memory, and desire, in constant danger of dispersion in the flux of space and time.”<sup>55</sup> Moevs’s insightful argument leads to one of my main points: while conversion requires the ultimate unity of individual, time and God, Petrarch’s pieced selves, subjected in the temporal discursiveness and spatial exile, could never obtain that. Since the subjective self has been divorced from the world and God, Moevs continued to contend that the philosophical (Aristotelian -Neoplatonic) and theological (Christian) framework within which conversion made sense, have been erased. But in which way do these frameworks cease to be effective? Moevs stopped, and that’s where

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<sup>53</sup> Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch*, p.18

<sup>54</sup> Christian Moevs, “Subjectivity and Conversion in Dante and Petrarch”,p.227.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, p.245.

I will continue: the invalid frameworks are produced by the rupture between the personal time (micro-history) and the Christian historiography (macro-history) on the existential level.

The investigation of Petrarch's view on the relationship between time, space and the self will lead to the studies on two aspects in particular: (1) how Petrarch's *ego* evolves through time and space based on his self-narration; (2) how the narrative of the self enters into the consciousness of time. Time is, in one sense, anthropological. The classical work that thoroughly discusses narrative, self and time would be Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*<sup>56</sup>, in which he projects how the story-telling has contributed to the self-fabric. Ricoeur explores the temporality intrinsic in narrative, and he tries to clarify how the story-teller, by transferring his experiences in time into narration, saw the construction and fashioning of himself. *Time and Narrative* is fairly inspiring because it helps me to discover that how Petrarch's sense of realistic existence has been transformed into a literary event, and consequently the crisis of existence becomes the problem of narrative and language.

The temporal experiences of Petrarch are classified into two levels: the first is the personal experience of time, and the second is the view on the becoming of history. The former level, being the subset, is in a mapping relation with the latter level. Mommsen's outstanding study, the article "Petrarch's Concept of 'Dark Ages'"<sup>57</sup>, has shown Petrarch's novelty in his understanding of history. First, Petrarch reverses the traditional chronology of "luminous" ages and "dark" ages<sup>58</sup> by connecting the luminous age with the antique; more importantly, he re-defines the meaning of history by focusing solely on the pagan history of Rome rather than the Christian Rome. For Petrarch, the decline of Rome is regarded as the beginning of "Dark Ages" since the city falls into the hands of barbarians. However, this is not the only reason for Petrarch's demarcation.

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<sup>56</sup> Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. by David Pullauer, University of Chicago Press, vol.1 (1990), vol.2 (1990); vol.3 (2010).

<sup>57</sup> Theodore E Mommsen, "Petrarch's Concept of the 'Dark Ages'", *Speculum*, vol.17, no.2, 1942, pp.226-242.

<sup>58</sup> "Antiquity, so long considered as the 'Dark Age,' now became the time of 'light' which had to be 'restored'; the era following Antiquity, on the other hand, was submerged in obscurity.", *ibid*, p.228.

Mommsen has proposed that it is Petrarch's coronation in Rome that stirs his interest to re-discover Roman history. The coronation, according to the research of Gerhard Regn and Berhard Huss, is a ceremony reviving a classical tradition that had been neglected for centuries.<sup>59</sup> This further testifies to Petrarch's major interest in pagan Rome. Mommsen has explained the external reasons for Petrarch's new demarcation: his coronation and his political interest; but, as far as I am concerned, he goes no further than that. Behind such external reasons, what sustains Petrarch's division?

Marguerite R. Waller intends to give a more comprehensive explanation by looking into Petrarch's poetics.<sup>60</sup> By exploring Petrarch's poetic language, she finds that his way of reading and writing, as well as his understanding of language reflected, or *vice versa*, his concept of history.<sup>61</sup> Waller's argument emphasizes that Petrarch's grammatical and semantic approaches correspond to his interpretation of history as a text. While Petrarch is interpreting the grand "book" of history, he arbitrarily defines Rome to be the center. However, Petrarch's Rome proves to be an absence: lacking the ontological grounding, the city hardly can be tasked with sustaining the whole history and its center status is hardly persuasive, too: the demarcation of history reveals its arbitrariness rather than authenticity. His portrayal of Laura in his poetic works is analogous to his description of Rome: his beloved woman, the desired center of the whole text, demonstrates the same inadequacies as Rome. Both are absent and lacking, basing themselves on the self-reference of poetic creation. The contribution of Waller's method of studies is that she successfully connects Petrarch's poetic practice with his historical view. If Waller tries to apply literary practice to Petrarchan historiography, then Gianfranco Folena is the one who intends to relate Petrarch's consciousness of

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<sup>59</sup> Gerhard Regn and Berhard Huss, "Petrarch's Rome: The History of the Africa and the Renaissance Project," *MLN*, vol.124, no.1, Italian Issue, 2009, pp.86-102.

<sup>60</sup> Waller, *Petrarch's Poetics and Literary History*, The University of Massachusetts Press, 1970.

<sup>61</sup> "Petrarch's concept of history vis-à-vis a traditional medieval historical understanding, which I describe as mutually inverse images, suggests the priority that structural issues might take in our coming to terms with what appears to be a significant relative shift in the modes of reading and writing experience, both historical and poetic.", *ibid*, xi.

time with his experiences with the newly-invented mechanical clocks, which has changed the old way in which people regard time. Within a new system of time regulation, the experience of time has become more ordered, but also more scattered, bringing to people a heavy sense of fragments and alienation rather than of unity and safety. The studies on Petrarch's demarcation of history has led to a profound revelation to his consciousness of time, on which his poetic construction of the self has been developed.

Another interest on Petrarch and temporality lies in analyzing how he responded to the tyrannies and irreversibility of time. For example, Teodolinda Barolini argues about how Petrarch manages to arrange his lyrics in a time sequence, while attempting to reject the risk of time's devastation,<sup>62</sup> which highlights Petrarch's unsolvable contradictions in dealing with time. This aspect makes prominent the dignity of man by telling how a mortal creature like man struggles to transcend the temporal obstacles with his intellectual fruits, which could be seen as an anticipation of Pico's claims. Such attempt, while manifesting the brilliant side of humanity, is dangerous since it may become a transgression to God, a Babel-like desire. Here, our attention should be given to the relationship between intellect and will in Petrarch. Traditional Petrarchan scholars would rather consider that Petrarch places will before intellect by quoting his

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<sup>62</sup> Teodolinda Barolini, "The Making of a Lyric Sequence: Time and Narrative in Petrarch's *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*", *MLN*, vol.104, no.1. 1989, Barolini proposed that Petrarch, on one hand, accepted the reality of inseparability of time and narrative; while, on the other hand, wished to create a poetic space immune from time: "he alternates between evading narrativity and the confronting it, exploiting the dialectical tension between the lyrics sequence's lyric and narrative drives to tread a tightrope between the safety of stasis and the exigency of motion. Thus, the basic feature of this problematic is the paradox of narrativity's simultaneous absence and presence, a paradox that informs the lyric sequence as a genre and underlies the *Fragmenta* as a whole: Petrarch seems to accept the narrative burden of time when he arranges his lyrics in a sequence; he seems to deny it by calling them—and to a lesser extent by making them—fragments.", pp. 7-8. I am much indebted to Barolini's works when I constructed my own thoughts on Petrarch's time consciousness and narrativity. Barolini helps us realize the time burden in every narration, including the narration of self. Apart from the shiftiness of human language, this is the second biggest challenge Petrarch confronted: he had to narrate in order to make his self "present" and to stabilize his authority, but he also realized the desperation—on one could escape the devastation of time. The narrative "I", constructed and protected by words, inevitably undergoes perishing, which is contradicted to Petrarch's desire of eternal fame, and his wish of an eternal Rome.

words from *De ignorantia*, which says that “It is better to will the good than to know the true.” For Moevs, he thinks that Petrarch seeks to “will” love without understanding it, and he points out that through the intellect, or self-identification, Petrarch perceives a self “that is rootless, unstable and incapable of conversion.”<sup>63</sup> Lee, on the contrary, seeks to display the superior status of intellect over will, which contends that Petrarch has inherited from Augustine’s early works for the view that “the intellectual practices necessary to merit redemption could be derived from the role played by truth in distinguishing between virtue and vice.”<sup>64</sup> Under the help of reason, one is led to the road of redemption by understanding true happiness. It is intellect that moves the will to follow the good. I think Lee’s highlight on the role of intellect playing in Petrarch’s thoughts helps us to understand his differences from the later more mature humanists. Petrarch’s words in the *De ignorantia* should be interpreted as a warning not to hold too much confidence on man’s intellect, or man would fall into the danger of Dante’s Ulysses. For Petrarch, intellect makes man see his own limits, but his insistence of pursuing virtue despite recognizing these limits has later been valued greatly by the upcoming Renaissance humanity. It is the sprout of Petrarch’s humanism.

The discussion of Petrarch’s consciousness of time is based on Karl Löwith’s classical book, *Meaning in History*<sup>65</sup>, in which he discusses two modes of time in historiography: circular vs. linear, cyclical vs. progressive. In my opinion, what’s most important in Löwith’s research is that he highlights how our current understanding and interpretation of history as an advancing process is actually resulted from the heritage of Christianity. Men in modern society are interested in predicting the future, and they would like to think our society is progressive and advancing. For example, our textbooks of history tend to describe our culture as an advancing wheel: it is seen that there once lived the primitive men who did not even know how to use tools; after some

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<sup>63</sup> Christian Moevs, “Subjectivity and Conversion in Dante and Petrarch”, p.246

<sup>64</sup> Alexander Lee, *Petrarch and St. Augustine, Classical Scholarship, Christian Theology and the Origins of the Renaissance in Italy*, p.151.

<sup>65</sup> Karl Löwith, *Meaning of History*, The University of Chicago Press, 1949.

pages, we are told the coming of “Industrial Revolution”, an epoch of new inventions and tools; when we cast our eyes to the present, we find ourselves surrounded by an “information explosion” which emerges with the cyborgs, space expedition, gene-modification projects and biological transformation. Every media is picturing to us a vision of progress. But is it always so? According to Löwith, this is the aftermath of the profound influence of Christianity.

In pre-Christian history, men were more likely to treat history as a circle always repeating itself; just like the old saying goes “there is nothing new under the sun.” There exists universal rule that determines rise and fall of each epoch, and each reign must follow such a rule. The cyclical time, or mythical time as it is called by Mircea Eliade, provides man with an ontological paradigm in which the repetitive scheme legitimates men’s actions, informing them that they are performing what thousands of years ago their ancestors, or gods were performing. Eliade calls this an archetype, adding that: “reality is acquired solely through repetition or participation; everything which lacks an exemplary model is ‘meaningless’, *i.e.*, it lacks reality.”<sup>66</sup> Linear time, composed of accidental sequences and events “lacks reality.” However, the advent of Christ changes the ancient view of cyclical time by infusing linear time with meaning by giving it an ultimate goal—the final salvation of the whole mankind. After that history of human beings starts to take on a new outlook—it should process to its fulfillment of salvation which will definitely be realized since it has been promised by Christ, whose scarification has saved men from their fallen sin. Thus, Löwith argues that, unlike their Greek or Jew ancestors, men under the horizon of Christianity become more interested in the promised future. They look forwards to the other side of life, not this earthly one. From the perspective of micro-history, the trajectory of private history also appears to be linear and progressive: one is promised to be saved, thus his life could be considered a conversion to God and an advance from earthly corruption to heavenly beatitude.

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<sup>66</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Or, Cosmos and History*, Princeton University Press, 1954, p.34.

The classical research by Thomas P. Roche, Jr.<sup>67</sup>, on the other hand, focuses on discovering the calendrical structure of *Canzoniere*. Based on mathematical deductions and Petrarch's personal experiences, Roche proposes that each poem corresponds to a day of the year (thus 366 poems mean 366 days of the year). Also, he argues that the division of *Canzoniere* into two parts has been a result Petrarch's following the Christian calendar. Part I deals with the death of Christ—the beginning of Petrarch's torturing love, and part II deals with the birth of Christ—the death of his love for Laura, which signifies the end of his secular care.<sup>68</sup> Emphasizing its Christian context, Roche finds a geometrical balance and mathematical symmetry in the whole *Canzoniere*; however, he only stops at the level of aesthetics, and is not interested in exploring the reason of Petrarch's obsession with time. But Roche's study has clearly showed us that Petrarch's consciousness of time is turns out to be a persistent intention that internalizes itself as the innate structure throughout his works.<sup>69</sup> Edoardo Taddeo is more interested

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<sup>67</sup> Thomas P. Roche, Jr., "The Calendrical Structure of Petrarch's 'Canzoniere,'" *Studies on Philology*, vol.71, no.2, 1974, pp.152-172.

<sup>68</sup> Besides Roche, A. A. Zottoli, in *Il numero solare* also wrote about this point. Zottoli has attributed Petrarch's insertion of Christian calendar into his poems to his desire to sanctify his autobiography.

Roche has configured each poem to a certain date:

264 Canzone 25 December

268 Canzone 29 December

270 Canzone 31 December

323 Canzone 22 February

324 Ballata 23 February

325 Canzone 24 February

331 Canzone 1 March

332 Sestina 2 March

359 Canzone 29 March

360 Canzone 30 March

366 Canzone 5 April

And he argued that, for example, the last 40 poems "form a symbolical forty days of Lent", and thus the poem 366 corresponded to 4 April, the Palm Sunday of 1327.

<sup>69</sup> Besides Roche, Giovanni Biancardi provided a more comprehensive review and analysis on Petrarch's calendrical order of *Canzoniere* "L'ipotesi di un ordinamento calendariale del 'Canzoniere' petrarchesco," *Storico della letteratura Italiana*, 1995, pp. 1-55. Biancardi agreed with Zottoli's and Roche's confirmation on the Christian influence on Petrarch's order, and he further suggested that Christian influence was actually from St. Augustine: "Anche a noi non riesce difficile, infatti, immaginare l'anziano poeta intent nell'allestire un anno

in exploring Petrarch's sentiment about time. In his two articles "Petrarca e il tempo, il tempo come tema nelle opere latine"<sup>70</sup> and "Petrarca e il tempo, il tempo come tema nelle Rime."<sup>71</sup> Taddeo has done a meticulous textual studies on Petrarch's works, intending to show all writings that concern with Petrarch's worries, frustrations, vulnerability and desperation about time. It is Petrarch's feeling of a short, fleeting life ("L'esistenza umana è concepita come percorso, viaggio da un punto ad un altro; viaggio irrecersibile"<sup>72</sup>) that drove him towards the longing for eternal fame.<sup>73</sup> He confirms Petrarch's allusion to the Augustinian concept of time, but also finds that Petrarch can never realize a unity among the tri-partition of time like Augustine, who is able to see the vision of eternity through the extension of soul. Indulging himself in the despair of time's irreversibility, Petrarch mourns the shiftiness of man's life and the smallness of one's power against the cruelty of Fortune. Taddeo's study is inspiring to my thesis in that it highlights the *urgency* of individual existence in confronting with time. The anxiety of homelessness and of the impending death endows Petrarch with a slight air of "modernism". It is the sentiment of time, the anxiety towards existence and the preoccupation with one's end that compel Petrarch to perceive the life of individual's differently from his other medieval companions. Petrarch still accepts the

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'sacro' di rime, giacché questi non solo ci apparirebbe come l'autore preoccupato di portare a termine, nel poco tempo rimastogli, un'opera vagheggiata per decenni. Egli sarebbe anche quell medesimo uomo di cultura che, ampiamente superato il traguardo dei sessant'anni, era venuto compiendo lue sue più profonde riflessioni sulla natura del rapport cultura-fede religiosa, e da tali riflessioni di era uscito vieppiù convinto della validità degli insegnamenti di Agostino." p.53 "Biancardi gave an example that how Petrarch learnt from *De Trinitate*: "Se tali dunque erano le letture dell'anziano Petrarca, le fonti di ciò che egli additava come il vero sapere, fra I progetti del poeta, e nei medesimi anni, poteva ben trovare posto quello di una strutturazione in chiave calendariale della raccolta delle proprie rime volgari."p.53.

<sup>70</sup> Edoardo Taddeo, "Petrarca e il tempo, il tempo come tema nelle opere latine", *Studi e problem di critica tesuale*, n.25, 1982, pp.53-76.

<sup>71</sup> Edoardo Taddeo, "Petrarca e il tempo, il tempo come tema nelle Rime", *Studi e problem di critica tesuale*, vol.27, 1983, pp.69-108.

<sup>72</sup> E. Taddeo, "Petrarca e il tempo, il tempo come tema nelle opere latine,"p.72.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, "quell pensiero trova il suo vero antagonista non tanto nell'idea di vita celeste, condivisa ma non vissuta, quanto nel desiderio di gloria, che si protende ben oltre I limiti dell'esistenza individuale, ma pur sempre in un tempo terreno, umano, e spinge gli animi dei grandi a confrontarsi e gareggiare con gli uomini di tutti i secoli."p.66.



canon that life of this world is a pilgrimage to God, but at the same time he realizes there are other possibilities and roads as being an independent individual.

Compared to Roche and Taddeo, Franco Simone and Remo Bodei appear to be more philosophical. Both of them are interested in discussing the significance of time in Petrarchan thoughts. Simone focuses on Petrarch's comprehension of cyclical history<sup>74</sup>, which has on two points: (1) his insistence on the permanence of human nature, and (2) the belief on the re-rise of Rome. But Simone's argument only emphasizes the political side of Petrarch, which seems to neglect Petrarch's Christian side that reveals his concept of linear time. Actually, Petrarch does not choose one over the other between two modes of time. For him, many things are situated in a "grey zone" rather than taking up a black or white outlook. Both time patterns tangle with each other in Petrarch's mind: on one hand, he believed in the return of Rome, while finding that he himself could never—like Rome returning to her previous splendor—return to God's side. His repeated falling for Laura is to blame; on the other hand, he applies the Christian calendar to his works in order to mark his life events with important religious events, while finding that all fame (including both Rome's and his own) was destined to decline. In this way, Petrarch's personal history is always at odds with the Christian history. His consciousness of time, compared to Augustine's and Dante's, appears to be more multi-dimensional.

The study of Remo Bodei gives a brief but revealing response to their commons and divergences on the concept of time<sup>75</sup>. Bodei first confirms the Augustinian influence on both Dante's and Petrarch's concepts of eternity, but he thinks Dante's influence is from *Città di Dio* while Petrarch is from *Confessioni*. Petrarch has inherited from Augustine the idea that eternity is always the *present* without changes, but he, instead of inventing a Dantean paradise, perceives eternity through Laura's revival with an immortal body. The changelessness of eternity is now configured as the living body of Laura; this,

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<sup>74</sup> Franco Simone, "Il Petrarca e la sua concezione ciclica della storia," *Arte e storia: Studi in onore di Leonello Vincenti*, Turin, 1965.

<sup>75</sup> Remo Bodei, "Tempo ed eternità in Dante e in Petrarca", *Letture classensi*. XXXII/XXXIV, 2005, pp.67-76.

Bodei thought, is the most humanistic side of *Trionfi*.<sup>76</sup> However, Christian Moevs holds a different view on Petrarch's perception of eternity. He argues that Petrarch's eternity is "a stranger affair: it is not a transcendence of time and flux, but rather it is time and flux frozen, fixed, stopped. It is not a beatific vision of the divine light, of pure being or consciousness as the ontological foundation of the world; it is rather a dream that the fleeing world itself could be made a '*cosa...stabile e ferma*'".<sup>77</sup> I think Moevs' argument is more persuasive since I find Petrarch's *eternity* resonates with Dante's description of a frozen status of the neutral angels of *Inferno*, which again verifies the suspicious status of Laura as the literary center that most highlights Petrarch's fragmented vision.

Apart from the authors I have mentioned above, Brian Stock and Carol Everhart Quillen<sup>78</sup> tries to explore Petrarch's narrative "I" from the perspective of reading. Their methods are different from R Waller's, though the three of them are all concerned with Petrarch's interpretation of history: Waller would like to emphasize Petrarch as an author, while the other two scholars prefer to take Petrarch as a reader. Both scholars would like to define the language of humanism and to discover the challenges confronted by the humanists that are brought by the textual records of history. They study Petrarch as a reader who interprets history and life as texts, and whose method of interpretation reflects his new emerging consciousness towards the past and his contemporary. The way Petrarch writes, reads and his strategies of rhetoric echo Augustinian influences, but he does not find it necessary to accept Augustine's precise

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<sup>76</sup> "Più insistente è, infatti, in lui il senso del tempo e dei suoi condizionamenti, meno presente la dimensione etico-politica, più basata sulla speranza che su una fede granitica l'attesa del Paradiso, più umana la conclusione dei *Trionfi*, che culmina non nella visione di Dio, ma in quella di Laura risorta col suo corpo glorioso." *ibid.*, p. 73; "Nell' eternità cessa la varietà delle vicende

<sup>77</sup> Christian Moevs, "Subjectivity and Conversion in Dante and Petrarch", p.234.

<sup>78</sup> For the studies on Petrarch as a reader, please refer to Victoria Kahn, "The Figure of the Reader in Petrarch's *Secretum*," *PMLA*, vol.100, 1985, pp.154-166; Brian Stock, "Reading, Writing and the Self: Petrarch and His Forerunners," *New Literary History*, vol.26, 1995, pp.717-730; *After Augustine: The Meditative Reader and the Text*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001; Carol E. Quillen, *Rereading the Renaissance: Petrarch, Augustine, and the Language of Humanism*, the University of Michigan Press, 1998; "A Tradition Invented: Petrarch, Augustine, and the Language of Humanism", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol.53, no.2, 1992, pp.179-207.

meaning and his strict theology. The importance of Stock and Quillen's studies lies in their emphasis on the fact that Petrarch is able to anchor his *ego* within the sea of minds by the process of reading and interpreting signs and allegories. Not only Petrarch is a reader, all of us are, too. Our interpretation of history is based on Petrarch's interpretation of his "history". When everything could be treated as texts, we must be vigilant to the "fraudulence" and distortion of language. That is why Quillen would entitle one of his articles as "a tradition invented". From the theory of readers, Stock and Quillen also reveal Petrarch's essential relationships and literary intimacy with both classical and Christian authors, especially Petrarch's connection with Augustine. We will discuss this in our following reviews.

St. Augustine, called by Petrarch as "our father" (*nostro padre*), is considered one of the most influential spiritual mentors to our poet. The importance of Augustine to Petrarch, according to many Petrarchan scholars and students, mainly lies in that he is a perfect example to show the literary and theological combination of the Christian and pagan minds. Augustine, like an experienced captain, teaches his pupil how to avoid the siren of the pagan sea, and to successfully arrive at the port of heaven. His autobiographical writing—the story of his conversion—has become one of the archetypes for the narration of the self which legitimates the liberal construction of the self with religious values. Stock and Quillen intended to capture Petrarch's image as an attentive reader of Augustine: Stock showed how the methods of reading, writing and exegesis of the saint have influenced Petrarch's forming of humanistic reading and writing. He especially points out that Augustine's use of "sign" effected Petrarch's understanding of ancient texts. Quillen, on the other hand, argues that Petrarch, instead of sharing a sort of mental intimacy with Augustine, tends to use Augustine's words to defend himself from his contemporaries who refuse to share his views. Augustine's status as a spiritual leader is challenged because Petrarch might have treated Augustine functionally rather than philosophically. The studies of Stock and Quillen are intriguing, but they cannot explain why Petrarch would have a new attitude towards the reading of the ancients.

Both Quillen's and Stock's views emphasize Petrarch's reliance on Augustinian rhetoric, but my attempt is to show that Augustine's influence on Petrarch is structural and foundational, and that Petrarch's narration of the self uses the Augustinian conversion as a reference. Trinkaus is the one who argues for the existence of intellectual affinities between Petrarch and Augustine. Particularly, Petrarch finds Augustine's idea of the "double consciousness" very appealing to him since selfhood is made prominent in the struggles of a divided mind. Augustine's eloquent expression of conversion also inspires Petrarch to seek a transcendental elevation through everyday experiences. I think Trinkaus's most inspiring point is that he is bold enough to make a statement about Petrarch's poetic way of presenting philosophy, that is, discarding the polarization between "objectivity-subjectivity", he recognized Petrarch's "theological poetics" which expresses universality through individual subjectivity.<sup>79</sup> My method is a bit different from Trinkaus's in that I wish to show how not only Petrarch's participation in philosophy in his unique, poetic way, but also his engagement in poetics, reflect an ontological confirmation of individualism and existentialism. In a word, Trinkaus emphasizes the "method", while I focus more on the "content".

The strongest argument on Augustine's influence on Petrarch can be no other but Alexander Lee's *Petrarch and St. Augustine, Classical Scholarship, Christian Theology and the Origins of the Renaissance in Italy*. Unsatisfied with previous studies which only implicitly recognizes Augustine's impact, Lee contends that Augustine's early writings have offered Petrarch the conceptual foundations for his approaches to moral philosophy, and that despite Petrarch's devotion to classical antiquity and rhetoric, Petrarch's thought, though lacking inconsistency, take its root on the soil of Augustinian theology. Lee point out that Petrarch's *Secretum*, *De otio religioso* and *De vita solitaria*

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<sup>79</sup> "Petrarch's kind of poetry had a special relationship to the new mode of philosophical consciousness that was emerging in the Renaissance to which he made so important a contribution.", *ibid*, p.2; "he (Petrarch) tried to persuade others to do so through his letters and treaties based on classical moral philosophy. In this way the poet became a philosopher and sought to make his own subjective insights universal... The poet describing what the human condition *might be* becomes the philosopher making subjective statements concerning individuals that simultaneously acquire the nature of universals.", *ibid*, p.26.

are based on Augustine's early works. I agree that Augustine's influence is fundamental and conceptual rather than literary, rhetoric and functional, as the conversion serves as a solid motif as well as an innate structure in Petrarch's works. Accepting the Augustinian conversion as an archetype of the narration of the self may not indicate Petrarch's adoption of Augustinian theology, but it does show Petrarch's deep meditation on the meaning of *self* regarding the development of a narrative "I" in the Christian allegory of self-transcendence.

Albert R. Ascoli's studies on Petrarch's historical imagination are fairly intriguing, too.<sup>80</sup> Some ideas of my thesis are most indebted to his research. He takes the Augustinian conversion as a "trope", an event that was textual and literary by nature<sup>81</sup>; also, he is the one who recognizes the problematic structure of time in the conversion: for it has no other way but to "leave the present self detached from and uninvolved with the images of its past"<sup>82</sup> This, actually, is a version of self-alienation rather than unification. Ascoli further pointed out the illusions about conversion: (1) it requires the new self to be entirely separated from the old one, which is impossible considering the continuity of time and unity of the *ego*; (2) it requires a vantage point from which the new self can review its own past, which is also impossible if one is still living. The narration of conversion, in fact, invents an arbitrary death, ending with the revival of the self in order to justify its peculiar temporal structure: only after the spiritual death of the old self, could the new self gain the vantage point to make the valuation within the frame of entire narration. My research is also indebted to William J. Bouwsma who strongly argues that Stoicism and Augustinianism construct the two faces of the

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<sup>80</sup> Albert R. Ascoli, "Petrarch's Middle Age: Memory, Imagination, History, and the 'Ascent of Mount Ventoux'", *Stanford Italian Review*, vol.X, no.1,1991, pp.5-44.

<sup>81</sup> "Conversion is clearly an event, an act of will which separates past self from future and which invites a narrative extended in time, as the *Confessions* themselves prove, and as Petrarch's memorial meditations on the summit suggest. At the same time, for Augustine, conversion is also a trope, a turning, which takes place in no time at all, having no temporal and hence no true narrative extension—as Petrarch's reflections during the ascent itself remind us.", *ibid*, p.28.

<sup>82</sup> Albert R. Ascoli, "Petrarch's Middle Age", p.29.

Renaissance “coin”.<sup>83</sup> Bouwsma discusses in detail both the Stoic and Augustinian elements in humanistic thought, which inspires me in detecting Petrarch’s philosophical outlook. However, his main point is settled upon rhetoric rather than philosophy: his studies are principally based on Kristeller’s opinion that *rhetoric* is the center of humanism. Thus, he claims that it is the rhetoric characteristics that made Stoicism and Augustinianism so important to Renaissance humanism.<sup>84</sup>

This thesis, focusing on exploring the poetical thoughts of Petrarch that convey his Augustinian views, suggests that Petrarch’s spiritual autobiography is essentially Augustinian in structure. It is the conflict between the Petrarchan narration of the self and the Augustinian structure that produces these failed “conversions” in Petrarch’s works: his insistence on the mode of Augustinian autobiography drives him to go through so much spiritual anguishes because he painfully finds that his example—the Augustinian autobiography—cannot accommodate the scattered *self*, and bring it to unity. The Christian allegory proves to be unsuitable for the newly-emerging individualism. Petrarch desires to accomplish the unification of his fragmental selves like the saint, but the Augustinian mode, confronted by Petrarch’s experiences, seems to be too simple and even naïve because it does not, or cannot, take into consideration the complexity and astonishing varieties of individualism. Also, the narrative time in conversion follows a linear development while the Petrarchan self is subjected to cyclical time. Man, under the humanistic horizon, belongs less to the love-bounding brotherhood than to himself as an independent subject. Unable to accomplish his

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<sup>83</sup> William J. Bouwsma, “The Two Faces of Humanism: Stoicism and Augustinianism in Renaissance Thought,” in *A Usable Past: Essays in European Cultural History*, University of California Press 1990, 51. Also see Bouwsma’s *The Interpretation of Renaissance Humanism*, Service Center for Teachers of History, vol. 18, 1966. This article could be read as a preparation for the “Two Faces of Humanism”, in which Bouwsma emphasized the varieties of Renaissance: on one hand, it had high intimacy with medieval thoughts; on the other hand, it points to the modernity and individualism.

<sup>84</sup> “Both were bound up with the ancient rhetorical tradition, Stoicism through the ethical teachings of the Latin orators and essayists particularly beloved by the humanists, Augustinianism through the rhetorical powers of Augustine himself and, more profoundly, the subtle rhetorical quality of his mature theology.”, *ibid*, p. 22.

spiritual pilgrimage, Petrarch finds himself, even under the Grace of God, vulnerable to the arbitrariness of Fortune and to the shiftiness of life.

Actually, Petrarch's affinities to Augustine is most prominent in his comparison to Dante. For me, there is no doubt about the Dantesque impact on Petrarch. Marco Santagata<sup>85</sup> and Paolo Trovato's researches have well detected Dante's influence on his literary and intellectual enterprises. Nevertheless, I am not interested in exploring the philological affinities between these two poets. I would rather like to take their intellectual affinities as proof that both poets are heirs to Augustine in their narration of the self. Both would like to construct a history of self as a conversion. Petrarch's repeated failures in conversion do not indicate his narration of the self, like his Laura to the fig tree, is an opposition to the Augustinian allegory; rather, it is in his consistent endeavor to imitate the Augustinian conversion that underlines his clear consciousness of narrative "I" and of the power by "authority".

This thesis, using the method of literary theory, attempts to demonstrate something more fundamental and metaphysical in Petrarch's thoughts: for example, how Petrarch perceives time and space, how he understands the concept of self and language, and how he views a narrative "I" regarding the authentic, realistic "I". Through the bridge of literary theory, I would like to reach the side of philosophy: to show how the Petrarchan philosophy of "individual existence" testifies to his "modernity" and "humanism". I know clearly the dangers of talking about "philosophy" in the Renaissance, an epoch assumed to despise the Medieval philosophy of scholasticism, and I am aware of Petrarch's ambiguous status in the field of humanistic philosophy. As Lee has observed, the difficulty in relating Petrarch to serious philosophers lies in

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<sup>85</sup> Marco Santagata, "Connessioni intertestuali nel *Canzoniere* del Petrarca", *Strumenti Critici*, vol.9, no.26, 1975, pp.80-112; M. Santagata, "Presenze di Dante «Comico» nel «Canzoniere» del Petrarca, *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, 1969, pp.163-211; Paolo Trovato, *Dante in Petrarca. Per un inventario dei dantismi nei Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*, Olschki, 2012 ; or Nancy J. Vickers, "Re-membering Dante: Petrarch's 'Chiare, fresche et dolci acque'", *MLN*, vol.96, no.1, *Italian Issue*, 1981, pp.1-11. For the counter opinion, I would like to refer to the book *Petrarch and Dante: anti-Dantism, Metaphysics, Tradition*, ed. by Zygmunt Baranski and Theodore Cachey, University of Notre Dame, 2009.

the fact that his works are too scattered to reach a consistency, and his passion in rhetoric makes him look like an orator who solely pursues styles and skills rather than systematical meditation on metaphysics. Lee, however, argues that Petrarch's lack of consistency has been due to a transformation of views over the decades of his life, and his works actually display affinities to and find united resonance in Augustine's early, more immature works.<sup>86</sup>

However, I do not intend to portray a complete outlook of the philosophy of the Renaissance in this limited space, nor do I wish to argue that Petrarch is a serious man of philosophy—because he never was. I do attempt to crystalize some philosophical aspects in Petrarch's thoughts and writings, and prove that these thoughts triggered the exploration of philosophy of man as an independent individual. I believe that if not the systematic mode of philosophy behind Petrarch's discursive writings and complicated mind, there must be something more ontological and metaphysical. Despite the dispersion and inconsistency of his thoughts, Petrarch holds an intensive concern for metaphysical issues such as "being and time". A man who has such great passion for renovation of culture and the promotion of morals would hardly pay no attention to these metaphysical problems.

Actually, according to Barolini, Petrarch is a metaphysical poet.<sup>87</sup> Although she is not "suggesting that Petrarch subscribed to a metaphysical system in the sense of a philosophical solution,"<sup>88</sup> she insists that "the problems that tugged at him ceaselessly—in particular the nature of time and the existence of the self in time—are metaphysical in nature."<sup>89</sup> In other words, maybe the way Petrarch thinks is not "philosophical", but the subject he himself concerned with is all about "philosophy".

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<sup>86</sup> Lee, *Petrarch and St. Augustine, Classical Scholarship, Christian Theology and the Origins of the Renaissance in Italy*, the "Introduction".

<sup>87</sup> Thedolinda Barolini, "Petrarch as the Metaphysical Poet Who is Not Dante, Metaphysical Markers at the Beginning of the *Retum vulgarium fragmenta (RVF 1-21)*", in *Petrarch and Dante: anti-Dantism, Metaphysics, Tradition*, pp.195-225.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, p.196.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, p.196.



Therefore, I'd like to argue that, it is Petrarch's subjective experiences in the fragments of time and his exile in space that construct the most philosophical outlook of his humanism. And I hope such findings could shed a light on the ontological uniqueness of early humanistic thought which give impetus to: (1) rethink the role of Christianity in the lens of Petrarchan thoughts; (2) redefine Renaissance humanism in the context of post-modern and post-human; (3) re-posit the place of man, during the waning of religion, in the new age of technology and cyber space.

## **I. Two Modes of Time and Its Relation with Space in Petrarch**

### **Introduction: General Concept of Time in Pre-Christian and Christian Period**

It can be said without exaggeration that what Petrarch concerns most is the problem

of time, and it is this concern that keeps him pondering much over death, morality, mortal limitation and vulnerability of a life of a single man when facing the infinite time and space. His narrations, most of which is about his self, are in fact a sort of display of the selfhood in the layout of time: within the chemistry of writing, Petrarch examines the mutations, transformations and developments of himself that manifests an itinerary from his birth to his very last days: how he is born in exile as a baby, how he encounters his life-time love as a young man, how he regards glory and solitary as a middle-aged man, how he retreats from world and confesses his youthful errors as an old man. These events, unfolding in the concrete historical/calendrical time, must be able to connect with the upcoming ones or to explain the already-happened ones. This will require a narration that can string them up.

The discussion about the difference between *discourse* and *history* is not new. Realistic events usually do not promise a story that contains a meaning. The meaning is given when one looks in retrospection and makes interpretations. Even for historical events, their selections and editions are not deprived of meaning-making: it is too naïve to think our history is all about what has been recorded in books. The actual-happened events way far outnumber those having-been-recorded. The micro-history—the history of an individual — cannot restrict itself away from this undertaking. When one starts to narrate his own life, it is almost impossible not to search for interpretations, and such deeds lead to the meaning-making of one's life. Through narrativity, private history becomes discourse, and the natural time, refigured by the narration, is made into a mental/narrative time.

If we are asked about our intuitive feeling about time, we may explain like this: when the sun rises, *today* begins, and we go to work or school; and when the sun falls, *today* becomes *yesterday* the past which is gone forever (irreversible) and we return home, while *tomorrow*, the future, is yet to come. However, this tri-partition of time, closely related to our economic life, is developed much later, not until the establishment of Christian :

Even the articulation of all historical time into past, present, and future reflects the temporal structure of the history of salvation. The past points to the first things, the future to the last things, and the present to a central presence which connects the past with the future through teleological succession. It is only because of our habit of thinking in terms of the Christian tradition that the formal division of all historical time into past, present, and future times seems so entirely natural and self-evident.<sup>90</sup>

There are several classifications of time. The basic classification is linear/cyclical time. The mythical/historical time and pagan/Christian time are based on the linear/cyclical classification. One of the earliest investigations of the nature of time comes from Aristotle, by whom time is defined as “a number of change in respect of the before and after” (“arithmos kineseos kata to proteron kai husteron”, *Physics*, 219b1). For Aristotle, the perception of time is only possible with the perception of the changes or movements in the *space*. Such a definition tries to make the intangible time tangible by drawing it in the visible motions. Thus, human’s initial understanding of time usually comes from the cosmic time; That is, the motion of celestial objects. In *Purgatorio* of the *Divine Comedy*, time is measured by the movement of stars, the indication of constellations and most importantly, the rise and fall of sun. The movement of sun makes the *Purgatorio* contradictory to the *Inferno*, where the pilgrim has described as “a place where no light shines” (in parte non che è luca, *Inf.* 4:151). Also, Petrarch began his description of time in *Triofi* by the movement of sun—the sun of god moves in his four-horsed carriage:

FORTH FROM his golden palace, after the dawn,  
So swiftly rose the Sun, begirt with rays,  
Thou wouldst have said: "Yet hardly had it set."  
Risen a little, he looked round about

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<sup>90</sup> Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History*, The University of Chicago Press, 1949, p. 185.

As wise men do, and to himself he said:

"What thinkest thou? Thou shouldst take greater care. <sup>91</sup>(*Triumph of Time*, I, 1-6)

For ancient people, their concept of time is more of intuition: the rise and fall of sun, the moon from part to full, the change of seasons from spring to winter and they found they themselves in the embrace of the spring again. The periodic motion of sun, in the first place, produces an image of the eternal circle. Time is elaborated in a predictable, stable circle of recurrence, which is pleasantly accepted to the ancients. They were, according to Löwith, "more moderate in their speculations":

They did not presume to make sense of the world or to discover its ultimate meaning. They were impressed by the visible order and beauty of the cosmos, and the cosmic law of growth and decay was also the pattern for their understanding of history...In this intellectual climate, dominated by rationality of the natural cosmos, there was no room for the universal significance of a unique, incomparable historic event. As for the destiny of man in history, the Greeks believed that man has resourcefulness to meet every situation with magnanimity—they did not go further than that. They were primarily concerned with the *logos* of the *cosmos*, not with the *Lord* and the meaning of *history*.<sup>92</sup>

Pleasant to see the natural, rational and regular order of universe, they believed that time, as well as history—the movements unfolded in time—is cyclical with the rhythmic repetitions. Löwith continues leading us to speculate the temporal mode of Greeks, about which he said, "Greek philosophers and historians were convinced that whatever is to happen will be of the same pattern and character as past and present events; they never indulged in the prospective possibilities of the future."<sup>93</sup>

The disinterest in future is due to the fact that once the *Logos* has presented itself as

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<sup>91</sup> All the English translation of the *Trionfi* is from:[http://petrarch.petersadlon.com/read\\_trionfi.html?page=V-I.en](http://petrarch.petersadlon.com/read_trionfi.html?page=V-I.en).

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, p.4.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, p.6.

a rational, recurrent pattern, future is easy enough to predict and to manage. Also, their opinion of a single historical event is different from that of Christians: for example, Herodotus merely recorded significant happened events, in case they were forgotten by the future generations. Each event has a meaning within themselves, that is, it is auto-reference and self-sufficient. Its significance ends in itself, and its meaning has been fulfilled once it happened. It did not end in some transcendental goal leading to the ultimate meaning, for example, the eschatology of Christian, which prevents it to be the figuration or the footnote of the yet-to-happen future events. A man, in facing the universal pattern, can calmly go to meet his destiny—although Fortune still strokes him with unexpected grieve and accidental loss. Such a calmness becomes the highest dignity of man, which is often seen in the ancient Greek plays. But this is hard to see in modern people, who are unbalanced, scattered, and suppressed by madness. The absurdity of modern plays is somewhat ridiculously hilarious and depressively chaotic compared to the calmness of the ancient ones.

Nevertheless, the speculation of linear time is not excluded from this universal circulation. From the progress of “born, grows, ages and die”, we know how time exercises its irreversible magic on the individual. Petrarch always laments that the speedy time is aging person: “This morn I was a child, and now am old” (*Triumph of Time*, I:52). From the documents of history, we know how time exercises its irresistible magic on the state. It is seen that an empire has been established and fell apart, and another empire succeeded. Linear and cyclical times penetrate and tangle with each other, outlining an anfractuous and perplexing image of mankind’s history.

The initial motive to narrate cannot be separated with the search of identity—the who. As is said by Ricoeur, “To answer the question ‘Who?’ ...is to tell the story of a life. The story told tells about the action of the ‘who’. And the identity of this “who” therefore itself must be a narrative identity.”<sup>94</sup> Under this light, time is not only a

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<sup>94</sup> Ricoeur, P. , *Time and Narrative III*, trans. K. Blamey and D. Pellauer, University of Chicago Press, 1988, p.246.

natural phenomenon, but it is a product integrated with human intellectual that is subjected to interpretation. The classification of mythical time and historical time is generated from our further interpretation of “time” itself. Before our discussion, there is one thing to clarify: I use this classification in the definition of Mircea Eliade, who defines historical time to be linear and irreversible, while mythical time cyclical and repetitious. This classification of time is different from the linear/cyclical one because it introduces narrativity. According to Mark Freeman, mythical time is cyclical: it follows a certain archetype and can be repeated, through which “reality is acquire”<sup>95</sup>. Historical time, on the other hand, is devoid of significance due to its accidental and ephemeral characteristic: “Note the implication: real events just happen, unstoried: and time itself, from this perspective, can only be the linear backdrop of their happening.”<sup>96</sup> This “unstoried” time of history is unacceptable to archaic people because “any meaningful act performed by archaic man, any real act i.e., the repetition of an archetypal gesture, suspends duration, abolishes profane time, and participates in mythical time.”<sup>97</sup>

Mythical time, closely connected with human’s mental state, is richer in dimensions for it involves memories, rephrases, re-figuration and recollection which enable man to dissemble, disrupt and reorganize the natural time. Ricoeur proposes that mythical time seems to be more apt for the understanding of man’s *temporality*:

It is as though recollection inverts the so-called natural order of time. By reading the end in the beginning and the beginning in the end, we learn also to read time itself backwards, as the recapitulating of the initial conditions of a course of action in its terminal consequences.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Mark Freeman, “Mythical Time, Historical Time, and the Narrative Fabric of the Self”, *Narrative Inquiry*, 8(1), pp.27-50, 1988, p.32.

<sup>96</sup> “Mythical Time, Historical Time, and the Narrative Fabric of the Self”, p.37.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Narrative Time*, p.176, in “Mythical Time, Historical Time, and the Narrative Fabric of the Self”, p.42.

Apart from revealing the perception of temporality in the self-explaining course of narration, the mythical time also contains an ontological privilege that linear time lacks. Eliade argues that the mythical time appears to be more favorable to the thinking mode of ancient people because mythical time provided a recurrent pattern, a “paradigmatic gesture”—an act that has been “performed for the first time by a god, an ancestor, or a hero”.<sup>99</sup> For archaic man, this paradigmatic gesture thus contains an essential legitimacy, called the original ontology, which they can safely follow and mimic: to perform the same act following their ancestors:

An object or act becomes real only insofar as it repeats an archetype. Thus, reality is acquired solely through *repetition or participation*; everything which lacks an exemplary model is “meaningless”, i.e., it lacks reality...<sup>100</sup>any meaningful act performed by archaic man, any real act, i.e., any repetition of an archetypal gesture, suspends duration, abolishes profane time, and participates in mythical time.<sup>101</sup>

These are what the linear time cannot offer to do so. For the archaic men, their visions always fall in the past, following the original archetype.

It is interesting to note that in the narration of history, different past tenses have been used to indicate complicated temporal structure of the text, which further reflects the author’s view of time. Lorenzo F. Garcia probes the problem of time in *Iliad* starting with three words of tense: “not yet”, “still perfect” and “would be”.<sup>102</sup> He notices how

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<sup>99</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return, or Cosmos and History*, University of Chicago Press, 1954, p.34, cited from Mark Freeman, “Mythical Time, Historical Time, and the Narrative Fabric of the Self,” *Narrative Inquiry*, 8(1), pp.27-50, 1988, p.32.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p.36.

<sup>102</sup> Lorenzo F. Garcia Jr., *Homeric Durability: Telling Time in the Iliad*, Hellenic Studies Series 58. Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2013. Introduction, from the website of Center: <http://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/5221>.

Homer tries to preserve the spirit of his hero beyond time. His Achilles is “not yet” dead, but as long as he participats in the Troy war, he would, definitely, be dead. The “would be”—the future of a past—is intriguing because it does not simply treat all the past as preterit, and this tense, observed by Jonas Grethlein, has been frequently used in the writing of history, which illustrates that “historiography serves both to make sense of the past and to overcome the vagaries of time.”<sup>103</sup> To overcome the vagaries of time is the way Homer has treated his Achilles, making his fame eternal and enduring in the withering of time. The “would be”, however, has incorporated in itself some “fatalism”, because viewed from the author, the future of a past is destined to happen. For example, when Scipio hears the event in the plupast<sup>104</sup> (the past of a past)—the destroy of Carthage—he breaks into tears because he knows that the same fate will also happen to Troy, Assyrian, Median, and Persian. The Roman Empire, again, will fall like Troy; thus, the plupast, according to Grethlein, actually anchors itself in the future. In this way, the past is not all about what has gone; rather, it contains a blueprint of the future. For those ancient historians who write history, they stand firmly on the past, from which the future can be developed, unfolded, and more importantly, predictably repeated. This view of historiography is paralleled to that of Eliade, who has thought that ancient people are in nostalgia search of the beginning of mythical time, when all rituals, customers are performed very first by their gods and heroes.<sup>105</sup> The “Great Time” is always so attractive to the archaic men, just like the Golden Age described by Ovid (*Met.* 1), when “honey and milk” flew in the river, when spring remained forever, and when men knew nothing about pains and diseases.

The recurrent pattern of original ontology, however, can never be compatible with the revolutionary abruptions. In the pre-Christian era, Löwith says, there is no such thing that is truly revolutionary: the revolution is still considered to be under the same,

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<sup>103</sup> Jonas Grethlein, “Time, Tense and Temporality in Ancient Greek Historiography”, in *Oxford Handbooks Online*, 2014, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935390.013.43, p.3.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, p.3.

<sup>105</sup> See the footnote no.10.



universal pattern: "Greek philosophers and historians were convinced that whatever is to happen will be of the same pattern and character as past and present events".<sup>106</sup> Thus, the cyclical history cannot cope with the incident of fallen of mankind, or the Advent of Christ. The narrative of Christian history must requires a new narrative method. The mythology of linear time penetrates into the narration of mythical time when the story of original sin began. The dramatic effect of man's fallen is profound. The happening of this revolutionary event has entirely and absolutely changed what man is: the nature of man has been corrupted, irreversibly. The impetuous abruption has a great impact on the pagan value of historiography; for Thucydides:

since *human nature does not change*, events that happened in the past "will happen again in the same or in a similar way." Nothing really new can occur in the future when it is "the nature of all things to grow as well as to decay."<sup>107</sup>

In the horizon of Christian, however, man has changed by the crime they committed eternally. From perfect to fallen, the history of man, after the brutal abruption of his noble origin, has gone through a linear decadence. After the incident of fallen, man has been subjected to a cursed cycle, in which they are born with sins, die with sins, and their generations face the same recurrent fate. The eternal recurrence, instead of providing legitimacy for man, now indicates the endless tortures originated from the very fallen moment. Before the Advent of Christ, human beings could not have the chance to be saved, and they were doomed to live in the eternal obscurity. During the journey down to the hell, Dante the pilgrim and Virgil are to reach Limbo first, where Dante sees so many sighing souls of men, women and infants. Virgil tells Dante why they are doomed to be here, hanging in a situation of suspension:

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<sup>106</sup> Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History*, The University of Chicago Press, 1949, p.6.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, p.7.

“that they did not sin; and if they have merits, it is not enough, because they did not receive baptism, which is the gateway to the faith that you believe.

And if they lived before Christianity, they did not adore God as was needful: and of this kind am I myself.

...

And I would have you know that before them no human spirits were saved.” (*Inf.* IX, 34-39;62-63)

Virgil explains that, including himself, the Limbo dwellers live in desire without hope. Without hope means without expectation, which further means deprivation of the chance to look forwards to the future. It is interesting to note that Petrarch expressed his confusions in almost the same way: “While I know what I desire, I do not know what to hope for, thus resulting in a crowd of conflicting thoughts in my mind. (*Fam.X,2*) Their *present* is not the blissful *present* based on the arrival of Christ, but actually is a cursed eternity. Suspended in a “middle status” deprived of hope, they were also deprived of the experience of time—the pilgrim has described them to sigh in the eternal air (l’aura eterna). The desire, as the “vouloir –dire”, fails to reach its signified/desired. Like the Jew, this desire is always and forever searching for its ultimate goal, subjecting itself in the eternal restlessness. After the Advent of Jesus Christ, nothing truly revolutionary happened or will happen until the eschatological moment arrives. In Dante’s hell, this unique event is implied by the ruin of a bridge down in the 5<sup>th</sup> level, which remains its breaking in the “futures past”:

Yesterday, five hours later than now, one thousand two hundred and sixty-six years were completed since the way was broken here. (*Inf.* XXI, 112-114)

The loop is broken only after the occurrence of another revolutionary event: the Advent of Christ. The narration is delicately fabricated: if every man is predestined to have sins, how does Christ, also born as man, avoid such a punishment? That is, how is Christ exempt from this cursed circulation faced by the whole mankind. Christ, different from all other men, is born from the embryo of a virgin. His birth, like his coming, is unique in history: there was no one before, and will not be one in the future. He is *the One*. A man without original sin has taken the fate of all men on his shoulder: he has been tortured to death, has declined to the hell, and revives again from the tomb. The cyclical time has been disrupted and made straight again—it will proceed to the end of history, the eschatology.

The eschatology, the future yet to come, is, however, a promise of an un-happened *presence*, based on the fact that Christ has already come among us. Founded on this accomplished deed, the future has been given a promise, that is, an eventual salvation in the day of Last Judgement. In this way, the eyes of Christians have been directed to focus on future, to wait in the promised expectation. Unlike the Greek historiography which looks retrospectively, the Christian history always looks forwards. As was said by Gilson:

Elle (l'histoire) n'est ni celle d'une decadence continue, puisque, au contraire, elle affirme la réalité d'un progrès collectif et régulier de l'humanité comme telle, ni celle d'un progrès indéfini, puisqu'elle affirme, au contraire, que le progrès tend vers sa perfection comme vers une fin; *elle est bien plutôt l'histoire d'un progrès orienté vers un certain terme.*

<sup>108</sup>(the italic is mine)

Löwith also points out that, it is Christian historiography that brings about the concept of development and progress within human history:

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<sup>108</sup> Etienne Gilson, *L'Esprit de la philosophie médiévale*, Gifford Lectures, Vrin, 1983, p.370.

We of today, concerned with the unity of universal history and with its progress toward an ultimate goal or at least toward a "better world," are still in the line of prophetic and messianic monotheism; we are still Jews and Christians, however little we may think of ourselves in those terms.<sup>109</sup>

The Christian time not only look forwards the future, but emphasizes most the *present*, in which Christ has arrived, thus, the salvation is *perfectum praesens*.<sup>110</sup> While the ancients desired to obtain the eternal legitimacy from their very first men, the Christians, on the contrary, started their history of salvation by displaying how their first men fell. The miserable fate of human beings did not change until the advent of Christ. The future salvation, based on the Advent of Christ, demonstrates itself as a "will be", which is sharply different from the Greek's "would be". Christian history, lingering on the *present* of the Advent, makes the *present* the center of Christian history, which will never pass and continues absorb the future into its extension: "What is particular to the Christian time-reckoning is that it counts from a *central* event, which occurred when the time had been fulfilled...With regard to this central event the time is reckoned *forward as well as backward*."<sup>111</sup> According to this argument, Petrarch's view on the *present* is typically medieval. In his *De otio religioso*, Petrarch criticizes the vain hope that the Jews put into the future that imprisoned them in restlessness: "illi autem, presenti gaudio per inscitiam et insolentiam se privates, future spe inani et stultissima expectatione se torqueant"<sup>112</sup>(*OT*. I. 4, 105). Their ignorance has failed their sight to see what has already come and keeps them waiting for what had already passed:

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<sup>109</sup> Löwith, *Meaning of History*, p.19.

<sup>110</sup> Löwith distinguished the Jew time from the Christian time by saying that: "For the Jews, the central event is still in the future, and the expectation of the Messiah divides for them all time into a present and a future aeon. For the Christian the dividing line in the history of salvation is no longer a mere *futurum* but a *perfectum praesens*, the accomplished advent of Jesus Christ", *ibid*, p.182.

<sup>111</sup> Löwith, *Meaning of History*, p.182.

<sup>112</sup> Francis Petrarca, *De otio religioso* (short for *OT* in the following citation), Book I. All English translation of the *Otio* is from Petrarch, *On Religious Leisure*, ed. and trans. by Susan S Schearer, intro. by Ronald G. Witt, Italica Press, 2002. "The Jews, however, depriving themselves of this present joy through ignorance and arrogance,

Quid vero, si Cristum venisse constant fide nondum creditor? Expectabitur ne Messias, seu verius utique venturus expectabitur Anticristus, qui ut hostis resistendi animo, non ut Dominus obsequendi proposito expectandus est? Messias eni verus Dominus iam venit: ipse est Cristus.<sup>113</sup> (OT. I, 4,98-99)

In the light of eschatology, the significance of the past and the future has been almost eliminated and is focused solely on the *present*: yesterday is not a day that has passed, but proves to be a pre-figuration of *today*; while tomorrow is not a day that has yet to come, but proves to be a fulfillment of *today*. Human history is turned into the interims that happen to take place between these important points—the fallen of Adam and Eve, the coming of the Redeemer and the Final Judgement.

However, history cannot solely live on these points. It is a duration. Therefore, Christian history, despite its disinterest in human's political lots, needs them to fill the vacancies. Apart from the history of Salvation, there is another type of history—the annuals that record men's political events. Through the annual of Saint Gall, Hayden White discovers an interesting phenomenon: that is, the annual's record lacked the structure of narrative. It is written like this:

709. Hard winter. Duke Gottfried died.

710. Hard year and deficient in crops.

711.

712. Flood everywhere.

713.

714. Pippin, Mayor of the Palace, died.

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torture themselves with a meaningless hope for the future and a very stupid expectation.”,p.70.

<sup>113</sup> *ibid*, “What if people do not yet believe with abiding faith that Christ has come? Will a Messiah be awaited, or more truly will the coming Antichrist be awaited, who is to be resisted as an enemy rather than be obeyed as a master? The Messiah, our true master, has already come; He is Christ himself.”, p.69.

715. 716. 717.
718. Charles devastated the Saxon with great destruction.
- 719.
720. Charles fought against the Saxons.
721. Theudo drove the Saracens out of Aquitaine.
722. Great crops.
- 723.
- 724.
725. Saracens came for the first time.
- 726.
- 727.
- 728.
- 729.
- 730.
731. Blessed Bede, the presbyter, died.
732. Charles fought against the Saracens at Poitiers on Saturday.
- 733.
- 734.<sup>114</sup>

He asks, why does the Middle Ages annalists choose to constraint themselves from narration? “They seem to have the same order of importance or unimportance”, White added, “They seem merely to have occurred, and their importance seems to be indistinguishable from the fact that they were recorded. In fact, it seems that their importance consists of nothing other than the fact that they were recorded.”<sup>115</sup> This cold, seemingly-rational and documentary style of the annual makes it appear to have some commons with the history recorded by Thucydides and Herodotus (despite their

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<sup>114</sup> This chart is taken from Hayden White’s article, “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality”, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 7, No. 1, On Narrative (Autumn, 1980), pp. 5-27, p.11.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, p.12.

sharply different structure); however, if we observe closer, we can find that these events recorded in the annual of Saint Gall do not have their own significances. Their value lies in the fact that they have happened within the interims, making them part of God's providential plan. Another observation made by White is that, he notices the column on the time appearing the left is full, while the time of the right column is randomly lacking. This absence of the social center is explained by White as following:

There is no scarcity of years: they descend regularly from their origin, the year of the Incarnation, and roll relentlessly on to their potential end, the Last Judgment. What is lacking in the list of events to give it a similar regularity and fullness is a notion of a social center by which both to locate them with respect to one another and to charge them with ethical or moral significance.<sup>116</sup>

The “ethical or moral significance”, obviously, refers to the Christian ethics. This method of recording history thus embodies in itself Christian value—their neglect of narrative reveals a detached attitude towards the human lots themselves, but points to the fullness and completeness of God's time. Once time is created, it is completed: “and thou goest beyond all times to come, even because they are to come, and when they shall come, they shall be past: whereas thou art still the same, and *thy years shall not fail.*” (*Conf.* 11:13, the italic is mine) The failure to have an entire vision of time, or the limitation that makes one view time merely as a linear unfolding, has thrown men into the waiting of the unknown day of salvation. The political events of this “city on earth”, on the other hand, ease the anxiety of expectation in certain degree. If not for the expectation of eschatology, the interim we are experiencing currently will be meaningless. Human history gains its significance of existence only because it will extend to the Final day when all worthwhile souls will be saved: “Kingdom of God is already at hand, and yet, as an eschaton, still to come. This ambiguity is essential to all

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, p.15.

history after Christ: *the time is already fulfilled and yet not consummated.*<sup>117</sup> Like what Petrarch says: “all of which we see have been fulfilled in the very order in which they had been predicted, with the obvious exception of the Last Judgement, which we await, certain of its reality, but unsure about its time”<sup>118</sup> (*OT*, I 4, 174, the *italic* is mine).

The contradictory attitude of Petrarch on time is revealed: it is the doubt about time that negates one’s hope in Grace. The time when Christ arrived has passed, but the salvation is yet to come. In the context of macro-history, the conversion—the revolutionary turning—has been completed, the Christ has already been with us, and the salvation has been promised and determined; however, in the context of personal history, the conversion is still on hold. The imbalance between these two histories results in men’s ceaseless waiting for the final salvation. On the contrary, the existence of archaic men in temporality is balanced between the predestined recurrent pattern of *logos* and the fluctuation by Fortune. The predestined pattern that comforts them with the return to the “Golden Age” helps archaic men to face the cruelty brought by Fortune. Nostalgia is their core emotion. However, in the horizon of Christianity, men’s temporality is most experienced as a lacking, as well as a limitation caused by sins. The imbalance between macro-history and micro-history, resulted from the temporal contradictions between God’s eternity and men’s limitation, constitutes the most drastic side of Petrarchan mode of time both in narrativity and in life.

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<sup>117</sup> Löwith, *Meaning of History*, p.188, the italic is mine.

<sup>118</sup> “que omnia eo ordine quo predicta errant impleta conspicimus, preter ultimum scilicet iudicium quod de re certi, *de tempore dubii*, expectamus”, *On Religious Leisure*, p.75.



# The Concept of Time in Augustine and Dante: The Self in Conversion

## Augustine's Confessions on the *Present*

The investigation of the meaning of time in the Middle Ages and Renaissance must not be isolated from the context of Christian theology. In the first place, we must be aware that the Augustinian time cannot be understood if separated from his perception of eternity. Different from the modern definition largely derived from the field of physics and mathematics, time is considered as a “being” made by God at the very beginning. In the Book XI of the *Confessions*, Augustine defends from those who have asked: “How did God employ himself before he made heaven and earth?”<sup>119</sup> (*Conf.* XI,10) by arguing that:

For how could innumerable ages pass over, which thyself hadst not made; thou being the author and creator of all ages? Or what times should these have been, which were not made by thee? Or, how should they pass over, if so be they never were? (*Conf.* XI,13)

Then he comes to a firm conclusion which states that “in no time therefore, hadst thou ‘not made’ anything.” (*Conf.* XI, 14) However, being aware of time’s being part of God’s creations is not enough to reveal its nature. The most famous question about time is Augustine’s inquiry in his *Confessions*:

“What is time then? If nobody asks me, I know; but if I were desirous to explain it to one that should ask me, plainly I know not.” (*Conf.* XI, 14)

What makes his inquiry so intriguing is that Augustine reveals the reason at stake

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<sup>119</sup> All the English translations are from Augustine, *St. Augustine's Confessions*, with an English translation by William Watts, 1631, in two volumes. The Loeb Classical Library, ed. by T.E. Page, M.A., and W.H.D. Rouse, Litt. D. The Macmillan, 1912.

why men are so interested, so obsessed and so curious about time. That is, the meditation of time leads intrinsically to the concern of the individual existence and of the meaning of history, and ultimately to the understanding of the self in the vision of Christianity. These concerns in turn call attention to two essential issues: the pattern of human history and the destiny of human being. To meditate upon both issues takes one's breath away, for it makes us realize that when searching for the ultimate meaning of history, we are facing nothing but two roads: one leads to the vacuum that could only be fulfilled by faith and hope, while the other leads to the expectation that the progress of science and technology will eventually solve all the puzzles. However, in the regression of Christianity, accompanied by the permeation of science and technology, we are, from time to time, pulled back to the same *aporia* faced by Augustine thousands of years ago: *what is time then?* And what will await us at the end of the time? These teleological problems imply a transcendent purpose that is expected to be able to offer a complete comprehension to the whole course of events. The ultimate goal of human history, while indicating an eschatological future, will realize the meaning of each individual in the blueprint of God's realm.

To answer Augustine's question, we should be aware that the focus of his concept of time is *nunc*, that is, the *present*. According to the traditional classification of time, it can be divided into three parts: past, present and future. However, Augustine challenges the tradition by arguing that there is in fact no past and no future: "Those two times therefore, past and to come, in what sort are they, seeing the past is now no longer, and that to come is not yet?" (*Conf.* XI, 14); on the contrary, time should be divided into three parts based on the *present*:

Nor do we properly say, there be three times, past, present and to come; but perchance it might be properly said, there be three times: a present of past things; a present time of present things; and a present time of future things. (*Conf.* XI, 20)

In this way, Augustine made the elusive, irrecoverable time "measurable" because the *present* makes the past and future things *re-present* in themselves: "Wheresoever therefore and whatsoever they be, they are not but as present" (*Conf.* XI, 18).

By inventing the threefold *present*, Augustine skillfully avoids the slaughter of the skepticism about the nonbeing of time. However, Augustine's solution, as Ricoeur has put it, is "at once an anticipation of the solution and a temporary impasse"<sup>120</sup>, for Augustine, in this way, finds himself inevitably being trapped in another predicament, that is, the *present* has no extension: "For lengthened out if it be, then it is divided into the past and the future. As for the present, it takes not up any space" (*Conf.* XI, 15). He posted the biggest *aporias* about time:

Those two times therefore, past and to come, in what sort are they, seeing the past is now no longer, and that to come is not yet? (*Conf.* XI, 14)

If any instant of time be conceived, which cannot be divided either into none, or at most into the smallest particles of moments; that is the only it, which may be called present; which little yet flies with such full speed from the future to the past, as that it is not lengthened out with the very least stay. For lengthened out if it be, then is it divided into the past and the future. As for the present, it takes not up any space. (*Conf.* XI, 15)

Such a predicament drives Augustine to find a way to turn the point-like present into a *present* which is extendable. This is where Augustine delicately shifted his narrative — starting with the question of "what", he answers with "where":

For if there be times past, and times to come; fain would I know *where* they be: which yet if I be not able to conceive, yet thus much I know, that wheresoever they now be, they are not there future or past, but present. (*Conf.* XI,18, the italic is mine)

Through a laborious solution, Augustine finally arrives at his most innovative point in the argument of time by introducing into his argument the spatial ground. He contends that it is in the soul that time can be measured:

In thee, I say, it is, that I measure the times. The impression, which things passing by cause in thee, and remains even when the things are gone, that is it which being still

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<sup>120</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. I, trans. by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, The University of Chicago Press, 1984, p.9.

present, I do measure: not the things which have passed by that this impression might be made. (*Conf.* XI, 27)

By turning the past into memories and the future into expectation, the soul transforms the threefold time as all *present*, that is, *nunc*. The point-like present, no longer being a mere instant, now obtains the extension that makes it assessable by the self.

By highlighting the *nunc* in human time, Augustine then points to God's eternity: God is always *present*; eternity, instead of consisting of past, present and future, is always in the moment of *now*: "As for the present, should it always be present and never pass into times past, verily it should not be time but eternity." (*Conf.* XI, 14) Such an understanding is different from Plato's definition in *Timaeus*, in which time is a moving image of the eternity. Augustine's arguments show that eternity is not the time without ending; instead, it rises above and transcends time:

Nor dost thou in time precede times: else thou shouldest not precede all times. But thou precedest all times past, by high advantage of an *ever present eternity*. (*Conf.* XI, 13)

Therefore, it must be aware that when Augustine talks about eternity, all he talks about is the *present*, not the *past*, nor the *future*. It is the present, the *nunc* of the Christian moment that matters. That is why Löwith has said, paradise is not a heaven long lost in the Golden age, but a place of *perfectum praesens*.<sup>121</sup> The comparison between man's temporality and God's eternity continues: "Thy years are one day; and thy day is not every day, but to-day; ... Thy to-day is eternity." (*Conf.* XI, 13) In this way, time highlights eternity by its own lacking: while eternity is an ever present, time, consisting of memory and expectation, of fear and hope, is a linear movement extending from the past to the future.

However, Augustine does not discuss time for the sake of time itself; instead, his aim

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<sup>121</sup> Karl Löwith, *Meaning of History—The Theological Implication of the Philosophy of History*, The University of Chicago Press, 1949. "for the Kingdom of God is already at hand, and yet, as an *eschaton*, still to come. This ambiguity is essential to all history after Christ: the time is already fulfilled and yet non consummated", p.188.

is to build a connection between men and God. According to Augustine, the distension of human soul is by itself the mimic and intellectual participation in God's eternity. Due to the fact that the soul can transform the threefold time into the extendable present, man, though being imprisoned in their own temporality, is able to share the eternity by meditating still on his own soul. Man's perception of God, thus, is individualized and subjectified by Augustine, who seems to take an initial step to make the man-God relationship a private issue. In this way he claims that he has found God in his memory: "In what place therefore did I find thee, that so I might learn thee, but even in this thine own self, far above myself? Place there is none; we go backward and forward, but place there is none." (*Conf.* X, 26) Here we understand why Augustine has put so many efforts in building his argument of time upon the *present*: through the *present*—the moment of *nunc*—God's eternity can be realized by man in his own soul, creating a tie that links the individual directly to God.

Augustine's laborious solution to the enigma of time, however, is at the cost of casting behind the human language. I will propose that in order to reach the eternal *nunc*, the autobiographical narrative must come to an end. This assumption can properly explain Augustine's abrupt turning to the commentary of *Genesis* in the last three books of the *Confessions*, leaving his previous narrative of conversion in suspension. In his earlier argument of time, Augustine has already implicitly expressed his distrust in the human language: "For but a very few things there are, which we speak properly; but very many that we speak improperly, though we understand one another's meaning." (*Conf.* XI, 20) Such a slight distrust is easily overlooked by us since Augustine does not continue to justify his moving away from ordinary language, and he even seems to make a compromise by saying that: "Let this also be said: there be three times, past, present, and to come, according to our misapplied custom; let it be said: see, I shall not much be troubled at it, neither gainsay, nor find fault with it" (*Conf.* XI, 20). But that, unfortunately, cannot conceal the problem that human language lacks the substantial power to capture the *nunc* in the narrative. Different from the eternal Word of God, narrative is a textual experience of temporality generated and developed in

temporalization. By making a comparison between the Word/the divine *Verbum* and the voice/ the human *vox*. Augustine says the latter is “uttered, and passed away, had a beginning and ending; the syllables made a sound, and so passed over, the second after the first, the third after the second, and so forth in order, until the last came after the rest” (*Conf.* XI, 6). The Word, on the contrary, “is far above me, and abides for ever” (*Conf.* XI, 6). The *Verbum* remains while the *verba* flees. If something can be narrated, it means that it has already *been* there.

We will not be too attentive to the word *been* because it signifies the being/existence, while at the same time indicating a *present* that has *already happened* but still remains. Like what Augustine said, we can use the word “is” “was” or “will be” to indicate different time tenses; however, whichever we have used, the life events that we intend to narrate or are narrating, at the very moment of narrative, have already passed. Human language use different tense to revive the past experiences as if they are happening at the current moment in the narration. However, such a *present*, instead of abolishing the temporality and chronology, in fact deepens them since while narrative takes a laborious effort to make things *present*, it ends up looking backwards to things that have happened or forwards to things that are going to take place. What it can never grasp and pin down is the *now*.

Book X proves to be the turning point in the whole book of the *Confessions*. The structure of this autobiographic writing can be divided into three parts: The Books I-IX are devoted to Augustine’s memories and the review of his past; the Books XI-XIII show his firm standing in the *present*, which leads to the revelation of eternity of God. The Book X, linking these two parts, is an official announcement for the entry to the *nunc*, in which he wishes to write down what he *is* like in the *present*, with the aim to encourage those who are still lost on roads:

For, as for that fruit, I have both seen and spoken of it: but for what I now am (*sed quid adhuc sim*), behold, yea in the very time of the making of these Confessions, divers people desire to know...(*Conf.* X, 3)

This is the fruit of my Confessions, not of what I have been (*non qualis furerim*), but of what I am (*sed qualis sim*): namely, to confess this not before thee only... but in the ears also of the believing sons of men, sharers of my joy, and partners in mortality with me; my fellow citizens, and fellow pilgrims (*Conf. X, 4*)

Therefore, the Book X is exactly where Augustine has to end his narration by suddenly turning to the interpretation of the Scripture. By looking into the linguistic predicament of human language when facing the moment of *nunc*, we can understand why Augustine suddenly abandons the pervious narrative of the self and turns to the exegesis of Bible, and why his confession of the *present* self eventually leads to a hermeneutic discussion on Genesis. These problems cannot be solved as long as we do not realize the impossibility of the narrative to capture the present like the extension of the soul did.

Let's first turn back to the autobiographical Books I-IX, which display to readers a dual death. The drama of autobiography reaches its climax when Augustine, after hearing the mysterious "take and read", converts himself to God in the garden of Milan: by accomplishing the spiritual conversion, the old, past Augustine was dead and the new Augustine is born as another person. The death of the old self is immediately followed by the death of Monica in Book IX, Augustine's physical and spiritual mother. The termination of Monica's life on earth occurs at the same time with the termination of Augustine's lingering on the secular desires and earthly pursuits. From Monica's mouth, we know that Augustine has already waved goodbye to his old way of life, saving himself from the earthly corruptions:

What I should here do any longer, and to what end I am here, I know not, now that my hopes in this world are vanished. There was indeed one thing for which I sometimes desired to be a little while reprieved in this life; namely, that I might see thee to become a Christian Catholic before I died. My God hath done this for me more abundantly; (*Conf. IX, 10*)

The two deaths of the Book IX—the death of Augustine's sinful, old self and the death of Monica—signify a thorough departure to the past, paving way for the moment of *nunc* to come, and leading simultaneously to the end of his autobiographical narrative.

The *nunc* becomes a forbidden zone for the narration since time does not stop flowing,

while narrative is always one step later. That explains why Augustine's confessions of his past take up more than two-third of the whole book, because once the narrative of conversion reaches the *present*, it immediately fails. Language, according to Freccero, is always connected with desire. These two are inseparable: "This reaching out toward an as-yet-unspecified object is at the same time the birth of language, or at least of the paralinguistic of gesticulation, ... Language is not only the vehicle of desire, it is also in some sense its creator."<sup>122</sup> Desire, the lacking in the self, always stretches out to something that is external to the self in the form of narrative, through which it is expressed and made manifest, and eventually satisfied: "The child learns to speak in order to express its desire; at the same time, however, it learns what to desire from a world of objects that adults have named."<sup>123</sup> Since desire is unceasingly generated, language has to reach it constantly and continuously. The void in the self, fulfilled by language bit by bit, does not stop to expand itself to an unlimited region. This is how people are entangled with earthly seductions. In this way, we can see that narrative, together with desire, ends in trapping themselves in the endless search outside of the self.

To overcome the inborn weakness of human language and to justify his way of presenting himself by the narrative, Augustine reorients himself gradually from the corruption of language to the investigation of the soul, which is self-sufficient in that God is nowhere but abides in it: "And behold, thou wert within me, and I out of myself, where I made search for thee: I ugly rushed headlong upon those beautiful things thou hast made" (*Conf. X, 27*). Our soul, the inner image of the self, has God's image as its fundamental and ontological foundation, which is able to endow something that has no extension—the point-like *nunc*— with extension. In other words, the soul, through its extension, is able to imitate God's eternity by presenting the three-folded time into one *present*. Instead of searching for the external sources, the perception of the eternity

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<sup>122</sup> John Freccero, "The Fig Tree and the Laurel: Petrarch's Poetics", *Diacritics*, vol.5, 1975, pp.34-40, the quotation is from p.35.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*, p.35.



requires only the meditation on the soul itself. Unable to capture the *present*, language has to retreat into the shield of past; but for Augustine, the accomplishment of conversion has wiped out the possibility of narrating his past—he officially claimed his confession of the past was over: “For, as for that fruit, I have both seen and spoken of it.” (*Conf. X*, 3)

The exit for the language to retreat has been blocked, therefore Augustine has to turn to the narrative of the *Genesis* in a surprisingly abrupt way. The Books XI-XIII, the last three books of the *Confessions*, following the end of the narrative of the self, fulfill the role to complete the whole book. However, the probing of the nature of time does not stop. Augustine’s hermeneutic switch to the *Genesis* is triggered by its first sentence which says that “in the beginning” God made the world. The word “beginning” contains in itself an obvious temporal dimension, which seems to indicate that God’s creation of the world, with a beginning and an ending, is subjected to time. This is what cannot be endured by Augustine. He argues that God is above and transcends time; while man, born with his temporality, can only understand God’s creation of the world in the scheme of time—the first day, the second day, until it reached the seventh day. Narrative proves to be the method that man can understand God’s creation of the world since he fails to have an immediate perception of God. However, the limitation of human language allow Augustine at all time to point beyond his own frailties to the eternity of God: it is through the awareness of man’s limitation and temporality that Augustine sees God’s *present*. Eternity, thus, is defined in a negative way that emphasizes time’s limitation.

Through his attentive meditation on the meaning of the *Genesis*, Augustine realized that God created the world in his Word once for all. The world was created not as *prima* and *poi*, but all in the *nunc*. At this moment, Augustine steadily substitutes his confession of the *present* with God’s infinity, where he transforms the failure of language in capturing the *present* into the re-presentation of God’s *present*. Giving up narrating his *present*, Augustine finds content to narrate the true *nunc* revealed through God’s creation of the world. This transformation is hidden under such an abrupt turn in

the narrative that readers and scholars, surprised at his sudden swift in the narrative, do not realize that this is an alternative way to narrate the moment of *nunc*. Through the confessions of the *present* to God—with his memory that can bring the past and future to the present, and with his understanding of time which can project the past as memory and the future as expectation — Augustine is able to establish himself as an “on-going” prayer, an image that shares God’s forever *nunc*.

## Dante’s Experiences of Time from the *Inferno* to *Paradise*

The Augustinian concept of time has a profound influence on Dante, whose *Divine Comedy* displays a narrative structure that initially negates time, then embraces it, and finally transcends it. Following the subjective, internalized time of Augustine, in which the saint internalizes within his own soul the *nunc* of God, Dante builds the biblical time within his personal life: “Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita”. At the middle age of one’s life (between 30-40 years old, according to Dante’s discussion of man’s four periods in *Convivio*), Dante starts his voyage on the day of Christ’s crucifixion, following the moving path of the sun.<sup>124</sup> Using his personal life experience—his pilgrimage—as a thumbnail, Dante has displayed a temporal scheme in the *Divine Comedy* which is clear and well stratified.

According to Freccero, Dante’s entire spiritual autobiography is “essentially Augustinian in structure”.<sup>125</sup> Here I shall argue that Dante’s incorporation of the Augustinian structure is manifested most prominently through his recognition of the Augustinian understanding of time. On the one hand, Dante concedes that the moment

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<sup>124</sup> About the theological meaning of the trajectory of the pilgrim, please refers to John Freccero’s *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, Harvard University Press, 1988, Chapter 4 “Pilgrim in a Gyre”, pp.70-92.

<sup>125</sup> Freccero has proposed that the prologue scene of the *Divine Comedy* bears “a striking, indeed at times a textual, resemblance to the ‘region of unlikeness’ in which the young Augustine finds himself in the seventh book of the *Confessions*. Moreover, the resemblance is not simply an isolated fact of purely historical interest but is also of some significance for an interpretation of the poem...Dante’s spiritual itinerary deliberately recalls the experience of Augustine in the *Confessions*.”, *ibid*, p.1.

of *nunc* constructs the essence of God's eternity. In this way, he depicts a hell that is deprived of time, and the intellectual debility in some infernal souls, according to Dante, lies in the fact that they can never understand the moment of *nunc*. On the other hand, Dante, following the steps of Augustine, believes that the human time/word shall be transcended and casted behind in order to participate in the eternity of God.

In the *Inferno*, there is no indication of time: "aura senza tempo" (*Inf.* III, 29), and all is in darkness. The status of obscure darkness not only refers to the horribly infernal ambient, but to the blindness in intelligence of the sinful souls: being imprisoned in such a place of shadow, their eyes of mind are blind, failing to recognize the true light—God's grace. Interestingly, in Dante's narrative, such an intellectual defeat bears a temporal outcome in itself, that is, the *present*—the moment of *nunc*— is lacking the infernal time. In this way, the debility in the mind is objectified and configured as the incompleteness of time, through which the Christian reward and punishment system is bridged with the individual's perception of time: incapacity to know the *nunc* proves to be the punishments of sins, while being able to know it represents a blissful status.

In the tenth canto of the *Inferno*, Dante the author has invented the character Farinata, staging him in an exaggeratingly dramatic way — Farinata is proud, delicately emotional and aggressive, making him one of the most seditious characters in the underground world. The rigidity in his posture—his refusal to turn his head or to bend forward—indicates the wrong obstinacy in his knowledge, making him fail to realize his own criminals against God and his own province. Unlike the fragile Cavalcante, Farinata always kept his contempt. However, he, like Cavalcante, was still indulged in their earthly issues: upon meeting Dante, the very first sentence that uttered from his mouth, scornfully, is: "who were your forebears?" <sup>126</sup>(*Inf.* X, 42-43) Limited in his narrow vision of political concern, he failed to acknowledge Dante as a man of God's

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<sup>126</sup> All English translation of The Divine Comedy is from Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, Volume I-III, ed. Durling, M. Robert, illustration by Robert Turner, Oxford University Press, 1996(*Inf.*), 2003(*Purg.*), 2011(*Par.*)

land, but tried to identify him with the secular region. The word “tu” expressed his class stereotype which explains his extraordinarily orgulous attitude towards Dante and to Guido’s concern for his son. Farinata blatantly distained Guido’s womanly weeping, trying to avoid being included at this melancholy drama of the infernal scene, which can be told from his stubborn position when talking to Dante. However, he was ironically trapped in his blindness, unable to acknowledge the *present* — the eternity of the God. Both Farinata and Cavalcante show their ignorance to what was going on in the world, so Dante asked Farinata for explanation. He told the pilgrim that they were only permitted to see the future, but “When they (the things) approach or are present, our intellect is utterly empty; and if another does not bring news, we know nothing of your human state.” (*Inf.* X, 103-105) Such a knowledge of prediction will dissipate completely when “the door of the future will be closed” (*Inf.* X, 107-108) Thus, their knowledge about the future is not like the people who are still living, because such a knowledge “non ricco di potenzialità”.<sup>127</sup> Ignorant of the present and obscure for the future, the temporal dimension that Farinata was trapped in is the past. The haunted past, being related to the bloody conflicts between parties and political groups, is the very reason for his eternal torments.

In Augustinian context, the eternity is all about *present* that cancels the temporal sequence as *prima e poi*. The lacking of present, thus, reveals an ironic fact: the timelessness in hells actually indicates the total negation of the eternity. Rather than being merely deprived of time, Dante’s hell turns out to be an inversion of eternity and an absence of goodness, because of which the cursed souls were tortured and lamented ceaselessly in such a desperate place without mutation. The infernal “eternity” proves to be a parody of the heavenly blessedness, for it turns the changelessness and stability of God’s eternity into a desperation that entirely cuts off any hope to end the severe punishments these souls were undergoing.

This deadly stagnancy in hell has already been displayed by the “neutral” angels at

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<sup>127</sup> Franco Masciandaro, *La Problematica del tempo nella Commedia*, Longo Editore, 1976, p.79

the entry of the Dis. Virgil tells Dante that these angels “were not rebels yet were not faithful to God,” (*Inf.* III, 37-38). Instead of making a turn—the conversion—they choose to do nothing. It is their will to put themselves in a passive stagnancy, which leads to the deprivation of any hope and any existence:

They have no hope of death, and their blind life is

so base that they are envious of every other fate.

The world permits no fame of them to exist;

mercy and justice alike disdain them (*Inf.* III, 46-50)

The infernal “eternity”, or anti-eternity, functions as a cursed fate. Just like the reversed cross of Satan frozen in the ice lake, these wretched, miserable souls were also frozen in the reversed eternity: for them, their suffering status is stationed forever at the very moment, the *nunc* without any hope of mutation:

L’eternità infernale è chiusa a ogni divenire e a ogni possibilità di attuazione dell’essere in esso sempre presente. E se vi è movimento («facevano un tumulto, il quale *s’aggira Sempre* in quell’aura»), questo è un movimento che non implica un divenire, una successione in vista di un fine: è un movimento circolare ed uniforme, *sempre uguale a se stesso*.<sup>128</sup>

The absence of present has cut off the connection between past and future, resulting in the negation of time in total. From this view, Dante has created an extremely horrified hell—these infernal souls are the most miserable and desperate creatures compared to the living men who are trapped in the temporality. While temporality always frustrates man with its limitation, it allows him at all time to refer beyond his inborn weakness to the hope of salvation in the future. However, in this territory of anti-eternity, the deprivation of time has extinguished any hope, and the future for souls like Farinata means nothing but the extermination of all their knowledge and the judgement that

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, p.73.

sentences them to their final death. Analogously, the past for them is merely a void, illusory shadow that is excluded by the Christian salvation: the past, being the evidence of their sins, only causes in them lamenting torments.

The pilgrim, on the other hand, was trapped in his own temporality, too. His perception of time still stays within the boundary of “past, present and future”. Incapable of understanding the relationship between his pilgrimage and Christ’s descent, he fails to understand the *presence* of the Son even though obvious signs are already shown: the date of Dante’s descent into hell and the broken bridge in the *Inferno*. Even in such a miserable world like the hell, God’s Providence is never *absent*. Nowhere is not the realm of God. From the mouth of Farinata, Dante already knows his miserable fate of being exile which fears and dismays him so much: “But not fifty times will be rekindled the face of the / lady who reigns here, before you will know how / much that art weighs.” (*Inf.* X, 79-81) His own limitation, however, deters him from understanding his own future, neither can he clearly recognize Farinata’s own limitation. The pilgrim’s intellectual limitation is displayed through his incapacity to unite the triple time to form a complete image of God’s *nunc*, and his future frightens him because of its obscurity. If the pilgrim can at that moment understand God’s being *perfectum praesens*, he would not have been frustrated by the future exile. As said by Cacciaguیدا:

Contingency, which extends no further than  
the quaternion of your matter, is all depicted in  
the eternal Gaze; (*Par.* XVII, 37-39)

The “eternal gaze” will not be effected by the events on earth, which possess a divine serenity that man cannot have. By perceiving time as the distension of soul—the distension of the *nunc*—, one can also obtain the serenity that helps him face the arbitrary of fate’s cruelty. After talking with Cacciaguیدا in the *Paradiso*, Dante fully comprehends the fullness of God’s time and his own mission: to spread the truth he

heard from heaven: “make manifest all your vision, and let them still scratch where the itch is.” (*Par.* XVII, 127-129)

If the *Inferno* is a place deprived of changes, then the *Purgatorio* is a reign ruled by time-planning, which requires the souls’ progress and movements. In the *Purgatorio*, time, related to the process of atonement, should be valued and cherished. At the entrance of the mountain, Cato’s severe critics of souls revealed the urgency of making good use of time: “What is this, laggard spirits? What negligence, what standing still is this? Run to the mountain to shed the slough that keeps God from being manifest to you.” (*Purg.* II, 119-123) For Dante the pilgrim, time is also a precious thing: “tell us where the mountain slopes so that it is possible to climb it; for losing time displeases most those who know most.” (*Purg.* III, 76-79)

The salvation of the souls in the *Purgatorio* also depends on time, too. According to Manfred, those who died in contumacy of Holy Church must be forced to remain outside the cliff of Mount Purgatorio, and the time they should be waiting was thirty times of their rebellious time.<sup>129</sup> From his words, it is known that time is considered as the standard for measuring sins and the scale for atonement. Unlike the infernal time that lacks the *present*, the time in *Purgatorio* is continuous and unbroken. The gap between the past (sins committed) and the future (how long will one need to perform atonement) is filled by the present, that is, the decree is “shorten by good prayers” who are *now* still living. However, the *Purgatorio* is also a place where human’s temporality — men’s limitation to appreciate God’s eternity — is most manifest. Their valuation of time, as well as their recognition of time’s irreversibility, turns out to be an intellectual defect. The difference between the infernal souls and those of the *Purgatorio* lies in the fact that, the souls in the process of purification are granted with hope of salvation. However, trapped in their own temporality, they see time not as the distention but distraction: the past has gone, the future is uncertain, and the present — their journey of atonement — is nothing but a long waiting, making them fail to recognize that God’s

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<sup>129</sup> *Purgatorio*, III, 136-141.

*presence* was everywhere and has already been among them.

In his commentary on the literary meaning of the *Genesis*, St. Augustine has identified three modes of vision: the corporeal, the spiritual and the intellectual.<sup>130</sup> For the pilgrim, his vision still remains on the spiritual level, which has explained why when he sees Matelda, he does not recognize the innocence and happiness of her figuration but rather sees her as a Proserpina, an Ovidian character of eroticism. As suggested by S.Hawkins, Dante has described a pastoral world as the paradise bound to be lost, in which Matelda is portrayed with negative meanings. For example, Dante uses a profane poem by Guido Cavalcanti as the subtext to describe the landscape where he met Matelda.<sup>131</sup> This perception of this profane, erotic desire is, of course, contrary to the figure represented by Matelda. More problematically, when he sees her happily playing and picking flowers, he:

recalls the fatal moment when Pluto saw Proserpina –the moment just *before* he delighted in her and carried her away...The effect of the pilgrim’s remembrance is to import a set of tragic expectations into Eden’s “onesto riso e dolce gioco” (“honest joy and sweet sport,” v.96). It suggests that from Dante’s vision of Matelda, delight—and also rape—will follow.<sup>132</sup>

The Ovidian reminiscence, on the one hand reflects the sins needed to be purified in the pilgrim, on the other hand points to his humanly temporality. The status of his soul is tantamount to his understanding of the relationship between time and eternity. In the *Putgatorio*, the pilgrim is still imprisoned in the three-folded time, which deters his perceive of the future. Hearing the prophesy of his future, Dante still cannot understand its meaning: “I know my saying is obscure; / but not much time will pass before your / neighbors will act so that you can gloss it.” (*Purg.* XI, 139-141)

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<sup>130</sup> Francis X. Newman, “St. Augustine’s Three Visions and the Structure of the *Commedia*”, p.59, in *MLN*, vol.82, no.1, Italian Issue, pp.56-78.

<sup>131</sup> Peter S. Hawkins, “Watching Matelda”, in *Dante’s Testaments: Essays in Scriptural Imagination*, Stanford University Press, 1999, pp.161-162.

<sup>132</sup> *ibid.*, p.166.



Apart from the good work of purification, the *Purgatorio* is also characterized by its geographic stratification, the design of which points to a reality that exhibits the scheme of time. The climbing of the seven levels, leading to the gradual purification of the sins of the souls, displays a clear temporal layout. It is consisted of the present, in which the souls are experiencing atonement on each level according to their deeds on earth—“the debt be paid” (*Purg.* X, 108). For example, the souls who commit the sin of pride are punished to bear heavy stones that overwhelm them. In this way, the past, in which the souls acknowledge their criminals against God while they were living, is summoned to the present during the purification. The future, when the *Purgatorio* will be abolished, signify the expectation by the souls for the final salvation from God, to which Dante says: “Do not regard the form of the suffering: think / what follows it, think that at worst it cannot go / beyond the great Judgment.” (*Purg.* X, 109-111) Also, the prayers by the living people can shorten their time of atonement, creating a connection between them and the living world, which is contrary to Guido and Farinata’s ignorance. The three dimension of time, interplaying and connecting with each other, compose a force that hastens the souls to accomplish their purification with the greatest efficiency. Both Dante and the souls feel a strong sense of urgency facing with the irreversible fleeting of time.

Compared to the *Purgatorio*, the *Paradiso* is a realm that cancels and eventually transcends time. Unlike the three-folded time of the *Purgatorio*, time in the *Paradiso* displays a unity—the status of *nunc*, which has taken the metaphor of a book. In the last song of the *Paradiso*, the pilgrim says he sees the whole universe, in which all the substances and accidents are bound up by love as a complete volume.<sup>133</sup> The heavenly stratification for souls does not indicate differences in God’s love to them; on the contrary, such a stratification is actually a sign for meeting Dante’s mortal intellectual limitation, the Scriptural condescendence to mortal’s minds:

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<sup>133</sup> *Paradiso*, XXXIII, 85-94.

They have shown themselves here, not  
because this sphere is allotted to them, but to  
signify the celestial one that is least exalted.

To speak thus to your understanding is  
necessary, for it takes from sense perception  
alone what later it makes worthy of intellection. (*Par. IV, 37-42*)

Thus, the souls he see that are situated in each heaven are, in fact, the representation of God's justice — according to the degree of beatitude, souls are placed in different level of heavens, from low to high. The differences of location, rather than being the differences in nature, are distinctions among the souls. Just like a man's eyes and nose, eyes are located higher not because they are superior to nose, but are decided by their function. Souls in their own locations are cooperating perfectly as the Only will:

Indeed, it is constitutive of this blessed *esse*  
to stay within God's will, and thus our very wills  
become one,  
so that how we are arranged from level to level  
through this kingdom, delights the entire kingdom,  
as well as the King who enamors us of his will. (*Par. III, 79-84*)

In the infinity of God's love, the hierarchy is integrated: the whole does not eliminate the distinctions of the parts while the parts, depending on the whole, works in harmony to display the most completeness of the whole. The instant, moreover, is much more than an indifferent point on an ever-extending line of time; rather, specific moment is chosen to construct the moment of salvation. Therefore, the meaning of each instant

can be understood only when it is seen from the whole course of time. Analogously, Dante's time, though signifying a salvation that occurs to a single man, reflects the historical-redemptive moment for mankind as a whole.

The pilgrim, also being the part of the whole, sees the steadiness in this ever changing universe. Like Professor Folena said, the biggest differences between Dante's experience of time and that of Petrarch's is that : "Petrarca sente di essere nel tempo, non in presenza del tempo come Dante: Dante vede dalla riva scorrere il fiume, Petrarca si sente immerso e trascinato dalla corrente."<sup>134</sup> Dante's firmly standing on the *present*, like that of Augustine's, provides him a solid fulcrum to investigate the mystery of time, and through the eyes of Cacciaguida, he finally realizes how the trichotomous time is united as one: "so you see contingent things before they come/to be, gazing at the point to which all times are/present:" (*Par. XVII*, 16-18) In the *Paradiso*, the present does not exhaust itself as the inseparable instant that is immediately engulfed by the past but extends to the future, consequently maintaining the possibility of hope while keeps referring to the past in prefiguration. In this way, the present is no longer composed of irreversible instants but gains duration like Augustine's distention of soul. Dante's journey, starting from the *Inferno* where there's no present, and to the *Purgatorio* where present is presented but in an imperfect form of irreversibility, now finally arrives at the heavens in which the once-scattered time is united as all *present*. The experience of time, originated from temporality, has transcended it. Now it is a participation of God's eternity and a sweet taste of the forever beatitude.

For both Augustine and Dante, the understanding time is closely related to their narrative of conversion. Their profound observation of the relationship between time and narrative helps them to understand men's limitation in experiencing and comprehending the nature of time, which is shown as "temporality", an element that is bored in every mortal. Secondly, time is closely related to the history of salvation: from the meditation of time, the salvation can be understood as a process in which the

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<sup>134</sup> Gianfranco Folena, "L'orologio del Petrarca", in *Textus testis: lingua e cultura poetica delle origini*, Bollati Boringhieri, 2002, p.277.

temporal struggles of man in the secular world is gradually replaced by the comprehension of eternity. However, eternity does not abolish time but deepens it, highlighting its essential meaning when a man reaches his own point of conversion—a breaking point in his personal time that can separate the old self from the new one, witnessing him rising from fallen to blessed. On the point of conversion, the instant of turning, the moment *nunc* is transformed into an extension that reaches to God’s *present*, and a person, under such a circumstances, is able to transcend his own temporality to witness the *One*. Generally, for Dante and Augustine, time is a linear matter which advances and makes processes. If a man listens to God, time for him is such a progress: from earth ascending to heaven, from bad to good, good to better, and finally better to perfect. The moment of *present* is the very moment of conversion, and this Christian allegory of the self has endowed the human language with possibility to capture the *nunc*.

## **The Concept of Historiography, the Breaking Point in Life and the Linear Time in Petrarch (*Fam. XXIV*)**

Petrarch’s sentiment about time, that is, his *anguistia temporis* pervades many of his works. For example, the Book XXIV of *Familiare*, the *Canzoniere*, the last two chapters of the *Trionfi*, the Book II of *Africa*, just to name a few. His good friend, Giovanni Dondi, also wrote a book on time and mechanic clock called the *Liber astrarii*, which is most likely to be known by him. The invention of mechanic clock, according to Folena, represents a new concept as well as a novel mode of perceiving time. Time is no longer a product of religious activities that is exclusively operated by churches; rather, time becomes something more related to layman’s life and to economy.<sup>135</sup> More

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<sup>135</sup> Folena observed that cities such as Padua, Milan, Paris, Bologna and Florence were the earliest to have mechanic clocks, these cities, he said, were “tutte città mercantile e comunali”. “Non piùil tempo della Chiesa, le

importantly, time becomes more objective and tangible when calculated by the mechanic clock. Time is divided into hours, minutes and later even seconds: in this way, every part looks exactly equal to the others. Time becomes easier to measure, and thus becomes more rigid. The religious aura has been generally mitigated and dissipated. Time is no longer treasured the way it has been treated in the *Purgatorio*, where souls should make the best of their times to get purified. Time is not a symbol of human's limitation, nor is it related to human's spiritual salvation. In modern society, time even becomes an economic object. As the famous slogan goes: time is money. The sentiment of Petrarch and his contemporaries about the irreversibility of time and about the briefness of life have been crudely replaced by "to waste time is to waste money". Ironically, all people of modern society are rushing forwards because they desire to get the best economic outcome from time (no matter the time is contributed to works or is invested to self-cultivation).

Petrarch is among those who first experiences the change of the perception of time brought by mechanic clock, making his feelings, therefore, greatly different from that of St. Augustine and of Dante. In Augustine and Dante, time is more ontological—it is created by God and thus follows His guidance without any variance. It is destined to unity when the last day comes:

“Infatti, ho memoria di aver memoria, intelligenza e volontà. Ho intelligenza di intendere, volere e ricordare. Ho volontà di volere, di ricordare e di intendere”.(*De Trinitate*, XIV, vii 10) Come precepisco il tempo come unità, così avverto me stesso come uno, dal momento che “queste tre cose sono una sola cosa, per la stessa ragione per la quale sono una sola vita, un solo spirit, una sola essenza” (*ibid*, Ivi ,X ii 18)<sup>136</sup>

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ore canoniche o temporali, ma il tempo laico dei Mercanti, le ore *eguali* degli astronomic he entravano allora nella vita quotidiana e stabilivano anzitutto un nuovo ritmo del lavoro più preciso e inflessibili e anche più crudele. “L’orologio del Petrarca”. P.267.

<sup>136</sup> Orlando Todisco, “Il tempo della coscienza in Agostino e Petrarca”, p.339, in *L’esperienza poetica del tempo e il tempo della storia—studi sull’opera di Francis Petrarca*, a cura di Carla Chiummo e Anatole Pierre Fukasa, Università di Cassino, 2005.

However, the advent of mechanical clock—by dividing time into hours and minutes—has scattered people’s experience of time. Let’s imagine how this iron “monster” disturbed people’s life with its “dang dang dang”. The running of time becomes more obvious and noticeable, and the non-stopping “tik-tok” highlights the briefness and irreversibility of one’s life without precedent. Petrarch’s scattered selves might be related to the novel experience brought by the clock. For him, time is more phenomenal, psychological and more related to the personal existence, which is expressed as an anxiety for existence and a universal anguish for life.

In his poetic world, time can be transformed, distorted and repeated: the whole life can be experienced as a year (*Canzoniere*’s 366 poems) or an instant: “He was born only recently, a lovely baby, but now he is a youth, and now a man”. Or as said by Augustine, “they will all vanish at the same time in the twinkling of an eye”<sup>137</sup>. But one day’s misery lacking of Laura makes it seem lifelong. Also, Petrarch records events with accurate dates: in a letter of *Seniles*, he records the arrival of the boat bringing news of the Venetian victory against the island of Crete in this way: “It was, I believe, the sixth hour of June 4, this year 1364.”<sup>138</sup> Petrarch’s meticulousness with time serves to mark down every detail of his life experience, just like the precise calculation of mechanic clock that pinpoints a specific and concrete moment of time. He does so not only for memory, but also for the future: with these exact dates, Petrarch is translating his life into a perennial poetic/literary fact directed to the posterity, who can in turn reshape Petrarch’s experience with such data. Each life event has been clearly recorded

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<sup>137</sup> Francis Petrarch, *My Secret Book*, p.79, trans. by J.G.Nichols, Hesperus Press Limited, 2002.

<sup>138</sup> The example is quoted from Ricardo J. Quinones, *The Renaissance Discovery of Time*, Harvard University Press, 1972, p.113-114. According to J. Quinones, Petrarch’s seriousness with time is due to his exile in youth “And Petrarch, perhaps more than others, needed such anchors of stability. We must not forget that he was born into exile...If not in space, then at least in time he would have his moorings.”, p.114.

under one concrete date, and all dates appearing on the letters or other writings of Petrarch, like pearls on a string, together conjure up a clear outlook of our poet.

## The New Demarcation of Human History

Petrarch's legendary status in the history of Western literature lies largely in his role as a figure of transition. The age of Renaissance has witnessed the penchant for classical works, the re-heated passion for antique manuscripts and the revolution of language—the rise of vernacular Italian, or the neo Latin. All these, if tracked back, are indeed started by Petrarch and his contemporaries, and among them, Petrarch's promotions were the most outstanding. His contributions lie not only in the revival of classical and the pagan culture, but also in combining his ambition of moral propaganda—mostly Christian morality—with the classical thoughts, and in exhibiting his literal and historical perceptions through the continual conversations with the ancient authors. It is said that Burckhardt has invented “Renaissance” as much as Petrarch did. According to him, in the transition from Middle Ages to Renaissance, the tendency is gradually turned from the collective to the focus of individual, from religion to secularization. To bring back to revival of the splendid classical culture and to light up the dark and suffocating Middle Ages is considered the core mission of Renaissance humanists, and this is the original meaning why we name Petrarch's age as an epoch of “Rebirth”.

The penchant for antiquity is not new or unknown before<sup>139</sup>, but it is Petrarch who attempts to construct a familial genealogical relationship with the long distant age while

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<sup>139</sup> Before the arrival of Renaissance, there are, according to Panofsky, two period of the “revival of antiquity”: the Carolingian revival and the “proto-Renaissance”, “proto-humanism”. However, Panofsky thought these two period of revival classics were different from Renaissance in structure, because Renaissance is the epoch that treats herself separated and different from the age of antiquity, while, for example, the Carolingians take themselves as the continuity and legitimate heirs to the antiquity: “To put it briefly: the Carolingians salvaged the classical sentences and concepts in their writings; and they were able to use them, as it were, by way of quotation. It was beyond their power and their wish to activate them.”p.219, “The ‘distance’ created by the Italian, or main,

abruptly cutting off the age in which his father and his grandfathers were born. This paradox in Petrarch witnesses a sharp consciousness of at once the difference between his own age and that of Augustine and Dante, and the intimacy that links his age with the age of Cicero and Seneca. He sharply senses there existed a “distance” between his age and the “Dark Ages”, let alone the long-gone classical past. It is difficult for Petrarch to imagine and to understand how could Dante count himself as the sixth of the ancient authors in the Limbo. His peculiar anachronism is reflected through his treatment of the precedent age:

Petrarch turns back to long-dead, far distant, and even, in the case of Homer, literally unreadable (by him) authors, imagining a familial, conversational relationship with them. In this way, following the familiar trope of historical rebirth, the distant past becomes the yesterday of the present, while the empirical “yesterday,” the later Middle Ages of Mussato and of Dante, silently falls away into “the dark backward and abysm of time.”<sup>140</sup>

The Carolingian literary men faithfully preserved, transcribed, emended and commented upon all classical manuscripts, and they could write beautiful Latin prose and poetry no less excellent than Petrarch. However, “none of them could have thought of composing an epic entitled ‘Venus and Adonis,’ a play about the Death of Orpheus or a pastoral staged in Arcady”.<sup>141</sup> They were like “an insect to a piece of amber”, constricting themselves in the frame of Christian narrative.<sup>142</sup> Petrarch, on the contrary,

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Renaissance deprived Antiquity of this reality. The classical world ceased to be both a possession and a menace—and became, instead, the object of an everlasting nostalgia. Both the mediaeval renaissances, regardless of the differences between the Carolingian *renovation* and the revival movements of the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, were free from this nostalgia.”Erwin Panofsky, p.277, “Renaissance and Renaissances”, *The Kenyon Review*, vol.6, no.2, 1944, pp.201-236.

<sup>140</sup> Albert Russell Ascoli, “Blinding the Cyclops, Petrarch after Dante”, Petrarch and Dante, eds. T. Cachey and Z. Baranski, South Bend IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2007.

<sup>141</sup> E. Panofsky, “Renaissance and Renaissances”, p.218

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid*, p.219.



holds a different attitude towards the tradition. For him, the practice of literary imitation should be like bees: "...to imitate the bees which through an astonishing process produce wax and honey from the flowers they leave behind."

Petrarch's seemingly radical action actually reflects his self-consciousness of being born in such a new age, an age in the darkness before dawn, and this self-consciousness leads him to insist writing something uniquely about "himself":

To repeat, let us write neither in the style one or another writer, but in a style uniquely ours although gathered from a variety of sources. That writer is happier who does not, like the bees, collect a number of scattered things, but instead, after the example of certain not much larger worms from whose bodies silk is produced, prefers to produce his own thoughts and speech — provided that the sense is serious and true and that his style is ornate. (*Fam.* I, 8)

By looking at classical works in distance and incorporating them into his own languages, Petrarch has created a new movement in literature, bridging him with the ancients in a way that no one did before.

However, Petrarch's clear demarcation of epoch does not mean the negation of Christianity; on the contrary, Christianity has an undeniable impact on his modulation of the self, as was said by Montano:

The deepest conviction, in Petrarch and all his followers, was that through the study of the Latin poets the moral values could be established in the world; superstitions, spiritual conflicts, barbarianism, and fanaticism would be overcome, and Christian religion would become firmer and purer in the hearts of men.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Rocco Montano, "Italian Humanism: Dante and Petrarch", *Italica*, vol.50, no.2, 1973, pp.205-221, the citation is from p.215.

In his heart, he considered the Dark Age” to be fogged with the decay of morality. Despite his passion for the classical culture, his persistence in Christian morality shapes profoundly his view of history. Unlike Virgil who cannot comprehend the true light of the Christ, and “... who walks at night, who carries the light behind him and does not help himself, but instructs the persons coming after”<sup>144</sup>, Petrarch realizes the importance of Christian morality, which he never intends to separate or make incompatible with his vernacular pursuit. He does treasure thoughts of the ancients, but he also notices their weakness:

They were men, and to the extent that they could accomplish this through human curiosity, they had both knowledge of things and clarity of expression and were fortunate in natural genius. But they were wretched in their lack of the knowledge of the highest and ineffable good, and like those who trust their own strength and do not desire the true light, they often stumbled over an immovable stone in the manner of the blind.<sup>145</sup>

As for himself, his insistence on following the Christian helps him to avoid the “ignorance” of Virgil: “Indeed the true wisdom of God is Christ so that in order to philosophize rightly we must first love and cherish Him. Let us be such in all things that above all things we may be Christians. Let us thus read philosophical, poetic, or historical writings so that the Gospel of Christ resounds always in the ear of our heart.”<sup>146</sup> Also, unlike the “one eyed” Gherardo<sup>147</sup>, he keeps his two eyes that projected one towards the heaven, and the other towards the earth. In his letters to Gherardo on the topic of “poetics and theology”, Petrarch insists “theology is the poetry of God”,

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<sup>144</sup> *Purgatorio* XXII, 67-69.

<sup>145</sup> *Familiare*, VI, 2.

<sup>146</sup> *Familiare*, VI, 2.

<sup>147</sup> Petrarch, in his *Parthenias*, has attributed the “one eyed” Monicus to his little brother Gherardo, because “two eyes that we mortals usually use, one to gaze upon heavenly things and the other upon earthly ones, you renounced the one that beholds earthly things, being content with the better eye.”, quoted from Ascoli’s “Blinding the Cyclops”. According to Ascoli, Petrarch has used this ironic image to negate and reject Gherardo’s one-sided objection to vernacular literature, turning his respect to his brother into an agonistic hostility.

while quoting Aristotle's saying to strengthen his "the first theologians were poets".<sup>148</sup> Petrarch's persistence on the Christian morality greatly shapes his view of historiography: He does not contract Christian with the earthly Rome, but treating the Christian-dominated Middle Ages as a period that followed the natural transition of history. After this period, Rome would come to know herself again, and her glorious culture will be enjoyed once more.

The most famous work that discusses the problem of Petrarch's historiography is no doubt Mommsen's "Petrarch's Concept of 'Dark Ages', in which he points out that Petrarch had reversed the old allegory of Christian, and "Antiquity, so long considered as the 'Dark Age,' now has become the time of 'light' which had to be 'restored'; the era following Antiquity, on the other hand, was submerged in obscurity."<sup>149</sup> Petrarch substitutes the traditional point of division—the Advent of Christ—with the revival of Rome. Mommsen also finds that Petrarch's exclusive emphasis on Rome and his insistent belief on its revival are the outcome of the poet's coronation in Rome, the event that makes him a legal and ideal citizen of Rome. He labels his own age and Middle Age as "dark" because he has seen how barbarians dominated this wonderful city, and how people of both ages show oblivion to its splendid past. Thus, the missions to wipe out people's ignorance and to bring back the old-time glory fall on the shoulder of humanists to make Rome rise up again. However, unlike the traditional Christian whose hope has been fulfilled, Petrarch's hope, like that of Jews', is still located in the future. For him, everything is unfinished, but all is directed to a divine teleology:

My life is destined to be spent' midst storms  
and turmoil. But if you, as is my wish  
and ardent hope, shall live on after me,  
a more propitious age will come again:

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<sup>148</sup> *Familiare X*, 4

<sup>149</sup> Theodore E Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages', p.228, *Speculum*, vol.17, no.2, 1942, pp.226-242,

this Lethan stupor surely can't endure  
forever. Our posterity, perchance,  
when the dark clouds are lifted, may enjoy  
once more the radiance the ancients knew. (*Africa*. IX, 634-641)<sup>150</sup>

If the re-rise of Rome is predestined, the fluctuations and deviations shall not disrupt its realization. Although Petrarch is pessimistic in his own age, he is truly optimistic about this new age, in which the antique “radiance” will be enjoyed by his prosperity.

But how can Petrarch make his argument of Rome's revival under the condition of Christian spirit? Isn't it that “Dark Ages”—the age of Christianity—the main reason why Roman history has been disrupted and broken? Mommsen thinks that Petrarch is contradicted by himself in this sense.<sup>151</sup> However, Petrarch, from the beginning, does not intend to separate or negate the period of Christian from the map of Roman history; rather, he tries to prove the continuity of it. The prospective of Rome's revival in the future is a perfect combination of the two seemingly contracted elements. That is to say, Petrarch did not intend to consider the “Dark Ages” as an interruption of Roman history, but a period that Roman history happened to lose some of its ancient “radiance”. This can be read from his letter to Giovanni Colonna. When he and Giovanni Colonna wander around the city, he sees the famous ruins of Rome. Then he enumerates a long list of places of interests by chronicle: from ancient to present, from the establishment of the city of Rome, to the establishment of Roman Empire, and to the age of Christian, from which we not only see the famous she-wolf, the triumph of Caesar, but also the birth of Christ the child. Finally, we also see Petrarch has listed the events that Nero persecuted the Christian and that St. Peter and Paul were scarified. Mommsen, from

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<sup>150</sup> Francis Petrarch, *Petrarch's Africa*, trans. and annotated by Thomas G. Bergin and Alice S. Wilson, Yale University Press, 1977.

<sup>151</sup> According to Mommsen, Petrarch's historiography has a strong inconsistency: “on the one hand Petrarch denies the intrinsic value of secular knowledge and declares that everything must be referred to eternal religious truth; on the other he puts a most exclusive emphasis on the history of pagan Rome and neglects the Christian aspects of the eternal city.”, “Petrarch's Conception of ‘The Dark Ages’”, p.32.

this list, concludes that Petrarch emphasizes more on the ancient part; but for me, I see how Petrarch, without acting deliberately, has presented us with a complete picture of the history of Rome from the pagan time to his own days. Within this list, there is no obvious disruption, no deliberate division, only the continuity. One event follows up and is followed by another event, all of which are arranged smoothly in the line of time.

He saw the whole history as an entity, but not without demarcation. When he was discussing it with Giovanni Colonna, he said:

Our conversation was concerned largely with history which we seemed to have divided among us, I being more expert, it seemed, in the ancient, by which we meant the time before the Roman rulers celebrated and venerated the name of Christ, and you in recent times, by which we meant the time from then to the present. (*Fam.* VI,2)

He has admitted his penchant and his preference to the antiquity; nevertheless, he does not intend to contrast the Middle Ages—the decline of the Empire— with the Roman history as a whole: it has been a period of “darkness”, but the human history could be composed of ages of “all-light”, for this only belongs to the city of heaven.

But when Petrarch set up this new chronological demarcation of history, and when he endeavors to reverse the traditional theological meanings of “darkness” and “light”, he does not abandon the essence of Christian time. The core of Christian time lies in the fact that there is a breaking point that happens only *once* along the history, and from that point as a center, history refers backward to the past and forwards to its divine teleology. Unlike the circulation of the Greek that things will reoccur themselves, and it is contrary to the saying that “there is nothing new under the sun”, the advent of Christ is a unique event that happens only once. The revival of Christ only comes for once and once for all. His advent has already defined the running orbit of the rest of human history: between the Advent of Christ and the final Salvation, the human history is nothing but a long, lengthy waiting, during which the degree of faith and merit will become the standard of salvation. Stronger, more insistent the faith, higher the chance

to be saved at the final Judgement for all. For Petrarch, analogically, the existence of Roman Empire itself is the central point of the whole human history. It is the unique queenly city, *the city whose name never falls*: “though fallen, Rome shall ne’er be vanquished. To her and to her stock alone all of the nations of mankind this grace is granted.” (*Africa*, II, 390-394)

## The Demarcation of the Self

Similar to his demarcation of history, Petrarch views his own life with clear demarcation of his own life. Scholars such as P. Rocher, A.A Zottoli, M. Santagata ,T. Barolini, just to name a few,<sup>152</sup> think that Petrarch’s deliberately choice of the date “6<sup>th</sup> April” reflects his intention of making his autobiography a myth in the Christian spirit. For example, Greene calls Petrarch’s allusion to the Christian events in writing his biography as an imitation “eclectic or exploitative”:

It essentially treats all traditions as stockpiles to be drawn upon ostensibly at random. History becomes a vast container whose contents can be disarranged endlessly without suffering damage. The art of poetry finds its materials everywhere, materials bearing with them the aura of their original contexts, charged with an evocative power implanted by the poet or the convention from which they are taken.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> There are lots of works concerning the significance of the date 6<sup>th</sup> April to Petrarch, and the poet’s intention of choosing it. For example, Rocher’s “The Calendrical Structure of Petrarch’s ‘Canzoniere’”, Zottoli’s “Il numero solare nell’ordinamento dei ‘Rerum vulgarium fragmenta,’” , Santagata’s *I frammenti dell’anima* and Barolini’s “The Making of a Lyric Sequence: Time and Narrative in Petrarch’s *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*”. These opinions, first of all, focus solely on Petrarch’s *Canzoniere*; secondly, they propose that is a structure lying behind the *Canzoniere*, making these songs and poems an entity; thirdly, they all notice Petrarch chose a particular, liturgical date (the birth and the death of Jesus) to mark the important events in his personal life. This obvious relation has negated the one-sided opinion that Petrarch is a man who totally broke away from the medieval traditions and acted exactly like a man of modern, like Nietzsche who claimed “God is dead”. Also, Petrarch could not have the idea that the age after him and started at his lifetime would be called “Renaissance”; scholars like Baron, Voigt would like to conclude that Petrarch saw something new but cannot fully realize what it was.

<sup>153</sup> Thomas M.Greene, *Light in Troy*, p.39, Yale University Press, 1982.

For Greene, Petrarch's choice of a religious date is for the sake of literary creation. Santagata, on the other hand, would like to consider his choice more "Christian". He contests that Petrarch's linking his first amorous fallen with the death of Christ showed that the poet's emotion of narrative is born under the sense of St. Augustine<sup>154</sup>, which has brought into the *Canzoniere* "a religious dimension".<sup>155</sup> But most scholars assume that Petrarch wants to arrange his scattered life events into a clear order that can mitigate the anxieties brought by the unsteadiness of Fortune and cruelty of time. They, however, does not ask why Petrarch would like to have such a temporal anchor in his life. Does it have any relation to his concept of time (both history and individual)? In my point of view, Petrarch's utilization of history and his allusion to Christian religion deserve another angle of thinking.

I think that Petrarch's choice of the 6<sup>th</sup> April as the anchor of his complicated life events actually reflects his intention to borrow the concept and historiography of Christian time in creating his own biography. Through the demarcation of his life, he, is able to arrange these scattered, discursive events around the central point, putting them into a persuasive narrative. This Archimedean point has provided a temporal foundation upon which his amorous emotion is developed in the light of Christian religious. On the 6<sup>th</sup> April, on the date of Jesus's Passion, Petrarch's life is also changed dramatically:

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<sup>154</sup> "Gli interessa unicamente che nella memoria dei lettori si fissi la corrispondenza tra l'inizio dell'amore e il giorno liturgico della Passione. Così sarebbe apparso chiaro che il suo sentimento era nato sotto il segno del peccato, di più, intriso di peccato, e proprio nel senso agostiniano: distratto dalla bellezza della creatura lui aveva tradito il Creatore, e ciò nel giorno in cui avrebbe dovuto essere più vicino, più partecipe alla drammatica vicenda del Dio incarnate che si sacrifica per donargli la salvezza.", p.24, Marco Santagata, *L'amoroso pensiero*, Edizioni Mondadori, 2014.

<sup>155</sup> Santagata has commented the function of Sonnet 3: "per ora e a lungo, la funzione di quell testo sembra essere quella di introdurre nel libro la dimensione religiosa, non esplicita nel sonetto proemiale, e di correggere le impressioni lasciate dai due sonetti, cronologicamente più antichi..."p.192, from *I frammenti dell'anima*, Mulino, 2011.

Era il giorno ch'al sol scoloraro  
Per la pietà del suo fattore I rai  
Quando l'fui preso, et non me ne guardai,  
Ché I be'vostr' occhi, Donna, mi legaro. (*Can.* III, 1-4)

The exact date and time of fallen in love is revealed in the canzone 211<sup>156</sup>:

Mille trecento ventisette, apunto  
Su l'ora prima, il dí sesto d'aprile  
Nel laberinto intrai; né veggio ond'èscia. (*Can.* CCXI, 11-14)

Petrarch tries hard to capture and to underline the unique moment of his intoxication with the high accuracy of time, from which point he starts his “love pilgrimage”; from which moment his life is covered with darkness and pain; and from which instant he is gradually alienated further from himself, finding himself submerged in tears and regrets day and night.

In the *Secretum*, he has Augustine to ask Francis: “Now tell me: when did you first see that lady’s beauty?”, and Francis admitted: “To be honest, my first meeting with her and my deviation from the right path happened at the same time.”<sup>157</sup> At the instant of seeing Laura’s eyes, Petrarch’s life has been entirely changed: he is no longer the man he used to be. (“quand’era in parte alre’uom da quell ch’I’sono”). From this demarcated point, his life evolves around this “fallen” instant, making him look back to his life with much sighs and regrets: the “rime sparse” we are listening are signs of his heart caused by the youthful mistakes (“giovenile errore”).

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<sup>156</sup> Many researchers have talked about Petrarch’s inaccuracy because the Good Friday of 1327, the year they met each other, fell not on 6<sup>th</sup> April but on 10<sup>th</sup> April. But Carlo Calcaterra (*La “Date Fatale” nel Canzoniere e nei Trionfi del Petrarca*, Torino, 1926) has shown that Petrarch was not meaning the actual liturgical date of the specific year, but the absolute time when Christ was actually crucified on the sixth of April.

<sup>157</sup> *My Secret Book*, Book III, p. 65.



It is noticeable that Petrarch signifies time with such an unprecedented precision, that he deliberately emphasizes that in the “first hour” of the 6<sup>th</sup> April, he fell in love with Laura. Folena points out that this precision is the attribution of mechanic clock:

per la prima volta nella storia delle lettere, il momento preciso della composizione, della trascrizione, della correzione, o semplicemente della lettura e della riflessione...<sup>158</sup>

The 6<sup>th</sup> April not only marks the date Petrarch met Laura, but also marks the day of Laura’s death:

*L'ora prima era, il dì sesto d'aprile,*

che già mi strinse, et or, lasso, mi sciolse: (*Trionfo della morte*, I,133-134)

This fact is also confirmed in the 336 of *Canzoniere*: “Sai che’n mille trecento quarantotto,/il *dì sesto d'aprile, in l'ora prima,*/ Del corpo uscío quell;anima beata.”(CCCXXXVI, 11-14), and in the inscription of his copy of *Virgil*: “Laurea, propriis uirtutibus illustris et meis longum celebrate carminibus, primum oculis meis apparuit sub primum adolescentie mee tempus, anno Domini m<sup>o</sup> iii<sup>o</sup> xxxvij<sup>o</sup> die vj<sup>o</sup> mensis Aprilis in ecclesia sancte Clare Auin.”<sup>159</sup> This date marks the birth and death of Laura, creating a circle that subjects her into an “eternal” status that prevails above the linear time. Coincidentally, on the 6<sup>th</sup> April of 1338, the idea of writing *Africa* first occurred to his mind: “It was while I was wandering on those mountains, one Good Friday, that the attractive idea occurred to me of writing a heroic poem on Scipio Africanus”.<sup>160</sup> The magical 6<sup>th</sup> April becomes a central point that divides Petrarch’s life,

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<sup>158</sup> Folena, “L’orologio del Petrarca”,p.279.

<sup>159</sup> Quoted from P. de. Nolhac, *Pétrarque et l’Humanisme*, Champion, 1907, II, p.286.

<sup>160</sup> *My Secret Book*, “A Draft of a Letter to Posterity”,p.100. The Petrarchan commentators have translated the day as Good Friday, but in the Latin *Posteritati*, it is written “sexta feria”:<sup>160</sup>“sexta quadam feria maioris hebdomade”. But in the year when Petrarch started *Africa*—the year of 1338—Good Friday did not fall on 6<sup>th</sup> April but on 10<sup>th</sup>.

around which he articulates his life events, and this is how Petrarch revises the exact historical time in order to create a uniformed date that fits for his own calendar.

The revision of date further confirms Petrarch's emphasis on the demarcation of his own life—he wished that his life could be read by the future generations referring to a special, unique time. The 6<sup>th</sup> April now has become a Petrarchan day. By referring the day as Good Friday, Petrarch is successful in adding the Christian spirit into his own literary project: a mythologized of the self in the narrative. This religious date is an important element in the composition of the narration of *conversion*, since it serves as the vantage viewpoint on which his retrospective narration is constructed, telling the regrets of his youth mistakes, his divided wills, and his hope for salvation within the Christian frame of time. To read these works in the spirit of Augustinian conversion is not unreasonable and necessary.

Another event worth of marking in Petrarch's life is his coronation in 1341. In his letter to the *Posterity*, he writes how he receives two invitations of entitling him the crown on the same day. One is from the Roman Senate and the other from the University of Paris. He, after serious considerations, turns down Paris's invitation and accepts the one from Rome. Then he travels to Naples, where his talented has been examined by the King Robert of Naples, who wishes the ceremony of coronation to be held in his reign. Petrarch, faced with such an enthusiasm, insists on receiving the honor in the Senatorial Palace on the Capitoline in Rome. The ceremony took place in the midst of Roman ruins on 8<sup>th</sup> April. That day was the Easter:

Choosing this particular time and place for the coronation charged the procedures with an intense symbolism, for the renovation of culture was staged *in loco ipso*, in the ruins of classical Rome, hence in the midst of decay—on Resurrection Day.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Gerhard Regn and Bernhard Huss, p.87, "Petrarch's Rome: The History of the Africa and the Renaissance Project", *MLN*, vol.1, no.1, Italian Issue (Jan., 2009), pp.86-102.

His insistence on receiving the crown in a specific place (the city of Rome) and on a specific date (the Easter) has shown Petrarch's two ambitions. The coronation in Rome officially makes him an ideal, legal citizen of Rome, the eternal city on earth; his receiving the crown on the Easter has clothed his poetic achievement with a religious sublime, in this way, this secular event has been legitimated with a hope that points both to the revival of Christ and that of the classical culture. The coronation also means an erasure of enormous shame as well as a poignant pain brought by the deprivation of citizenship—readers can take a glimpse of this suffering in *Divine Comedy*: “You will experience how salty tastes the bread/ of another, and what a hard path it is to descend/and mount by another's stairs.” (*Par.* XVII, 58-60) As a man born and grown up in exile, Petrarch takes much effort to anchor his drifting identity through space and through time.<sup>162</sup> The confirmation from the coronation is powerful, both in secular and in religious meaning. After the coronation, Petrarch is no longer a man without “identity”/citizenship. As a poet of Rome, his glory and personality are closely related to the glory of Rome itself. In the following years, working on the unfinished *Africa*, Petrarch does not forget to add the event of coronation in the epic, which he intends to pass down to generations, unlike his little book *Secretum*. According to Ennius's dream, Petrarch, following the footsteps of ancients, will become the laurel poet, the “second Ennius”, who writes an epic poem to record the grand deed of Scipio as well as the splendid heritage of Rome. In his letter to Colonna, he signs that in his days, Roman people know so little about Rome “Sadly do I say that nowhere is Rome less than in Rome.” (*Fam.* VI, 2) The ignorance has resulted in the disappearance of many virtues. Now we understand more why Petrarch would call his age “tenebre”: the guilt of oblivion has suffocated the “light” of the Roman Empire. His task is to write down the glorious deeds of the ancient Rome, showing them to people who live in the darkness

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<sup>162</sup> According to Ronald G. Witt, Petrarch's “insistence in the autobiographical *Ad posterum* on fixing the exact hour of his birth, “in the year 1304 of this latter age which begins with Christ's birth, July the twentieth, on a Monday at dawn,” reveals in its exaggerated specificity an anxiety to claim a place in the flows of history.” *In the Footsteps of the Ancients: The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruini*, Brill, 2001, p.276.

of forgetfulness: in this way, he has established himself an absolute authority—the poet appointed with a mission to revive the Empire. Thus, his *Africa* gains “authority” and “authenticity” as a work to be read and lauded, which in turn makes Petrarch the most legitimate son of Rome.

The effect of the coronation is double in its meaning: like a string that connects, it relates together one extreme—the secular glory—to the other, that is, the revival of Christ.<sup>163</sup> On a day celebrating the resurrection of Christ, people also celebrate Petrarch’s extraordinary achievement, whose task is to wipe out years of bareness and to wash away the dusk of oblivion that blanketed Rome: the revival of Christ is made overlap the secular glory of our poet. Without the context of Christian, we cannot understand the what separates Petrarch from Cicero, Augustine and Dante in the project of Rome. Gerhard Regn and Bernhard Huss argue that in Cicero, there is no conflicts between this world and heaven: “The only thing necessary to ascend to the heavenly spheres is to serve the fatherland as a *vir vere Romanus*. Heaven is the reward for those we live their lives in accordance with the Roman *virtutes*...For this reason, heaven, in Cicero’s *somnium*, is basically just another argument in favor of true *romanitas*, and there is no real conflict between this world and the next.”<sup>164</sup> For Augustine, Rome, as a city on earth, is doomed to meet her end since only the city of heaven can enjoy eternity. Their pessimism has influenced Petrarch, who has written about Rome’s fall, the fragile of glory and earthly things in the dream of Scipio. However, his insistence and confidence on Rome’s revival makes him different from the Augustinian pattern.

Dante, on the other hand, would like to incorporate the history of Rome into the history of Salvation, making Rome a prefiguration of the Christian model city. Petrarch intends to free Rome from this pattern by giving her new meanings to stand on her own, a meaning that is unpretendingly great to a secular city.

Petrarch’s demarcation of his own life is problematic in many senses. His choice of

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<sup>163</sup> But there is still one question concerning the time: Roche has pointed out that “We do not know whether Petrarch chose this precise date, but it is entirely possible that he was most particular about this most spectacular event in his life.” “Calendrical Structure of Petrarch’s *Canzoniere*”, p.165; however, for Gerhard Regn and Bernhard Huss, Petrarch’s choice of this date is intentional. A man focusing so much on the bearing in time, it is reasonable to believe the ceremony to be held on Easter Day was prepared.

<sup>164</sup> Gerhard Regn and Bernhard Huss, “Petrarch’s Rome: The History of the Africa and the Renaissance Project”, p.96.

marking time with religious dates shows that Petrarch still follows the Christian historiography, in which he would like to create a center that can govern the whole course of life, making it an orderly progression, and he would like to insert his own spiritual journey into the blueprint of Christian morality like Dante has done. However, he increasingly discovers that the traditional Christian pattern is not suitable for him because of its rigidity and monolithism.

## The Sentiment of Time and the Rectilinear Life of Individual

*“though their heart be flicking hitherto between the motions of things past and to come, and be very unstable hitherto.” (Conf. XI, 11)*

The life is short and the mortals doom to wither away; the fear and uncertainty about the death haunts the mortals, and the irreversibility and *inarrestabilità* of time makes all things fluctuate. This is Augustine’s description of the “unstable”, which turns out to be the exact portrayal of Petrarch’s anxiety of time. In the first sonnet of his *Canzoniere*, Petrarch has already highlighted similar feeling: “che quanto piace al mondo è breve sogno.” (*Can.* I,14) The whole life can be as short as a year, or even a day, or more precisely, life is nothing but a fleeting dream. In the Sonnet CCLXXII, Petrarch laments grievously about the fugacity of life:

La vita fugge et non s’arresta un’ora  
et la Morte vien dietro a gran giornate;  
et le cose presenti et le passate  
mi danno Guerra et la future ancora, (vv.1-4)

Petrarch packs the contradictions between the past, the present and the future in these four verses, polymerizing them at the point of death. In the unceasing fleet of life,

chased by the Death, Petrarch sees no happiness in the days of the past and of the present; worse still, the days yet to come, because of this fierce agony, become desperate and hopeless. The future, which is supposed to be anticipating, now loses its charm since there shall be nothing to be expected. These verses are full of grudge: time is configured as a great enemy, a destroyer that ruins everything. In the Sonnet CCCLV, time even becomes a cheater, whom the mortals seldom recognize enough:

O tempo, O ciel volubil che fuggendo

Inganni I ciechi et miseri mortali,

O di veloci più che vento et strali!

ora *ab expert* vostre frodi intendo. (vv.1-4)

It is quite interesting to know the image of time in Petrarch is a character of cruelty, fierce and foxy. However, the image of Time remained as an old man (with some variations sometimes) for quite a long time in Renaissance, and the change did not happen until 1530s and 1540s.<sup>165</sup> Only until 1530s and 1540s, time assumed the image of a powerful and ruthless destroyer, a horrible power that wipes out everything and every man, a loathsome thief that steals away people's youth and happiness. This image was initiated by Petrarch linguistically, but was realized in visual arts much later.

E. Taddeo claims that no author before Petrarch has experienced the time the way Petrarch does. “*la profondità della prospettiva temporale*” is the character of his poetry, Taddeo says.<sup>166</sup> Indeed, compared to Augustine and Dante, the experience of time in

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<sup>165</sup> S. Cohen, “The early Renaissance personification of Time and changing concepts of temporality”, *Renaissance Studies*, vol.14, no.3, pp.301-328.

<sup>166</sup> Edoardo Taddeo, p.75, “Petrarca e il tempo. Il tempo come tema nelle Rime. Il tempo come categoria formale nei sonetti”, *Studi e problemi di critica testuale*, vol.27, 1983, pp.69-108. In this article, Taddeo has meticulously enlisted the words, phrases indicating the character of time: “Ritroviamo la forza superiore del tempo cosmico: «Selve, sassi, campagne, fiumi et pogi./ quant'è creato, vince et cangia il tempo» (CXLII 25-26); «Ben vedi omai sì come a morte corre/ ogni cosa creata» (XCI 12-13); la rapidità: «La vita che trapassa a sì gran salti» (CXLVIII 11); «I di miei più leggier' che nusun cervo/ fuggir come ombra» (CCCXIX 1-2); l'irreversibilità: che ‘l tempo/ non è chi ‘ndietro volga, o chi l'affreni» (LXXXVI 10-11); «Che fai? che pensi? che pur dietro guardi/ nel tempo,

Petrarch starts to gain a kind of exigence, concrete as a universal anxiety about the individual existence and crystalized as an agony when facing the pre-destined morality: “there is no one who would not, if he were questioned, deny that he was a mortal dwelling in a perishable body.”<sup>167</sup> In the *Familiare*, Petrarch discusses frequently the fleeting and swiftness of time. For example, he writes how he feels time flying by on him:

I feel myself, believe me, while I seem to be in the very flowering of my life, beginning to wither. But why use slow words when referring to a very rapid occurrence? Indeed, I feel myself hastening, running, and to speak most clearly, flying. As Cicero says, ‘life does indeed fly.’ He then adds that ‘the time of this life is really nothing more than a race toward death. (*Fam.* I, 3).

The fugacity of time has brought about such a vision: one’s life is a line stretching towards its end that has no stops or turning back. Like the sands in an hourglass: once the sand is exhausted, there is nothing left but vacuum that suffocates our souls. The sentiment of time is configured as the irreversibility and aging of one’s life:

Truly fleeting is time, unrestrainable by any stratagem; whether you are asleep or awake, the hours, the days, the months, the years, the centuries slip by. All things under the heavens from birth hasten and are led to their end with astonishing swiftness. There is no interruption, no stopping, and the days and the nights equally take flight. The busy and the

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che tornar non pote omai?» (CCLXXIII 1-2); «et veggio ben che ‘l nostro viver vola / et ch’esser non si pò più d’una volta» (CCCLXI 9-10); e perfino l’elasticità del tempo soggettivo: «Ogni giorno mi par più di mill’anni». Il motive della morte fa risuonare i suoi gravi rintocchi anche in componimenti giovanili, molto vicini alla canz. *Sì è debile il filo*: «Ma perché vola il tempo et fuggon gli anni, / sì ch’a la morte in un punto s’arriva» (XXX 13-14); «Quanto più m’ avvicino al giorno estremo / che l’umana miseria suol far breve, / più veggio il tempo andar veloce et leve» (XXXII 1-3). E come dimenticare—per dare almeno un esempio di certe risonanze affettive—il sospiro di rimpianto che pervade, con la sua ariosa inarcatura, l’inizio del son. CCCXV: «Tutta la mia fiorita et verde etade/ passava», anche’esso prodotto di una distensione dell’animo verso un passato irrecuperabile?»p.72

<sup>167</sup> Petrarch, *My Secret Book*, p.16.

sluggish are proceeding in like measure, and those who seem to be standing still are hastening. Unlike a ship at sea whose progress varies with alternating winds, the course of life is ever the same and extremely rapid; never is there any returning or standing still, for we sail onward in any kind of weather and wind. (*Fam.* XXI, 12)

Time is out of the hand of any man: “che ‘l tempo non è chi ‘ndietro Volga o chi l’affreni!” (*Can.* LXXXVI, 10-11)

The life of a single man is rectilinear and short. Rome, when one day comes to know herself, is capable of returning to its glorious days again; a life of a single man, however, can never return to life again when it is consumed. The future of Rome is to revive, but a future of every man is death. The fate of individual turns pale in the shadow of the glorious Rome. There is no man like Christ: the mortals can only live once and once for all. It is not difficult to see Petrarch’s contradictions: his optimism about the macro-history (human history) and his pessimism about the micro-history (personal history) since time is not equal to both. The final Salvation seems to lose some of its attraction because of the shortness of man’s life. Instead of putting hope in a promised yet unknown future, Petrarch would rather like to “extend life” by restricting lusts and by managing time efficiently: “drunkards waste wines, besieged people economize even with water; abundance begets wastefulness; want begets thrift.” (*Fam.* XXI, 12) However, these efforts cannot fully erase his anxiety, and we see that the vigilance of existence accompanies Petrarch throughout his whole life: even when he was found dead, he was lying on his study desk with his Virgil. Reading and writing, therefore, serve as a cure to mitigate his worries about existence.

## **The Cyclical Self and the Frozen Space of Poetics in *Canzoniere***

Another question that concerns Petrarch’s history of the self is that can a man achieve



his conversion? Or will we become a better man before the termination of our life? Or do we stay as what we were like Augustine in the *Secretum* questions those intellectuals: “Why do you ignore things, and grow old among mere words? Why do you dwell upon childish absurdities when your hair white and your foreheads wrinkled?”<sup>168</sup> Considered Francis’s reluctance of giving up his *Africa*, the critics are severe and hit the targets. These questions become particularly urgent when one is facing the fugacity of life. There are, of course, advances and progresses: when he was born, he knew nothing, and could do nothing; generally, he grows up, becoming a man with skills, talents and capacities. No matter from the concern of intellect or of physics, he gains advances. But it gets complicated regarding our various limitations—the briefness of life, the gradual aging of the body, *etc.* It gets even more complicated in the modern society, when the standards of value become varied. It is almost impossible to judge if a man is becoming better or degrading himself. However, back in Petrarch’s time, or more precedent, the judgement is not that hard to make. At least in a Christian context, to become a better man means to get closer to God, which is a way to the highest virtue necessarily taken by all men.

In Petrarch’s “linear” life, however, we also perceive a cyclical time. Franco Simone’s classical article “Il petrarca e la sua concezione ciclica della storia”<sup>169</sup> explores in details Petrarch’s views of the circular history, which is contrary to the linear history of Christian. By referring to “circular”, Simone emphasizes that our poet thinks that human nature will not change, and thus the glory of Rome will certainly come back: “Crede enim michi, Cesar; mundus idem est qui fuit;”(Fam. XVIII, 1) writes Petrarch in his letter to Carlo IV. To him, the concept of circular history gives him the firmest confidence in the re-rise of Rome:

E questo perché nessun'altra concezione poteva dare al suo cuore di poeta la certezza

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<sup>168</sup> Petrarch, *My Secret Book*, p.17-18.

<sup>169</sup> Franco Simone, “Il Petrarca e la sua concezione ciclica della storia,”*Arte e storia: Studi in onore di Leonello Vincenti*, Turin, 1965.

teorica che l'età amata, per modi sconosciuti ma possibili, poteva ritornare a confortare la vita degli uomini...per l'affermata uniformità della natura umana, uguali effetti, la più luminosa certezza rendeva sicuro il nostro scrittore che, trionfando fra gli uomini la virtù romana, ancora una volta sulla terra sarebbe ritornata la grandezza antica.<sup>170</sup>

But Simone reminds us that we must distinguish the views of history between Petrarch the politician and Petrarch the humanist. Although Petrarch insisted upon the steadiness of human nature, he does not deny the development and varieties of human's intellect.<sup>171</sup> From the steadiness of human nature, he sees the greatest hope of the return of ancient glory, but he also admits that such a return is actually an out-breaking elevation of the human history. Thus, we see Petrarch's value of circular history is not an aimless loop, but with a secular and political purpose: the re-establishment of Rome. The two modes of time do not exclude each other 's effects in Petrarch; rather they penetrate into the other's system, which is presented as a fluctuation and alternative in the scheme of Christian historiography.

Petrarch's love story is narrated on the base of the circular view of history, the reoccurrence of which is best represented by the relapse of his mental disease: "Ardomi et struggo ancor com'io solia / l'aura mi volve et son pur quel ch'i' m'era." (CXII, 3-4); "Diceste anni à già rivolto il cielo/ poi che 'mprima arsi, et giamai non mi spensi; / quando aven ch' al mio stato ripens, / sento nel mezzo de le fiamme un gelo.(CXXII, 1-4); "ponmi con fama oscura o con illustre: / sarò qual fui, vivrò com' io son visso, / continuando il mio sospir trlustre. (CXLV, 12-14); "già per etate il mio desir non varia; ben tem oil viver breve che n'avanza." (CLXVIII, 13-14) In these verses, Petrarch emphasizes how the pass of years fail to save him from his first fallen—so many years

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<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*, p.410-411.

<sup>171</sup> "per altro egli suggeriva quante possibilità vi fossero per raggiungerlo: possibilità non soltanto nuove, ma infinite quanto infiniti sono gli umani intelletti. In questo modo l'umanista rendeva omaggio all'unicità del canone classic pur difendendo la storia originalità delle successive generazioni; così l'attento giudice di valori storici sempre rinnovati, questi giustificava senza infrangere il ferreo circolo in cui vedeva muovere e vivere tutta l'umanità." *ibid*, p.420.

have passed, but I still cannot change myself to a better man. His makes Francis lament that even his own meditation on death cannot change him, so Francis keeps questioning: “What is it that holds me back?”<sup>172</sup> Augustine attributes this failure to his not going deep enough. However, the problem at stake is not only about the degree of meditation, but more about the view of historiography that Petrarch the author holds towards his life—the life is not always advancing and progressive towards the heaven.

In the Sonnet CXVIII, Petrarch introduces the stagnant space into his cyclical time to signify a deliberate lagging-behind:

Or qui son, lasso, et voglio esser altrove,  
et vorrei più volere, et più non voglio,  
et per più non poter fo quant'io posso;

et d'anitichi desir lagrime nove  
provan com' io son pur quell ch'i' mi soglio,  
né per mille rivolte ancor son mosso. (vv. 9-14)

This sonnet has revealed that Petrarch, without the determination to make a correction “per più non poter”, relapses for the same mistakes over years. The circulation of time, peculiarly, results in the alienation of location: “qui son, lasso, et voglio esser altrove.” Petrarch wishes to be somewhere else but not here, therefore, the current space “qui” that contains his self “sono” proves to be a displacement. Notably, this sonnet is also an anniversary poem that signifies the 16<sup>th</sup> year of Petrarch’s intoxication. It seems that our poet does not take into account the influence of time on himself since he says, even though all these years have passed, his suffering keeps renewing and it is like it just began 16 years ago, on 6<sup>th</sup> April in that very church: “fosse ’l principio di cotanto affanno” (v.4) “provan com' io son pur quell ch'i' mi soglio.” (v.13) Time is

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<sup>172</sup> Petrarch, *My Secret Book*, p.21.

miraculously brought back to the very beginning, the beginning of Petrarch's love drama. Trapped in the love for Laura, Petrarch finds himself paralyzed, unable to do anything. Feeling feeble, he begins to cry; but even if the tears are new ("nove"), they are shed for the old desire ("antichi desir"). The ending is most intriguing: Petrarch endeavors to take a turn in his life, so he keeps turning and turning "per mille rivolte", only to find he does not turn at all "ancor son mosso". The conflicts between "new" and "old" signifies a paradox that instead of turning to a new side of life, he just keeps spinning—which does not make any advances though one is always in motion. Through this "stagnant" motion, space becomes frozen and concretionary, keeping him in the same old status for years.

The creation of the frozen space proves to be effective in combating with time, and the stagnancy in Petrarch is nurtured by the cyclical time that promises to bring back the past eternally. In the canzone 23, Petrarch displays a dazzling series of metamorphoses that fall upon him: a green laurel, a swan, a stone, a fountain, a deer. These forms seem to indicate "changes"; however, at the last stanza, the poet claims that those new shapes all happen within the laurel: "né per nova figura il primo alloro/ seppi lassar,"( vv.167-186) That means, after Petrarch has been turned into a green laurel, he remains this form while within the tree, he continues to transform to another shapes. A movement without moving, a metamorphose without changing, that is how Petrarch tries to infuse the cyclical time with the linear one. In this way, the laurel, the symbol of poetry and the sign of Petrarch's secular love, is turned into a space that at once imprisons and preserves him. Within this space, time is transformed, twisted and separated from the linear and historical time: "In quanto tale, il mito si colloca, se non in una dimensione acronica, in un tempo tutto suo, svincolato e indipendente dal tempo storico e dal tempo contingente inteso nel suo svolgersi lineare."<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Giovanni Barberi Squarotti, "Il tempo del mito nei Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta", in *L'esperienza poetica del tempo e il tempo della storia—studi sull'opera di Francis Petrarca*, a cura di Carla Chiummo e Anatole Pierre Fuksas, Università di Cassino, 2005.

There are fifteen anniversary poems in the *Canzoniere*: 30,50,62,79,101,118, 122,145,212, 221, 266, 271, 278 and 364. According to Dutschke, in these anniversary poems, “we are able to follow the evolving story of Petrarch’s ideal autobiography: they establish the chronology, express Petrarch’s inner thoughts about love and ultimately produce a dynamic self-portrait.”<sup>174</sup> Dutschke thinks these poems are arranged in a progressive way: “as they present a progressively alternating perspective of love.”<sup>175</sup> , so Petrarch finally seeks peace, freeing himself from anguish. Barolini thinks that these anniversary poems carry with them “their own time bombs in the form of numerical expressions indicating the precise number of years that have elapsed since that fatal day.”<sup>176</sup>; however, she contends that this group of poems, instead of following a progressive time, “contains some of the poet’s most pronounced refusal to accommodate time.”<sup>177</sup> Actually, like Baroloni says, the anniversary poems are emblem of Petrarch’s paradoxical attitude towards time: they aim at marking time and mutation, while infusing in themselves a resistance to time. That is, to infuse in the linear time with the cyclical one that aims to refuse advance.

In the first anniversary canzone, the 30, Petrarch has expressed his unchanged desire: “Ma perché vola il tempo et fuggon gli anni / sì ch’ a la morte in un punto s’arriva / o colle brune o colle bianche chiome, / seguirò l’ombra di quel dolce lauro / per lo più ardente sole et per la neve, / fin che l’ultimo dì chiuda quest’ occhi.” (vv.13-18) The verb “seguirò”, in future tense, expresses Petrarch’s persistence of loving Laura, and this persistence has lasted throughout the whole anniversary series. In canzone 50, Petrarch laments how the continuous and reoccurring desire keep hurting him: “fine non pongo al mio ostinato affanno; / et duolmi ch’ogni giorno arroge al danno, ch’i’ son già pur *crescendo* in questa voglia / ben presso al decim’ anno,” (*Can.* L,52-55) The

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<sup>174</sup> Dennis Dutscheke, “The Annivesary Poems in Petrarch’s Canzoniere”, p. 83, *Italica*, vol.58, no.2, 1981, pp.83-101.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid*, p.92

<sup>176</sup> Teodolinda Barolini, “The Making of a Lyric Sequence: Time and Narrative in Petrarch’s *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*”, p.16, *MLN*, vol.104, no.1, Italian Issue, pp.1-38.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid*, p.17.

verb in italic highlights the *nous* status of Petrarch's suffering in these ten years, same with the 221 "et son già *ardendo* nel vegesimo anno". (*Can.* CCXXI, 8) His love does not disappear, but rather keeps increasing: "sì crescer sento 'l mio ardente desiro." (*Can.* LXXIX,4). Usually, this continuous love accompanies the regret of seeing how time flies: "So come i dì, come i momenti et l'ore / ne portan gli anni, et non ricevo inganno" (*Can.* CI, 9-10) No matter how days and nights come and go, the pendulum always swings back to the origin: having passed 7 years, 10 years, 16 years, and ending with 31 years, Petrarch still could feel the flame of love first lit upon his heart. The anniversary poems construct a strange phenomenon: reading through all these 15 poems, we can clearly see how time is spent and proceeds; however, the theme of these time-marking poems do not change at all—the desire lasts even after Laura's death: "Ma la forma miglior che vive ancora / et vivrà sempre su ne l'alto cielo, / di sue bellezze ogni or più m'innamora;" (*Can.* CCCXIX, 9-11) All of them point back to the same old story. Like an old, haunting ghost, it appears and re-appear; like a replay tape, it plays the same piece of music again and again, twisting the time flow into a forever loop.

To understand Petrarch's time philosophy, one also needs to look at his *sestina*, the other example of his circular view. There are nine of them: 22, 30, 66, 80, 142, 214, 237, 239, 332. Actually, the *sestine* and the anniversary poems, according to Barolini, "move toward the same goal—the liquidation of time—from opposite perspectives."<sup>178</sup> Here, I would like to mainly focus on the literary form of the Petrarchan *sestina*. Petrarchan *sestina*, characterized with its internal pattern of carrying out the message, proves to be compatible with Petrarch's view of time. The antithesis form of Petrarchan *sestina* is the Dantean *terza rima*. Freccero has brilliantly displayed how *terza rima* corresponded to Dante's theological hermeneutic, and he also highlighted the correspondences between the three *cantiche* and the pilgrim's spiral movement.<sup>179</sup> The *terza rima* goes like: ABA, BCB, CDC...XYX, YZY, Z. Freccero interpreted such form

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<sup>178</sup> *Ibid*, p.17.

<sup>179</sup> For detailed argument, see Freccero's "The Significance of *Terza Rima*", in *Dante: The poetics of Conversion*, pp.258-274.

as “a forward motion, closed off with a recapitulation that gives to the motion its beginning and end. Any complete appearance of a rhyme... BA BCB... incorporates at the same time a recall to the past and a promise of the future...”<sup>180</sup> The retrospection and future promise exist at the same rhyme, which is paralleled to, surprisingly, the pilgrim’s path. Freccero was exciting about this correspondence between the theme and the form, about which he said: “The geometric representation of forward motion which is at the same time recapitulatory is the spiral.”<sup>181</sup> And he shows us readers how Dante, from underground world to the heaven, makes advances in the form of spiral. It is a motion contrary to that of Petrarch. Although it always turns back to the past, it keeps advancing; while Petrarch’s movement is always turning, or turning around without leaving the center of his circle.

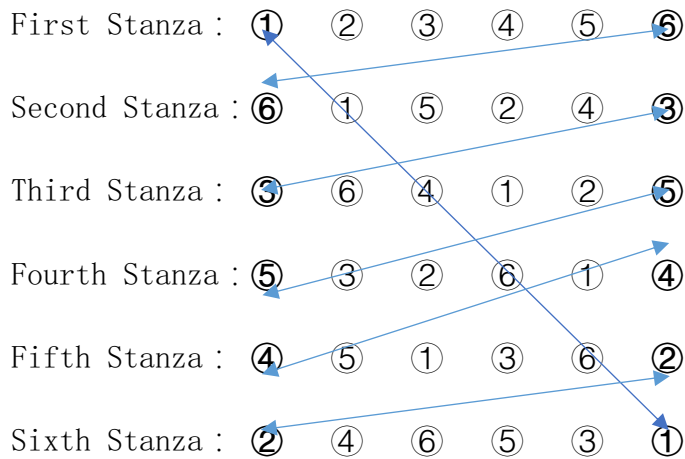
What makes sestina representative of the Petrarchan concept of time is its cyclical form and space. “The time marked by clocks ‘is a hybrid concept, resulting from the incursion of the idea of space into domain of pure consciousness.’ Such time is analogous to the spatial organization of series of lyrics poems into syntagmatic wholes.”<sup>182</sup>, said by Marianne. To endow the linear narrative poetry with a spatial image is vouchsafed by the sestina’s structure—the resemblance of foot, the deliberate arrangement of syntax, the recombination of letters—all serve to infuse the experience of space into the linear writing. Seen from the below chart, the numbers 1-6 represent the six feet appear at the end of each verse in each stanza. It is easy to note that the last foot of a stanza shall reappear at the very first verse in the following stanza:

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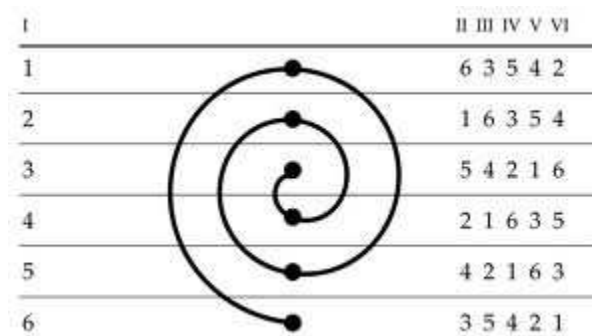
<sup>180</sup> *Ibid*, p.262.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>182</sup> Shapiro Marianne, *Hieroglyph of Time: The Petrarchan Sestina*, University of Minnesota Press, 1981, p.8.



Its tautological nature is best shown as below:



This image is well anticipated by Cipolla, who highlights that: “The points of departure and arrival meet, giving these works the structure of infinity: self-contained wholes in which the beginning and the end are interchangeable.”<sup>183</sup>, just like the “ouroboros”, the snake that bites its own tail. However, the narrative proceeds in the constant interchange of beginning and end, the narrative proceeds, but not time. In its tautological structure, everything reappears and reoccur together in the very last stanza, which creates an illusion that all will be occur again just in the beginning.

Such a cyclical form is strengthened when Petrarch uses some indicative images: for example, the tortuous labyrinthine, or the phoenix that burns and rebirths in its own

<sup>183</sup> “Labyrinthine Imagery in Petrarch”, Gartano Cipolla, *Italica*, vol. 54, no. 2, *Dante-Petrarca*, 1977, pp. 263-289.



nest. The most prominent, again, is the laurel. Petrarch compares himself as Apollo who was chasing ardently after Daphne, who is transformed into a laurel in the end. The laurel, metonym of Laura, serves as the object of desire. However, not only Laura but the poet himself were transformed into the tree: “Qual mi fec’ io quando primier m’ accorsi / de la trasfigurata mia persona, / e i capei vidi far di quella fronde / di che sperato avea già lor corona, / e i piedi in ch’io mi stetti et mossi et corsi, / com’ogni membro a l’anima risponde, / diventar due radici sopra l’onde” (*Can.* XXIII, 41-47) When the pursuer becomes what he pursues, the desire does not point to the object but turning back to the subject. Such a self-reference and self-contain have established the highest autonomy for an author:

...the poetic lady created by the poet, who in turn creates him as a poet laureate. This circularity forecloses all referentiality and in its self-contained dynamism resembles the inner life of the Trinity as the Church fathers imagined it. One could scarcely suppose a greater autonomy. This poetic strategy corresponds, in the theological order, to the sin of idolatry.<sup>184</sup>

By referring back to author, the circularity is constructed to harbor and to stop the fleeting of time, thus keeping death at bay.

## **The Linear Time of Conversion and The Circular Self**

Petrarch’s cyclical spiritual trajectory, through projecting the self in the time and space that resists the advances and revolutionary turning, proves to be at odds with the temporal pattern of conversion. Conversion requires, at the first place, a vantage point for narration. This special point has the same function of the “central point” of the Christian history. It has been discussed that with the “central point”—the Advent of

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<sup>184</sup> John Freccero, “The Fig Tree and the Laurel: Petrarch’s Poetics, p.36, *Diacritics*, vol.5, no.1. 1975, pp.34-40.

Christ—the time can be viewed backwards and forwards, referring both to the past and to the future, with the past being “pre-figuration” and the future being “configuration” or “fulfillment”. The entire narrative of Christian history thus rests itself on the “allegory” and “figure”-making.

Analogously, the old self before conversion is the “preparation” while the new self after conversion is the “fulfillment”. The vantage point should also be a cumulating point when the author and the autobiographical persona encounter—a symbol of the completion of transcendence.<sup>185</sup> To state it geometrically, it is the lowest point of a parabola, the most crisis moment of one’s life. At this very point, the old, corrupted old has been completely transformed into a new, blessed self, when the past has been consumed, over and the present takes over. The revolution of the self, is emblematic of an entire breaking from the past, which signifies the most precarious moment of the life, when one needs to undergo a spiritual death, so that he is to be born again as a new self. This new self:

no longer subject to significant spiritual change, can objectively review and interpret its own past blindness, its own disorientation *in via*, from beyond the symbolic grave in which the body of sin has been interred.<sup>186</sup>

However, the achievement of the new self through the conversion is dubious. First of all, it is impossible to obtain such a revolutionary point that can entirely and rigidly divide the life of an individual into two parts: the aversion and the conversion, the fallen and the blessed, the bad and the good, since every moment in life is interconnected with each other, and the present is not simply a present—it is forged by its past and will extend itself to the construction of future. At the meanwhile the present will eventually

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<sup>185</sup> Freccero, “Conversion demands that there be both a continuity and a discontinuity between the self that *is* and the self that *was*. Similarly, a narrative of self demands that author and persona be distinguished until they are fused at the narrative’s cumulating moment.”, from “Petrarch’s Poetics”, p.25.

<sup>186</sup> Ascoli, “Petrarch’s Middle Age: Memory, Imagination, History and the “Ascent of Mount Ventoux”, p.28, from *Stanford Italian Review Volume X, no.1*, Perspectives on the Italian Renaissance, ed. By Marilyn Migiel, pp.5-44.

become a past like the other pasts. So there is no such a point that can cut off and abandon the past thoroughly. Secondly, according to Ascoli, to gain such a vantage point, one needs to have a “perspective of the end”, from which “one can decide which changes were really significant (which made a genuine difference from the future) and which were not, and thereby construct a linear narrative of progressive alterations.”<sup>187</sup> However, he refutes the idea of “the end” by stating that, all of us, as a living witness of our own lives, only have the “perspective of the middle”. The perspective of the end is an illusion, because:

That within this life there can be no true and secure “perspective of the end”, that man is always *in via*, caught between the body and spirit. In this view, the narrative turning of conversion is always open to reversal and to degeneration into a mere rhetorical trope.

Reducing the conversion to a rhetorical trope, Ascoli has revealed the naïve side of Christian narration and the complexity of real life. We should remember Mazzotta’s excellent discussion about Petrarch’s fragmental “selves”: it is not only difficult to find a revolutionary point to separate the new self from old one, but for such complex “selves”, it is too naïve to assume one can find such point. Thirdly, the realization of conversion is founded on the “reality impossible” space where one can find “a simulacrum of death in its ending and a simulacrum of survival in its very existence.”<sup>188</sup> However, such a simulacrum that at once projects death and rebirth proves to be impossible for the mortals, which is based on the narrative of Christ’s transcendental revival. The peculiar side of the story of conversion is that “the story of one’s life is definitively concluded, yet one survives to tell the tale”<sup>189</sup>

From this viewpoint, conversion is a very special discourse invented by Christianity

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<sup>187</sup> *Ibid*, p. 40.

<sup>188</sup> John Freccero, “Autobiography and Narrative”, p.29, in *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought*, ed. by Thomas C.Heller, Morton Sosna, and David E. Wellbery, with Arnold I.Davidson, Ann Swidler, and Ian Watt, Stanford University Press, 1986, pp.16-29.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, p.20.

that can match with its own historiography. In the myth of conversion, one is persuaded that “death” is necessary before the revival—it is the same logic that Christ went crucified. Such a mythology can only be obtained through literary discourse: Paolo’s arrival at the third heaven, Augustine’s “tolle, legge”, Dante’s descent to hell, Aeneid’s dreamy visit to the underworld, who are the narrators that manage to survive their own death and to speak out their “impossible” stories.

For a man still in the middle of his life, he has no capacity to judge which event is *the* event that can totally turn his trace around since he cannot predict what shall happen in the next moment: will this moment proves to be the real turning point, or will this moment drags him back to his corrupted state? Has he been totally free from all dangers in the rest of his life? Thus, Freccero says: “we too will be struck by the definitiveness of Augustine’s conversion.”<sup>190</sup> The moment of “turning” is essential, but one who is still living cannot tell when it will happen. However, for the faithful men in the Middle Ages, they believed that such moment (such breaking point in life) has been already promised to them by the Advent of Christ; as long as one can follow God determinedly, that moment shall come. But to reach this breaking point is not easy despite it has been promised to mankind. As a human being, we lack the perspective to see time “spatially” like God, and time for us is always divided, irreversible and intangible. Like the whole mankind waiting for the Final Salvation, an individual is also waiting for his conversion.

Except for a revolutionary point, conversion, more importantly, requires a linear, progressive life, the assumption of which is that one can become a *better* man. Dante explains in what condition one is authorized to speak of himself—one of the reasons is that his story can become a model for others to follow:

e questa ragione mosse Agostino ne le sue confessioni a parlare di sè, *chè per lo processo de la sua vita, lo quale fu di [non] buono in buono, e di buono in migliore, e di migliore in ottimo, ne diede essempla e dottrina, la quale per sì vero testimonio ricevere non si*

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<sup>190</sup> *Ibid*, p.18.

*potea.*<sup>191</sup>

From Dante's statement of self-justification, we are able to tell that the narration of conversion is beneficial since it tells the story of a man's spiritual advances: from not good to good, from good to better, and finally to the best. Such a belief assumes that the life of the individual should be advancing despite the obstacles, seductions and even worse relapses. All accumulates unto a point when the revolutionary change bursts out. Contrarily, the cyclical time introduces into one's life relapses and stagnancy: it outlines an image in which the self is paralyzed to take actions or to make a decisive turning. Worse, it exclaims that the past will never be gone, and no matter the present or the future, they are under the shadow of the past which promises that all shall be brought to the origin again. The cyclical time becomes a threat to conversion and thus is prohibited.

For a successful conversion, there should be two conditions: (1) a breaking point that can separate the new self from the old; (2) the trajectory of life should be linear and progressive. The two conditions are exactly the foundation of the Christian concept of historiography, which determines a progressive and linear that is founded on a central point which can separate the human history into two parts: the darkness and the luminousness. The narration of conversion and the narration of Christian history share the same pattern, because of which it shall cause no contradiction or no disturbance between the personal history and human history in the horizon of Christianity. Medieval authors like Augustine and Dante who believe in the fulfilled history of Christ, is readily to accept its pattern to narrate about themselves. The individual conversion can be a reflection of the salvation of the whole mankind; at the same time, it is under the Christian horizon and historiography, conversion, such an impossible experience and narration, can be realized.

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<sup>191</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Convivio*, I, ii, 12. Quoted from Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, p.2.

### **(1) The Contradiction between Conversion and the Cyclical Self**

Unlike Augustine and Dante, Petrarch finds the contradictions in the hermeneutic between macrohistory and microhistory, because for Petrarch, the life is not a linear, progressive time that possess an Archimedean point; instead, more often and more frequently, it is turning around and around, staying where it was years ago. There seems no answer to this predicament even under the Grace of God. Petrarch does not give up on asking heavenly help, but he himself is not sure whether it would help him out of this stormy sea and leads him to the safe port long expected by him. It is not all about the determination and confidence in faith (we must not absurdly accuse Petrarch of lacking faith), but about the deeper understanding of the complexities of life, history and time.

However, the first thing to confirm is that Petrarch has never been away from the Christian pattern. Concluded from his view of Roman history and from his marking of the 6<sup>th</sup> April, we can see that Petrarch still holds belief in the Christian pattern of time. However, the problem is, he is not willing to abandon the cyclical pattern that can bring him security and that can erase his anxiety in the irreversibility of life. However, the cyclical pattern has disturbed the progressive movement of a life towards conversion since it, in Petrarchan narrative, represents the fatal relapses and yearly stagnation. For the linear time and the cyclical time, Petrarch would like to have it both ways:

That moment between God and Moses remains a limited moment, as does the event of Christ's crucifixion, on whose anniversary Petrarch situates his meeting and enamorment. Since such as moment does represent a theophany, it acquires a new dimension. It becomes "precious" in itself because of its irreversibility as a historical event. Thus in his utilization of the two antiquities Petrarch inserts linearity into myth. He is reluctant at best to relinquish in turn the myth's cyclical temptations, since they are instrumental to keeping death at bay.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Marianne, *Hieroglyph of Time: The Petrarchan Sestina*, p.69.

In Petrarch's eyes, Providence and Fortune belong to two independent systems: God has dominated everything, but his grace is separated from the power of Fortune. There has always been such a doubt in his mind: does his life, disposed at the vicissitudes and changes of time, will definitely receive the mercy of grace before the coming of death? If it will come, when will it arrive? Because "a power so remote and utterly different as God could care to justify sinners."<sup>193</sup> Even though he understands that his sufferings and spiritual lacerations are similar to those of St. Augustine, his faith is constantly shaken by the bites of Fortune because the Providence of God is so remote and abstract, while the effect of Fortune is so common and close to daily experiences. For example, the sudden death of a young man before he reaches his maturity, the diseases that strikes some innocent people, the accidents and unexpected catastrophes... Like Augustine signals to Francis: "It is even more disturbing to see someone younger, and stronger, and better-looking, die suddenly. Everyone looks around and says, 'He seemed to be living there safely enough, but now he is taken from us'."<sup>194</sup> All these accidents grind Petrarch's heart and he even questioned:

Nothing is impossible to God: in me there is total impossibility of rising, buried as I am in such a great heap of sins. He is potent to save: I am unable to be saved. For however great the clemency of God, certainly it does not exclude justice, and mercy as immense as you wish must be reduced to the measure of my miseries, for no actions of agent are operative with regard to an incapable recipient...<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Trinkaus, *In our Image and Likeness, Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, pp.28-29.

<sup>194</sup> Petrarch, *My Secret Book*, p.16.

<sup>195</sup> Francis Petrarca, *De otio religioso*, ed. by Giuseppe Rontondi, *Studi e Testi*, 195, Città del Vaticano, 1958, pp.25, "Nichi impossibile Deo est: in me est omnis impossibilitas assurgendi tanta peccatorum mole obruto. Salvare ille potens est: ego salvari nequeo. Quantalibet enim clementia Dei sit, certe iustitiam non excludit et quamvis immensa misericordia as mensuram mee miserie redigenda est, nam nec actum agentium circa patiens indispositum operantur".

For Petrarch, even the all-mighty power of God cannot penetrate a soul that is not capable of receiving his Grace. He even make Augustine of the *Secretum* says: “Does anyone guarantee my safety? God? Some magus? No, I am mortal too.”<sup>196</sup> By emphasizing the “mortality” in men, Petrarch attempts to insert the individual experiences and sentiments into the ontological Christian morality. His differences lie in the fact that he is proud to exclaim there was something in men that is untouchable by God’s Providence: it is these emotional struggles that most display the human nature—the “humanism”.

Humanism is not a blind optimistic; instead, it is a sharper perception that penetrates into the human nature. It recognizes at the same time the noble parts of man—that is what Pico called “the dignity of man” and his fragility within this nobility: his weakness in faith, his vulnerability to seductions, his swings by fortunes and miseries, and his lingering in mortal things. The existence of Grace does not necessarily cancel these inborn humanistic characteristics of man. For Petrarch, he is honest enough to express such a doubt: even though he converses in this moment, does it mean that he would be excluded from the play of Fortune? In one’s life, everything can be regarded as probability instead of absoluteness, so does the salvation of an individual. Petrarch might be caught up in the predicament that, despite his endeavors, he can never reach the point of turning.

The “unsteady” element of Fortune does not eliminate the Providence, but complicates and enriches it. Many wry variations have been added to the rigid Christian allegory of the self. In this way, the self, under the influence of Fortune, the chance and even the sin, takes on different outlooks in different individual. The self is not a homogenous image that is portrayed according to the image of God. Freccero’s opinion is quite interesting in addressing this issue:

As every reader of Dante knows, the truly interesting people are in hell. Similarly,

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<sup>196</sup> Petrarch, *My Secret Book*, p.16.



Petrarch's portrait of himself as sinner is essential for his characterizing himself as unique...Because saints are meant to represent the image of God, they all look pretty much alike.<sup>197</sup>

Analogously, the stories of conversion always look similar: it is a formative narrative about how a corrupted soul becomes purified. The stories of fallen, on the contrary, are various due to different personalities and characteristics. However, a successful conversion can wipe out all dissimilarities and uniqueness, and people after conversion will become a saint, like all other saints in history.

At this point, the story has no more to tell: as long as it reaches the present of conversion, it is drained away. The adventure is over. Petrarch is the one who refuses to be alike to others. He does not believe that there is only one road for men towards salvation—in *Secretum* as well as in *Familiari*, he has argued that his secular love to Laura will become a catalyst to his love for God. The ways to salvation varies, depending on the varieties man's personalities. More importantly, Petrarch is reluctant to accept a conversion, which means an ending to his story. For him, the “end”—the death of his narrative self—is not compatible with his literary project that aims to transcend time and space. In order to achieve the effect of “never-ending”, Petrarch lingers in the middle. However, the suspension, or more precisely, Petrarch's “middle status”, highlights no less effort he takes to achieve the final goal than Augustine has done. The contradictions he has to deal with between the individual and history are no less complicated than those faced by his predecessors. Compared to the rigidity of Christianity, Petrarch's treatment of the self can even be considered to be richer and more authentic. Petrarch never actually abandons the allegory of conversion, so his real challenge lies in the fact that he has to adopt this “Augustinian” mode while breaking from it. In this way, he has to present his conversions as the “failures”, but after so much effects and struggles. It is the numerous trials attempted by Petrarch to adapt the pattern

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<sup>197</sup> Freccero, “Autobiography and Narrative”, p.21.

of conversion into his own life that eventually makes prominent his individualism and modernism.

## II. The Delayed Time and Three Conversions

It is hard not to notice that the failure of conversion appears frequently in Petrarch's works: the sad prayer that begged St. Maria for salvation at the end of the *Canzoniere*, the hesitating pupil of the *Secretum* and the disappointed mountaineer of *Mount Ventoux* of the *Familiari*. IV, 1, etc. All of them narrate the same story, in which Petrarch fails in accomplishing his conversion.<sup>198</sup> What do these recurring failures mean? Do they indicate a status incompleteness in Petrarch or do they signify Petrarch's revolutionary undoing of the traditional Christian allegory of the self?

### The Petrarchan Irony: Final Conversion or not?

It is often surprising for Petrarch's readers to find him having chosen to close his scattered songbook with a penitent canzone that begs Virgin Maria for his salvation.

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<sup>198</sup> There are disputes concerning whether these conversions were accomplished. For example, scholars like Santagata has considered that the prayers at the end of *Canzoniere* actually symbolize Petrarch's spiritual "turning"; the reading of Augustine at the summit of Ventoso represents a new status of Petrarch's mind. However, these could be called "changes" but not "metamorphoses" since they fail to reach such a climax point that brings about an entirely "new" self in Petrarch. Petrarch's unique experience in going through "conversions", on the one hand, reveals the failure of Christian allegory; on the other, it opens up a new value of the "self": whether the conversion is successful is not of essential importance; what matters is the process in which the "self" develops and changes. It is through such a process that the self is most make distinguished.

Although this Augustinian confession does not come without anticipation—in the canzone 359, Laura appears for the last time in the *Canzoniere* in which she criticizes Petrarch for loving her wrongly: “Non errar con li sciocchi, / né parlar,” dice, “o creder a lor modo. / Spirito ignudo sono c’e Ciel mi godo; / quel che tu cerchi è terra già molt’anni” (*Can.* CCCLIX, 58-61)—it still surprises us when our poet suddenly turns to the Virgin for help, terming her as the “true Beatrice”.

Before arriving at canzone 366, we can already feel a sense of “re-orienting”. It starts with a long canzone, 360, in which Petrarch officially accuses Love of deviating him and wasting his days. This canzone depicts a heated court scene in which Petrarch and Love are arguing, and Petrarch the lover defends himself against Love before the Court of Justice. Lady Reason, after hearing both sides, actually chooses to withhold her final judgement. Her refusal to immediately make a decision again reflects Petrarch’s “fear of ending”—instead of making a definite choice, Petrarch always prefers to let things suspended. No one knows who wins in the end, and no one has privilege to judge who is criminal and who is innocent. Our poet’s accusation is weakened by the fact that he has been the one benefited from Love.

The condemnation of Love by the poet are not rare throughout the whole *Canzoniere*; often, Petrarch accuses Love of having subjected him to great agonies, sufferings and emotional tortures. However, in this canzone, Love talks back for the first time—in previous poems, he is just a cold-hearted, lofty god who cares nothing about Petrarch’s miseries. Equal in status to the accuser, Love argues for all the cares and benefits that he gives to Petrarch, let alone the splendid glories that come with the poet’s coronation:

Sì l’avea sotto l’ali mie condotto  
Ch’a donne et cavalier piaceva il suo dire;  
Et sì alto salire  
il feci che tra’ caldi ingegni ferve  
il suo nome, et de’ suoi detti conserve  
si fanno con diletto in alcun loco (*Can.* CCCLX, 110-115)

Contrary to Petrarch's lament in Sonnet 1 that he has become the talk of the town "Ma ben veggio or sì come al popol tutto/ favola fui gran tempo," (1:9-10), Love claims that his work makes him a famous celebrity everywhere, "in alcun loco". Moreover, Love denies that it impedes Petrarch's conversion by arguing that Laura's beauty should not be considered as his intentional deception. Also, the love for mortal things is not opposite to the love of God, as claimed by Petrarch:

da volar sopra 'l ciel li avea dat'ali  
per le cose mortali,  
che son scala al Fattor, chi ben l'estima (360:137-139)

Love, in fact, is the one who provides him with a "colonna" to rise to the First Cause "l'alta cagion prima" (*Can.* CCCLXI,143). Is not this statement familiar to readers? In the third book of the *Secretum*, Francis, facing Augustine's condemnation, becomes the one who upholds the same opinion as Love does here. He argued that his love for a mortal woman could finally lead him back to God: the roads to conversion can be varied, some people take a straight road (like Gherardo) while others may experience much deviation and relapse before reaching the destination. Francis, the personage of Petrarch in the *Secretum*, actually holds the same opinion as Love.

To fight back Petrarch's charge, Love throws out an ironic response: Petrarch hates Love not because he realizes his "youth errors" in mortal love, but because he cannot endure the strike by Death in taking away his beloved. Petrarch's confessions about his own "youthful mistakes" turns out to be an excuse for which he brings up all these accusations because of his loss of Laura. Then Love answers him calmly: it is God the Creator who has taken Laura away. The accusation finishes without Petrarch's further defense, as if he has no words to fight back. The force of Petrarch's accusation has been compromised by his silence because it seems that Love prevails in the end. Moreover, Petrarch mentions nothing about his love for God or for St. Maria after hearing Love's

argument, making all of his former accusations peculiarly ambiguous. That is to say, he implicitly admits the glories and benefits brought to him by Love, and admits that these “mortal” things are still attractive to him.

It is also interesting to note that canzone 360 witnesses a linguistic crime. According to Petrarch’s accusation, his poetic talents is used by Love: “Misero, a che quell caro ingegno altero / et l’altre doti a me date dal Cielo?” (vv.39-40) Blinded by innamoramento, the poet has used all his “high talents” to serve Laura and Love, investing decades to please them, until one day he finds himself old and weary in front of his mirror “Dicemi spesso il mio fidato specchio, / l’animo stanco, et la cangiata scorza / et la scemata mia destrezza et forza” (*Can.* CCCLXI, 1-3) Such talents, endowed by God, should be used to serve Him. Thus, Petrarch complains that he could have flown higher as a poet, while his bound to mortal love drags him down to the ground: “era disposto a sollevarmi alto da terra; e’ mi tolse di pace et pose in guerra.” (vv.28-30) His linguistic extraordinariness should have won him a lofty place in heaven, but now he has been transferred to a savage place, among wild beasts, rapacious thieves, thorny bushes and barbarous people,<sup>199</sup> and abandoned by the civilization: “et non sonò poi squilla / ov’ io sia in qualche villa.” (*Can.* CCCLX:66-67)

Petrarch’s miserable state testifies to his identity as a man “in exile” which gives a constant restlessness to his soul. Love’s defense is that Petrarch’s poetic talent originates from his amorous nutrition: before he was subjected under Love, he was only a youth who “fu dato a l’arte da vender parolette (anzi menzogne);” (vv. 81-82); *i.e.*, without his help, Petrarch may have grown to mediocrity, a man just like everyone else: “un roco mormorador di corti, un uom del vulgo!” (vv.116-117) Poetic talent, under the light of their arguments, has become Love’s conspiracy as well as Petrarch’s bittersweet experience. This trial begins with Petrarch’s suffering from his literary desires—he has spent all his youth in narrating his love for Laura— and ends with lamenting the death of his beloved. Love not only plays a role in Petrarch’s love story, but more importantly,

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<sup>199</sup> “Cerear m’ à fatto deserti paesi, / fiere et ladri rapaci, ispidi dumi, dure enti et costumi,” *Can.* CCCLXI, 46-48.

it links Petrarch's poetics with poetic objects. It is the tunnel that realizes his literary ambition, and at the same time it is the source of Petrarch's pain. The bitterness that devours Petrarch's heart is accompanied by his complaints, that the gifted genius has been wasted "Misero, a che quel caro ingegno altero/ et l'altre doti a me date dal Cielo?" (vv.39-40) For Petrarch, Love, more than torturing his heart, actually damages his literary gift. This is the crime Love commits to Petrarch.

Following the suspicious arguments of 360, Petrarch's penitence grows more intense when facing the approach of death. Sonnet 361 reveals his physical old age and the irreversible passing of life, while Sonnet 362 depicts a fantasy in which Petrarch has been brought to heaven because the celestial Laura recognized his determined correction: "perch' à i costume variati e 'l pelo." (*Can.* CCCLXII, 8) Petrarch's decisive change, while corresponding to the last sonnet, where he has realized his own mistakes as if he woke up from a long dream "d'un lungo et grave sonno mi resveglio" (*Can.* CCCLXI, 8), also responds to the condemnation by the St. Augustine of the *Secretum*, where the saint reproaches Francis in that the aging of his appearance does not bring any change to his inner self: "have you noticed how your face changes from day to day, and how some white hairs have already begun to appear on your head?"<sup>200</sup> Thus, the sonnet 362—the recognition of Laura and God—is a direct correction of Petrarch's postponed conversion.

The following three sonnets (363-365) continue to deal with Petrarch's anxiety about death, with the 364 being the last poem of his "anniversary series". Aging forces him to face the upcoming but uncertain death, and Petrarch's emotion of repentance, together with the sentiment upon the swiftness of time, has gradually reached its climax, which further aggravates his awareness of Death's approaching. That is the moment when he starts turning to God's help:

Signior che 'n questo carcer m'ài rinchiuso:            A quel poco di viver che m'avanza

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<sup>200</sup> *Secretum*, p.77.

Tramene salvo da li eterni danni,  
ch'i' conosco 'l mio fallo et non lo scuso.  
(364:12-14)

et al morir degni esser tua man presta:  
Tu sai ben che 'n altrui non ò speranza  
(365:12-14)

At the end of the sonnet 365, our poet even cries out: “Tu sai ben che 'm altrui non ò speranza.” (“You know You are the only hope I have”, v. 14)

Finally, in canzone 366, the poet, as we have known, suddenly composes a prayer to the Virgin. The structure of canzone 366 is rather simple: every stanza begins with the name “Virgin”, and is followed by the “laude” of her heavenly nature, unequalled beauty and benign disposition . Stanzas 1 to 6 mainly discuss the incomparable virtues of Mary and how humbling and degrading are mortality and this earthly life, which are shown by terms like “miseria estrema de l'umane cose” “i sia terra” “i mortali sciocchi” “rasserena il secol pien d'errori oscuri et folti”. The remaining five stanzas return to the theme of fleeting time: seeing death is at the front door, Petrarch thinks this is his last chance for him to enter the safe port of salvation. From “sol Morte n'aspetta” “l'ultimo pianto” “estremo passo”, we can see Petrarch frequently using the word “last” “ultimate” “final” to underline his limited lifetime. In the last stanza, the poet emphasizes one last time how urgently he needs the Virgin's help because of his vision of the impending death:

Il di s'appressa et non pote esser lunge,  
Sì corre il tempo et vola,  
Vergine unica et sola,  
e 'l cor or coscienza or morte punge; (CCCLXVI, 131-134)

Contradictions and doubts are raised because this unexpected confession to Mary has been chosen as the closure of this large poetic collection, leaving readers in a cloud of confusion: does it mean Petrarch successfully accomplishes his conversion and obtains a new self like Augustine and Dante? Santagata treats the entire *Canzoniere* as a

linguistic conversion. He notes that, in sonnet 1, Petrarch scarcely mentions his desire for love; instead, he uses words like “speranze” “dolore” and “vergogna” that convey a deep sentiment of penitence. The sonnet ends in a biblical atmosphere which emphasizes the vanity and illusions of the earthly world.<sup>201</sup> Being the first poem of the *Canzoniere*, it determines the Christian undertone for the remaining 365 poems. The penitent emotion accumulates and intensifies as the development of Petrarch’s love story, but such an emotion, as we have read, does not bring about any progress or advance in Petrarch’s mind.

Besides, the scene of his confessions and his praying to Mary remind us more of the image of pre-conversion Augustine than of the “new” Augustine, as the former one was struggling between two lacerated wills in the garden in Milan. Augustine has already confirmed his will to follow God through understanding the fatal mistake of his past, but lacking the necessary bravery, he still needed God’s help: “As for mine own temporal life, all things were as yet unresolved; my heart was to be purged from the old leaven, The Way (our Savior himself) I very well likend of: but it still irked me to follow him through its straitness.” (*Conf.* VIII, 1) By searching deep within his soul, he interrogates himself again and again, asking himself when he can eventually abandon those old habits to make the final step. His emotion gradually accumulates and surges, and finally turns into a storm of tears. That is when the magical voice appears that saves him from his constant torment. Augustine’s emotional pattern, upon reaching a climax, finds an exit: when he hears the mysterious voices of children, he stops crying and goes to open the book, reading whatever that catches his sight. Unlike his hysterical tearing, he reads the book quietly in silence. After reading, he finds the tranquility he has been longing for — “a well-quieted countenance”. (*Conf.* VIII, 12)

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<sup>201</sup> Marco Santagata, *I Frammenti dell’anima, storia e racconto nel Canzoniere di Petrarca*, Il Mulino, 1992, p.191: “L’oggetto d’amore non è mai menzionato; lo stesso sentimento amoroso è presentato in modo in apparenza crudo, ma in realtà eufemistico. La sua considerazione in termini morali, come «errore» e «vaneggiamento», passa sotto silenzio la sua natura istintuale e passionale...A carico del narratore restano solo gli effetti di una passione, peraltro non nominata, allusa attraverso l’evocazione dell’esperienza altrui, quasi annegata, infine, nel biblico mare della *vanitas vanitatum*..”



Petrarch, like the saint, has been aware of his wrong love for mortal things, which is addressed in his first sonnet's exclamation, that the joy of world is only a fleeting dream or "breve sogno". Also like Augustine, he asks for celestial help, but it seems that nothing substantial has happened in the end. If Augustine gains final peace, then Petrarch's emotion is frozen at a point infinitely approaching the point of conversion. The frozen emotion then is transformed into Petrarch's old lamentation about his wasted time and "breve" life: "Il di s'appressa et non pote esser lunge, / sì corre il tempo et vola" (*Can.* CCCLXVI,131-132) Actually, Petrarch's conversion is still on hold since he is waiting for Christ's help: "racommandami al tuo Figliuol...ch' accolga 'l mio spirto ultimo in pace" (*Can.* CCCLXVI,137-139). Therefore, he is not "Augustine", who has been introduced to the sweet peace of heaven, and his status is uncertain. The concluding canzone only tells us Petrarch's expectations for conversion, not his actual commitment—the "opening book" ("libro aperto"), following the usual habit of our poet, leaves everything in an uncertain/unfinished state.

The moment of "Mount Ventoso" is similar. Petrarch, suffering from the disharmonies between body and spirit, fails to cooperate with his conflicting wills. The emotional torments lead him to consider how much time he has wasted. He even opens a book and tries to read like Augustine, however, the miracle moment does not arrive. What he read only turns out to be a negation of his ambitious climbing. He took the words from *Confessions* as an augur for him, but still, he did not figure out what he should do with his conflicting wills, nor has he determined which road to take. With the mouth of Francis, he admitted his lingering of earthly glory. Let the celestial glory be enjoyed afterlife! Both his statement and the deliberate postponing signals Petrarch's failure of conversion.

The last poem of the *Canzoniere* also surprises Petrarch's readers by declaring that the Virgin is the "true Beatrice" ("vera Beatrice", v.52). Here, the departure of the "original" Beatrice in the canzone 359 makes this declaration more persuasive, and it seems that for this time, Petrarch has already decided to leave behind the earthly love for the celestial one. However, his celebration of Laura glorified in the heaven in the

*Triumphus Eternitatis* (known as the *TE*) again repudiates Petrarch's conclusion in the canzone 366. As a further palinode, the *TE* is seen as a correction of the *Canzoniere*'s repudiation of Laura, in which Petrarch depicts a celestial Laura "And she, of whom I yet lamenting sing, / Shall wonder at her own transcendent/ seeing herself far above all admire." (*TE*, 97-99) Actually, the compositions of both work—the *Canzoniere* and the *Triumphus*—appear to have overlapped: The Correggio form of the *Canzoniere* has been dated between 1356 and 1358, while the earliest extant manuscript of the *Triumphus* has been dated from 1357. On the other hand, the final form of the *Canzoniere*, known as Vatican Latin manuscript 3195, has come into being in the last year of Petrarch's life; at the same period, Petrarch finishes writing the last chapter of the *Triumphus*, the *TE*. The contradictory treatment of Laura in both works has paled the religious color of the poem to the Virgin Mary, and the penitent confession of which, out of expectation, does not lead to a spiritual conversion. The ending where the readers might reasonably expect the conversion to be found is occupied by Petrarch's meditation on death, on his short life and his temporality: "Il dì s'apparesa et non pote esser lunge,/ sì corre il tempo et vola," (*Can.* CCCLXVI, 131-132). Even though the *RVF* and the *TE* seem to be contradicted with each other, they are at the same time complementary to one another. According to Cachey, these two works "represent the culmination of a life in writing that continually oscillated between contrary impulses. Petrarch concluded his poetic journey by situation himself...between departure from this life in the *RVF* and arrival at the next in the *Triumphus Eternitatis*."<sup>202</sup>

The canzone 366, as well as the whole *Canzoniere*, in this way, ends with the dread of death and the vanishing of time. Petrarch frequently dots it with words like "the last" (*ultimo*) and death (*morta*): "non tardar, ch' i' son forse a l' ultimo anno. /I dí miei piú correnti che saetta/ fra miserie et peccati /sonsen' andati, et sol Morte n' aspetta" (*Can.* CCCLXVI, 88-91); "ch' almen l' ultimo pianto sia devoto, / senza terrestre limo, /come fu 'l primo non d' insania vòto" (*ibid*, 115-117); "Il dí s' appressa, et non pote esser lunge,

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<sup>202</sup> Theodore J. Cachey, Jr., "Poetry in motion", from *Cambridge Companion to Petrarch*, ed. by Albert Russell Ascoli and Un Falkeid, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp.13-26.

/ sí corre il tempo et vola...e 'l cor or conscientia or morte punge.” (*ibid*,131-132-134). Petrarch’s emotions are, along with his confessions, piling up and accumulating, but they never reach a point of summit; instead, they vanish into the recurrent theme of “sentimentality of time”.

Regarding the dominant emotion (360-366) projected upon death, it seems that Petrarch’s decision to “converse” is not caused by his mental progress, but by his fear and anxiety about death. He might not intend to obtain the transcendence like Augustine or Dante through his penitent “conversion”, for his confession to the Virgin seems to be a solution for him to combat with death and to smooth his agony of aging. His confession is not a conversion, but a display of his vulnerability facing with the death of his beloved; thus, his confession, under the cloth of religion, turns out to be a vernacular elegy for earthly love. The last seven poems of the *Canzoniere* are not only about the death of Laura, or of Colonna, or the death of Petrarch himself. They are about the meditation of death itself, a universal event that human beings and all mortal things will encounter.

The other aspect of Petrarch’s meditation of death is shown in the *TE*, in which Petrarch shows a game of combat: Love is defeated by Chastity, Chastity by Death, Death by Fame, Fame by time, and in the end Eternity wins all. Death/temporality and eternity are two faces of time, and both of them concerns the existence of man and things. Petrarch’s consciousness of time, in fact, is eventually configured as his thinking about death. It can be said that his attitude towards death in some way reflects part of his modernity. In the *Confessions*, St. Augustine accepts the death of Monica with a religious restraint, and he, although having undergone a series of conflicts and struggles, accepts the death of his old self with equal calm: “For instantly even with the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of confidence now darted into my heart, all the darkness of doubting vanished away.” (*Conf.* VIII, 12) In the *Divine Comedy*, Dante tries to smooth the pain of his deadly exile with Cacciaguida’s prophets: “Already that blessed mirror was rejoicing only / in its thought, and I was tasting mine, tempering / the bitter with the sweet” (*Par.* XVIII, 1-3)

Unlike Augustine or Dante who choose to face their end with a cold dignity and an ardent hope for the other world, Petrarch always finds himself restless as long as he touches the problem of death. His sentiment of time, his longing for the secular fame despite his praise for monastic spirit, and his enthusiasm for propagandizing moral philosophy in his age draws him closer to this world. Petrarch's intimacy with this world, while incorporating human activities into the economy of history of salvation and justifying his pursuit of the literary career, meanwhile reveals to him, more cogently than to others, the miserable side of death and the mortality.

## **The Aesthetic Conflicts between the Augustinian Conversion and Francis's Way**

The little secret book of Francis Petrarch, *Secretum*, chiefly stages the problem of how to incorporate the narrative of the Augustinian conversion into Petrarch's narrative of the self. This problem also concerns the way to read and interpret texts—both Christian doctrines and classical literature — and how to reconcile reading with experience. The three books all focus on one specific problem: why does Francis fail to accomplish his conversion, as he is urged to do by Augustine? The reasons for his failure are encapsulated in multi-layered conflicts that involve not only a crisis of faith but also questions of literary narrative of the self and of allegorical reading.

Under the pen of Petrarch, “another” Augustine is made; *i.e.* it is not the historical Augustine. For readers who know Augustine well, it would be astonishing to see the Petrarchan Augustine as a saint that boasts about conversion without the presence of Grace, and the way he talks is more Stoic than Christian. By portraying such a hybrid figure, Petrarch displays how he interprets Christian and classical literature as a harbinger of Humanist learning. The Petrarchan way of interpretation and revision eventually responds to one of the central problems in the *Secretum*: how does he interpret Augustine's *Confessions* and the Augustinian conversion? For Petrarch,

Augustine's *Confessions* need to be viewed not only as the spiritual guidance of the vivid experience of transcendence in textual form, but also as a trope, the archetype for narrating the self. By reading Augustine's *Confessions* as a trope, Petrarch realizes that his narrative of the self is contradictory to the discourse of the Augustinian conversion.

Before we address such a contradiction, we should first return to see Petrarch's attitudes towards reading, including both Christian and classical works. In the *Secretum*, Augustine and Francis often quoted classical authors to support their arguments, but we find that their conclusions and understandings of the same author are likely to be different and even contradictory. In Chapter IV, I have presented how Augustine reproaches Francis's way of reading, since his pupil tells him that, once he closes the books, he forgets what he has read and relapsed into his previous degraded state. (*Secretum*, II) Instead of making Francis a better person, his love of antiquity has distracted him from seeking out the real truth and from loving God. In other words, Augustine thinks that Francis's reading only serves as literary pleasure rather than salvation. Then the teacher required him to bear what he read deeply in mind, to mark it down in his intellect. More importantly, Augustine advised Francis to read allegorically, penetrating the text on the surface into a world of transcendence.

Augustine is a successful reader and writer concerning his mediation of Christian and classics. First, he reads books and finds connections between *res* and *verba*, which means that he finds correspondence between the real experience and the textual experience. The successful conversions he read of in books not only belong to his predecessors, but also to him; in this way, the experience read from books is not only a linguistic event, but an experience revived in Augustine himself. By reading allegorically the narratives of conversions of those before him, Augustine ascends from the text to the spiritual world, in which he finds that his narrative "I" can be incorporated into the narrative of conversion committed to the page by other authors in the past. In this way, the reading Augustine is interacts and is combined with his predecessors. Secondly, by writing his own experiences of conversion—by transferring *res* into *verba*—Augustine on the one hand reaches the climax when his narrative "I" is

successful in converting to the author; on the other hand, the author, from his vantage point, can organize all narrative clips into an organic completeness, saving the self from the dangers of fragmentation. Allegorical reading, while lifting Augustine's intellect to a new level, clearly shows him the possibility of transcendence and the itinerary of reaching it.

However, this may not be the case of Petrarch who reads his Cicero, Horace, Virgil or Plato more independently from *res*. He is more passionate about their *verba*, the rhetoric of their works. According to Kahn, Francis emphasizes the “aesthetic pleasure”: “Where Augustinus focuses on the spiritual meaning of texts, Franciscus focuses on beauty and eloquence, and the pleasure these afford.”<sup>203</sup> This does not deny his understanding about the ancient texts; in fact, Petrarch is likely to have a more comprehensive understanding about the classics than most of his medieval predecessors: “it seems that Petrarch is suggesting through Franciscus's recalcitrance that literature—both the ancient's and his own—captures more vividly and accurately the divided will of fallen Christian experience than do the theological treatises of St. Augustine.”<sup>204</sup> During his reading, Petrarch does not for a moment forget the gap in time and space between him and these authors, both ancient and Medieval ones, nor does he try to conceal the distance between past and present. The way he revives the classics is not by pretending they are no different from him, but by knowing that, despite the differences, classical culture can still enlighten his age of “obscurity”. However, past experience has already gone, and the texts that record it can never get back what is passed. Moreover, that Petrarch can find resonance in the writings of previous authors does not mean he finds that their experiences are able to “recur” in his own drama of a life. He may find that the pieces in his hand do not exactly fit in the puzzle of literature.

Kahn finds that both Augustine and Francis often quote the ancients out of context for literary effect, for example, he finds Augustine quotes Virgil's description of

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<sup>203</sup> Victoria Kahn, “The defense of poetry in the *Secretum*”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Petrarch*, ed. by Albert Russell Ascoli and Unn Falkeid, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp.100-110.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid*, p.105.

Aeneas's agony and tearing in order to reproach Francis's stubbornness.<sup>205</sup> Analogously, Francis also quotes Cicero's saying to justify his recalcitrance: "If I am wrong in this, I am happy to be wrong; I don't want to give up my errors as long as I live."<sup>206</sup> Augustine quickly sensed his "out-of-context" appropriation: "But Cicero used those words when he was expressing his glorious belief in the immortality of soul... You, on the contrary, are misusing these words in order to maintain an opinion which is shameful and false."<sup>207</sup> Both interlocutors treat ancient texts as tropes, discourse and narrative, trying to adjust them to their own experiences. This is the same method that Petrarch uses in Augustine's *Confessions*. However, by treating Augustine's narrative of his spiritual journey as a trope, Petrarch realizes the fact that the gap between experience and text, and that the gap between the experiences of two different individuals/authors cannot be covered. Petrarch does not participate into the narrative "I"s of the *Confessions*: when he reads it, he treats it as experiences that have ceased in their own past, and as experiences already frozen into *verba* Petrarch's communication with the past— his summoning of ancient and Christian spirits—is fundamentally a literary event based on words. He understands these dead man of literature in a linguistic way, and has no intention of making their *verba* his own experiences — *res*.

Also, by treating the Augustinian conversion as a trope, Petrarch realizes that Augustine's narrative from a point of ending is an illusion—a person who is living can never obtain such a point. As I will discuss in the following part, Petrarchan writings of conversion show an opposite relationship between narrative "I" and the author, since they find no meeting point between the narrative "I" and the author. The lingering of the narrative "I" means the self is always in progress and in change—it refuses to make progresses to grow into a "mature" author. Such a progress is a salient feature in Dante's narrative of his pilgrimage: at the end of the *Divine Comedy*, Dante the pilgrim has met

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<sup>205</sup> *Ibid*, p.105.

<sup>206</sup> *Secretum*, 57.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid*, p.57.

Dante the poet, and his intellect has been elevated to the “third heaven” that leads him to perceive God with immediacy. That explains the absence of closure at the end of the *Secretum*. Thus, Petrarch’s reading and writing shows a more complicated dimension in which the Petrarchan narrative “I” is contracted into the authoritative identity of the narrative “I” of the *Confessions*: the latter will grow to be the “author” while the former just lingers around.

The price of following the Augustinian conversion means that Petrarch has to subject his narrative “I” to a linear process, which is contradictory to his consciousness of time as circular. In this way, he would have to abandon his way of writing of the self: he has to give his narrative self a perfect ending. The end, for Petrarch, may signal some horror, or the termination of his literary career. His ambition is to construct a forever-unfinished narrative “I”. However, according to Augustine, such an action is an alienation that separates the author from his own textual character, which will eventually disperse the identity of Petrarch himself:

here Augustinus represents the activity of writing as precisely what alienates Franciscus from himself, as something that must be neglected or deferred if he is to return to himself, to become whole. By pointing to this alienation, Augustinus denies the relationship between authorship and identity, the equation of self and subject, and the logic of exemplarity, from which the humanist project of recovery and revival.<sup>208</sup>

Unable to provide closure, Quillen says, Petrarch makes *Secretum* a disappointing allegory to its readers.<sup>209</sup> However, Petrarch’s construction of such an “open” and

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<sup>208</sup> Carol E Quillen, *Rereading the Renaissance: Petrarch, Augustine and the Language of Humanism*, University of Michigan Press, 1988, p.204.

<sup>209</sup> “Finally, as an account of spiritual crisis the *Secretum* is singularly disappointing: Petrarch explicitly denies exemplary status to his account when he urges his book to remain the private possession of its author; the end of the text lacks decisive closure; and the few hints in the dialogue of conversion suggest that Franciscus is moving in the decidedly wrong direction.” *Ibid*, p.187



“developing” ego is a more appealing method to represent the individual “I”, since it overcomes the termination of the self: by continuing to write the self, the narrative “I” can extend through time and the space, addressing present and distant authors, as well as past and future readers.

In Petrarch, the fabric of the self does not want to create an ontological form without variance, but to create a self that can flow with and within time. The continuous and non-stop writing of the self makes it a parallel to one’s whole life, which is more important than reaching a divine and transcendental point where one becomes a saint. For Augustine, the writing of the self is a memory, an aphorism frozen in the words; for Petrarch, it is a life vividly on-going. A never-ending narration, therefore, proves to be a more authentic reflection of reality. The on-going writing of Petrarch, by imitating the rhythm of authentic life, has invented a new method to capture the shifty *instant* of the self, which does not need to resort to the external ontology like the Augustinian discourse. This is one of the most intriguing aspects of the Petrarchan poetics.

## Space and Time in “The Ascent of Mount Ventoux”

### Two Mountaineers: Dante and Petrarch

“One poet’s poems do not, in this case, constitute themselves as an object of study until and unless they are read in comparison with poems by other poets. Because Petrarch’s poetry in the *Canzoniere* orients itself particularly towards the *Commedia*...”<sup>210</sup> So says Waller when talking about the poetic structure of the *Canzoniere*. The comparison is of vital importance in literary studies, and scholars of Petrarchan studies should feel fortunate, since there is just the perfect author for reference—Dante. His influence on Petrarch is profound and without question. It makes

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<sup>210</sup> Waller, *Petrarch's Poetics and Literary History*, p. 29.

the comparisons more logical and oriented, and avoids basing our research on arbitrarily chosen comparisons or reading a text without any literary references. Actually, there has already been fruitful research comparing these two authors, in fields from lexicography to literary theory: the works of L.Mascetta-Caracci, Paolo Trovato, Marco Santagata, to name just a few.. To read Petrarch's ascent of Mt. Ventoux in the light of Dante can allow us to anchor more precisely the Petrarchan uniqueness in recreating and in representing this traditional Christian theme—the ascent/spiritual elevation and the descent/Incarnation. It seems quite natural to read Petrarch's ascent allegorically. Perhaps the best examples are the Franciscan “itinerarium mentis in Deum” and the Augustinian “cognitio sui”, considering that there have been lots of passages about climbing in Scripture and in the works of many Christian authors. Dante's *Divine Comedy*, without a doubt, aims to be read in this light. The “descent and ascent” in the trajectory of his pilgrimage obviously follows this Christian allegory as its narrative archetype. However, is this hermeneutic mode suitable in the case of Petrarch? Is the climbing of Mount Ventoux an allegory of the spiritual transformation of the fallen soul, like it happens to Dante the pilgrim? Or, does it try to tell us more? Through the comparative reading of Dante's ascent of Mt. Purgatory and Petrarch's of Mt. Ventoux, we may find some explanations to these questions.

It is undeniable that there are many similarities between Dante's Mt Purgatory and Petrarch's Mt. Ventoux. For example, Santangelo's reading *Familiare* IV,1 side-by-side with Dante's *Purgatorio* offers a new standpoint in the interpretation of Petrarch's climbing.<sup>211</sup> He discovers that there are many lexical similarities between these two works: “one may also notice a set of generic allusions and similarities to Dante's ascent of mount Purgatory: the mountain is an ‘altissimum montem’ (Dante's is a ‘monte[...] akti’); ‘fer semper in oculis est’ (Dante's mountain, by contrast, ‘vincea la vista’)”.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Enrico Santangelo, “Petrarch Reading Dante: The Ascent of Mont Ventoux (*Familiare* 4.1), pp. 95-111, in *Petrarch in Britain: Interpreters, Imitators, and Translators over 700 years* (Proceedings of the British Academy 146), ed. by Martin MaLaughlin, Letizia Panizza and Peter Hainsworth, OUP/British Academy, 2007.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid*, p.99.

He also points out Petrarch's allusion to Dante's Cato in portraying the old shepherd: both are old men who give severe critics.<sup>213</sup> However, their differences are made all the more prominent in the light of these similarities: the temporal and spatial experience on Mount Ventoux makes it entirely another world compared to the mountain in *Purgatorio*. The biggest divergence between Dante and Petrarch lies in their ways of climbing the two mountains. Dante's itinerary is vertical, from the lower hell up until heaven: he, guided and accompanied by Virgil, does not go the wrong way or make any mistake in choosing the road. Virgil's guidance has exempted him from such problems. As he ascends along the mountain, his body becomes lighter and swifter, which, in turns, accelerates his speed. Different from Dante's trajectory, Petrarch's way is circuitous, and the climber exhausted by constant mistakes: "What more need I say? This happened to me three or more times within a few hours, not without my annoyance or my brother's laughter."<sup>214</sup>(*Fam.* IV,1) Unlike Dante, who has a guide and a companion, Petrarch, most of the time, climbs alone: Gherardo is always ahead of him and when they reached the peak, Petrarch throws himself in the meditation upon himself, and on the way downwards, we can no longer hear a word from Gherardo. On the surface, the two brothers did climb together—in one communal space; however, they were hardly each other's companion. Gherardo's choice in taking the road does not become an example for his elder brother even though Petrarch knows that he should follow Gherardo. Then why does he, before the climbing, take so much effort to choose an appropriate companion? *i.e.*, what is the motivation behind such a choice?

His decision reflects a sentimental nostalgia, an emotion of "coming back home". "Coming back", the constant theme in Petrarch's narration, not only means a geographical return, but also the spiritual reunion with the long-lost "hometown". The Petrarchan homesickness is remindful of mankind's unremitting yearning for the lost

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<sup>213</sup> *Ibid*, p.101.

<sup>214</sup> All English translations of the *Familiars* IV, 1 are from Francis Petrarch, *Letters on Familiar Matters*, vol. I: Books I-VIII, trans. by Aldo S Bernardo, Italica Press, 2014.

paradise. In the *Fam* I,1, the first letter of his large collection of epistles, Petrarch starts his life story with the experience of exile:

I, begotten in exile, was born in exile, with so much labor undergone by my mother, and with so much danger, that she was considered dead for a long time not only by the mid- wives but by the doctors. Thus I experienced danger even before being born and I approached the very threshold of life under the auspices of death. (*fam*.I.1)

As a man suffering from the misfortunes of exile, he is eager to go back. His choice of selecting Gherardo, who comes from the same womb as him, as the companion implicitly shows his wish to be back to the family.<sup>215</sup> Now Gherardo has come home—after his own conversion, Gherardo has become a monk who was back in God’s realm. Petrarch, still trapped in secular matters, realizes “how distant I am in my misery from your fatherland, Jerusalem, for which we yearn *in our exile* except for the distraction of this muddy and filthy prison.” (*Fam*. X,5). By choosing Gherardo as his companion and by portraying Gherardo’s successful climbing, Petrarch delicately mixes his brotherly sentiment with religious emotion. Petrarch’s endeavor to end his exile and to “come home” not only refers to this kind of union, but also to a more antique allegory of Christianity: man’s coming back to Eden.

Before the climbing, Petrarch gives a detailed description of his reasoning in choosing a companion. Many of his friends are excluded because Petrarch find disharmonies between them: “One seemed too slow, another too careful; one too deliberate, another too rash; one too gloomy, another too joyful; finally, one too foolish and one, whom I wished to have come along, appeared too prudent. The silence of this

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<sup>215</sup> Gherardo’s conversion took place in 1343, thus, the letter, claimed to be written in 1336, did not mention this event. However, according to the research of Pierre Courcelle and Guiseppe Billanovitch, the letter was actually written some 15 years later. Pierre Courcelle, “Pétrarque entre Sanit Augustine et les Augustins du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Studi petrarcheschi*, 7, 1954, pp.51-71; Giuseppe Billanovitch, “Petarca e il Ventoso,” *Italia medievale e umanistica*, 9, 1966, pp.389-401.

one, the impudence of that one, the size and weight of another one, and the thinness and feebleness of still another terrified me. The cool incuriosity of this one and the burning concern of another dissuaded me.” (*Fam.* IV, 1) Eventually, he puts his hopes on his brother, whom he thinks he shares so much with:

we emerged from a single womb, that I who ought to precede you shall not be ashamed to follow you. You will remember our vain desire for expensive clothes, which still entraps me today, I admit, but daily grows weaker; what trouble we used to take repeatedly putting on and taking off fancy clothes morning and evening; what fear we felt that a single hair might fall out of place or that a light breeze might spoil our elaborate coiffures; or how we tried to avoid animals coming from any direction so that any dirt they kicked up might not soil our perfumed, spotless clothes or so that in the encounter they might not crumple our pressed creases. (*Fam.* IV,1)

However, his “home-coming” is disappointing. The two brothers, once sharing the same womb and having the same vain belief in human affairs, have now become so different:

Having overcome all these miseries with which we are constantly agitated, he has become for me also a source of perennial reproach as he holds fast to his port, watching me labor in these waters, and disdains from his lofty perch human tempests. (*Fam.* X, 2)

That is why Petrarch found it extremely surprising when he received the news of Gherardo’s sudden conversion: his little brother, who once was a “worry” to him, now suddenly has found faith in God. Their ways of life have been separated: as soon as the climbing started, Gherardo proves to be quicker, more prudent and more determined; while Petrarch is *segnior, tardier, mestior et stultior*. Instead of finding a common

ground, their temperaments are not as similar as Petrarch has thought. Thus, “the irony that Petrarch turns on himself lies in his having sought external characteristics in the companion of his ascent, then discovering in the seemingly perfect companion a strength and purposefulness which not only embarrass him physically, but, considered allegorically, convict him spiritually as well”<sup>216</sup>, suggested by Connell.

Petrarch displays a complex attitude towards his brother’s conversion. On the one hand, he praises his conversion, calling him the “happiest of men” (*Fam. X, 2*); however, he cannot readily submit himself to the monastic life, neither can he stop his passion for Laura, or was he willing to abandon his writing. His attitude is constantly changing: in one way or another, he implicitly expresses his opposition to Gherardo’s conversion. In his letter to Socrates, he seems to deny the reproaches about his secular love and his writing: “I consider it more prudent to suspend judgment whenever *ultimate certainty* is involved.” (*Fam. X, 2*, the italic is mine) Do not judge his decision too quickly, so says Petrarch. Following the letter to Socrates, Petrarch immediately showed readers his letters to Gherardo: “Thus I chose a middle course; though delaying greater projects, I got involved in something to while away the time.” (*Fam. X, 4*) His argument corresponds to his words in the letter to his old friend Socrates: reluctant to accept a final judgement on him, he tries to justify his decision that he chose to occupy himself with secular writing. Though he was not sure where his writing would lead him to, he is not in a hurry to determine the result, “whenever *ultimate certainty* is involved”. The thing that occupies Petrarch is, without doubt, the enterprise of human intellect. Petrarch might have a feeling that, even though Gherardo’s conversion is worth praising, it somehow eclipses the role of the intellect:

In alter parole, la conversione si è compiuta non perché l’avesse volute necessariamente Gherardo, o perché questi si fosse adoprato a tal fine con sincerità e contrizione, ma piuttosto perché così ha voluto Dio – e Petrarca

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<sup>216</sup> Michael O’Connell, “Authority and the Truth of Experience in Petrarch’s ‘Ascent of Mount Ventoux’”, *Philological Quarterly*, 62, 4, 1983, pp. 507-519, the quotation is from p.510.

grida “miracolo!” Ma se convertire, e, di conseguenza, entrare in un ordine monastico, dipende esclusivamente dalla mano di Dio, allora nell’ottica nel monachesimo occidentale quale ruolo viene ascritto alla componente intellettuale? <sup>217</sup>

The conversion of Gherardo does not show his own will, but is accomplished under God’s will. As suggested by Lokaj, Gherardo “belongs to the world of men who passively accept as Gospel whatever they might hear, without, however intimately benefitting from it”<sup>218</sup> and he also belongs to those who “give up the exercise of their own free will for the security of the cloister.”<sup>219</sup> Lokaj even argues that Gherardo climbs the mountain only to take a nap, which signifies a passive and Carthusian *otium*, contrary to Petrarch’s *negotium otiosum*.<sup>220</sup> Petrarch’s humanistic leisure is not idleness but indicates “‘philosophical endeavor’, ‘searching for truth’, ‘raising of the self’ *etc*”. For Gherardo, his entrance into the monastic life means an end to all philosophical and theological endeavor.<sup>221</sup> In a word, Petrarch is reluctant to be a “Vas d’elezione” (chosen Vessel)<sup>222</sup> of God. Thus, he knows that Gherardo’s choice is right, yet he is late to follow him. His union with his brother indicates his mental contradiction: he would like to follow Gherardo and to end his exile in this filthy world, but he cannot do it right away.

Apart from the kindred union, Petrarch shows a desire for returning to Italy, his hometown. Born in exile, Petrarch, depicting himself as a modern Ulysses, is in the

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<sup>217</sup> Rodney Lokaj, “Perdere tempo nelle *Familiars* di Petrarca”, pp.201-216, in *L’esperienza poetica del tempo e il tempo della storia, studi sull’opera di Francis Petrarca*, a cura di Carla Chiummo e Anatole Pierre Fuksas, Laboratorio di Comparatistica Dipartimento di Linguistica e Letterature Comparete, Università di Cassino, 2005. The quotation is from p.205.

<sup>218</sup> Rodney Lokaj, *Petrarch’s Ascent of Mount Ventoux, The Familiaris iv, I*, new commented edition, Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 2006, p.36.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid*, p.41.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid*, p.53.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid*, p.57.

<sup>222</sup> *Vas electionis*, the phrase used by God to refer to Saul/ Paul in Acts 9.15. This phrase also is used by Dante in *Inferno* II, 28 of the *Divine Comedy*.

eager search of his hometown: “I confess that I heaved a deep sigh toward the sky of Italy which was visible to my mind rather than to my eyes, and I was overcome by an overwhelming desire to see once again my friend and my homeland.” (*Fam.* IV, 1) However, also like the Ulysses of Dante’s *Commedia*, he is committing a crazy poetic flight, a fact that he cannot deny. The two chains that bound him, love and glory, are actually one. They are merged in the desire of writing/telling about himself. Just as Petrarch has told Gherardo, once he started writing, he could not stop.<sup>223</sup>

His desire to return to Italy, is, in an intricate way, entangled with the craziness of his love for Laura and literary glory. There exists a correspondence between the micro-history and macro-history— the amorous passion of an individual is compared with the political passion of a state. In his famous political canzone “Italia mia”, Petrarch describes the invasion of Italy by her enemies, which exposes her to severe suffering, degeneration and chaos. At the end of the poem, Petrarch strongly calls out “pace pace pace!” His Italy is longing for peace to comfort her scattered states, and so does Petrarch: he needs peace to comfort his fragmented souls. Analogously, St. Augustine has compared Francis’s madness in love to the suffering of Italy in the *Secretum*:

A: This is madness! For sixteen years now you have been feeding the flames in your heart with such false allurements! Truly, Hannibal, Italy’s most famous enemy, did not oppress her for a longer period, nor did Italy suffer more prolonged aggression, nor blaze with stronger fires, than you have in your time, with the flames and assaults of a violent passion.

Someone was eventually found to drive Italy’s enemy away; but *that Hannibal of yours*, who will get him off your back if you won’t let him go away but rather keep him with you by becoming his slave? You even enjoy your misfortune!<sup>224</sup> (*Secretum.* III)

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<sup>223</sup> *Familiari*, X,3.

<sup>224</sup> All English translations of the *Secretum* are from Francis, Petrarch, *My Secret Book*, trans. by J .G. Nichols, Hesperus Press, 2002, p.59.



From the reproaches of the saint, we see that Petrarch's love for Italy has been disrupted by his love for Laura. It is the same love that prevents him from accomplishing his spiritual transformation like Gherardo did. His innamorato of a mortal woman, therefore, has cancelled Petrarch's two unions—his union with Gherardo and his union with Italy: Petrarch leaves his brother aside to seek for his own “easier, longer” road; and the sky of Italy is almost an illusion appearing to his imagination.

Tales of “home-coming” traditionally express a desire to return to the blessedness of human beings before the fall, and aims to regain the happiness of Eden. However, such a longing is not found in the Petrarchan nostalgia. In *Secretum*, we even see a man who is enjoying the state of innamorato, which is regarded as “mad”:

F: You are wasting your time: I don't believe any of those things. There is support for me in Cicero's remark:” If I am wrong in this, I am happy to be wrong; I don't want to give up my error as long as I live.” (p.57)

Petrarch was reluctant to admit that his love for Laura became an impediment to his conversion; on the contrary, Augustine shows a determined attitude to his old habits, that he personified as women: “The very toys of all toys, and vanities of vanities, (those ancient favorite of mine) were they which so fast withheld me: they plucked softly at this fleshly garment, and speak softly in my mine ears: Canst thou thus part with us? And shall we no more accompany thee from this time for ever?” (*Conf.* VIII, 11)<sup>225</sup>. He wished to end the sinful state NOW: “How long? How long still “to-morrow”, and “to-morrow”?” (*Conf.* VIII, 12) Despite of his blind lingering in this corrupted situation, the Francis of the *Secretum* is at least concerned about how to deal with his current status; Petrarch the mountaineer displays an ambiguous neglect, a detachment, and even the

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<sup>225</sup> All English translations are from Augustine, *St. Augustine's Confessions*, with an English translation by William Watts, 1631, in two volumes. The Loeb Classical Library, ed. by T.E page, M.A., and W.H.D.Rouse, Litt. D. The Macmillian, 1912.

desire of a slippery escape from his *present*. He was not willing to face his current status directly.

On the top of Ventoux, Petrarch reflects and reviews his life events chronologically—he memorizes his past and makes plans for the future, only his *present* is neglected; *i.e.*, Petrarch is absent from his present. Here we have to look deeper at what it means to be absent from the present. The best example would be the infernal Cantos in the *Divine Comedy*, where souls know the past and are able to predict the future. What is inaccessible to them is the NOW, the current moment. It is to the present that they are absent. When the pilgrim is curious about their intellectual knowledge, Farinata responds:

"We see, as does one in bad light, the things," he  
said, "that are distant from us: so much the highest  
Leader still shines for us.

When they approach or are present, our intellect  
is utterly empty; and if another does not bring news,  
we know nothing of your human state.<sup>226</sup> (*Inf.* X,100-105)

Their ignorance to what *is* now highlights their deviation from God's eternity, in which there is no tri-partition of time "past, present and future"; to God, He is the *is*: "non aliquo modo est, sed *est est*" (*Conf.* XIII, 31) The deprivation of the present is a punishment to their lack of faith, which means these infernal souls are banned to participating in God's eternity. Their knowledge, lacking the present, is only partial: they can only understand things when they are past. Although they have the capacity to predict the future, once the future approaches and becomes the present, they cannot know it anymore. What was once clear to them, when reaching the current moment, turns oblique again. In a similar way, it is found that Petrarch, like the souls in hell, is

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<sup>226</sup> All English translations of Divine Comedy are from Durling, M.Robert., The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Volume I-III, illustration by Robert Turner, Oxford University Press, 1996(*Inf.*), 2003(*Purg.*), 2011(*Par.*)

absent to the NOW. During the climbing, he mediates twice on his *self* (both his past and future); however, when he should turn inwards to discover his self in the present, he suddenly turns outwards. He starts to become concerned about the physical hardness and the external surroundings of the mountain, whose turnings create a peculiar discontinuity within his *selves*.

## The Discontinuity of Space and Time During the Climbing

Petrarch's record of his ascent of Mt. Ventoux is a peculiar one. Readers often feel awkward about this piece, for example, his unnatural writing of the moment of "conversion" at the peak, or his meditations about the self and history during the climbing. Everything seems unnatural, disconnected and even appears to be artificial and forced. There is no severe monologue within the conflicting wills, nor is there the mysterious moment of "take it, read it". Readers do not see Petrarch's urgency of undergoing a drastic turning, nor can they feel the ecstasy of change. Unlike the *Secretum*, where the allegorical intention is presented at the very beginning — with the dream-like plot-setting, the sudden appearance of the Truth and the silent saint — the ascent of Mt. Ventoux is more like a personal diary, which makes it hard to determine whether it aims to be written "allegorically". It could be, if we do not take into account that his brother has turned monastic or that he suddenly reads the *Confessions* after viewing the mountain scene. Also, Petrarch's frequent shifts between space and time, between external environment and internal self, and between body and soul add a dazzling effects to the reading experience. Then what makes Petrarch perceive himself through time and space in this way? How does the narration of time and space affect Petrarch's spiritual conversion? More importantly, where are space and time discontinuous in Petrarch's narrative of his climbing?

There is no doubt that Petrarch's conversion is a "failure". Durling has contributed thoughts on his spiritual failure to the crisis of Christian allegory: Petrarch's failure in

imitating the Augustinian conversion only shows that the Augustinian type does not fit his own narration of the self: “The more often basic patterns are imitated, the more diluted the imitations become.”<sup>227</sup> By listing the events of conversion into several successive episodes and comparing these episodes, he finds that the comparison of parallel episodes between the conversions of St. Antonio, St. Augustine and Petrarch are all negative,<sup>228</sup> which puts Petrarch’s conversion into question: “I would like to suggest that irony is the negative form of allegory. If allegory joins two events in a proposition that sees fulfillment, irony disjoins two events by denying or frustrating fulfillment.”<sup>229</sup> Irony permeates Petrarch’s works, produced by the contrasts between the Christian archetype and his own life experiences. Petrarch’s constant effort turns out to be a futile endeavor, which can never erase the inappropriateness of the Christian narrative when applied to his narrative of the self. Frozen on the verge of transformation, Petrarch found that his turning, instead of leading him to the “new” self at the present (*nunc*), took him back to his erroneous youth: “I have gone backwards through inextricable turning” (*Psalm, 7 (7.7)*). It is like the limit process in mathematics, in which the signifier, always striving to approach to the maximum/minimum, can never reach it. Like the *vouloir-dire* of Derrida, Petrarch’s allegorical discourse points to a signified (*dire*) which is impossible to obtain. For Petrarch, final salvation has been determined in God’s plan, but its realization is still unknown and far away. Hope by itself signifies an absence of the presence: it is already present because it has been promised by God; it is absent because this day is built on an untouchable future that is unknown to Petrarch.

The irony in Petrarch’s conversion is not only generated by its opposition to the Augustinian archetype, but also by its peculiar discontinuity of time and space. In the

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<sup>227</sup> Robert M. Durling, “The Ascent of Mt. Ventoux and the Crisis of Allegory,” *Italian Quarterly Dep.*, 1974, pp.7-28. (for academic journals: also use the number of the issue)

<sup>228</sup> Durling, “The Ascent of Mt. Ventoux and the Crisis of Allegory”, “Now the striking thing about this series is that almost without exception the parallels are negative. In place of the integrative, resynthesizing process of Augustine’s experience, we find disjunction, the dissolution of possible connections, negative parallels”, p.21.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid*, pp.22-23.

letter of *Ventoux*, time and space are closely related to the *self* of Petrarch. Specifically, time is related to the self in the past and future, while space relates to the self in the present:

And I began saying to myself: “Today completes the tenth year since you departed from Bologna after completion of your youthful studies.”(*Fam.* IV, 1)

Petrarch confesses that during the past ten years, he has been tortured by his two conflicting wills, which deviate him from the right road: “I love, but something I would like not to love, and would like to hate. Nevertheless I love, but unwillingly, constrainedly, sorrowfully and mournfully.” (*Fam.* IV,1) The laceration of will, in fact, jeopardizes the linguistic balance between the *vouloir-dire* and *dire* in the Petrarchan text. If the birth of language, or at least of “paralanguage”<sup>230</sup> is originated from the desire that reaches out towards the signified, then Petrarch’s language and will, being bound in one discourse, are failed: his love/*vouloir*, failing to refer to the things/*dire* he should have loved, reach out toward its opposition—things he’d like to hate. Such a reversion does not simply deny fulfillment, but substitutes it with its opposite: the turning has been accomplished, but in a negative way that denies the “ascent” of the self. The negative fulfillment dramatizes the bigger irony. After looking back to his past, now Petrarch mediates upon his future:

If it chanced that this transitory life would be extended another ten years for you, and you were to approach as far toward virtue as during the past two years — through your new inclination doing battle with your old — you retreated from your former obstinacy could you not then, although not

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<sup>230</sup> John Freccero has discussed the relationship between desire and language, and their relation to the Word of God. See John Freccero, “The Fig Tree and the Laurel: Petrarch’s Poetics”, p.33.

certainly but at least hopefully, go to meet death in your fortieth year or disregard calmly the remainder of a life which is vanishing into old age?  
(*fam. IV, 1*)

While thinking of time—his past and his future, Petrarch’s eyes turn inward: his attention falls upon micro-history, upon his own development as an individual and upon his possible development in the future. These meditations lead to one essential question: will he accept death readily? However, what is worth noting here is that both the past and the future are *absent* to the current self, because the past is already gone and the future is yet to come. Thus, the self that presents itself in the past and in the future, does not actually exist. It is the memory and expectation projecting in time that in some way gives figuration to the self. Then we may wonder, where is the present/current self? It is found that Petrarch placed his current self in the space — in the mountain and its surroundings. He is occupied by the space: the frozen, snow-covered Alps and his imagined Italy. While looking around, Petrarch comes to know that his current self is located in the space present right before his eyes: *I stand in the trance, I watch these scenes, and I read the legends of Roman history.* The meditation upon space has drawn Petrarch into the context of macro-history, through which he starts to think of the physical, external world, where his figural *I* is minimized due to the sudden shift to the horizon. Through projecting his current self in the space, Petrarch in fact turns away from himself, since his meditation on the external world and macro-history construct a temporal detachment from the individual *I*.

The two modes of thinking are in contradiction, since focusing on one will make Petrarch forget about the other. He fails to handle space and time simultaneously and he can only deal with them one at a time. Having viewed the scene from the peak, he said to himself: “My mind thus was overcome by a new thought and was transferred from those *places* to these *times*.” (*Fam. IV, 1*, italics are mine) This is his first turn. Nevertheless, his meditation on time brings him to forget about space:

And I seemed somehow *forgetful of the place* to which I had come and why... (*Fam.* IV,1, the italic is mine)

Putting aside his meditation on time, Petrarch, once again, turns to space:

...until, after laying aside my cares as more suitable to another place, I looked around and saw what I had come to see. (*Fam.* IV,1)

This is the second turn. Then he takes a view from the mountains of the province of Lyons, the sea at Marseilles and the Rhone... Grand and spectacular as they are, Petrarch calls them “earthly things”. However, it is these earthly things that have constructed the very space that can harbor Petrarch’s existence, because the spatial, physical existence makes concrete the mental consciousness of the self that exists in the present. Neither the past nor the future has this vital function. One cannot have the consciousness of existence as “I *was* there”, because it is not *being* but only the memory of *being*. Analogously, the consciousness of “I *will be* there” is just an expectation of *being*. Existence, bound within space, consumes every instant of the present, the very moment before the eye. That explains why God, always in eternity, is the fullness of *being* “Ego sum qui sum.”

Nevertheless, Petrarch turns away from space when he starts to read Augustine’s *Confessions*:

“And they go to admire the summits of mountains and the vast billows of the sea and the broadest rivers and the expanses of the ocean and the revolutions of the stars and they overlook themselves.” (*Fam.* IV,1)

The meditation upon space, in Augustinian context, becomes a sinful detachment since it has drawn people away from themselves and leads them to search outwards. Turning inwards has been the most important theme in Augustine’s conversion: according to

him, God has already been living *within* us, thus we do not have to search outside if we were to search for the true light. “Place there is none (et nusquam locus); we go backward and forward, but place there is none;” (*Conf. X. 26*) Instead, we should turn inwards, and only by discovering ourselves, could we finally find out the road leading to God. The Augustinian itinerary is a journey from the outward space to inward self, where space and time are perfectly converging: by participating to the eternity of God, he perceived within his soul (space) that God is forever present through our understanding of time.

Now we can see why Petrarch’s conversion seems so peculiar and unnatural, since the narration of time and that of space are totally separated from each other. When his consciousness is projected onto time, Petrarch forgets why he has come to this place; when his consciousness is transferred to space, he has forgotten himself—not understanding his own life as a “distraction” (*distention, Conf. XI, 29*), he goes to admire the earthly mountains and rivers.

Even though the meditation on space suggests the sinful detachment of the self, we must remember that this detachment is actually connected with the *self in the present*. The meditation on time, appearing to search for the inner soul, in fact represents the *self* in the form of absence—a self that is subjected in the past or in the yet-to-come. However, once Petrarch casts his sight on the self in present, it slips away into the external space; thus the present self becomes something untouchable. Once reached, it immediately recedes back into space, transforming into a detachment from itself. The deliberate avoidance of the *now*, according to Lisa Freinkel, happens also in Augustine’s *Confessions*.<sup>231</sup> She observes that there is an abrupt rupture between the first 9 books and the books 10-13 in *Confessions*:

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<sup>231</sup> Lisa Freinkel, *Reading Shakespeare’s will—the Theology of Figure from Augustine to the Sonnets*, Cambridge University Press, 2002.



But the *Confessions*, of course, doesn't simply come full circle: when the narrative reaches Augustine's present—the now of writing the conversion narrative—Augustine abruptly shifts gears, moving from narrative to an exegesis of Genesis.”<sup>232</sup>

It is indeed curious, since the present self of Augustine can only be searched through his past: after finishing his confessional past, he stopped. According to Freinkel, “It is not, then, that Augustine's narrative breaks down because he reaches the present; rather, it is because he is unable to reach the present, because the now keeps receding from him, that his narrative breaks down.”<sup>233</sup> The *now*, made up of slippery instants that have no duration, is by nature opposed to the narrative; if it were recorded in written form, it would perforce refer back to the past.

Petrarch's self in the past and future is no doubt absent, and his self in the present is revealed to be a detachment from itself. In this way, Petrarch's self, no matter how it is projected in time or in space, fails to guarantee fulfillment, a complete *presence*. Petrarch's discontinuous narration of time and space has scattered his *self* into confusion: “il passato da dimenticare designa i propri errori, il futuro l'aspirazione alla salvezza, il presente (inserito non per caso dal nostro) l'abborrita condizione generale dell'epoca;”<sup>234</sup> His awkwardness in narrative, on the one hand, points out to why his conversion is “unnatural” compared to Augustine or Dante. Both authors are able to put a foot firmly in the present—using the present as a fulcrum, they can safely look backward to their once-corrupted self and are able to tell their stories successfully. On the other hand, it shows the inappropriateness of the Augustinian mode that makes it unsuitable for Petrarch's project of autobiographical writings, because the temporal

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<sup>232</sup> *Ibid*, p.31.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid*, p.32.

<sup>234</sup> Edoardo Taddeo, “Petrarca e il tempo. Il tempo come tema nelle opere latine”, *Studi e problemi di critica testuale* n. 25 (ott. 1982), 1982, pp. 53-76, the quotation is from p.62.

and spatial union in Augustine's conversion cannot be realized by Petrarch's scattered souls which never promise a unity.

The Augustinian conversion, on the contrary, displays a smooth narration of time and space. Petrarch's recall of his past and future ten years is an obvious allusion to Augustine's *Confessions*, in which the saint says:

Because I had already lost so many years (twelve or thereabouts) since that nineteenth of mine age, when upon the reading of Cicero's Hortensius, I was first stirred up to the study of wisdom: and still I was deferring to despite all earthly felicity," (*Conf.* VIII, 7)

After the confession of his depraved past (*designa i propri errori*), Augustine, unlike Petrarch, does not avoid the present but chose to face himself directly *now*—his consciousness forces him to confront his errors and moral delays immediately, and he says:

But *now was the day come* wherein I was to be set naked before myself, and when mine own conscience was to rebuke me (*Conf.* VIII, 7)

At the verge of change, Augustine is struggling: He understands what is the right way, but he still cannot totally abandon the earthly happiness and devote himself to God. But "now as the day come" (*et venerat dies*), Augustine finally confronts his *self* in the current moment. Just as Derrida said, the presence of *self* is just in the blink of an eye.

When he meets himself and looks into himself, Augustine finds his crippled wills are fighting against each other, driving him to leave the house and to enter into the garden "Into that garden went I, and Alypius followed me foot by foot: for I was no less secret when he was near; ...Down we sat us, as far from the house as possibly we could." (*Conf.* VIII, 8) Having retreated to a quiet place, Augustine is able to better focus on his spirit and its physical detachment: he continue to deepen the meditation upon

himself, inquiring about his deliberate delays and criticizing his own faults. The conflict in his mind kept growing, torturing his heart, and when it finally reached the climax, Augustine had already found himself under the fig tree. This symbolic place slides into the narration so naturally that we do not even realize how Augustine changes spaces, and Augustine himself does not know it either: “I flung down myself I know not how (*nescio quomodo*), under a certain fig tree, giving myself all liberty to my tears”. (*Conf.* VIII, 12)) His indulgence in the meditation of the self makes him lose track of his spatial motion.

Different from Petrarch, he does not interrupt his thinking, although he has surprisingly found himself in another place. Rather, he continued his confessions to God. The decisive moment before his final conversion has witnessed how Augustine determined to project his self in the moment of NOW: “How long? How long still “to-morrow,” and “to-morrow”? Why not now? Wherefore even this very hour is there not an end put to my uncleanness?” (*Conf.* VII, 12) After Augustine has abandoned his old self in the past, his new self has been established right away: he finds himself standing in the *present*. The *past* is no more—the instant when the self accomplishes the conversion occurs simultaneously with the instant when self is *present* at the moment of *nunc*. In the letter of *Ventoux*, Petrarch continues to imagine himself in the same fallen state for the future ten years, which means his old self from the past continues to extend to the present and the future.

Compared to that of Augustine, Petrarch’s story of conversion is less dramatic and teleological. It does not have any mysterious moment, and even before he opens the *Confessions*, his mind still is attached to the external space. His detachments have twice interrupted the accumulation of plots, making the narration lack the spiritual urgency that drove Augustine to accomplish the conversion. That is why, when Petrarch tried to interpret his reading as a decisive moment, similar to Augustine’s moment under the fig tree, readers feel this switch is too abrupt to believe.

## The Discontinuity of Body and Soul

There is another discontinuity that disturbs the completion of Petrarch's conversion. His body and soul do not correspond to each other: the physical ascent does not promise, nor does it signify spiritual ascent.<sup>235</sup> That means we cannot take the physical movement as a symbol of the spiritual movement. However, admittedly, at least during the climbing, Petrarch wishes that his readers can read his postponement of corporeal difficulties as a moral weakness. When his brother Gherardo (who has converted) chooses the more direct, but also steeper way leading up to the peak, Petrarch would like to choose an easier, less direct way:

and I, in particular, pursued a more modestly inclined mountainous path. My brother proceeded to the heights by shortcuts over the ridges of the mountain, but I, being weaker, turned toward the lower reaches...To my brother, who would call me back and indicate the most direct path, I would answer that I hoped to find an easier passage on the other side of the mountain and that I would not be afraid of a longer road if I could advance more easily. Having offered this excuse for my laziness, I was still wandering through the valleys without finding a more gentle access anywhere by the time the others had reached the summit. (*Fam.* IV, 1)

But even after he realizes that he has chosen the wrong road, he does not want to be corrected: "when I, forgetful of my former wandering, pursued the easy length of the paths and headed down hill to end once again in the valleys...This happened to me three or more times within a few hours, not without my annoyance or my brother's laughter."<sup>236</sup>(*Fam.* IV, 1)

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<sup>235</sup> "Petrarch's postponing the real difficulties of the climb may be a legitimate instance of a moral flaw, but the converse is not the case: reaching the top of Ventoux may not be taken to signify an advance in virtue.", from "The Ascent of Mt. Ventoux and the Crisis of Allegory", p.10.

<sup>236</sup> The phenomenon of having chosen the wrong road also is presented in *Secretum*: "Quando infatti, salendo per

His relapse has again and again pulls him back to the original state, making him wander in the same place: “I was still wandering through the valleys without finding a more gentle access anywhere by the time the others had reached the summit.” (*Fam.* IV, 1). He also puts in the mouth of Francis a sentence about his “falling back”:

And now that I have fallen back, under the weight of my faults, in to my old wretchedness, I recognize the bitter taste of what me. I am explaining this to you so that you won't be surprised when I say that I know by experience the truth of Plato's ideas.<sup>237</sup> (*Secretum*, II)

The scattered “two wills” are not new to readers who know the story of conversion, with Petrarch specifically using the letter *Y* as its metaphor<sup>238</sup>: “This letter, a two-horned symbol, points to the heavens with its narrower right horn, while with its broader left horn it seems to curve toward the earth. The left horn, as they say, represents the path to hell, and while indeed the approach is rather pleasant, the destination is very sad and bitter, so miserable that it could not be more so.” (*Fam.* XII, 3) Petrarch says, few people would like to take the hard road leading to heaven, and even he would like to choose it, his corporeity became an obstacle. Francis in the *Secretum* keeps lamenting the paralysis of his will: “Indeed, I believe this is my punishment: since I did not want to stand upright when I could, now I can't get up when I want to” (*Secretum*, I)<sup>239</sup>. This also occurs to Augustine when he finds he fails make his will obey his mind:

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la retta via, sono giunto modesto e sobrio al bivio, e mi si disse di prendere a destra, io—non so se sventato o presuntuoso—ho piegato a sinistra.”, p.221.

<sup>237</sup> *My Secret Book*, p.41.

<sup>238</sup> Also, Augustine: “But it willeth not entirely: therefore doth it neither command entirely. For so far forth it commandeth, as it willeth it not, because the will commandeth that there be a will; not another will but the same. But it doth not command fully, therefore is not the thing done, which it commanded.” (Conf. VIII, 9) Petrarch: “What I used to love I no longer love. I am wrong, I do love it but too little. There, I am wrong again. I love it but I am too ashamed of it and too sad over it.

<sup>239</sup> *My Secret Book*, p.11.

More easily did my body (*membra*) obey the weakest willing (*voluntas*) of my mind (*anima/soul*) in the moving of its limbs at her beak, than my mind had obeyed itself in carrying out this great will that could be done in the will alone. (*Conf.* VIII, 8)

Why cannot the soul command itself? Asks the saint. Accordingly, the failure of command is caused by the laceration of the will, and the conflicting wills, lacking harmony within itself, results from the original sin embodied in mankind—the descendants of Adam: “I therefore myself was not the cause of it, but the sin that dwells in me”. (*Conf.* VIII,8). However, Francis’s answer interprets his moral decay as personal punishment for his delay. In this way, the Christian discourse of *original sin* applied to *everyman* has become a personal, individual sin in the Petrarchan context, that relates solely to one’s moral decay. Spiritual fall becomes a personal choice instead of the aftermath of *original sin*.

Augustine’s clarification between will and soul has an important significance: by pointing out the reason for the fall, he successfully defended the corporeity of mankind. The fault is not our body, but the sin.<sup>240</sup> In pre-Christian ages, the body has been wrongly blamed, and philosophers like Plato and Boethius always described body as the decayed prison of the soul. Augustine defended the innocence of the body, but he did not value it, or give it a proper meaning. Instead, he asked people to turn entirely inwards, to examine the sin dwelling within the soul, casting physical existence behind the body. In this way, Augustine, while justifying the body’s innocence, at the same time excluded it from the allegory of salvation. The meaning of body, therefore, undergoes a drastic change: in the pre-Augustine philosophy, it is an object of evilness, which has now been reduced to a trifle, something a true Christian should not care about.

Dante, on the other hand, takes a further step by emphasizing the significance of the body in his pilgrimage. He points out it is the flesh—the body which is contaminated

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<sup>240</sup> “For Christians, however, it was not the body *per se* that constituted the impediment, but rather the fallen flesh. It is not physical reality that the soul must flee, but sin itself.” Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, p.7.

by sin—that impeded the spiritual ascent. The body itself even proves to be beneficial to the pilgrimage:

We will call the flesh, or fleshliness, whatever hinders the soul in its ascent; it is the accumulation of mortal imperfection going back to Adam’s sin, of sinful habits and the innate dispositions that such habits have intensified. The body, on the other hand, created “good in its own kind,” with the bodily faculties of sense, motion, imagination and memory, is the essential instrument of the soul.<sup>241</sup>

In the beginning of the *Divine Comedy*, we see the poet innovatively inserting the plot of “incarnation”—from the refuge of the soul to the weary body:

*so my spirit (l’animo mio), still fleeing, turned back to gaze  
again at the pass that has never yet left anyone alive.*

*After I had a little rested my weary body (il corpo lasso), I took  
my way again along that deserted slope, so that my  
halted foot was always the lower. (Inf. 1:25-30)*

The sudden incarnation (Dante’s *fatta carne*) highlights Dante’s departure from the pagan philosophy that neglects the care of the body. The Reason in Dante’s soul has been well oriented but the body is not.<sup>242</sup> Thus Reason—to *know* (the core of the pagan philosophy)—cannot promise salvation. Dante’s Christian philosophy, in this way, has brought to the forefront the significance of corporeity, with the Advent of Christ.

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<sup>241</sup> Robert M. Durling, “The Body and the Flesh in the *Purgatorio*”, from *Dante for the New Millennium*, edited by Teodolinda Barolini, Wayne Storey, Fordham University Press, 2003, pp.183-191, the quotation is from p.183.

<sup>242</sup> For the detailed arguments of body and soul, and of the meaning of corporeity, please refers to “The Scene of Prologue” in *The Poetics of Conversion*, ch. 1.

However, here the body is not treated *per se*. Dante has used the metaphor of the body as an index to signify the state of the soul, that is, he used the corporeal burden as the figuration of the corruption in the soul. During the climbing of Mt. Purgatory, Dante's ascent is impeded by his heavy body: "I was weary, when I began: 'O sweet father, turn and look back at how I am left alone, if you do not stop'" (*Purg.* IV, 43-45). Although he would like to climb faster, "because of the burden of Adam's flesh that clothes him, against his will is slow to climb" (*Purg.* XI, 43-45). With the elevation of the soul, the corporeity has been decreased, and when Dante arrives in heaven, the characteristic of corporeity has completely been eliminated. The presence of the body has been entirely replaced by the light.<sup>243</sup> By erasing his sins gradually, the pilgrim can move with ease: "Master, say, what heavy thing has been lifted from me, so that while going up I feel almost no exertion?" (*Purg.* XII, 118-120) It could be concluded that the changes in the body synchronize with those of the soul in the *Divine Comedy*.

In the case of Petrarch, the connection between soul and body is loose, distracted and scattered. At times, there is some correspondence between these two elements, for example, his physical laziness, to certain degree, actually reveals his moral weakness, but at other times, there is not. For example, his successful ascent of Mt. Ventoux cannot be taken as a spiritual triumph, for Petrarch finds himself still indulging in secular things:

I closed the book enraged with myself because I was even then admiring earthly things after having been long taught by pagan philosophers that I ought to consider nothing wonderful except the human mind compared to whose greatness no thing is great. (*Fam.* IV,1)

Even the oracle from the *Confessions* cannot justify his ascent and does not help him to achieve the complete conversion of an Augustine: "No decision is reached by Petrarch,

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<sup>243</sup> For the relationship between the pilgrim's geographical state and his body, please refer to Freccero's *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, the phenomenology of penitent.



no change of profession. *There is only an act of reading.*”<sup>244</sup> Conversely, when Petrarch descended from M.Ventoux, his soul did not cease to climb; even when he retreated into a little room, his mind was still searching for the spiritual highness, while the earthly loftiness has been abandoned.

The motion of the body is heavy, slow, but the soul’s is not. Petrarch says, the journey that is difficult for a mortal body can be easily accomplished by the immortal soul “in the blink of an eye”. Here the link of the movement of the soul with the eye is interesting. Within the Platonic and Neo-Platonic tradition, it is emphasized that the movement of the soul cannot be accomplished by feet. Plotinus, in his *Enneads*, pointed out that for the soul to move from terrestrial to spiritual realm, “it is rather necessary to change our sight and look with inner eyes.”<sup>245</sup> Following Plotinus’s idea, St. Ambrose suggested:

But what manner of flight is this? It is not with our bodily feet that it is accomplished, for our steps, no matter where they run, take us only from one land to another. Nor let us flee in ships, in chariots, or with horses that stumble and fall, but let us flee with *our minds*, with *our eyes* or with *our interior feet*.<sup>246</sup>

Human sight, according to St. Augustine, has three modes: “corporeal”, “spiritual” and “intellectual”<sup>247</sup>. To achieve the highest vision, we must open our internal eyes, turning them to God. It is through this type of sight that our souls can escape from earthly filthiness and aim for higher deeds. Once the interior eyes are open, the soul has already arrived at its destination. No wonder that Augustine says:

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<sup>244</sup> “The Ascent of Mt. Ventoux and the Crisis of Allegory”, p.22. The italic is mine.

<sup>245</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, I, 8, ed. E.Bréhier, Societé d’editions “Les des lettres”, 1924-38, the text is cited by John Freccero, p.6.

<sup>246</sup> *Liber de Isaac et anima* VIII, 79 (PL 14, 559); the text quoted is cited by John Freccero, p.7-8.

<sup>247</sup> Francis X. Newman, “St. Augustine’s Three Visions and the Structure of the *Commedia*”, *MLN*, vol.82, no.1, Italian Issue, 1967, pp.56-78.

That way we go not in ships, or chariots, or upon our own legs, no not so small a part of the way to it, as I had come from the house into that place, where we were now sitting. For, not to go towards only, but to arrive fully at that place, required no more but the will to go to it, but yet to will it resolutely and thoroughly; not to stagger and tumble down a half wounded will, now on this side, and anon on that side; setting the part advancing itself to struggle with another part that is falling. (*Conf.* VIII, 8)

Here “to open our interior eyes” here is paralleled with “to will something fully”. In the *Secretum*, the saint also expresses similar opinions:

And yet, for all that, I did not change myself until deep meditation had brought all my unhappiness before my eyes. And then, as soon as I really wanted to change, I was able to, and with amazing speed I became a different person, the story of whose life I think you know from my *Confessions*.<sup>248</sup>

The transformation of the soul occurs simultaneously with the opening of the internal eyes, but what about the transformation of the body? This case is more complicated. Mid-way in his ascent, something unusual happened: Petrarch stops for a meditation in the valley. He is mediating on how to reach the blessed life that was located higher up. He knows that it is a difficult road: narrow and full of distractions. One must overcome these spiritual hardships by virtue. However, such a meditation brings nothing refreshing to the soul but turns out to be stimulation for his body. That is, after the meditation upon his mind, he suddenly turns to his body, thinking that he should finish his climbing.

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<sup>248</sup> *My Secret Book*, p.12.

The moment in the valley is ironic, because this should have been the real conversion moment for Petrarch. Here we turn to Augustine's conversion for comparison. When he is forced by his consciousness to face up his own mistakes, Augustine also makes some spatial move: first from the house into the garden, then to a place far from the house...but in the meanwhile, he realizes that these physical movements are unnecessary to the soul: "required no more but the will to go to it". (*Conf.* VIII, 12). Petrarch, on the contrary, after realizing what had detained him — "less impeded road of earthly and base pleasures"—seems to put it aside, and continues his climbing, turning again from internal to external, from soul to body. On the contrary, Augustine is not detached from his external surroundings, and he deepens his thoughts to repair his crippled wills, which makes him essentially different from Petrarch. Supposed that Petrarch would have deepened his meditation on the soul like Augustine, he would have taken out the *Confessions* to read in the valley, and would not have proceeded in his "wrong" journey up the mountain. When he reads Augustine on the peak, he has unfortunately accomplished what he finds out to be "wrong". In a word, Petrarch has missed the proper moment to convert, and when he would like to convert, he is wrong again.

More ironically, Petrarch abruptly inserts an anecdote about the Ventoux before finishing his ascending journey:

The highest slope of the mountain is one which the inhabitants call "Sonny."  
Why I do not know, except that I suppose it is said by way of antonym, as  
in some other cases, for indeed it seems to be the father of all neighboring  
mountains. (*Fam.* IV,1)

The passage displays an inversion, by addressing the "father" as "son". Some scholars would like to interpret the anecdote in more Christian way—as the Trinity. They tried to relate Petrarch's ascent with the pilgrimage allegory. However, if Petrarch deliberately wishes to incorporate the image of the Trinity in his letter, why does he do it in an inverse way? The inverse anecdote, following notably Petrarch's metaphysical

meditation, reveals an irony: his “conversion”, unlike that of Augustine, turns from the soul to the body, from inwards to outwards, which turns out to be an inversion as well.

When starting again from the valley, Petrarch asks an interesting question: which is easier, the journey of the soul that could be completed in the blink of an eye, or the journey of the body that took much effort? For Augustine, this is too obvious a question. Mankind should leave aside earthly and sensual pleasures, and devote themselves to the road leading to heaven. The fulfillment of the soul is of course more important than that of the body. Admittedly, the movement of the soul would be extremely easy, only at the condition that the will is not injured; Dante’s opinion is more or less similar. For him, the advance of the soul is able to erase the corporeal burden of the body, making its movement easier and easier. Therefore, for both Augustine and Dante, this would not have been a problem; but what drives Petrarch to make it a *problem*?

One explanation is that Petrarch has sensed the deceit of textual experience generated by language:

Rather than constituting the central example of the Letter, and a failed conversion by Petrarch, the example of Augustine’s conversion in the Confessions is one more instance of the failed authority of examples that exposes the deceit behind Augustine’s “easy” and rhetorical conversion.<sup>249</sup>

It is not only the undoing of Augustine, but also that of Dante when Petrarch says: “I had tried to put off the annoyance of having to climb, but the nature of things does not depend on human wishes, and it is impossible for a body to arrive at a summit by descending.” (*Fam.* IV,1) That “to arrive at a summit by descending” has a strong connection to Dante’s pilgrimage during which he has to first descend in order to ascent. On the one hand, Dante’s descent to hell is an attribution of Christian allegory in that

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<sup>249</sup> Massimo Verdicchio, “Petrarch’s Descent or the Undoing of Augustine by Example”, *Rivista di Studi Italiani*, anno XX, n.1, 2002, pp.129-146, the quotation is from p.136.

Jesus, after the crucifixion, descended down to hell to save the deserving souls. On the other hand, descent, in the Christian context, refers to humility, the opposite of pride, while pride is said to be the biggest sin that causes mankind to fall from their blessed state. Thus, pilgrims must at first wash away his “philosophical pride”<sup>250</sup> before elevating themselves up to Heaven. However, Petrarch considers it impossible for the descent to result in an ascent since “nature of things does not depend on human wishes”. (*Fam.* IV,1). Once again, he realized the deceit behind Dante’s rhetorical, poetic conversion.

This pivotal conflict between body and linguistics reflects, according to O’Connell, the conflict of values between two truths. One is Augustinian theology, while the other is the stoicism originated from the classical works. O’Connell argues that the Augustinian mode is free from the bounds of time, and that Augustine’s conversion occurs in an immeasurable instant that has excluded any temporal and spatial extension. Thus, if it happens, *it has happened*: “Of the mind and soul may ascend to the heights without concern for time or sequence, the whole may be achieved at once by a decisive act of the will.”<sup>251</sup> It is the same with Petrarch’s version of “in the blink of an eye” (*Fam.* IV,1), or Augustine’s “but to arrive fully at that place, require no more but the will to go to it.” (*Conf.* VIII,8). However, human beings, with their burdensome corporeity, “cannot free themselves at a single stroke from the constraints imposed by the body and its existence in time”<sup>252</sup>. Mankind’s moral weakness must be gradually overcome and spiritual maturity must be developed over time. The Augustinian conversion, deprived of its temporal extension, coincides its occurrence exactly with its completion. Such a mysterious moment is in contrast with the slow cultivation and

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<sup>250</sup> *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, “Pierre Courcelle has traced Augustine’s ‘vain attempts at Plotinian ecstasy’ back to their neoplatonic sources. What emerges clearly from his study is that the ancients saw no need for a guide on such a journey. Plotinus explicitly says that one requires self-confidence to reach the goal, rather than a guide. This self-confidence was precisely what Augustine interpreted as philosophical pride, the element that in his view vitiated all such attempts.”, p.9.

<sup>251</sup> O’Connell, “Authority and the Truth of Experience in Petrarch’s ‘Ascent of Mount Ventoux’”, p.511.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid*, p.511.

elevation more familiar to the layman. It is the second truth that was confronted by Petrarch. Looking back to Gherardo, his story is closer to the typical hagiography. The linguistic record of the conversion makes it look like it had a temporal extension; nevertheless, the real experience of conversion, which happens in an instant, excludes any extension.

Another factor that draws Petrarch further away from Augustine is the absence of Grace. In the *Secretum*, the saint, to our surprise, points out that as long as one wills enough, he can achieve spiritual transformation. Such a saying has entirely neglected the function and significance of Grace, which seems to claim that our will can accomplish what it wants if our desire is strong enough. In the letter of Mt. Ventoux, Petrarch expresses a similar opinion: despite the physical difficulties or spiritual predicaments, the key is to have a powerful and persistent will: “‘It was well said by the poet, however: ‘Persistent toil overcomes all things.’” (*Fam. IV,1*) Through the experience of climbing the M. Ventoux, Petrarch not only realizes his spiritual flaws— his postponing the conversion and his swinging wills, but also senses his weakness in facing physical difficulties— his laziness and his desire to take an easy road. If Petrarch does not consider them to be equally difficult, at least he is balancing, which was more difficult. Unlike Dante who uses the corporeality as an inverse sign to indicate the ascent of soul, Petrarch considers the progress made by the body to be an encouragement to the transformation of the soul: “if I had willingly undergone so much perspiration and toil to take my body a little closer to heaven, what cross, what prison, what torture rack should frighten the mind drawing nearer to God and willing to conquer the extremes of insolence and mortal destiny?” (*Fam. IV,1*) From his description, we have a new perspective about the discontinuity of body and soul in the letter of Mt. Ventoux: unlike Dante’s pilgrimage, Petrarch’s triumph of the body (reaching the summit) is not equal to the triumph of the soul. This is because he has considered them to be more independent, not the body relying on the soul. The discontinuity is the result of their own independence.

As usual, Petrarch is not the type of author who will directly draw a clear conclusion. His consideration has shown that he is already different from his predecessors in regards to the relationship between body and soul: the body, no longer serving as a footnote, a metaphor or an index to the soul, has become a more independent element in the narration of the self. In the case of Petrarch, the relationship between body and soul sometimes appears to be varied. At times, they are correlated negatively, but at other times they appear to be uncorrelated and independent from each other. That is why it is reasonable not to read Petrarch's ascent of Mt. Ventoux entirely as an allegory of conversion of the soul.

Actually, before his climbing, it is the concern about physical difficulties that dominates Petrarch's mind: "But putting this matter aside, I shall return to my mountain, and tell you that it appeared excusable for an ordinary young man to do something considered appropriate for an old king." (*Fam.* IV,1) Knowing from history that the old king was successful in overcoming the mountain, Petrarch assumes that his physical abilities can do that too. The new interpretation of the role of the body has led us to a new perspective about the old shepherd, whom the brothers come across during the climbing. Some scholars interpreted the old shepherd to be an indication of Petrarch's vain effort, a figure that predicts the Augustinian negation on the summit. Others like to interpret him as an allusion to the image of Cato at the gate of *Purgatorio*, who gives warning to the lingering souls to start the climbing as soon as possible. Here, the old man can be considered as a representation of corporeity, who successfully reaches the top, and has come back with a weary body. His story is all about the "body", the physical hardships. Gherardo, on the contrary, represents the spirit/soul. The narration about Gherardo mentions nothing about the body—as if he reaches the top instantly without encountering any physical difficulties. Gherardo has chosen the right way, as Petrarch described in *Familiari*: a man who has already held "fast to his port, watching me labor in the waters" (*Fam.* X,2)

However, there is one doubt about the sincerity of Petrarch's reading of the *Confessions*, because he has already known the passage by heart—this little book has

been carried around by its owner, and it would have been read many times. Why does Petrarch fail to capture the real meaning of these letters before? Durling explains this problem in the light of “letter and spirit” drawn from the tradition of the New Testament: “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (*Corinthian II*, 3:6).<sup>253</sup> I think this explanation is reasonable, yet too abstract, since Pauline hermeneutics can be applied to most cases of failed interpretation. I argue that it is his physical experiences—the wrong roads he had taken during the journey, the difficulties of the road situation and the tiredness of his body—that create a specific moment and a space that present the new significance of the old text. Without these difficulties encountered by him as a human being with his own mortal body, he could not have understood the *Confessions* in a new perspective—now he read Augustine not as a Christian author (or like any other author he had read before), but as a precept to discover himself. Thus, he refuses to share the passage with his brother, insisting it is ONLY for him—the internalization of a familiar passage is realized by the individual experiences that fuse with it.

The concern for the body in this letter leads us to further ponder upon how the body, the residence of soul, starts to gain philosophical attention. The Augustinian inwardness—seeking within the self—focuses mainly on “soul searching”, which would rather emphasize on the spiritual sides. However, with the development of medicine and anatomy, the cultivation of “autopsia” was blooming, a word whose original meaning refers to “seeing for oneself”. In his article, Jonathan Sawday takes a serious interest on the development of the culture of “self-portrait”<sup>254</sup>, as well as of anatomical studies of the “self-portrait” painter.<sup>255</sup> From the source of “autopsia”,

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<sup>253</sup> In “The Ascent of Mt. Ventoux and the Crisis of Allegory”, Durling said: “This relation involves the emergence of a paradigm or principle of elation that sets up an equivalence of some kind – usually based on analogy—between the events. It usually involved two audiences: the earlier audience and the present audience, or, in Pauline terms, those who read in the spirit and those who read in the letter (ultimately that means good readers and bad readers),p.7.

<sup>254</sup> Jonathan Sawday, “Self and Selfhood in the Seventeenth Century”, in *Rewriting the Self—Histories from the Renaissance to the Present*, ed. by Roy Porter, Psychology Press, 1997, pp.29-48.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid*, “A single illustration may suffice. Vasari, in his best-selling *Lives of the Artists* (1550) recounts the story told of Bartolommeo Torri, a minor painter from Arezzo, who is said to have sequestered limbs and other human members under his bed. Living in squalor amidst the detritus of his anatomical studies, Vasari wrote that Torri thus



comes the aesthetic and scientific commitment to the study of corporeality, which has been obscured and neglected by the Augustinian theology—the body starts to escape from the shadow of the soul. as R.D Laing claims:

*Most people feel they began when their bodies began and that they will end when their bodies die. The “embodied” person, has a sense of being flesh and blood and bones, of being biologically alive and real: he knows himself to be substantial. To the extent that he is thoroughly “in” his body, he is likely to have a sense of personal continuity in time.... The individual thus has as his starting-point an experience of his body as a base from which he can be a person with other human beings.*<sup>256</sup>

When treated in the light of medical science, the body is endowed with a significance of substance. It is no longer an earthly “thing”, a corrupted role in the Christian allegory, nor is it a footnote, a secondary index of the mind. Rather, the body becomes a vital index of the continuity of the self, whose accomplishments can carry the meaning of being a man.

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lived ‘like a philosopher’. The simile is revealing. Rather than surround himself with the works and commentaries of Plato, Aristotle and their humanist heirs, the ‘new philosopher’ who is also the ‘new artist’ surrounds himself with the vestiges of physicality. Corpses rather than a corpus of texts have become the object of his attention.”, p.35.

<sup>256</sup> R.D.Laing, *The Divided Self*, 1959, quoted by Sawday, in “Self and Selfhood in the Seventeenth Century”, p.38.

### III. Consciousness of Time in Petrarch's Narration of Self

What is time? Or more precisely, how do we understand time? The definition of this abstract and fleeting concept is always based itself on an individual's understanding of time. For example, Augustine understands time through the reading of Palms, or the listening to musical notes. For Petrarch, he understands time through the narration and the writing about himself. By narrating himself as a crying, broken-hearted lover, a promoter of moral philosophy, a layman who worships God, and an obsessive book collector, Petrarch is able to see how his "self" emerges, changes and grows through the flow of time; at the meanwhile he is able to perceive how the passing of time is unfolded to him gradually through his narration. Narrative for Petrarch is a means for the understanding of the self, and time is at once a force and a platform for the development of the self. In other words, the self must be developed within the framework of time, and for the self to be known (by oneself or by the others), it must be narrated, *i.e.* to be spoken out.

Narrative can incorporate both the self and time in its scheme to provide a clue for the interpretation of history and human nature, as has said by Freeman:

"Why speak of the narrative fabric of the self? If in fact human temporality, as a fundamental mode of being, is intrinsically tied to narrativity, as has been suggested, then the fabric of the self—by which I mean its constitutive and defining features—is inseparable from narrative."<sup>257</sup>

His comment points out why do irresistibly bring about narrativity as long as we touch

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<sup>257</sup> Mark Freeman, "Mythical Time, Historical Time, and the Narrative Fabric of the Self", p.44.

upon the field of self-fashioning. He gives his answer by referring back to the primitive desires originating in mythical time:

And that is that another portion of the interest in narrative can be attributed to what might be called “mythopoetic desire,” that is, a desire to raise our existence, somehow, to that level of meaningfulness, of sacred integrity, we might say, more readily found in times past.<sup>258</sup>

In this way, he says, we could relate our mediocre lives “into something larger and more sacred.”<sup>259</sup> His words testify Petrarch’s insertion of biblical sources in his works and life and his insistence on a specific day, 6<sup>th</sup> April. However, simply portraying Petrarch as a great author who borrows from the prestige of Scripture for self-establishment cannot explain his uniqueness, as Dante had done it already in his grand *Divine Comedy*. From a theological point of view, Dante did a much better job.

Then what makes narrativity so essential to the Petrarchan fabric of the self, which is different from the Dantesque paradigm? The departure of his narrative of the self from that of Dante lies in that Petrarch explores extensively and much more thoroughly the dimension of time while writing about himself. Through the representation of the self in the writing, one comes to know the “I” more clearly, by gradually knowing how the author looks at himself and how he wants others to look at himself. It is not only about authenticity, but also about the “desire”. For Petrarch, his desire makes his representation of the self surpass the boundary of time. We find that, most of Petrarch’s autobiographic writings are addressed to those who live in the past or in the future, rather than to his own contemporaries. He always has some potential readers in his mind while reading, but his readers are often in an anachronous dimension. Petrarch writes those autobiographic fictions for someone who is already passed away or is yet born. At this point, the problem of time becomes more serious: how could Petrarch’s writings

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<sup>258</sup> *Ibid*, p.45.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid*, p.46.

of the self, in the form of texts, survive through time and oblivion? Narrativity becomes the only way to realize such an anachronous communication since the obstacle of time has prevented Petrarch from meeting his anachronous readers face to face.

Like Brain stock has said, “it is possible to speak of a timeless soul but not of a timeless self.”<sup>260</sup> The problem concerning the consciousness of time becomes even more salient in Petrarch’s narration of his failed conversions. Conversion, a Christian autobiography by its own nature, displays the essential transformation of the self through time, in which the self is divided both spiritually and time-wise into the old and the new. The two “selves”, subjected to two different dimensions of time, demonstrate an itinerary for the development of the micro-history in the context of the Christian salvation and its teleological theology, in which the meaning of micro-history is revealed through the macro-history as a whole.

Every narration of conversion must require a “critical moment”, a point in time that serves as a standpoint to witness the metamorphoses of the self. This dramatic instant becomes the main characteristic of the narrative of conversion, distinguishing it from the other kinds of autobiographical writings. This profoundly time-bound character of the narrative of conversion determines its teleology, in that the self has been waiting for the climax of such a critical moment to come in order to fulfill all the expectations and to compensate all the sufferings it has gone through. Petrarch’s failed conversions are the autobiographical events that most highlight the conflicts, anxieties and contrasts between the self and time, and through which readers are invited to see how Petrarch’s selves are established, re/fashioned and presented. Such a process, we must remember, is not only how Petrarch wants his readers to see himself, but also how Petrarch considers himself to be. That is to say, fashioning the self through the telling of conversion is more than a desire to “speak of the self” or to “endow the self with a sense of existence”; in the case of Petrarch, it is also a mirror that reflects one’s self-perception and invites self-evaluation. The appeal to “know yourself”, derived from the ancient

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<sup>260</sup> Brain Stock, *Augustine’s Inner Dialogue, the Philosophical Soliloquy in late Antiquity*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.78.

Greek canon and inherited from Socrates and Plato, gains a sense of autonomy in Petrarch: it has become a conscious pursuit—to understand the self not for some ontological or metaphysical purpose, but *per se*. This strong desire to know the self implies a new narration of the self that may break away from the Christian allegory, dramatizing the tension between the homological hierarchy within the horizon of Christianity and the diverse autobiography of the individual in the Renaissance.

Petrarch constructs his narrative “I” in a way that distinguishes himself from the greater whole, and that makes his own self manifest under the collective veil. His intention to write those stories of failed conversions contains two aspects: firstly, he may present himself as a deviated traveler from the perspective of a Christian, however, his “failure” actually also highlights his ambition and determination to choose “another” road, which he believes to be right, too. In his letter to Gherardo, he also mentions that, although we all are bound to meet the same fate, someone takes his road more easily, more quickly, while others take it slowly and circuitously. Secondly, his writings about the self are not based on the belief that the individual should be a part of macrocosm. On the contrary, he writes to display his uniqueness, not what he was in common with others.

The exceptional emphasis on the self makes Petrarch more like a modern man than both his other contemporaries and his predecessors. Rather than a humble encouragement, his story of the failed conversion can be read as a proud exclamation. Deviation is a sin to a Christian, but maybe an emblem for Petrarch, a badge to be worn with pride. His refusal to position himself on the single, straight road has prominently manifests the novelty of his thoughts about concepts of the self and time and the about meaning of the classical revival.

## **Writing of the Self: Problems of Conversion**

As a unique type of autobiographical writing that flourishes in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the narrative of conversion becomes a literary witness of man’s growth under the Grace of God. Therefore, conversion is not only a narration of the self, but

also a testimony of man's faith and of his sheer persistence to follow the right way. It shows how the self makes a thorough retrospective account of its transformation and development, based on a vantage point from which the author is able to perceive and explain the linear and advancing progress he has been through, from low to high, from earthly to celestial and from mundus to transcendence. The discussion of the narrative of conversion must take into consideration of its theological dimension. It would be reckless and even meaningless to discuss conversion without the Christian context.

It is found that the narrative structure of Christian history is the meta-structure that underlines the conversion of the individual. As discussed in the previous chapters, the Advent of Christ is the breaking point of the Christian history, which at once provides a vantage point to look at once backwards and forwards. In retrospection, one can find past history to be the prefiguration of Christ, and future history to be the configuration of it. The entire history is based on this point of rupture, from which history is said to be fulfilled, yet unfinished. The same scheme can be applied to the individual history, too. Conversion is the epitome of the re-orientation of human history, which is realized by the Advent of Christ. Both events have undergone a death(spiritual) and resurrection. Based on this very point, one can view his own past as a preparation for the conversion, while his future to be the extension of it. From this moment, a person's life has been turned, and been oriented to God entirely. There should be no change after that—all he needs to do is to wait with patience for the final salvation. The process of individual history has not yet reached its end, but its significance has been fulfilled, and this means the termination of the writing of the self even though one's life still continues.

The structure of the Petrarchan autobiographical writing is essentially different from that of Augustine and Dante. Many readers have noticed the salient chronological and linear character in their stories of conversion: their narration follows a vertical track that tells how they became a "uomo nuovo" and how their once corrupted souls have been elevated. One might mention Augustine's lack of structure and the literary form in his *Confessions*. Nevertheless, what mark the saint's departure from Petrarch is the fact that he intends to get to a unified, authentic self—"a divinely 'authentic'

'illumination' which redeems the self for a transcendent and eternal end."<sup>261</sup> From his degraded past, Augustine reaches at the critical moment of "now": "what I am now, at this very time when I make my confessions", from which point he turns inward where he finally sees that God lives within him. Analogously, Dante's pilgrimage follows an advancing progressive itinerary, in which his soul has been elevated from the underground world up to the heavens. Both authors seem to find no difficulty in turning their narrative "I" (the personage in their autobiographical writings) into their *now* identity (the author). The coincidence of the narrative "I" and the author is realized through the accomplishment of their conversions.

But the narration of Petrarch's spiritual journey is more episodic and discursive that is full of recurrence, recede, overlapping and reconciliation. As noted by Peter Hainsworth: "All in all, the story as a story is primarily one of stasis, and as such more Beckettian than Augustinian. Only intensification of awareness and fuller articulation of the issues distinguish the later years from the earlier."<sup>262</sup> Petrarch's conversion thus is rather one of multiplicity and variety, for there is hardly a sense of unity that governs either his narrative self or his identity as the author and brings them together: his narrative self is constantly wandering in the past "sospiri" and memories, imprisoned in the moment that is alienated from the "now". Ironically, the author, moreover, does not stand on a higher vantage point that enables him to take a full review of his narrative "I". One of the most salient examples is that Petrarch does not become more mature than the person who is climbing the mountain when he wrote the letter of "Mount Venteux". Readers realize the existence of Petrarch's identity as the author only at the very end of the letter, when Petrarch says that he is writing these words at the inn to Dionigi da Borgo. Here, he says he wishes to have a unified and stable soul, which means he has not accomplished the final turning on the mountain. The fragmental, discursive self trapped

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<sup>261</sup> Paul L. Jay, "Being in the Text: Autobiography and the Problem of the Subject", p.1056, in *MLN*, Vol.97, No.5, *Comparative Literature*, 1982, pp.1045-1063.

<sup>262</sup> Peter Hainsworth, "*Rerum vulgarij fragmenta*: Structure and narrative", in *Cambridge Companion to Petrarch*, ed. by Albert Russell Ascoli and Un Falkeid, Cambridge University Press, 2015, p.40.

in the past, is always threatening to swallow the author in the present. The author, standing in the dimension of “now”, is always tangled and haunted by his past:

We must not conceive of a present “now” as a sort of bead on a thread, accidentally related to the “now” instants which precede and follow it...In forcing our attention back to into the context of our active, bodily experience in the world, we will find that “now” signifies *an extension of varying length* within a total biography.<sup>263</sup>

The self, facing with the dilemma of laceration, strikes the author by its incompleteness and discursiveness, submerging the author into sea of doubts and distress.

However, the rift between the narrative “I” and the author can never be concealed: “Part of the difficulty both writers faced, as we have seen, had to do with the inherent contradictions of the autobiographical enterprise itself, in which their own past identities could become disappropriated by the very texts which were mirror to them.”<sup>264</sup> Augustine and Dante’s successful conversion is based on the marginalization of this rift. Roland Barthes chooses not to believe in the Augustinian pilgrim ending, and he insisted that the self in reality should be scattered and decentered. The illusion of unification and center is created by the chronically progressive narration, which seeks to regulate the flux of unordered and discursive life events, with the aim to provide both author and readers with a hermeneutic version of linear time. Despite its lacking of the structure, the narrative of Augustine’s conversion still displays a limpid time axis; this kind of time, rather than being realistic and reliable, is something produced with the help of linguistic construction. We can see how Augustine tries to bring the dispersed time (pass, present and future) into one unity through the intellectual acknowledgement of the Trinity in order to avoid the rift:

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<sup>263</sup> Quoted from Mark Freeman, “Mythical Time, Historical Time, and the Narrative Fabric of the Self”, p.41, in *Narrative Inquiry*, 8(1), pp.27-50. The original text is by Brokelman, P. *Time and Self: Phenomenological explorations*, the Crossroad Publishing Company, 1985, p.28.

<sup>264</sup> Paul L. Jay, “Being in the Text: Autobiography and the Problem of the Subject”, p.1051.



“Infatti, ho memoria di aver memoria, intelligenza e volontà. Ho intelligenza di intendere, volere e ricordare. Ho volontà di volere, di ricordare e di intendere.”(*De Trinitate* XIV vii 10) Come precepisco il tempo come unità, così avverto me stesso come uno, dal momento che “queste tre cose sono una sola cosa, per la stessa ragione per la quale sono una sola vita, un solo spirit, una sola essenza” (ibid, Ivi ,X ii 18) Guadaganta questa rispondenza tra la trinità del tempo (passato, presente e futuro), Agostino apre il discorso sull’affinità tra le trinità dell’anima e la trinità di Dio (Padre: memoria, Figlio:intelligenza, Spirito: volontà). Egli infatti è persuaso che è possibile aver ragione del tempo solo se lo si riconduce al mistero trinitario di Dio, nel quale è custodito e nel quale la coscienza trova riposo.<sup>265</sup>

Thus, it is argued that “a ‘truthful’ rendering of the past—when the past enters into the work at all—will be fragmented, repetitious, and full of gaps.”<sup>266</sup> The chronology in the autobiographical writing, from this viewpoint, is actually a literary invention that makes all the events “narratable”. However, people start writing about themselves is not only for the truthful rendering of their past; they write in order to explore their minds as some “unknown lands”. Truth is required, but is not the end game. For Petrarch and for many others, writing about the self serves as a consolation for the disorder of life, and a therapy for smoothing the after-trauma suffering and pain.

The unitary self of the Augustinian conversion not only reveals itself to be a literary invention, but also reflects the non-flexibility of the self in the medieval times. According to Thomas Greene, Petrarch’s new flexibility, the “*varietas mortifera*”, is the core of his fragmental “selves”. By living a life of rich variety, Petrarch displays the

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<sup>265</sup> Orlando Todisco, “Il tempo della coscienza in Agostino e Petrarca”, in *L’esperienza poetica del tempo e il tempo della storia: studi sull’opera di Francis Petrarca*, a cura di Carla Chiummo e Anatole Pierre Fuksas, Cassino: Laboratorio di comparatistica, Dipartimento di linguistica e letterature comparate, Università di Cassino, 2005, p.339.

<sup>266</sup> Paul L. Jay, “Being in the Text: Autobiography and the Problem of the Subject”, p.1053, in *MLN*, Vol.97, No.5, *Comparative Literature*, 1982, pp.1045-1063

highest possibility to prove “how rich a human life could be at a single rung of the metaphysical ladder”<sup>267</sup>. Greene says that the roles Petrarch played are surprisingly multiple and even were “striking to his contemporaries”<sup>268</sup>, which include the secular recluse, the love-poet, the scholar, the laureate poet of Rome, the public voice at the loyal court, the wanderer in exile *etc.* However, such “*varietas mortifera*” becomes the obstacle to his conversion and the reason to deviate in his journey to God, while the radical stasis of the medieval personality, though in many ways limiting one’s possibilities and potential, has guaranteed to offer people with predestined salvation.

It is interesting to note that Petrarch is more than willing to explain to his readers how he became a deviated wayfarer and how he is eager to reach a safe port, being away from the stormy sea. Conversion requires an persistent heart and solid determination, just like the “one-eyed Monicus” Gherardo who focuses solely on heaven. However, the *varietas mortifera* has prevented him from being a single-minded saint, and Petrarch himself would never have liked to do so—after all, he is not Augustine, nor is he the converted Gherardo. Thus, his writing of conversion contains substantial differences from those of Augustine and of Dante.

For the latter two authors, writing and talking about oneself needs reasons that have to be justified. According to Augustine, it is all about the heart. Before confessing his *present* self, he asked:

What therefore have I to do with men, that they should hear my confessions, as if they would cure all my infirmities? A euripus people to pry into another man’s life, but slothful enough to amend their own. Why do they desire to hear from me what I am, who will not hear from thee what themselves are? And how know they whenas they hear myself confessing of myself, whether I say true or no; *seeing none knows what is in man, but the spirit of man which is in himself?* (sed auris eorum non est ad cor meu, ubi ego sum

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<sup>267</sup> Thomas Greene, “The Flexibility of the Self in Renaissance Literature”, p.249, in *The Disciplines of Criticism*, ed. Peter Demetz, Thomas Greene, and Lowry Nelson, Jr., Yale University, 1968, pp.241-286.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid*, p.248

quicumque sum) (*Conf. X, 3*)

In this paragraph, Augustine explains why he would like to tell his story of conversion to others: for one thing, he needs to narrate his “self” outwards to let others know his authentic outlook since *seeing* alone cannot reveal a person’s heart. If he keeps silent, i.e. and he gives up the writing of his self, people can never have the chance to know him. Writing becomes a way of manifesting the self, making it visible from the inside. Moreover, his story of conversion can be an example for others to follow, since they are all children of God, as much as they are partners and fellow pilgrims to Augustine—Augustine has included himself and others into a collective group, a solid community, regarding them as wayfarers that take the same pilgrimage as him.

The Augustinian writing of the self has become an encouragement for Dante’s writing of his conversion. Dante, in his *Convivio*, has mentioned similar reasons to that of Augustine’s ones, one of which is the following statement:

per ragionare di sè, grandissima utilidade ne segue altrui per via di dottrina; e questra regione mosse Agostino ne le sue confessioni a parlare di sè, *chè per lo processo de la sua vita, lo quale fu di [non] buono in buono, e di buono in migliore, e di migliore in ottimo, ne diede essempla e dottrina, la quale per sì vero testimonio ricevere non si potea.*<sup>269</sup>

Both authors have contributed their writings of the self to set a good example for others to follow. Their opinion has revealed an important message that we cannot miss: they emphasize the common lots of mankind, and they treat all individuals as parts of a greater whole. Following this logic, the temporal experience of each individual shall be the same: linear and progressive. The road taken has to be the same, too: from the low, earthly land to the high, heavenly world.

The same road, if we remember, was opposed by Petrarch. In almost all his works

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<sup>269</sup> Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, p.2.

that concern about the choice of secular over monastic life and the idea of conversion, Petrarch always argues the justification of “another road”: he insists that the road to God should be varied since every individual is different. Petrarch’s emphasis on the individual, according to the research of John Marin, reveals a profound cultural transformation from *concordia* to *sinceritas*:

Whereas *concordia* was based on a complex assumption about the potentiality of harmony throughout the universe—a harmony that ideally would be reflected in the way the individual Christian modeled him or herself on the image of God, the sincere ideal could not appeal, at least not for long, to the image of God within the individual person.<sup>270</sup>

Martin thinks that such a change is initiated in the writings of Petrarch and Valla, and became prominent in the sixteenth century. Although, he says, both terms are concerned with the ideal of the harmony between heart and language—that is, the idea that one should write according to his own mind—the sincerity is characterized by its emphasis on “irreducible individuality, its particular desires and affections that set it apart from other persons.”<sup>271</sup>

Clinging to his “*varietas mortifera*”, Petrarch finds himself constantly in doubt about the traditional view of the God-Man relationship:

Between me and my contemporaries, and even my elders, was this difference: to them the journey seemed certain and endless, to me it seemed in fact short and doubtful. In frequent conversations and youthful disputes concerning this, my elders’ authority prevailed, making me almost suspected of madness. (*Fam.* XXIV, 1)

In this passage, Petrarch points out two dichotomies in the attitude towards life: certain

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<sup>270</sup> John Martin, “Inventing Sincerity, Refashioning Prudence: The Discovery of the Individual in Renaissance Europe, p.1329, in *The American Historical Review*, vol.102, no.5, 1997, pp.1309-1342.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1333.

vs. doubtful and endless vs. short. Taking his life as a “short dream” Petrarch feels the urgency of this life more than his contemporaries do, and he worries about whether the “must-come” will “come” definitely,

There is a pathos in Petrarch’s lifelong wait for the decisive event, in his growing fear, his growing realization that the miracle of will and grace will not to be vouchsafed him.<sup>272</sup>

On the other hand, for Petrarch’s contemporaries or his elders, they have been sure of achieving predestined salvation. Therefore, they would be more at ease than Petrarch: the urgency of existence was out of their concern. That is what is lacking in their narrative of “successful conversion”. Their joy in accomplishing the spiritual turning, to certain degree, seems less richer compared to Petrarch’s unprecedented complexity of his self.

There is another unsolvable contradiction between the author and the narrative “I” in the conversion. As a type of autobiographical writing, the author and the *persona* of the story happen to be the same person. However, as I have mentioned, the uniqueness of the conversion lies in the fact that it requires a breaking point that leads to termination of the old self; that means, it creates a death in the middle of life. As Freccero has said: “Like the legendary drowning man who sees his whole life panoramically, the storyteller pretends somehow to have survived his own death.”<sup>273</sup> Such scene can only be understood in a theological context: one undergoes his own death and returns to tell his experience—isn’t this the mortal version of Christ’s Sacrifice and Revival? Thus, Freccero sharply pointed out that “a conversion is only a conversion when it is expressed in a narrative form that establishes a separation between the self as character and the self as author.”<sup>274</sup> His argument once again reveals an inconvenient truth: the experience of conversion is by nature either a *textual* experience or a literary invention.

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<sup>272</sup> *Ibid*, p.247

<sup>273</sup> Freccero, “Autobiography and Narrative”, p.20.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid*, p.17.

Just like those ancients to whom Petrarch write his letters, they approach to him not in persons, but in their “textual selves”.

What complicates the narration of conversion is its atemporal nature. It is known that conversion happens in an instant, and that no one knows whether it will come or when it will come. However, when it finally comes, it has already passed, since there is no spatial extension to the instant. No writing can entirely capture this particular passing moment of the conversion. The illusion is that the narrative makes conversion seem “narratable” because narrative is a literary extension of time, and it has its own space. By focusing on one particular transcendental moment, the arrival of the conversion represents at once the climax and the termination of the whole event.

Therefore, its atemporal nature always stands in the way of narrativity.<sup>275</sup> The narratives of Augustine and Dante, with the help of the divine intercession, successfully overcome transfer this contradiction into a joyful celebration of God. The instant of the conversion, impossible to hold, becomes extensive in the soul with the aid of Word/logos in the Augustinian miracle moment; Dante, on the other hand, has been promised with a chance to return from a deadly pilgrimage. Their narrations, via sharing in the eternal *present* of *logos*, have accomplished the story of spiritual transcendence. This is what is absent from the Petrarchan “conversion” since the author’s consciousness about both the self and time has come to a point of departure from the

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<sup>275</sup> Ascoli even described conversion as only as trope, a linguistic event: “What makes such a perspective possible, indeed, is the nature of conversion itself, at once temporal and a-temporal, a narrative event and a figurative equivalence. Conversion is clearly an event, an act of will which separates past self from future and which invites a narrative extended in time, as the *Confessions* themselves prove, and as Petrarch’s memorial meditations on the summit suggest. At the same time, for Augustine, conversion is also a trope, a turning, which takes place in no time at all, having no temporal and hence no true narrative extension”, from “Petrarch’s Middle Age”, p.28.

For me, I would not go as far as seeing the event of conversion wholly as a trope. It is a trope not for the subject who actually goes through transformation, but only for the author who writes it and readers who read it. For those who are still stuck in the pre-conversion moment, the experiences of other’s conversions are no more than experiences of texts and reading, that is to say, one cannot relive other’s conversion but can only read it. For Augustine, he apparently chose to conceal such an illusion by showing his readers how he was able to “relive” the conversions of Simplicianus (analogically, in Augustine’s narration, Simplicianus also “relived” St. Antonio’s conversion). For Petrarch, even in his reading of the saint’s life, he clearly knew that the story was not the reality but the text and the product of Augustine’s words.

medieval tradition and its theological system.

Petrarch's new flexibility of the self is accompanied by his consciousness of time, which is crystalized as his meditation of death and of the eternal glory. As is discussed above, unlike the Augustinian mode of view of time, Petrarch's awareness of time displays an unprecedented complexity that he himself cannot solve. Petrarch's rendering of the dispersed selves is at the same time the evidence and the result of his consciousness of time.

## **Petrarch's Consciousness of Time and His Narrative Self**

Waller once argued that Petrarch's historical revisionism had an essential influence on his poetics, and that he needed a new writing of history to understand both the self and the world.<sup>276</sup> She is sharp to capture the connections between Petrarch's sense of history (time) and his renovations in style and writing. My method here is similar to Waller's, since I want to explore the connections between Petrarch's consciousness of time and the way he constructs the self in his writings. Regarding the complexity of Petrarch's consciousness of time that is scattered in almost all his works, I will only focus on two main works: the XXIV book of *Familiaris* and the last letter of the *Senile* named "The Letter to Posterity". Petrarch composed letters to the ancients in the last book of the *Familiars*, and it may not be a coincidence that he chooses to close his *Senile* with a letter to posterity. The ending of the two collections of epistles signal an important information, in that both endings feature asynchronous correspondences that respectively face two temporal dimensions—the past and the future, and both can be seen as *sermo absentium* (speech of the absent) addressing to an imaginary audience.<sup>277</sup> By writing to both the ancients of the long-past and to his future posterity that will know

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<sup>276</sup> Waller, *Petrarch's Poetics and Literary History*, "Accordingly, Petrarchan texts register both exhilaration with the new possibilities of thought and action suggested by an alternative historical vision, and despair over the inadequacy of this "history" as a means of understanding the self and the world", p.5.

<sup>277</sup> Ascoli, "Epistolary Petrarch", in *Cambridge Companion to Petrarch*, p.124.

him, Petrarch shows to readers how he views his own self and how he constructs his own identity considering a long extension of time, both backward and forward.

The XXIV book is well anticipated in the first letter of *Familiars*, in which Petrarch writes to his Socrates that he would like to compose a series of letters to illustrious men of the past, namely Cicero, Seneca, Virgil, Varro, *etc.* In these thirteen letters, Petrarch converses with ancient authors as if they were his contemporaries. Petrarch explains this anachronism by claiming that he does it “for the sake of variety and as a diversion from my labors” (*varietatis studio et ameno quodam laborum diverticulo*). (*Fam.* XXIV, 2) However, there is more than that. It is surprising to notice that he talks with them like familiar friends, to whom he can express his criticism and opinions freely and openly. The intimacy Petrarch shows towards them, despite a gap of hundreds of years between them, is much denser than what he shows to most of his contemporaries, especially when we consider the bitter, harsh language in his “invectives”. More than once he expresses that he feels to have been born in the wrong era:

I concentrated most on the knowledge of antiquity, because I have always disliked this age we lived in; had it been for the affection of my friends, I would have been glad to have been born in any other age and to forget this one; I have always tried to think myself back into other time.<sup>278</sup>

This lack of satisfaction with his own times persists in his letters to Cicero, in which he writes that although he assumes Cicero would like to be informed of Rome’s current status, “but it is truly better to past over such subjects in silence, for believe me, O Cicero, were you to learn your country’s condition, you would weep bitter tears, wherever in heaven or in Erebus your lodging may be.” (*Fam.* XXIV, 4). Petrarch’s disdain for his own age is so apparent that he even hates to talk about it. In other letters, Petrarch expresses a similar opinion: he has claimed himself to be a man who loves

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<sup>278</sup> Francis Petrarch, *My Secret Book*, p.97.



classics, but his ignorant contemporaries know not how to value the antiquity, for they only love gold and silver and pleasures. Thus he says while addressing to Livy: “I busy myself with these few remains of your whenever I desire to forget these places or times, as well as our present customs, being filled with bitter indignation against the activities of our contemporaries...” (*Fam.* XXIV, 8)

However, Petrarch cannot fail to notice the great temporal gap between himself and his interlocutors: he desires to know all those ancient authors, and by reading them, he wishes to be transferred to another age. The truth is, however, no matter how much admiration he has expressed to them, he can never know them in reality. Those are, in any way, not real people: Petrarch does converse with them like old friends of his age, but he can only encounter their ghostly narrative selves that lingered scintillantly within the old manuscripts that have survived from ages of destruction and forgetfulness. The authors he converses with are textual people that only live in words. This is the key problem that time brings between them. The Petrarchan anachronism is concealed under the avoidance of facing such a gap. On the one hand, he tries to understand their feelings and to console them with his own living experiences. For example, he tries to understand Cicero’s patriotism—is not he himself also a man of patriotism of Italy? He advises Varro not to be troubled much by his lost works, while at the same time he worries about his own works failing to reach future generations. He tells Homer not to be disturbed by the fools since “Truer words could not have been uttered, as is attested by any street, home or public square.” (*Fam.* XXIV, 12) This is the exact attitude and contempt Petrarch himself throws on his attackers. On the other hand, Petrarch attempts to overcome time by bridging the great gap between the narrative “I” and the author in his conversations with these ancient authors—one alive and one dead, one existing in the body and one only in the text. For example, he adjusts his language accordingly: to Virgil and to Horace, he writes in poetry while to Homer, in prose. From time to time, he juxtaposes his autobiographical stories with the life events of the ancients, creating a feeling that they are living in the same age. However, these endeavors by Petrarch’s actually are jeopardized by the temporal and spatial disconnection between them: in the

writing, the real selves of these ancient author are forever absent, leaving behind their fragmented narrative selves that are subjected to Petrarch's appropriation and even distortion.

The sense of fragment and of an absence is even more intensive when Petrarch mentions how feeble words are—the only thing left by these authors—within the flow of time. When, unfortunately, no works happen to be left, Petrarch can do nothing about it, but remains speechless: “But since your fame has reached us almost stripped of details and has been aided more by the writings of others than by your own, I have very little to say to you.” (*Fam.* XXIV, 9, in the letter to Asinius Pollio) His lament on the feebleness, weakness and on the insubstantiality of words that he voices to the ancients is actually the lament of his own words. Vulnerable as they are, they keep on writing—such is the consensus of authors, in which Petrarch finds that so much resonances with the ancients:

You know that they would perish, even as you wrote; it is not given to a mortal intellect to create immortal things. What does it matter whether something that is destined to perish, perishes immediately or after a hundred thousand years? (*Fam.* XXIV, 6)

He consoles Varro with these words, telling him that this is the collective fate of all men of letters: look at Marcus Cato, Publius Nigidus, Antonius Gniphos... “They were once famous men but now are obscure ashes,” (*Fam.* XXIV,6) In the letter to Homer, Petrarch laments living at a time when the classical manuscripts are lost:

Unhappy me, thrice unhappy, and even more! How many things perish! Indeed, how little survives of all that our blind activities have accomplished under the revolving sun!...What are we, what do we do, what do we hope for, who indeed can now entertain hope in the dim light when the supreme sun of eloquence has suffered an eclipse? Who dares complain that anything of his has been lost, who can dare hope that any fruit of his labor will endure? (*Fam.* XXIV,12)

What interests me here is not the fact that Petrarch connects with the literary ancients, but *how* he manages to do so, and the fact that his anachronistic treatment of the classics reveals his consciousness of time, and especially his lifelong burden of confronting his mortality and his constant concern for the literary fame. Steven Hinds sharply observed that his two letters to Cicero reflected and problematized the relation of time and space between himself and the author he wrote to. In the letter *Fam.XXIV*, 4, Petrarch additionally mentions two other authors: Seneca and Virgil, and he discusses the failure of Seneca's connection to Cicero, and Cicero's triumphal connection to Virgil. Cicero, being the connection of the "ancient" relationships, becomes the mirror of Petrarch's own consciousness of time and space: "[it] offers a kind of prefiguration of Petrarch's actual epistolary experience of delayed *post mortem* response to the dead: at this point, unexpectedly, Virgil stands to Cicero more or less as Petrarch himself does in the letter which we are now reading."<sup>279</sup> Being a contemporary of Cicero, Seneca's wish for conversation, also due to the civil war, is dampened; Petrarch, on the other hand, overcoming the obstacles brought on by time, actually brings Cicero to his *presence* although such *presence* is, to a certain degree, an illusion. However, this does not dampen Petrarch's passion. Cicero's connection with Virgil is fascinatingly complicated by the fact that Cicero predicted Virgil to be the "second hope of great Rome", a fact that was mentioned by Virgil himself twenty years later. The Virgilian self-mythologizing, according to Hinds, is incorporated into the Petrarchan enterprise of literature: Cicero's prophecy of the fame of Virgil resonates in the *Africa* with the prediction about Petrarch's fame uttered by Scipio's father, and narrated in the Ciceronian atmosphere.<sup>280</sup> By extending his literary genealogy to Virgil, Homer and

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<sup>279</sup> Steven Hinds, "Petrarch, Cicero, Virgil: Virtual Community in *Familiares* 24,4", p.166, in *Materali e discussion per l'analisi dei testi classici*, no.52, *Re-presenting Virgil: Special Issue in Honor of Michael C.J.Putnam*, 2004, pp.157-175.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid*, "As in the midsection of the letter to Cicero, the game is one of literary futurology, with famous ancient authors predicting the greatness of others' forthcoming works...the allusive logic puts Petrarch in the place of *Virgil* as the post-Homeric poet of record," pp.172-173.

Seneca, Petrarch tries to portray himself as the “second Virgil” and as the hope of the post-antique world.

His epistolary conversations with the ancients, therefore, are not only concerned with the past; through creating a link to the past, Petrarch, standing in the present, casts his eyes onto the future. However, Petrarch makes connections with the ancients in the way that emphasizes distance rather than intimacy in this virtual community. Remember, Dante too had posited himself in such a community in his visit to the limbo: he proudly named himself as the sixth literary heroes after Homer and Virgil. The distances brought on by death and by time between them do not prevent Dante from counting himself as one of them. It would be impossible, however, for Petrarch to do the same. Although Petrarch does show great admiration and respect for the ancients, and although he displays unprecedented passion in “connecting” with them, he profoundly realizes that the connection between him and the ancients can never conceal the gaps in time and space. Actually it is the existence of these gaps that makes prominent the value of his effort: Petrarch’s status as the forerunner of the Renaissance is mainly evidenced by his efforts in bridging the gaps in time and space. The presence of his voice revives the voice of the ancients, and at the same time signals their absence. The letters, manifesting at the same time both presence and absence, are pronouncing Petrarch’s narrative self by making his own voices penetrate the wall of time.

After reviewing briefly the last book of the *Familiars*, I am going to discuss is the concluding “Letter to Posterity”, the last letter of the *Seniles*. From this series of “concluding letters”, we can see not only Petrarch’s attitude towards time, the impending death and fame, but also the mega-structure in which these letters are produced and linked together. The draft letter is characterized as a long autobiographical portrait of Petrarch, in which he tells his future readers about the exile of his family, the story of his youth, his intimate relationships with royal members, and most importantly, his epic enterprise—the writing of *Africa*. His address to the future readers bears the same concerns as he had expressed in the letters to the ancients: the perishing of words and the fading of reputation. The sadness he assumes those

illustrious authors to have felt is the sadness he feels for himself. According to Wilkins, Petrarch's initial intention of this letter is to defend his settlement in Milan which aroused much disputes and many attacks from his acquaintances. However, this defense was left unfinished and was made into the autobiographical portion in the "Letter to the Posterity".<sup>281</sup> In the initial draft, Petrarch chooses to not face those attacks with fierce attitudes, and when he turned this part into the letter to his future readers, we can see clearly that he may not care about the criticism of his contemporaries since he finds little common with them; but he does not want his posterity to misunderstand him. Through this autobiographical writing, he wishes to preserve his image and personality as complete as possible, even though he doubts that his words will survive: "Although I much doubt whether my obscure little name can have reached you at such a distance of time and space, it is possible that you have some inkling of me..."<sup>282</sup> By telling his readers what sort of man he is, Petrarch endeavors to preserve the entirety of his own self, and by closing his epistolary *oeuvre* with the writings about himself, Petrarch realizes his promise to write until the end of his life.

Petrarch's continuous writing of the self manifests his ambition to combat with time, the destroying power that scatters everything. Barolini once argues that time "comports otherness, difference, nonidentity, nonsimultaneity".<sup>283</sup> People's opinions also make his image fragmented as well: "Opinions will indeed differ about me, for everyone speaks as it suits him without regard to the truth, and without any moderation in either praise or blame."<sup>284</sup> It is very likely that the future readers will not have a complete understanding of his writings. More importantly, Petrarch himself has led a scattered life. As a baby, he was born in exile, removed from a steady geographical location and being deprived of a legitimate citizenship, which explains the ceaseless mental

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<sup>281</sup> Ernest H Wilkins, "On the Evolution of Petrarch's Letter to Posterity", *Speculum*, vol.39, no.2, 1962, pp.304-308.

<sup>282</sup> Petrarch, "A Draft of a Letter to Poesterity", in *My Secret Book*, p.95.

<sup>283</sup> Theodolinda Barolini, "Petrarch as the Metaphysical Poet Who Is Not Dante", p.198, in *Petrarch and Dante, Anti-Dantism, Metaphysics, Tradition*, pp. 195-225.

<sup>284</sup> Petrarch, "A Draft of a Letter to Poesterity", p.95.

turbulences that accompanies him during his whole life. Like a rootless plant, Petrarch finds that his life is divided: “Either by chance or by choice my life up to now has divided itself (“est partita”) into the following stages.”<sup>285</sup> His life itinerary is scattered between the land of Italy and foreign lands:

Almost the whole of my first year was passed in Arezzo where I first saw the light of day; the six following years in Incisa, on my grandfather’s estate fourteen miles above Florence, once my mother had been recalled from exile; my eighth year in Pisa; my ninth year onwards in France...<sup>286</sup>

Then he shows a long list of locations: the banks of a windy river, Carpentras, Montpellier, Bologna, Gascony, Germany, Paris, Rome, Vauclus, *etc.* He has been lingering for a long time in Avignon and leads a reclusive life in Vaucluse. Not until 1350s has he left Provence forever, to live in Italy under the protection of the court. As is argued by Theodore J. Cachey Jr., these places constitute a self-made map of Italy that represents the biographical space of Petrarch, displaying his anxieties about space and his perception of the relationship between the self and the world.<sup>287</sup> Cachey contends that Petrarch’s geographic-psychological map describes the itinerary of his life events: the narration of his life events and achievements cannot be separated from the places he has been. For example, the composition of *De vita* and the *De otio* took place during the years of Vaucluse, and *De remediis* is closely related to his staying in Milan (1354-61). The strong consciousness of commutation of space, paralleled with his experiences in different periods of his life, outlines an episodic outlook of Petrarch

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<sup>285</sup> *Ibid*, p. 97, the Latin text is “Tempus meum sic vel fortuna vel voluntas mea nunc usque partita est.”

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid*, p.97.

<sup>287</sup> “Petrarca cercò costantemente e ossessivamente nei suoi scritti di individuare un se stesso che non aveva un posto in questo mondo e poteva solo riuscire assicuresene uno temporaneo attraverso la letteratura. Petrarca associa se stesso all’Italia come un modo importante di consolidare la sua percezione, tanto minacciata e vulnerabile, del proprio posto nel mondo.”Theodore J. Cachey Jr., “La Mappa D’Italia in Dante Petrarca e Boccaccio”, p.21, *Le Tre Corone, Rivista internazionale di studi su Dante, Petrarca , Boccaccio*, Vol.V, 2018, pp.11-38.

himself:

I was never able to stay still; and I went not so much from the desire to see once more what I had already seen a thousand times, but, as sick men do, endeavoring to cope with tedium by a change of scene.<sup>288</sup>

Petrarch's private-micro time encounters disruption—overlaps, relapses, recurrences, flashbacks—caused by the mutations of space and time, and his own self is dispersed in different temporal and spatial dimensions. According to Cachey the structure of his biological map is elliptical that is made up of two centers, which however proves to be no center at all. Petrarch always puts himself in the restless space between two points, whether in real life or in his writing projects:

Petrarca situò sé stesso ripetutamente in via sia nella vita che nei suoi scritti, tra luoghi e tra partenza e arrivo: tra Avignone e Valchiusa e tra il *De viris* e l'*Africa* all'inizio della sua vita e della sua opera; tra la Provenza e l'Italia e tra il *Secretum* e il *De remediis* durante la cruciale transizione della mezza età; e tra Padova e Arquà e tra il *Canzoniere* e i *Triumphs* alla fine della sua vita.<sup>289</sup>

In another article, Cachey also points to Petrarch's obsession for being a "wanderer everywhere" ("peregrinus unique", *Epystole*, III, 19.16); and such an obsession pushes him to satisfy himself with constant changes of location—Petrarch travels everywhere and belongs to nowhere: "To locate himself between places in this way was to claim for himself a position analogous to the eternal present of his writing, the practice through which he sought to escape the limitations of time and space."<sup>290</sup> The absence of a fixed center in Petrarch's works, thus, shows the existence of a parallel between

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<sup>288</sup> Petrarch, "A Draft of a Letter to Posterity", p.103.

<sup>289</sup> Cachey Jr., *La Mappa D'Italia in Dante Petrarca e Boccaccio*, p.21.

<sup>290</sup> Cachey, "Poetry in motion", in *Cambridge Companion to Petrarch*, p.23.

the temporal/spatial and the textual modalities.

Moreover, the absence of a fixed center explains why his autobiography, unlike that of Augustine or of Dante, fails to reach a metaphysical goal or to offer a meta-structure that can govern all the scattered fragments. Just as Barolini said, “opposed to the constellation of time/ multiplicity/alterity/ desire is God, who is precisely not difference but sameness; in the language of the *Confessions*, God is never *aliud* but always *ipsum*, never ‘other’ but ‘the same and the very same and the very self-same’”<sup>291</sup> Petrarch’s dispersion in time, therefore, becomes the main reason of his exile in space, and his statelessness in both time and space is represented in the fragments of his writings, which finally results in the ambiguity of his identity and of his own self. In this way, Petrarch’s writing project, his self and his obsession with the changes of location have been united by his consciousness of time, which is developed to account for the narrative of his life as a centered-less entirety.

It is also interesting to note that Petrarch deliberately leaves out his achievements in the vernacular, that is, his love poems and there is no evidence to show he wanted to add them to the draft later. On the contrary, Petrarch discusses in details his literary accomplishments relating to Rome: how he got his coronation in Rome and how he got the inspiration to write the epic *Africa*, in which he is going to sing the praises of this grand city. It is obvious that he would like the posterity to see him as a citizen of Rome instead of a man belonging to “nowhere”, which corresponds to what he says in the opening of this letter: “As a young man I was deluded, as an adult I went astray; but old age corrected me...”<sup>292</sup> This letter, dated written in the late years of Petrarch’s life, also answers the question left open in the *Secretum* and contains a decision to end his “wandering”—which is evident, for example, in the *Canzoniere*, where Love causes him to wander along the riverside and inside the woods. Instead of staging himself as a wandering, sad poet who sings about love, Petrarch would like his future readers to consider him as a serious epic poet. However, does old age really correct him? At the

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<sup>291</sup> Barolini, “Petrarch as the Metaphysical Poet Who Is Not Dante”, p.198.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid*, p. 95.



end of the letter, Petrarch seems to decide to return to his previous restless status: By calling himself a sick man “never able to stay still”, he contradicts the image of an epic poet that he has strived to construct in the middle of the letter. The fluctuating impulse in his soul again causes him to break away from a definite identity.

What further scatters his autobiographical writing lies in the fact that his identity as an author can never successfully be united with his narrative self. In the very last letter of the epistolary collection *Familiars*, Petrarch writes a very significant sentence: “I began this work as a young man; I am completing it in my old age, or rather I am continuing it since it is the only one that death alone can end... Thus, the reader may, if he wishes, follow my progress and the course of my life.” (*Fam.* XXIV, 13) Petrarch clearly claims that he does not wish to end his narrative self unless death stops him. However, the narration of conversion can never lack an ending: the departure from the old self and the birth of a new one is the core of conversion.

In the Augustinian dictionary, “now” is an uncatchable instant, but Petrarch would like to surpass this obstacle by writing endlessly. He tries to capture every fleeting second into his words: through his non-stop writing, the fleeting time has been transferred incessantly into a linguistic form, and every second is pinned down by every letter in the writing. His narrative self and the author may not be unified as Augustine’s or Dante’s, but actually they meet each other in the flow of time and in the flow of writing. Though still being two separated objects, they mirror each other and are constant in mutual reflections. By writing continuously, the narrative “I” is created in a way that closely follows its author throughout his life, from the young to the old, from a boy to an old man, and from the entrance in this life to his departure from it.

Unlike Dante’s distinction between poet and pilgrim, or Augustine’s “another person”, there is no such severe rupture between Petrarch’s narrative “I” and the identity the author. Their difference lies in the degree, not in the nature. Though the Petrarchan portrayal of the self is fragmented, scattered and dispersed, this is actually the most realistic facet of the self in time and space. The self is supposed to be fragmented in the experience of time. As is argued by Strawson, there are two kinds of experiences:

“oneself principally as human beings taken as a whole,” and “the experience of oneself when one [considers] oneself principally as an inner mental activity of ‘self’ of some sort”; i.e. being the same human beings is not contrary to “different selves.”<sup>293</sup> Petrarch principally defends the episodic narration of the self, which is the opposite to the chronological narratives. In the episodic narration, the self considers itself as a subject of the “now” that is disconnected from the past and the future, and which threatens the argument that the self is a continuous being through time. Instead of a pilgrimage ending, Petrarch’s conversion depicts him as a man always suspended in the middle, in a status of fluctuation constantly turning towards and backwards. Thus, his writing about the self leans more towards the episodic side.

However, he does not exclude or reject the chronological narration from his writings, as is shown by his efforts invested in arranging his works into volumes and collections, just like the Francis of the *Secretum*, who wishes to collect the dispersed souls into one. Like he himself has said: “with the expectation of the first letter, which, though writing preceded its companions to serve as a preface; nearly all the others are arranged chronologically.” (*Fam.* XXIV, 13). Unlike the episodic narratives, Petrarch does not enclose himself from the past and the future. On the contrary, his narrative self, through his continual writings, carries with it the influence of the past and stretches itself into the future.

What makes his narration of conversion so unique is the fact the he often feels an unprecedented urge to face the “now”. Petrarch frequently talks about how time escapes from one’s life, and about the inevitability of the approach of death. His vulnerability also lies in his awareness that he cannot bring back the time he has already lived through:

è quindi umanamente naturale la nostalgia con cui piange e rimpiange il tempo  
irrimediabilmente trascorso che precepisce, in termini senecani, non come tempo che ha,  
che ha vissuto, ma come tempo che non ha e non avrà mai più...La vita umana è talmente

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<sup>293</sup> Galen Strawson, “Against Narrativity”, *Ratio* 17 (2004):428-52, quoted from Jame L.Battersby, “Narrativity, Self, and Self-Representation”, p. 28-29, in *Narrative*, vol.14, no,1, 2006, pp.27-44.

labile e volatile che siamo ridotti a contare gli anni che abbiamo pensando che siano davvero nostri e invece sono proprio quelli che non abbiamo più perché sono già stati vissuti.<sup>294</sup>

Vulnerable to the rapid dissipation of time, Petrarch finds himself doing nothing but writing. However, while he is devoting himself to non-stop writing, he still cannot neglect that time dissipates in every letter and in every sentence under his pen.

## **Writing the Conversion: How the Narrative Enters Time**

Narrative and time are independent but inseparable from each other. These two elements are tangled and inter-reacting in the textual universe in which man learns to understand and express his temporality—his limitations, his mortality and his attitude towards the impending death. However, no writing is like the writing of conversion that puts so great an emphasis on the critical role of time in the narrative, and no writing is more conscious of the meaning of time than the writing of conversion because, as is said above, conversion requires a breaking point in the timeline to separate the old self from the new one. This critical point in time serves not only as a watershed but also a vantage point that enables the new self to draw conclusions from its own past. The departure of the old and the arrival of the new, as two faces of one coin, signal the essential meaning of a specific point in time in the narrative of conversion. The following passage will explore how our two frequently mentioned authors, Augustine and Dante, understand the meaning of time through their perception of the narrative itself.

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<sup>294</sup> Diego Sbacchi, “Il Tempus Irrediturum di Petrarca”, p.104, in *Lettere italiane*, vol.66, no.1, 2014, pp.94-106.

## Narrative and Time in Augustine and Dante

When measuring time, Augustine comes to understand that what he measures is actually the extension of the “now” in his soul. This function of the soul, or what we call time, is actually the imitation of God’s eternity. To God, all time is “now”. Augustine argues that there is no such thing as past and future: standing in the moment of now, the past is its memory while future is its expectation.

Probing of the nature of time, Augustine sharply notices that his confessions unfold nowhere but in time: “Or even whilst we were a saying this should we not also speak in time?” (*Conf.* XI, 23) Every sound he utters or hears corresponds to certain duration in time:

And I confess to thee, O Lord, that I yet know not what time is; yea, I confess again unto thee, O Lord, that I know well enough, how that I speak this in time, and that having long spoken of time, that every long is not long but by a stay of time. (*Conf.* XI, 25)

Though still not knowing what time is, Augustine knows well how narrative is transformed into his consciousness of time. He also notices the parallels between people’s understanding of narrative and their understanding of the passing of time. To explain such a parallel, he introduces the famous metaphor of psalm-singing. He reveals to his readers the mysteries of time— the past is gone and no longer exists, the future is yet to come and has yet to exist, and the only thing existing is the “now” is an instant and impossible to calculate. Analogously, narrating a sound is similarly puzzling<sup>295</sup>— before the sound is uttered, it does not exist and could not then be measured; once uttered, it is gone and is no more. It may be measured when being narrated; however, sound, like the instant, does not stay, for “it was passing and passing away.” (*Conf.* XI,

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<sup>295</sup> In the 27<sup>th</sup> chapter in the eleventh book of *Confessions*, Augustine began to resolve the problem of how we were able to measure time. Here he used the metaphor of sound to clarify the fact that actually, we measure not the past, present and future time, but the extension of the soul.

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Then, Augustine asks: what are we measuring if we can measure nothing? That is when he realizes that he is measuring time in his soul. When time passes through the soul, it leaves memories; if this is not the situation, we can never understand a song since we can only hear unrelated notes one by one. Without the extension, we cannot memorize a note that is past, neither can we relate it to the passing notes and to the notes that are yet to come. Relating the consciousness of time to the singing of a psalm, Augustine says:

I am about to repeat a psalm that I know. Before I begin, my expectation alone reaches itself over the whole: but as soon as I shall have once begun, how much so ever of it I shall take off into the past, over so much my memory also reaches: thus the life of this action of mine is extended both ways: into my memory, so far as concerns that part which I have repeated already, and into my expectation too, in respect of what I am about to repeat now; but all this while is my marking faculty present at hand, through which, that which was future, is conveyed over, that it may become past: which how much the more diligently it is done over and over again, so much more the expectation being shortened, is the memory enlarged; till the whole expectation be at length vanished quite away, when namely, that whole action being ended, shall be absolutely passed into the memory. (*Conf.* XI, 28)

Narrative, this unique humanistic phenomenon, has been utilized by the saint to solve his profound doubts about time. A special kind of intimacy, therefore, is created between narrative and time. Through our daily use of language—to utter, to be heard, to write and to sing—the invisible time thus can be configured into every letter we speak or every word we write on the paper.

Augustine would like to consider the narrative of the self as a phenomenon that takes place within the consciousness of time, which include two aspects: “the relationship of

time to being and the subjective awareness of time's duration".<sup>296</sup> Stock tries to explain how Augustine has established a close correspondence between his narrative and the comprehension of the passing of time:

The sensory level relates to the past, since, as the syllables of a word make up a sound, their meaning is established through the memory. The mental level reflects the present, since, in realizing that meaning, *distentio animi* is created: this is an extension of the mind which expands the present in order to give continuity to meaning. The contemplative level pertains to the future, since Augustine is convinced that we generate this meaning in an active, intentional manner. We transform the inherent pastness of our modes of thought – since these, to establish meaning, must be past – into a project to be realized, namely ourselves...<sup>297</sup>

Having clarified the nature of time through narrative, Augustine eventually comes to a better understanding of his “temporary self” in regards to the eternity of God, which enables him to construct “an ethical position which derives its support from both literature and philosophy and serves the interests of his theology.”<sup>298</sup>

Dante's consciousness of time mainly lies in his intentional change between different modes of narrativity according to the change in time. In his commentary on the literary meaning of *Genesis*, St. Augustine has identified three modes of vision that can be rightly applied to the three realms in the *Divine Comedy*: the first level is *visio corporalis*, being the visual, sensual side of human perception. The second is the *visio spiritualis* or *imaginative*. This level mainly considers perceptions gained by means of imagination. The subjects still have physical shapes but they have already transcended

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<sup>296</sup> Brian Stock, *Augustine's Inner Dialogue, The Philosophical Soliloquy in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.78.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid*, p.78.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid*, p.78.

the corporeal realm. The final level is *visio intellectualis*, which provides the instant, direct perception of the highest truth.<sup>299</sup> In Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the *Inferno* represents the corporeal level, where sensation dominates; the *Purgatorio*, on the other hand, represents the imaginative level. This explains why the pilgrim, after arriving here, is occupied with dreams and phantasms; the *Paradiso*, situated on the highest level, is a place where Dante eventually comes to experience the unmediated vision of God.

The infernal inscription on Hell's door is obviously corporeal. Dante says to Virgil: "Maestro, il senso lor m'è duro." (*Inf.* III, 12) Many commenters have noticed the biblical source behind such words: It quickly recalls the scene in the Scripture in which the disciples say the same words when hearing Christ offering his flesh as food: "durus est hoc sermo" (this saying is hard).<sup>300</sup> However, the meaning of the words inscribed on the stone is complicated by the Pauline tradition which concerns the relationship between the word/body and the spirit/soul. In *Corinthian. II*, 3:3-6, St. Paul has distinguished two kinds of "words": words written with ink on the tablets of stone vs. words written with the Spirit by God on human hearts. He emphasizes the superiority of the spirit by confirming that: "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." (*Cor. II*, 3:6) According to Paul, the Jews failed to receive God's salvation, and failed to transcend the words inscribed on the stone to lift themselves to the realm of the spirit. Dante's frustration in encountering the inscription thus recalls the hermeneutic failure of the Jews, who could not understand Christ's offer: "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day." (*John* 6:53-54) Unable to read behind the letters and to understand the Spirit, their minds are doomed to be petrified into hard stone. Thus, Dante reminds his readers of this Pauline story by saying that the meaning is "hard".

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<sup>299</sup> Newman, "St. Augustine's Three Visions and the Structure of the *Commedia*", p.59.

<sup>300</sup> See *John* 6.61.

Contrary to the deadly letters, the eighteenth canto of *Paradise* has witness the formation of the letter of the Spirit—the skywriting performed by the dancing souls. This inscription is also composed of letters and words, like the one in hell. However, this new writing is not inscribed on the hard stone, but is composed by the souls in the air. On the heaven of Jupiter, the pilgrim sees the blessed souls dancing and singing, and in the meantime, they begin to form letters in the sky. Dante first watches them form the letters D, I, L, the first three letters of “diligite”, and they continue their skywriting:

They showed themselves, then, in five times  
seven vowels and consonants, and I noted the  
part as they were dictated to me.

“DILIGITE IUSTITAM” were the first verb  
and noun of the whole depiction,  
“QUI IUDICATIS TERRAM” were the last. (*Par. XVII*, 88-93)

“You who judge the earth”, Dante quickly recognizes it is a sentence from Wisdom I.1. It is appropriate for the souls to write such a biblical sentence on Jupiter, the heaven that represents God’s Justice. The souls finally stop at the letter “M”, from which they continue to form a lily, then to an eagle. What eventually is left on the sky is the eagle, symbol of Justice. Dante considers the written message as a “sign” addressed to him: “che li era *segnare* a li occhi miei nostra favella” (*Par. XVIII*, 70-72)

Unlike the hard, obscure words that horrify him, Dante find these words familiar, just like our language “nostra favella”. (*Par. XVIII*,72) The skywriting, different from the still words on the stone, has been formed by the souls one letter at a time, and they transform to composed the next letter—the composition of the skywriting is in a living process. The meaning of the sentence, analogously, is in the process of “generation”: not until the last letter “M” appears in the sky, can we capture its entire meaning. When Dante reads all the letters, they have already gone, leaving to him only the eagle of



Justice. The symbol of justice has summarized, and at the same time has transcended all previous letters, pointing to the Spirit that guides such a wonderful dancing. Augustine has the similar experiences:

As for that voice, it was uttered, and passed away, had a beginning and ending; the syllables made a sound, and so passed over, the second after the first, the third after the second, and third after the second, and so forth in order, until the last came after the rest, and silence after the last.. (*Conf. XI,6*)

The syllables come one after another, and so do the letters of the skywriting. With the elevation of his vision and intellect, Dante comes to understand the *logos* of God, taking away the veil that once covered on his petrified heart; in this way, he captures the letters with his “mind’s eyes”, and transfers them into his soul. He then calls the Pegasean to enlighten him. This is a very interesting detail. When Dante encountered Medusa in the ninth Canto of the *Inferno*, Virgil was worried that he would be petrified by the female evil, since petrification signifies the failure to comprehend the Spirit behind the letters.<sup>301</sup> Pegasean was born after Medusa was beheaded. Dante’s calling of Pegasean, therefore, means he has escaped from the danger of mental petrification signaled by Medusa. Now his intellect can approach closer to God.

God’s Word, different from that of mankind’s, is a “thing”: “The words of men are only vocables; the Word of God is a vocable but has the peculiarity of being also a thing, of having actual historical existence.”<sup>302</sup> In this way, we can say that the infernal inscription is a “void” of the Word, while the skywriting proves to be the evidence of the substantial presence of the Word. Even though both of them are letters, the letters inscribed on the gate of hell only recall the counterfeit presence of the body throughout the *Inferno*; on the contrary, the letters written in the sky signify the truthful presentation

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<sup>301</sup> For the moral and hermeneutic meaning of Medusa in *Inferno*, see Freccero’s “Medusa: The Letter and the Spirit”, in *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, pp.119-135.

<sup>302</sup> Robert Hollander, *Allegory in Dante’s Commedia*, Princeton University Press, 1969, p.21.

of God's highest Justice. To summarize briefly, I would like to list some comparison points regarding these two instances of ekphrasis.

Inferno	Paradiso
Inscription	Writing
Petrified Letters	Signs
Empty Image	Word of God/ Logos

Through displaying to his readers the “corporeal” letter and the “intellectual” letter, Dante himself understands the differences between temporality and eternity. The infernal letters actually represent a frozen, stagnant “time” that is opposite to God's eternity—such a frozen time turns out to be a lasting curse that imprisons the souls in punishment. Not only the dead letters in hell, even mankind's language is limited to temporality. To transcend temporality means to abandon human's language. That is why Dante emphasized at the very beginning that: “in the heaven that receives most of his light/ have I been, and I have seen things that/ one who comes down from there cannot/ remember and cannot utter” (*Par.I*, 4-6) There is no medium in the heaven, and the perception of God is instant and immediate. Beatrice told Dante that all the scenes he witnessed in heaven, were nothing but God's condescendence to mankind's vision. His signs are historical reality, extending from the past into the future, being both the prediction and fulfillment. Thus, the letters in the skywriting symbolize the final transcendence of time in the *Paradiso*, where the tri-partition of time has been unified into a forever “now”.

## Petrarch's Endeavor to Grasp Time in His Narration

“We all are constantly dying, I while writing these words, you while reading them, others while hearing or not hearing them; I too shall be dying while you read this, you are dying while I write this, we both are dying, we all are dying, we are always dying” (*Fam.* XXIV,1)

This famous quotation from Petrarch highlights the psychological situation of the author who keeps writing with an extraordinary intensity, and it also reveals Petrarch's endeavor to surpass the boundaries of time through his narrative. However, the more he writes, the more he realizes the inevitability of one's death and the vulnerability to stop such a progress with his literary activities. The steps of death are so loud that they warn Petrarch as he is writing down every single letter. Like his predecessor Augustine, he views every letter and every word he has written as an indication of the passing time. However, unlike Augustine, Petrarch does not turn it to the reverence of God's eternity, but to his apprehension and fear of death. Ironically, human beings most prominently display their universality, in the fact that they are constantly dying: not only the one who writes and speaks, but also those who read and hear. In the activity of narrative, the fate of men is unfolded and expressed.

Of course, Petrarch is not the only one who has such a feeling. Horace is famous for his *carpe diem*, but few pay attention to the sentence that precedes this famous quotation: “Dum loquimur, fugerit invida aetas” (*Odes*, I) The theme *dum loquimur*<sup>303</sup> opens a road through which the literary experience enters man's temporal experience. In Petrarch, it first reveals the brevity and shortness of the human life. Secondly, it reveals a profound vulnerability when facing the rushing of time. It is absurd to use the present continuous tense as if we could actually cause the time stop for a while. The

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<sup>303</sup> There is the spectacular analysis of G. Folena, “La coscienza del fluire di se stesso con le cose nell'atto stesso in cui le percepiamo e ne parliamo, il tema del *dum loquimur*, si appoggia a passi oraziani spesso allegati del Petrarca, come *Carm.*, I, II, 6, «spem longam reseces. Dum loquimur, fugerit invida / aetas». Da cui dependeva anche il «dum loquor», dell'esempio citato sopra di Seneca. Così il Petrarca: «inane gaudium et breve», vana e breve è ogni gioia, «flos iste, *dum loquimur*, arescit», questo fiore mentre parliamo si dissecca; e parallelamente nelle *Rime*: «Ora, mentre ch'io parlo, il tempo fugge» (LVI, 3) e «L'ombra... / crescendo mentr'io parlo, a li occhi tolle / la dolce vista del beato loco» (CLXXXVIII, 9-13)

fact is that: once written, the word has passed; It is paradoxical that we always intend to write down something that is fleeting. Petrarch has already realized that no matter how much he keeps writing, he can never successfully write down the current moment. The feebleness of the *carpe diem* through narrativity is something that is deeply felt in Petrarch's heart:

I feel that each day, each hour, and each minute propels me toward the end; each day I proceed toward death, indeed — as I had begun to realize while still young— each day I die; in fact I came close to using the verb in the past tense inasmuch as I have accomplished a large portion of what I was to do; what remains is minimal, and is happening, I hope, at this very moment as I speak with you. (*Fam.* XXIV, 1)

To him, “using the verb in a past sentence” in something still unwritten is pushing readers to an extreme, so that they have to face the predicament and paradoxes of the Augustinian narration of conversion.

When Augustine is writing his *Confessions*, he is the author who stands in his *present* to look back onto his own self in the past: the moment of conversion is the highlighted moment when the narrative “I” and the author come nearest to each other, but are also the furthest way from each other. This is the bridge that at once brings together and separates the narrative “I” and the author. Even though the narration of the *past*—the pre-conversion period—dominates a large portion of the whole writing, the core of the conversion lies in the *present*. The writing of the *past* is for the sake of comparison and differentialization. Thus Augustine, after his moment in the garden in Milan, says:

This is the fruit of my Confessions, not of what I have been, but of what I am: namely, to confess this not before thee only, in a secret rejoicing mixed with trembling, and in a secret sorrowfulness allayed with hope: but in the ears also of the believing sons of men, sharers of my joy, and partners in mortality with me; (*Conf.* XI, 4)

“Confessing to God of what I am (qualis sim)”, so is said by Augustine determines to drag himself away from the memories of his “old” self, so that he can stand firmly in his *present* status. After the series of struggles, torments, hesitation and agonies undertaken by his old self, Augustine has decided to focus on his current self. However, to stand in the *present* is not an easy task. In order to do so, one has to completely abandon all his past.

If we read carefully enough, we can find that following the conversion, Book Eight and Book Nine have witness the ends of several things: the end of his teaching career, the end of the life of his son, and most importantly, the end of the life of Monica, when Augustine was thirty-three, at the mid-point of his life and facing a turning point. The day before Monica died, they had a peaceful conversation, in which the three dimensions of time—the past, present and future—have been well discussed. The end of the conversation points to the eternity of God. The Latin text shows more clearly about the tripartite nature of time:

*et praeterita obliviscentes in ea quae ante sunt extenti, quaerebamus inter nos apud praesentem veritatem, quod tu es, qualis futura esset vita aeterna sanctorum. (“and forgetting those things which are behind, we reached forth unto those things which are before: we did betwixt ourselves seek at that Present Truth (which thou art) in what manner the eternal life of the saints was to be”, Conf. IX, 10)*

The past things (“*praeterita*”) are put into forgetfulness: “*extenti*” signifies something that is dead—i.e., the end of the past; they discussed the *Present Truth* (*praesentem veritatem*), while looking forwards into the future—that is, the blessed life in heaven. However, it is the *present* that they *were talking* about:

*et ibi vita sapientia est, per quam fiunt omnia ista, et quae fuerunt et quae future sunt. et ipsa non fit, sed sic est, ut fuit, et sic erit semper: quin potius fuisse et futurum esse non est in ea, sed esse solum, quoniam aeterna est: nam fuisse et*

futurum esse non est aeternum. (“and where life is that wisdom by which all these things are made, both which have been, and which are to come. And this wisdom is not made; but it is at this present, as it hath ever been, and so shall it ever be: nay rather the terms to have been, and to be hereafter, are not at all in it, but to be now, for that it is eternal.” *Conf. IX, 10*)

The Wisdom (*sapientia*) remain always changeless, Augustine writes, and it is not something that “has been” or “to be here-after”: it is “now”, since the eternity is always the *present*. That is the moment when Augustine shows his complete understanding of time: men’s discourse is “a word that has both a beginning and an ending”, but thy Word “remains in himself for ever without becoming aged, yet and renewing all things”. (*Conf. IX, 10*) By reaching into the *present* with their limited language, Augustine and Monica anticipate the *present-eternity* of God.

The grasp of *present* is the theme that links all books together. We read in the *Confessions* that books One to Eight are used to narrate the pre-conversion moment, while the ninth book is for the ending of all past, and the tenth and eleventh books are for the exploration of time. The final book, a detailed commentary on the *Genesis*, is to appreciate God’s creation of our world within time. Then, books One to Nine represent the past and the end of the past, then the remaining three books focus on the eternal present of God. Why is it so? When Augustine investigates on the nature of time, he comes to know that time is the imitation of eternity. Thus, he says: “Nor do we properly say, there be three times, past, present and to come; but perchance it might be properly said, there be three times: a present time of past things; a present time of present things; and a present time of future things.” (*Conf. XI, 20*) The final book is the vivid example of God’s eternity, which is opposite to the time of creation, which is trapped in temporality.

However, all *present* is actually an illusion. The *present* of Augustine’s conversion can only be represented in the form of the past events: while Augustine was discussing with Monica, and while he was writing down these words, it is already gone. Augustine

has to use as many as nine books to narrate his *present*, while in the remaining three books, he has to abandon the narration of himself in order to achieve the status of “being in the *present*”. This is because, if he were to continue the narration of the self, he cannot get rid of putting himself in the past for the sake of *present*. This paradox is grounded in the “fallen” nature of human language, the temporality of which cannot capture the *present*, and the insubstantiality of which cannot guarantee any substance to human knowledge. To a certain degree, human language twists the reality instead of mirroring it. Therefore, Augustine thinks it necessary to ask for the divine intercession—God’s Word—to guide his writing of the self. Augustine’s narrativity of the self has led us to face our lives unfolding in a series of moments, and if we cannot reach these moments in the *present*, we can never realize the potential that our soul can share in God’s eternal-now narrativity.

Petrarch, on the other hand, skips over the divine intercession, which brings him to face the unsteadiness of human language directly. Through *dum loquimur*, Petrarch realizes that all mortal things are destined to perish, and it is his literary experiences that amplify such a feeling. In Scipio’s dream, his father, after a long speech on Rome’s eternal glory, continued to reveal the swift fading of the mortals. We mortals, though we live in a narrow, limited world, are ambitious to long for immortal fame: “Such folly, though ridiculous, ever fills / your minds. You burn to have your name endure / through all of Time. (*Africa*, II, 525-527) What a ridiculous truth! Then, the old Scipio uncovered the three miserable deaths that the mortals have to go through. The first death, of course, is the death of our body: “But when the light eternal dissipates / all shadows and all dreams, / the wretches then / perceive the truth too late. With vain regret / for wasted years and all that they have lost, / in bitter lamentation they depart.” (*Africa*, II, 520-524) The second death occurs when the living people have entirely forgotten our once-existence: “the years will pass, your mortal form decay; your limbs will lie in an unworthy tomb / which in its turn will crumble, while your name / fades from the sculptured marbles. Thus you’ll know / a second death. (*Africa*, II, 557-561) Although writings and books help to preserve the name of an individual for a certain period, even

the greatest work cannot escape from the fate of destruction: “what serve it all? Books too soon die, / for what with futile art a mortal makes / is also mortal. (*Africa*, II,589-591) Books are susceptible to all kinds of natural or man-made disasters, and even if they could survive all this, “the earth itself / must die and take with it its dying scrolls;” (*Africa*, II,559-600) This pessimistic view is exactly the one expressed in the *Familiars* letters to the ancients. Their lost manuscripts and lost name are examples of Petrarch’s own final destination.

Then what is the use of Petrarch’s preservation of Laura in his poetry? What is the meaning of all his writings and books? As I have discussed before, Augustine and Dante’s way to reach the *present* is to go through conversion and become a new man: “Look, what I *am* is not what I *was* now”. However, when they reach the point of transformation, their writings of the self have end, since the meaning of such a discourse has been fulfilled. However, Petrarch does not want any termination: his way of grasping the *present* is to keep writing. By producing letters continuously, his whole on-going life can as much as possible be transferred into literary continuity, at least as for as this can be done. Just like a live broadcasting, even though there will be a time differences between the reality and the events shown on the screen, they mirror each other. Petrarch’s effort is in using letters to do a live broadcasting of his whole life: when readers read chronologically through his works, they can see his whole life until death stops it. That is why Petrarch is reluctant to commit a conversion. As Freinkel has said, “Petrarch offers the fantasy of perpetual translation, of endless turning.” His endless turning actually fails to complete its turn at all, and instead of making him go in circles without moving forward. This is the Petrarchan loop: always in turning, always trying to commit to the conversion, but never putting an end to the self. In this way, writing grows side by side with the self, constantly mirroring it, reflecting it and recording it. Here I cannot help quoting a passage by Barthes, which is surprisingly applicable to Petrarch:

This book is not a book of “confessions;” not that it is insincere, but because we have a



different knowledge today than yesterday; such knowledge can be summarized as follows:

What I write about myself is *never the last word*: the more “sincere” I am, the more interpretable I am...<sup>304</sup>

Petrarch now should consider a very critical problem: can his refashioning of the self, based on his narrativity, stand firmly in the flow of time and face the danger of death? The burden of confronting one’s mortality and the desire of referring back to one’s life is making Petrarch’s narrative of the self more complicated. For Petrarch, he knows well that to preserve his own self through writing is perilous, because the lifespan of a text is very limited, something that he knows from the lost manuscripts of the ancients that cost him such a great effort to discover and to collect. These illustrious works, when confronting time and space, hardly escape the fate of oblivion—that is, the death. By continuously referring back to his life, Petrarch actually creates a self that is always changing and stateless. Because, while his life is on-going, his past is always in a state of transformation, and his *present* self, relating to the past, can never put an end to itself. Such a statelessness makes Petrarch a wanderer whose identity is hard to define, whose decisions are always on hold and whose attempt to transcend the humanly temporality never stops.

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<sup>304</sup>Quoted from Paul L. Jay, “Being in the Text: Autobiography and the Problem of the Subject”, p.1056, the original text is by Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard, Hill and Wang, 1977, p.120.

## IV. The Crisis of Self in the *Secretum*

### The Opening of the *Secretum*: the Battle between Speaking and Silence

#### The Condition of Conversion: to Break the Silence

The little book titled the *Secretum* is well known for its contradictions and eclecticism in thoughts that swings between Augustinism and Stoicism, and between pagan thought and Christian theology. The suspicious figure, Truth, has called the most attention from Petrarchan scholars, who are mostly interested in probing the significance of the role of Truth and her peculiar silence throughout the three books. Whereas they focus on the silence of Truth, they seem to ignore the temporary silence of Francis and St. Augustine at the opening of the *Secretum* and the meaning behind it, and few have attempted to find out why these two do not have even a word with each other at the beginning of the book. Silence at the opening of the *Secretum* bears more meanings than we might have previously thought: it is a posture that symbolizes the spiritual status, the moral pursuit and the dilemma of Francis when he faces with two ways of life. It is not unjust to say that the temporary silence the two interlocutors enact is an indication for the later arguments between Francis and St. Augustine, revealing a deeper meditation on the value of secular life, on the knowledge of human emotions and on the significance of a new way of *otium*.

Due to the block of conversation between the two interlocutors, the whole opening is divided abruptly in two parts (see the chart below): the conversation between Truth and Francis, and the one between Truth and St. Augustine. Truth, though remaining

silent in the following dialogues, now acts most attentively to promote rhetoric activities without which there might not be a conversation between Francis and Augustine. We can see there are some interesting parallels between the two conversations with Truth:

Francis	St. Augustine
In silence, meditation of human's life and death	In silence, invisible to Petrarch
Appearance of Truth	Appearance of St. Augustine
Introduction of Truth	Introduction of Augustine
Truth has broken the silence of Francis <sup>305</sup>	Truth has broken the silence of Augustine
The conversation between Truth and Francis	The conversation between Truth and Augustine

Silence dominates both interlocutors, making them indulge themselves in deep meditation and thus reluctant of speaking. Francis is portrayed as being lost in thoughts thinking about the “coming and going” of a person into the world “in che modo fossi enutrato in questa vita e come ne sarei dovuto uscire.”<sup>306</sup> Stunned at Truth’s sudden intrusion, Francis seems not to be the one who starts speaking, so he only hears Truth’s voice: “but I did hear her speak”<sup>307</sup>. Although he is suffering from the anxieties produced by such thoughts, he remains silent and let himself drowning in the meditation of death. Analogously, Augustine keeps silent standing beside the Truth. Even at the invitation of Truth, he refuses to speak initially, saying that the presence of Truth makes his humanly rhetoric intervention unnecessary. Persisting in silence, therefore, has

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<sup>305</sup> In the opening, we see that only once Francis speak directly to Truth: in order to ask where she came from. Besides this, there is no direct description of his words.

<sup>306</sup> Francis Petrarca, *Secretum*, a cura di Enrico Fenzi, Mursia Editore, 1992, *Prohemium*, p.95.

<sup>307</sup> Petrarch, *My Secret Book*, p.3.

suffocated their desires for words. Truth is the only one that can connect the two silent individuals.

In describing Truth's endeavor to break the silence, we can see the author uses words like "break" "penetrate" "strike", as if only the violence of language can knock down the heavy wall of silence:

Se ne accorge, e mi concede una breve pausa di silenzio, e poi a poco a poco, ripetutamente, *lo rompe* [break] con le sue parole ...<sup>308</sup>

Moreover, the appearance of visitors is described as a force that interrupts Francis's peaceful life pattern, and our authors says such an appearance penetrates his previous solitude:

Quem postquam sine trepidatione sustinui, dum mira dulcedine captus inhereo, circumspectans an quisquam secum afforet, an prorsus incomitata mee solitudinis abdita *penetrasset*. [penetrate, enter]<sup>309</sup>

The sudden awareness of the saint brings more surprise and violence than joy. After awaking Francis from his dead silence, Truth turns to Augustine, pleading for his speaking. Truth wishes that her voice can be a tool to smash Augustine's wordless impasse:

Rivolta infatti a lui e interrompendone la profondissima meditazione, disse:<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> *Secretum*, p.97.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid*, p.97. "Once I had learnt to bear that light without a tremor, I was happy to stay close to her. I looked around. Was there anyone with her, or had she entered alone into my innermost solitude?" All the English translation of the *Secretum* is from Francis Petrarch, *My Secret Book*, trans. J. G. Nichols, Hesperus Press, 2002, p.3. I am quoting here and some passages in Latin because the original words show more clearly the "violence" and "power" of "speaking", which can help to make my points understood. For the other quotations from the *Secretum*, I still quote in English.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid*, p.96-98. "Turning to him, and breaking in on his profound meditation", p.4.

Quod cum ita sit, passionum expertarum curator optime, tametsi rerum omnium  
iocundissima sit taciturna meditatio<sup>311</sup>

Hearing the wholehearted persuasion of Truth, Augustine eventually agrees to speak to Francis.

However, Augustine's initial words to Francis are nothing more than forcing; upon listening to the saint's voice, Francis considers it as a violent "attack", from which we can estimate what an unpleasant disturbance and even astonishing pain the spoken words of Augustine have brought upon his lake of heart:

Ac ne longuis vager, his ille me primum verbis aggressus (attacked) est.<sup>312</sup>

Not as a comforting curation of the soul, speaking has appeared to be a sharp knife to penetrate the thick blanket of silence, a force that attempts to destroy the stagnant soundlessness and a violence that harshly invades the tedious quietness, activating the desires of speaking in both figures in order to make the following conversations possible. The opening of the *Secretum* witnesses the starting of the battle between speaking and silence:

After receiving the treatment of rhetoric, in the form of conversation with Truth, Francis thinks that he has become more intelligent and is able to stare Truth directly in the face: "Duplex hinc michi bonum provenisse cognovi: nam, et aliquantulum doctor factus sum,"<sup>313</sup> just like Dante the pilgrim whose sight is elevated to a degree that allows him to look at Beatrice's radiant face without needing a veil. The words of Truth, though acts in the form of "destroying", actually elevate the intellect of Francis: the

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<sup>311</sup> *Ibid*, p.98. "So I beg you, who are the best person to heal passions from which you yourself have suffered, I beg you, even though nothing is more agreeable to you than silent meditation",p.4.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid*, p.98 "So, without more ado, here are the first words Augustine spoke to me.",p.5.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid*, p.96. "I recognize now that my benefit from all this was twofold: I became a little wiser",p.4.

eyes of his mind now can allow him to “see” more. The increase of intellect is of much importance because it is the guide of will (*voluptas*) to search for true happiness.

According to Alexander Lee’s analysis, Petrarch puts an enormous emphasis on the role of intellect: Petrarch argues that it is through the activities of intellect, displayed in the form of a *meditation mortis* and the pursuit of self-knowledge, that the will would be motivated to respond and to cooperate with God’s Grace.<sup>314</sup> This confidence in men’s intellect, Lee points out, shows the genealogy of Petrarch’s *Secretum* to Augustine’s early work *De vera religione* more than with any other works. The leading place of the intellect is important because it directly addresses the core of Petrarch’s problem, which is caused by his intentional lingering between monastic solitude/silence and secular fame/speaking. Speaking signifies an intellect for active life, a desire / *voluptas* for the pursuit of fame, while silence refers to an intellect that can act to bring out the religious peace of the soul, symbolizing the solitude and a stilled heart. Thus, intellect is expected to guide Petrarch’s will to make a choice between two kinds of life, which is in turn represented as two *voluptas*: one desire heading towards the earthly happiness, founded upon Petrarch’s literary enterprises, and the other towards the celestial happiness, which, according to Augustine, is realized through the profound meditation of death.

The breaking of silence, having ended Francis’s lingering in meditation, has stirred up his desire to speak: he cannot wait to speak with St. Augustine as soon as he sees him: “Nec tamen ideo tacitus mansissem.”<sup>315</sup> However, just in this critical moment,

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<sup>314</sup> One of the main points of Lee’s argument is that intellect/reason is superior to will in Petrarch’s Augustinian inherited world view. In his book, Lee points out that: “The intellect remains the dominant force in Franciscus’ moral life and continues to direct the will, but does so in co-operation with God’s mercy.”p.95; “While, for Petrarch, a number of St. Augustine’s early writings—including the *Soliloquies* and *De vera religione*—provided inspiration for the view that the intellect was prior to the will, and that the rational pursuit of self-knowledge worked in tandem with the *meditatio mortis* in the search for truth and virtue,”p.108. Alexander Lee, *Petrarch and St. Augustine, Classical Scholarship, Christian Theology and the Origins of the Renaissance in Italy*, Brill, 2012.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid*, p.96. “even though nothing is more agreeable to you than silent meditation, to break that silence with your sacred voice, which I love so much”,p.4.

Truth holds back Francis's question: instead of letting Francis speak directly to the wordless Augustine, Truth herself approaches to the saint. Her sudden disruption has quenched Francis's newly-lit desire of speaking. But what is the intention of her sudden interruption? And why does this happens only in the prologue? We can come up with an interesting assumption: even if Francis speaks to St. Augustine, the saint would not talk to him because he prefers to remain in silence, in his deep meditation. He is not yet ready to release his speech, not until Truth breaks his silence. Similar to Francis's situation, the saint is willing to speak only after Truth has begged him: "tamesti rerum omnium iocundissima sit *taciturna meditation, silentium* tamen istud, ut sacra et michi singulariter accepta voce *discutias* oro."<sup>316</sup> The word *discutias*, together with the word *prorumpens, discutias*("breaking, destroying, scattering"), puts in evidence an antagonistic power competing with another force—that is, silence.

The battle between speaking and silence is complicated and delicate, for all combats and alliances are undertaken in an implicit way, so that only by reading cross-textually, that is, to read side by side the works of Virgil, Seneca, Cicero, Dante and Augustine, can we decode Petrarch's equivalent attitudes towards two ways of life. We first begin with St. Augustine and Truth. Faced with Truth's plea, St. Augustine seems not to be moved at first; instead, he retreats by saying to Truth that: "Tu michi dux, tu consultrix, tu domina, tu magistra."<sup>317</sup> Considering its textual origin, this answer is one of peculiar ambiguity, so much so that the meaning of its wording should be compromised, because it recalls a familiar plot point in Dante's *Inferno* in which Dante first met with Virgil. In the dark, obscure forest, Dante called Virgil his "master". But the role of Virgil is problematic and his authority over the pilgrim is disputed in various ways. During their journey, Virgil, rather than a prestigious, experienced master, acts more like an immature guide: for example, he was seduced by Francesca's gracious, sweet flattering; he did not know how to enter the gate of Dis while an angel could open a gate with a little wane; and he even failed to realize the tricks of Cantaur. His incomplete abilities,

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<sup>316</sup> *Ibid*, p.98.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid*, p.98.

due to his pagan limitation, makes him unable to comprehend Providence. Incapable of guiding Dante to his final destination, Virgil has been replaced by Beatrice upon reaching the heaven. The Virgilian reminiscence that overshadows the character of Truth reveals Augustine's amphibious doubt upon her authority, a sign that reveals how silence endeavors to quell the violence of speaking. This is the first, but not the only "assault" of Augustine towards speaking; in the following dialogues, we can see Augustine continuing to express his suspects towards the function of rhetoric and the language of human beings.

Francis, as if fighting back, has expressed a similar negation towards St. Augustine: their meeting recalls exactly the same infernal episode quoted above when Dante met Virgil. When the pilgrim spotted Virgil in the woods, and even before Virgil began to speak, he described him speaking with a hoarse voice: "dinanzi a li occhi mi si fu offerto/ chi [Virgilio] per lungo silenzio pareo fioco."<sup>318</sup> The *fu offerto* means that Virgil has been there for quite a while but Dante did not see him. In the prologue, Francis also describes Augustine as speaking with Roman accent "*romana facundia gloriosissimi*"<sup>319</sup> before he says any words. Likewise, Francis does not see him even though St. Augustine has actually been in his house for quite a while when he is having a conversation with Truth. Francis uses the way St. Augustine negates Truth as counter arguments to the saint himself. The character of Virgil, serving as a fulcrum, can be turned against or towards the roles in the *Secretum*. While Francis and Truth form an alliance in their rhetoric community, St. Augustine, on the contrary, represents the power of silence.

Unlike the amphibiously antagonism between Truth and Augustine, her relationship with Francis is more intimate. Truth frankly claims that she comes from Petrarch's poetic project—the Africa: "Illa ego sum – inquit – quam tu in Africa *nostra* suriosa

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<sup>318</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, ed. e tra. da Robert M.Durling, introduzione e cura di Ronald L.Martinez e Robert M.Durling, *canto 1*:62-63, p.28.

<sup>319</sup> *Secretum*, p.97.



quadam elegancia descripsisti.”<sup>320</sup> It is with this epic, the most Petrarchan of Petrarch’s works, that Truth relates her holy origin. Notably, when she mentions *Africa*, the poem that wins Petrarch the glory of Laurel, she even considers the epic as “ours” [*nostra*]. Such a manifestation reveals an unneglectable truth that there is an alliance and a sort of corporation between Truth and Francis. Not only Truth has confirmed her identity as a character in Petrarch’s poem, but she praises it as “clarissimam atque pulcerrimam” under the pen of the poet: “cui, non segnius quam Amphion ille dirceus, in extremo quidem occidentis summo que Atlantis vertice habitationem clarissimam atque pulcerrimam mirabili artificio ac *poeticis*, ut proprie dicam, *manibus erexisti*.”<sup>321</sup>

The epic *Africa*, the link between Francis and Truth, is a special piece in Petrarch’s *repertoire*: it is the poem that witnesses most of Petrarch’s secular ambitious. Through *Africa*, he has been crowned to be a poet of glorious Rome—the author on *romanitas* that turns him into a poet that possesses a historical status. Petrarch’s fascination over Rome is never quenched: he refuses the laurel from Paris and insists to the king that he should be crowned in Rome. On Easter Sunday 1342, the coronation took place on the Capitoline Hill: choosing such a particular place and time endows the ceremony with intense significance. Surrounded by the ruins of classical Rome, Petrarch speaks about the revival of classical culture and about the spirit of pre-Christian Rome. Although the ceremony has been held in a traditional medieval procedure, Petrarch is, however, thinking about the renovation of secular Rome. Truth’s notion about *Africa* is actually an announcement of the secular power of speaking.

Nevertheless, the *Africa*, the connection between Francis and Truth, is exactly what St. Augustine makes severe condemnation of. He tries to persuade Francis to abandon it: “Dimittebus Africam, eamque possessoribus suis linque; nec Scipioni tuo nec étibi gloriam cumulabis;”<sup>322</sup> Now we can sense how ironic it is that the saint praises Truth

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<sup>320</sup> *Secretum*, p.96. “‘I am she,’ she replied, ‘whom, with a certain studied elegance, you described in *Africa*, our poem; p.3.

<sup>321</sup> *Secretum*, p.96. “‘ like Amphion at Thebes but far in the west on the highest peak of the Atlas moutains, you raised a famous and beautiful dwelling so skifully, quite literally with the hands of a poet.’”,p.3.

<sup>322</sup> *Secretum*, III, 274. “Abondon Africa to its native inhabitants, since you cannot increase either Scipio’s glory or

as his guide, but later criticizes the work that represents Truth's origin. Referring to the magnificent palace built by Francis's poetical skills, Truth compares his words to the stable and indestructible "ancient wall": "cui, non segnius quam Amphion ille dirceus, in extremo quidem occidentis summoque Atlantis vertice habitationem clarissimam atque pulcerrimam *mirabili* artificio ac poeticis,"<sup>323</sup>. Her praise aims at displaying the stability of Francis's poetics capable of diminishing the effect of time; However, St. Augustine rightly crushes this illusion by saying that: "Vetusta cernenti menia succurrat in primis: «Ubi sunt, quorum illa congesserunt manus?»"<sup>324</sup> Through fighting Truth's words, the saint tries to make his patient to see how feeble his work is, for the highest wisdom should fall in silence.

But Truth's referring to the *Africa* as her origins is problematic. Giuseppe Mazzotta is sharp enough to notice the contradiction about on the one hand, she seems to be an invention of Francis's subjectivity; on the other hand, she has descended from Heaven. Mazzotta takes the claim of "double truth" to mean the existence of a link "binding the two dimensions together: Franciscus and Augustinus, respectively, a modern historical standing-point and a medieval eschatological perspective."<sup>325</sup> It is reasonable that Mazzotta tries to negotiate the two seemingly contradictory points held respectively by Francis and Augustine; nevertheless, an eclectic point cannot conceal Truth's favorable attitude towards human rhetoric. Her origin might be problematic, but her manifestation clearly puts her on Francis's side. It is interesting to note that Petrarch seems to deliberately eliminate the content of conversation between Francis and Truth: readers do not know what they have discussed, and they are only told that after the conversation, Francis found his intellect to be elevated. We might assume that Petrarch's intentional

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your own,"p.90.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid*, p.94. "like Amphion at Thebes but far in the west on the highest peak of the Atlas mountains, you raised a famous and beautiful dwelling so skillfully, quite literally with the hands of a poet.", p.3.

<sup>324</sup> *Secretum* III, p.276. "When you see old city walls you wonder: 'Where have they gone whose hands built these?'"p.91

<sup>325</sup> Giuseppe Mazzotta, "Petrarch's Dialogue with Dante", p.189, in *Petrarch and Dante: Anti-Dantism, Metaphysics, Tradition*, ed. by Zygmunt G. Barański and Theodore J.Cachey, Jr., with the assistance of Demetrio S.Yocum, University of Notre Dame Press, 2009, pp.177-194.

ellipsis is due to the fact that he is reluctant to draw the final conclusion about Truth: neither would he like to depict Truth as a transcendental figure in Augustinian terms — “all truth ends in silence”, nor does he wish to openly associate her with human speech. Therefore, he chooses not to mention what Truth has talked with Francis so that a certain space could be left to accommodate the author’s ambiguity towards the rhetorical enterprises that he associates with moral philosophy.

Petrarch’s setting of Truth actually reveals his inner struggles and hesitations: he admires the monastic life and attentive devotions to God, but he still would like to insist on pursuing the secular fame. This is the same with the Francis of the *Secretum*, who, at the very end of the conversations, chooses to postpone the conversion to God for the sake of the writing of the *Africa*. In a word, for both Truth and Francis, the devotion to God’s eternity does not exclude the possibility of literary pursuit and the connection to the secular world. Now the confrontation has been formed: St. Augustine /silence *versus* Francis and Truth/ Speaking.

## The Battle between Silence and Speaking

The conflicts between silence and speaking, starting from the prologue of the *Secretum*, continue throughout the whole book covering nearly all struggles encountered by Petrarch during these years. Petrarch’s secularization of medieval culture proves to be a way by which he tries to merge two kinds of life: one life aims at solitude, inner peace and silence, while the other life is immersed in secular fame, emotions and in the noisy life of the city that relates it to speaking. It is the confrontation of these two ways of life that puts Petrarch in a constant state of anxiety and restlessness. At the beginning, Francis is not a man of “active life”: indulging himself in the meditation upon death—the essential question of philosophy, he is more likely to remain silent if Truth were not to disturb him. Nevertheless, even after Truth breaks his silence reminding him of their *Africa*, Francis is still reluctant to submit himself to speaking. He has the desire to speak, but the worries and anxieties brought on by death

bears heavily on his mind. However, he finds that meditation cannot bring him happiness and inner peace; on the contrary, although he is secluded, he cannot wipe out his secular desires and leads a Stoic life suggested by the saint—he is unwilling to abandon neither his writing nor his love for Laura.

Francis's initial silence distinguishes him from Boethius, the languishing philosopher. At the beginning of *De philosophiae consolatione*, Boethius wrote: “ond'io /Bagno scrivendo il destro lato e 'l manco.”<sup>326</sup> Unlike Francis who submits himself to silence, Boethius is ready to speak: the philosophical meditation is ready for the rhetorical exit. But for Francis, to speak out is not that easy since he is severely disturbed by his struggling to choose between two ways of life and to justify his writings. His heart is unstilled, and meditation cannot cure his mental suffering but rather puts him in a worse situation: a situation overwhelmed by frustration, desperation has exhausted his confidence. Vulnerable to the thirst for glory, Francis finds that he cannot entirely turn his back on the secular world even though he appreciates the virtue of contemplation and solitude. Keeping silent means Francis has to suffer alone and to find his own way “out”.

The refusal to speak, *i.e.*, silence, is not only about making no sound, but about having no association with others (for instance, Augustine's invisibility to Francis), and about concentrating on the monastic life. Speaking, on the other hand, is not only about “talking” or “sounding”; instead, it is an attitude that promotes rhetoric, and that includes various activities such as writing for an audience, making speeches and reading. It is a way to express the self in a literary way. Thus, the essential difference between silence and speaking, in the context of the *Secretum*, lies in their treatment of rhetoric and human language. Whereas silence tends to banish rhetorical activities that associate with writing and reading, speaking advocates them. For Petrarch, writing is the main method for one to “speak out”: writing about one's self is more or less equal to “speaking to the public and making one's self known”, and Petrarch has well predicted

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<sup>326</sup> Boezio, *De philosophiae consolatione*, ed. and trans. by Claudio Moreschini, K.G. SAUR VERLAG, 2000.

at the very beginning of the *Canzoniere* that, through writing about his love story, he would become the talk of the town. Speaking out makes him “visible” while silence only leads to “invisibility” like in the case of Augustine.

Gur Zak argues that, reading and writing serve as the main methods for Petrarch’s care of the soul (*cura animi*): “the ancient texts should become like remedies written in the soul, forming the reader’s interior self and thus securing the control of reason,”<sup>327</sup> while writing assists him “to overcome the exile by curbing desire and the emotions altogether, using the practices of reading and writing to gain full control over fortune and the passions that depend on it.”<sup>328</sup> Also, Cachey adds: “For Petrarch writing truly became that place in which ‘the man who is without a home finds a place to live.’ His stateless condition inspired in him an ongoing preoccupation with place that fundamentally shaped his life in writing.”<sup>329</sup> Particularly, Zak emphasizes that it is through reading and writing that Petrarch gains a fuller image of his selfhood, thus becoming aware of what is most needed for his soul<sup>330</sup>. He goes on to point out that how Augustine’s suggestions on reading and writing influence Francis: Criticizing Francis’ superficial way of reading the ancients, Augustine asks him to read more attentively so that to let the text leave an imprint on his soul—“habeas velut in animo conscripta remedia”;<sup>331</sup> He also suggests Francis to write meticulous notes of the salutary precepts contained in his readings.

However, we must note that even though Augustine encourages his student to read more deeply, his actual intention is to ask Francis to have a deeper understanding of the reason with which to calm his inner tumult and control his passions and anger. Therefore, Augustine’s emphasis is not on promoting reading, but on acknowledging *reason* as it is presented in the books. Even at the end of the *Secretum*, Augustine still believes that the only way for the cure of soul is to mediate deeply upon death so that

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<sup>327</sup> Gur Zak, *Petrarch’s Humanism and the Care of the Self*, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2010, p.95.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid*, p.95.

<sup>329</sup> Cachey, “Poetry in motion”, p.1.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid*, p.85.

<sup>331</sup> *Secretum*, II, p.192.

one knows that he should pursue heavenly happiness instead of the earthly pleasures. Zak's explanation is more reluctant when it comes to the function of writing. He takes "writing" literally as "taking notes of salutary precepts". Zak's argument that the Augustine of the *Secretum* looks favourably on reading and writing is, in this way, shaky. On the contrary, we see an Augustine who condemns these two rhetoric activities. He pointedly tells Francis that his reading of Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* is no use to him since Francis never puts them into practical use. All he needs is to calm the tumult in his soul. Though reading might be useful in achieving that goal in some way, what is truly important is to control one's *will*. Zak's view may have exaggerated the role of reading in Augustine's perspective. Neither reading or writing is truly approved by the saint, validating the assumption that he is the representative of "silence".

However, both reading and writing should be taken in a broader horizon so that the relationship between human rhetoric and theology, and between eloquence and philosophy can be more clarified. Christian tradition thinks rhetoric to be against Truth, because rhetoric, fitting itself to the demands of different audiences and changing circumstances, lacks in consistency and unity. It deviates people from knowing Truth by drawing them to focus solely on styles and forms while to neglect the ethics behind the texts; whereas Petrarch, as we have discussed before, thinks rhetoric is compatible with theology: "That other discourse deals with God and divine things, this one with God and men; whence even Aristotle says that the first theologians were poets" (*Fam.* X, 4) In this way, Francis is made to oppose the stand of Augustine.

Truth, representing "speaking", is actually the one who saves Francis from his desperate meditation. The poetic language represented Truth is distinguished from both the Christian discourse, characterized with penitent aesthetics, and from the inward, sensitive soliloquy of the Stoics. The penitent aesthetics sees human language as a depraved mimic of God's Word, while the Stoic soliloquy only recognizes the monolithic voice of heart, refusing the participation of other different voices. For Petrarch, speaking can be a rhetorical practice that aims to enter into the world of complexities and transitions in order to establish its own place, to obtain earthly glory

and to find a position for every individual. It confronts directly the problem of self-existence, as suggested by Mazzotta:

What makes active life, and with it poetic practice, superior to the *ascesis* of the contemplatives is that the life of contemplation, notwithstanding the lure of its visionariness, is a simplified, not risky enough perspective on the complex demands of existence. Because ascetic life sees the future as an infinite prolongation of the present, it brings about a foreclosure of time and allows time to flounder in foreshadowed eternity. The poet, on the other hand, by his roaming over the uncharted expanse of the landscape, confronts the contradictory exigencies of history.<sup>332</sup>

For Petrarch, speaking is the core of “active life”, for it owns the power of propaganda and the enchantment of persuasion that can influence the secular world, and, especially, is capable of leading the whole human beings towards true happiness. The power of rhetoric, standing side by side with philosophy, has the capacity to teach people what is real happiness in this world. Philosophy in Petrarch’s humanism aims not for abstract knowledge but for a virtuous way of living and an austere care for the soul. This new definition of philosophy, Zak points out, “blurs the distinction between the realm of philosophy and rhetoric”.<sup>333</sup> Petrarch advocates such active life since it is guided by virtues and moralities: the secularization of Christian culture made by Petrarch attempts to break the dichotomy between active, secular life and contemplative, monastic life. With the revival of classical blood, secular life is led towards the pursuit of virtues and a true knowledge of the self that eventually turns to God. However, it is never easy for Petrarch to justify his own way of “reaching God”; even he himself, at many times, is skeptical about rhetoric: By taking another road instead of the traditional monastic life, he finds himself being stuck in an embarrassed situation: how can he

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<sup>332</sup> Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch*, p.151.

<sup>333</sup> Zuk, *Petrarch’s Humanism and the Care of the Self*, p.80.

persuade himself and others that his secular writings—the praise of Rome and its distinguished people, the love for Laura—can guarantee the right way to God?

A letter written to his brother Gherardo also reveals such an ambiguous attitude towards speaking:

I have made up my mind, O brother dearer to me than light, to put an end to my long silence. But if by chance you believe that this silence indicates a forgetful mind, you are mistaken; I would no more forget you than I would forget myself. So far I feared to interrupt the silence of your novitiate; I knew that you were fleeing tumult, that you loved silence, and indeed that once I began writing I could scarcely stop. This then is an expression of my love for you and my admiration for what you are doing.<sup>334</sup> (*Fam.X*, 3)

Petrarch frankly admits his feverish writing habits: once started, he can barely stop, and in song 125, Petrarch, unable to constrain his linguistic desire, acts like a child:

Come fanciul ch'a pena  
Volge la lingua et snoda,  
Che dir non sa ma 'l più tacer gli è noia,  
Così 'l desir mi mena  
a dire, et vo'che m'oda (*Can. CXXV*, 40-44)

This impulse to write compels him to break his long silence; in return, the behavior of talking about himself has increasingly kindled his desire and aggravated his fever, subjecting him to the entrapment of temporality. Such fever kindled by rhetoric activity is also noted in the canzone XXXVII of the *RVF*, which shows how the poet is thrown into a non-stop circle by his desire of “speaking”:

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<sup>334</sup> Francis Petrarch, *Letters on Familiar matters*, trans.by Aldo S.Bernardo, Vol.III.



Lasso, se *ragionando*(speaking) si rinfresca  
Quell'ardente desio  
che nacque il giorno ch'io  
lassai di me la miglior parte a dietro,  
et s'amor se ne va per lungo oblio,  
chi mi conduce a l'esca  
onde'l mio dolor cresca,  
et perché pria *tacendo*(silence) non m'impetro? (XXXVII, 49-56)

According to Petrarch, it is on the day that he fell inside the bait of Love that this desire was born, but the activity of speaking “*ragionando*” keeps bringing back his ancient desire “*si rinfresca / Quell'ardente desio.*” It is interesting to note that “speaking” is presented as an activity of the intellect/reason, for the word “*ragionando*” means “reasoning”. However, his intellect, instead of leading him to the right road, re-kindles his amorous desire again and again. Fallen to be a victim of Love, Petrarch laments that he has left his soul—the best part of him “*di me la miglior parte*” behind. The separation of soul from its body is, according to tradition of love poem, is the “priority of the lover”, so that his soul can stay beside the loved woman. However, this separation also proves to be a scattered of the self. Realizing such a frustrated fact that “speaking” would cause him so much pain, Petrarch says he should have remained silent and becomes a stone: “*perché pria tacendo*(silence) non m'impetro?”

Despite the pain caused by “speaking”, Petrarch still continues, just like though he says in the letter that he is worried about these secular words might not be appropriate for his converted brother, he insists on citing words and examples from his favorite ancient authors—he does it according to his own taste, not Gherardo's. In a somewhat narcissistic way, he confesses this letter is actually written for his own sake. Obviously, he is reluctant to admit that the biblical rhetoric—the highest principle of which is silence—is superior to the secular one. In this way, Petrarch has challenged the Scripture's exclusive right for hermeneutics and persuasion in Medieval time: he has

cultivated a new land for humanistic rhetoric, that is, one can use writing and reading as the therapy for curing the soul and for knowing the self, which he believes to be the important elements in people's conversion to God.

In the following letter, Petrarch extends his arguments to the relationship between poetry (profane language) and theology (religious language), assuring his brother that they are not antagonistic as they seem at first sight:

In truth, poetry is not in the least contrary to theology. Does this astonish you? I might almost say that theology is the poetry of God. What else is it if not poetry when Christ is called a lion or a lamb or a worm? In Sacred Scripture you will find thousands of such examples too numerous to pursue here. Indeed, what else do the parables of the Savior in the Gospels echo if not a discourse different from ordinary meaning or, to express it briefly, figurative speech, which we call allegory in ordinary language? Yet poetry is woven from this kind of discourse, but with another subject. Who denies it? That other discourse deals with God and divine things, this one with God and men; whence even Aristotle says that the first theologians were poets.<sup>335</sup>(*Fam.* X, 4)

By affirming the significance of the profane language of poetry, Petrarch has justified his way of writing, which further affirms the meaning of a secular poet. In this way, he found an eclectic way to ease the anxieties brought on by his brother's conversion. As is shown in his address to Gherardo, the two brothers, born from the same womb, were not that divergent in the beginning: as young men, they pursued fancy clothes, shoes, indulging themselves in various kinds of social activities and women's love. Thus, it was a great astonishment that the younger brother suddenly abandoned his old way of lavish living and chose to become a monk. His sudden conversion has certainly become a severe condemnation on Petrarch's deliberate lingering in the traces of earthly desires. These earthly desires are fundamentally literary, which can be testified by Augustine's

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<sup>335</sup> *Ibid*, Vol.III.

condemnation of Francis, in which the saints days what impede Francis's final conversion are two chains: the love for a mortal women and the love for glory. However, the two chains that bound Francis are actually one, because in his love for Laura he also aims for earthly glory. Laura is the poetic object that bears his literary ambition. In the Sonnet CCLXXXIX, Petrarch confirms that his motivation for fame is realized through the poetic art, that is, his vernacular writing about love for Laura:

O leggiadre arti et lor effetti degni:

L'un co la lingua oprar, l'altra col ciglio,

Io Gloria in lei, et ella in me virtute! ( *Can.* CCLXXXIX,12-14)

By creating Laura as a transcendental figure of poetics and love, Petrarch has meanwhile created himself as a master who invents this precious ontology.

Thus, to be free from both chains means to stop all writing: the "laude" of Laura, as well as the "laude" of Rome. This is the true meaning of Augustinian silence. It signifies a model of spiritual conversion by retreating from the hustle-bustle and noisy crowds of city life, which can prepare the mind for inner peace. In the *Secretum*, the silence suggested by Augustine combines Christian solitude with Stoic detachment. However, the Augustinian model is not compatible with Petrarch whose lay solitariness is not a suffocating space but rather a vehicle leading to a tranquil land for meditation upon human matters. The Augustinian silence tends to hold a suspicious and even adversarial attitude towards earthly matters, assuming that they will deviate men from God. It is silence that makes St. Augustine invisible at first: refusing to step out of his meditation, he does not want to speak; his wordlessness makes him an *absence* in the drama of prologue—Francis fails to notice his presence even when he is right beside Truth, and his seemingly rational arguments, trying to exclude all considerations about human emotions and sentiments, leave Francis skeptical.

## The Petrarchan Silence: A Humanistic Solitude

Petrarch is reluctant to reduce his solitary life into a mere rational syllogism, neither is he a man of strict philosophy: he would like to be the one who dwells in earthly life, experiencing it by person: “Eloquent writers have written books on this very matter, but none in my opinion has hitherto praised such a life sufficiently... for it abounds in new and countless advantages that are learned not by listening or by reading but only through experiencing” (*Fam.* III,5). Life is like a book of experiences that needs reading, but philosophy in many ways may not grant much weight to such trivial matters. Instead of direct, instant perception, philosophical men prefer abstract, rational perception. Petrarch is obviously not a man of this type. Then what does silence mean to him, if it were not monastic withdraw nor philosophical meditation?

Related to the subject of “silence”, here we can first go to examine two concepts: *solitudo* and *otio*. Petrarch gives a detailed description of them respectively in two books: *De vita solitaria* and *De otio religioso*, and these two words are always used without much careful distinctions. In general, *solitudo* is viewed as the condition of *otio*, and *otio* is regarded as the reward brought by solitary life. However, as Lee has noted, the solitary life described in *De vita solitaria* is different from that in the *De otio religioso* since the *solitudo* in the *Otio* tends to follow the *vacatio* of the Augustinian spirit which promotes a monastic lifestyle that exempts secular desires. The solitary retreat in *De vita solitaria* “is commonly interpreted as a humanistic development of the classical notion of *vita contemplativa*, defined in opposition to the active engagement in civic life, *vita activa*.”<sup>336</sup> Before Lee, scholars used to take Petrarch’s *solitudo* as a faithful tribute to Stoic and Epicurean philosophy; Lee points out that it is not the case: instead of agreeing with all the Stoic and Epicurean, Petrarch always finds fault in them. For example, Petrarch thinks the Stoic *credendum* is all too “un-

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<sup>336</sup> Lee, *Petrarch and St. Augustine, Classical Scholarship, Christian Theology and the Origins of the Renaissance in Italy*, p.161.

humanistic” because it demands to transcend human nature.<sup>337</sup> Lee continues to develop his views by finding sources from *De vera religione* and *Soliloquies*: he argues that, for example, Petrarch described the condition of unhappy city dwellers is “following St. Augustine’s argument in the *De vera religione*, he makes it clear that this confusion is centred upon a failure to recognise the foolishness if seeking contentment in the worldly.”<sup>338</sup> Lee is right about confirming the differences and affinities between Petrarch’s *solitudo* and St. Augustine’s, however, he seems to neglect one very important element that distinguishes Petrarch’s *solitudo* both from that of the Stoic and Epicurean and from that of St. Augustine, that is, the practical power of rhetoric and its attitude towards worldly matters. Let us go into a deeper analysis of the Petrarchan solitary life.

First of all, it is a lay solitude. Such solitude, contrary to the monastic solitude, does not enclose Petrarch from the secular world, but rather places him in the centre of moral and cultural revolutions of society.<sup>339</sup> In Petrarch’s view, the convent is not an absolutely safe harbour because the soundness of this type of life actually makes the monks more vulnerable to the outside seductions. Petrarch himself has already implicitly mentions in his letter to Gherardo, in which he says:

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<sup>337</sup> Lee has given readers a few examples on how Petrarch refuted Seneca’s and Quintilian’s view on solitary life. For instance, Petrarch disagreed with Seneca’s suggestion that Lucilius should avoid not only the many, but even individuals. *Ibid*, p.183

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid*, p.193. Lee also points out that Petrarch’s understanding of eloquence is inherited from *De doctrina christiana*: “This image of eloquence as *τεχνη* used for Christian purposes and founded upon a personal understanding of truth which could be recovered through reading echoes an identical belief underpinning Augustine’s treatment of homiletic rhetoric in the *De doctrina christiana*.”p.325.

<sup>339</sup> Susanna Barsella, “Boccaccio, Petrarch and Peter Damian: Two Models of Humanist Intellectual”, *MLN* Vol. 121, No. 1, *Italian Issue* (Jan., 2006), pp. 16-48. “The lay solitary wanders through the vicissitudes of life because he is not a hermit devoted to the contemplation of God. Although living in isolation and only comforted of few friends, his efforts aim at an earthly goal, which he pursues through morally exemplar life and the production of works useful to the ethical reform of society.”, p.30.

every sound terrifies the inexperienced soldier (*militiam inexpertum strepitus omnis exanima*), but no noise upsets the soldier hardened by battle. The new sailor is horrified by the first murmur of the winds, but the experienced helmsman who has so often led his battered and disarmed ship into port looks down haughtily at the stormy waters. (*Fam. X*, 3)

The complicated matters of everyday life, the tangled, delicate sentiments of people, and the conflicts generated by various desires, have articulated an intricate web that tangles everyone. Human beings are destined to experience them, and those who have little life experiences will be terrified by the complexity of existence which is most closely related to every individual. We have noted that Petrarch has just said that his brother loves silence and “fleeing from tumult” [*fugere te strepitum*]; he is the one who is frightened by the “sounds”.

The fragility of monastic solitude, cutting from the external world for the sake of mental tranquility, fails to fulfil Petrarch’s ambition of cultural renovation. In this way, Petrarch’s solitude, though drawn much from the classical spirit, is fundamentally different from that of the Stoics which promotes a life of absolute isolation, excluding as much as possible the contact with others. He disagrees with the notion that solitude is equal to isolation<sup>340</sup> by contending that a solitary life should be a peaceful retreat from the city into the countryside dedicated to salutary reading and writing, with a company of a few close friends who also appreciate such a life. Petrarch’s view of solitude is more human:

Solitude must be temporary, for the man of *litterae* must place his wisdom at the service of the community. This eventual engagement of the solitary man in the active life distinguishes Petrarch and Boccaccio’s civic ideals of the poet-educator.<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> *De vita solitaria*, Z I, v,3.

<sup>341</sup> Barsella, “Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Peter Damian: Two Models of the Humanist Intellectual”, p.26.

The monks' refusal to confront the living complexities cannot convince Petrarch that their way of life is superior to his own; rather he insists that it is not the *solitudo loci* (place) but the inner calm of mind that matters.<sup>342</sup>

Also, the Petrarchan solitude is characterized by its preference for worldly matters. Admittedly, Petrarch admires a contemplative life that exempts desires and worldly pleasures: he appreciates Stoic life for its independence of will and its coolness of reason. He also appreciates the contemplative life promoted by Augustine and his followers who choose to devote themselves to God and nothing else. Reason and religious devotion, to Petrarch, are superior to secular pursuits. However, despite this recognition, Petrarch still chooses to stay secular: his solitude is not like the “cold” Stoic nor like “passionate” Augustinian.

Secondly, Petrarch's solitude is not opposite to rhetoric but rather confirms its role in the practice of moral philosophy. This is the most distinguished facet of Petrarch's solitude. Residing in solitude—“being in silence” is not a goal, but a way to cultivate one's virtue,<sup>343</sup> it is a practical application of the moral philosophy promoted by the author himself. The enchantment of rhetoric, as argued by Barsella, can inspire men's hearts and enable them to comprehend more about God's truth: “it does not linger in the abstract speculation of the causes, but researches the principles of human actions; its goal is the knowledge of what makes a man good and useful to the others.”<sup>344</sup> The way to practice moral philosophy is “speaking”—to use rhetoric to encourage and to move people to follow true virtues.

His new definition of “moral philosophy” also contributes to new thoughts on rhetoric, which says that a qualified philosopher should also be a good orator who knows well the art of words. For Augustine, all rhetoric should serve to reveal God's

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<sup>342</sup> In *De vita solitaria*, Petrarch argues that there are three types of solitude: *solitudo loci* (place), *solitudo temporis* (time) and *solitudo animi* (mind): “Triplex, nempe, si rite complector, solitudo est”, Z, II, iii.

<sup>343</sup> Francis Petrarca, *Invective contra medicum*, II, 83: “Via sunt nempe, non terminus, nisi errantibus ac vagis quibus nullus est vite portus.”

<sup>344</sup> Barsella, “Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Peter Damian: Two Models of the Humanist Intellectual”, p.30.

Providence, uncovering the veil of abstract truth; for Petrarch, the purpose has become very particular and practical: the main goal of rhetoric is to kindle the desire for morality and virtue among ordinary people, guiding them towards the right road. The two orators that Petrarch admires most are Cicero and Cato, both of which agree that rhetoric should not be separated from virtue and Highest Wisdom, “a good story is often one which has a moral.”<sup>345</sup> According to Cato, an orator should be a good man that speaks well; while Cicero thinks that the nature of rhetoric is to speak with skill and wisdom.<sup>346</sup> Petrarch himself also says: “If therefore you are seeking the title of orator and the true honor of eloquence, give your attention first of all to virtue and wisdom”<sup>347</sup> In another letter to Gherardo, Petrarch tries to explain the etymology of the word “*poetes*” in order to explain that rhetoric is not excluded from preaching the spirit of God. He relates it to the praise of God “lest their praise remain mute, they determined to appease the divinity with high-sounding words and to bestow sacred flattery on the divinity in a style far removed from common and public speech” (*Fam. X, 4*). Thus, the origin of Christianity is related to the action of breaking the “silence”—not letting the Word of God remain mute. He exclaims that whatever Scriptural words or vernacular words, they are just different methods conducive to truth: “To praise food served in an earthen vessel while feeling disgust at the same meal served on a golden platter is a sign either of madness or hypocrisy. To thirst for gold is a sign a greed; to be unable to tolerate it is a sign of the petty mind” (*Fam. X,4*).

Leading to “speaking”, the Petrarchan solitude anticipates a practical effect upon the world of men, and the Petrarchan *otium* is a productive leisure that casts its great concern on the worldly matters. The Augustinian dichotomy of “philosophy and rhetoric” has been overcome, to a certain degree, by Petrarch who endeavors to discover the compatibility and harmony between them: rhetoric can help people to interpret the

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<sup>345</sup> *My Secret Book*, “Introduction”, p.xii.

<sup>346</sup> (*De remediis utriusque fortuna*), I, ix; (Rotterdam, 1649), 31-32; cit. in Jerrold E. Seigel, “Ideals of Eloquence and Silence in Petrarch”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Apr. - Jun., 1965), p.158.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid*, p.158



obscure philosophic doctrines because it can present people with vivid and touching descriptions. This character makes the Petrarchan philosophy (if there is one) different from the arid, recondite scholasticism which only prefers abstract concepts, doctrines and deductions.

Exclaiming that eloquence is not contracted to philosophy, Petrarch, at the same time, declares that such a stereotype is due to the unjust use of rhetoric by its people. He blames those city men who use eloquence in a wrong way: they go about cities delivering speeches about virtue and vice but they do not actually practice what they are promoting. All they pursue is the splendid style of rhetoric, the people's applause and the glory but not Truth itself. Therefore, as he put in the mouth of St. Augustine, Petrarch writes:

Certainly the chatter of intellectuals will never stop: it abounds in such brief definitions and prides itself on providing material for never-ending disputes. Yet for the most part they do not really understand what they are talking about...Why do you ignore things, and grow old among mere words? Why do you dwell upon childish absurdities when your hair is white and your foreheads wrinkled?<sup>348</sup>

With a such unsteady, limited tool as language, men could never be able to reach the heights of God's Word. As the saint has warned: "You will be ashamed of wasting so much time on striving for perfect eloquence – something which is impossible to achieve."<sup>349</sup> His berated attitude is consonant with Petrarch's condemnation of orators in *De vita solitaria*; In the eyes of Petrarch, those tricky orators hate silence, they love the noisy, turbulent city life:

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<sup>348</sup> *Secretum*, I, p.124: "ista quidem dyaleticorum garrulitas nullum finem habitura, et diffinitioum huiuscemodi compendiid scatet et immortalium litigiorum materia gloriatur: plerunque autem, quid ipsum vere sit quod loquuntur, ignorant...Quid, obliti rerum, inter verba senescitis, atque inter pueriles ineptias albicantibus comis et rugosa fronte versamini."

<sup>349</sup> *Secretum*, p.148. "Pudebit tantum temporis consumpsisse in eam rem, quam et assequi impossibile, et assecutam esse vanissimum sit."

It is a peculiar characteristic of orators that they take pleasure in large cities and in the press of the crowd, in proportion to the greatness of their own talents. They curse solitude, and hate and oppose silence where decisions are to be made.<sup>350</sup>

Thus, he urges that the promotion of morality and virtue should fall on the shoulders of philosophers instead of orators. It is not rhetoric itself, but the way orators use it that provokes Petrarch, who criticizes orators' use of rhetoric for the purpose of trivial glory. In order not to let orators' verbal tricks fool people, Petrarch encourages true philosophers to train themselves with rhetorical skills so that they can compete with those "fake" ones: "leave the healing or influencing of the mind to real philosophers and orators."<sup>351</sup>

True philosopher, according to Petrarch, should abandon the city life and search for solitude. He puts into the mouth of Francis the following words to express his dislike of the city life:

Who has any idea of what I suffer daily in the gloomiest and most unruly city on earth, a bottomless choking cesspit overflowing with the filth of the whole world? Who could describe the nausea which raises at every step I take? All this wounds the feelings of those who are used to better things, destroying their peace of mind and interrupting any worthwhile pursuits.<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> *De vita solitaria*, 341.

<sup>351</sup> Francis Petrarca, *Le Senili[Libri I-VI]*, III, 8; traduzione e cura di Ugo Dotti, Aragno, 2004. The English translation is from Francis Petrarca, *Letters of Old Age*, Vol. I, trans. by Also S. Bernardo, Saul Levin and Reta A. Bernardo, Italica Press, 2014. "curare animos aut movere philosophis veris atque oratoribus linquite." p.80

<sup>352</sup> *Secretum* II, p.190. "Quis vite mee tedia et quotidianum fastidium sufficienter exprimat, mestissimam turbulentissimamque urbem terrarum omnium, angustissimam atque ultimam sentinam et totius orbis sordibus exundantem? Quis verbis equet que passim nauseam concitant: graveolentes semitas, permixtas rabidis canibus obscenas sues, et rotarum muros quatientium stridorem aut transversas obliquis itineribus quadrigas;...Que omnia et sensua melioribus assuetos conficiunt et generosis animis eripiunt quietem et studia bonarum artium interpellant."

Although Petrarch is disgusted with city life and its foolish crowd, he has never thought of excluding himself from this society. For him, knowing Truth is not enough; one should take actions to change the current situation. During the practice of rhetoric for the purpose of achieving virtue, slowly will come glory, which is a reasonable result and recognition for his deeds. Actually, Petrarch himself frankly admits that personal glory is one of the motives of his literary endeavors:

Let this one truth suffice: that the desire for glory is innate not merely in generality of men but in greatest measure in those who are of some wisdom and some excellence. Hence it is that although man philosophers have much to say in contempt of glory, few or none can be found who really condemn it. Which is shown most clearly by the fact that “they have inscribed their names at the beginning of the very works they have written in contempt of glory,” as Cicero says in the first book of the *Tusculans*.<sup>353</sup>

It is hard to define whether glory is the purpose or the result of practicing rhetoric in Petrarch, so it is unreasonable to avoid receiving glory for the practice of rhetoric. From our arguments above, we can see that Petrarch’s attitude towards rhetoric and human language is very cautious, swinging between opposing and approving. Following the medieval tradition, he insists (and he also believes) that eloquence is certainly inferior to God’s Word but rhetoric can equally serve to reveal truth as Scriptural language used by the church. Despite of the inconsistency and unsteadiness of human rhetoric, it has a practical power that may not be possessed by religious language. For Petrarch, rhetoric can be used to express falsehood, but its power to stimulate people to follow virtue cannot be compromised:

Further more, how much help eloquence can be to the progress of human life can be

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<sup>353</sup> Ernest H. Wilkins, “Petrarch’s Coronation Oration”, p.1245, *PMLA*, Vol.68, No.5, 1953, pp.1241-1250.

learned both in the works of many writers and from the example of daily experiences.

How many people have we known in our time who were not affected at all by past examples of proper speech, but them, as if awakened, suddenly turned from a most wicked way of life to be the greatest modesty through the spoken words of others!

(*Fam.* I, 9)

True eloquence, in humanistic perspective, should guide man toward virtue and morality, not mislead them down to vicious matters. Petrarch satirizes those orators as being: “the doctor who helps the sick man with his advice, however, is not always healthy, and he has often died of the same malady from which he had freed many others.”<sup>354</sup> For him, retreating from the city life is required if one wishes to nurture virtue and a good mind; nevertheless, he is also responsible for communicating the virtue to others while leading a solitary life:

and if through its own power our mind could *silently* display its good traits without the support of words, great toil would yet be necessary for the sake of those with whom we live. For without doubt, our conversations would be of great assistance to their minds.

(*Fam.* I, 9)

It is not right both for the orators who merely boast about virtue but do not practice it and for the true philosophers who live a virtuous life but remain silent in speaking out what true virtue is. This is what Petrarch really means when he emphasizes that “The care of the mind calls for a philosopher, while the proper use of language requires an orator. We must neglect neither one” (*Fam.* I,9). In a word, solitude provides a way for one to obtain Truth and lead a virtuous life, but it does not end here; rather, it eventually leads to rhetorical practices in good will—that is, to use eloquence to communicate to others what philosophers obtain through solitude.

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<sup>354</sup> *De vita solitaria*, Z I, iii,2: “Sed non statim sanus est medicus, qui consilio egrum iuvat, quin eodem sepe morbo, quo multos liberaverat, interiit.”, the English quotation is from Lee’s *Petrarch and St. Augustine*, p.305.

Petrarch himself expresses a similar view: in the speech for his coronation, he says that he writes poetry for three reasons: first, the honor of the Republic; second, the charm of personal glory, and third, the stimulation of other men to a like endeavour.<sup>355</sup> Stimulated by rhetoric—writing, reading or making speeches, people’s interest in virtue would be activated. For him, the praise of eloquence is not vice since eloquence and philosophy are not in contradiction with each other, although eloquence seems to lack consistency and is always changing; however, “the stylistic devices appropriate to eloquence serve to distinguish the one from the other, and responded to the demands of changing audiences, but did not compromise the theoretical harmony of their relationship as long as each discipline was properly conducted.”<sup>356</sup> To focus on those abstract, obscure doctrines alone is not enough; one should get involved with common human lot and experience humanly emotions: happiness, sadness, anger, erotic... Only when one understands the feeling of being a man—the comprehension of emotions of living, can he understand how to be a good man, as well as a qualified citizen under God.

Another sin that St. Augustine accuses Francis of is *accidia*, a desperate emotion and a loss of confidence in the faith in God. *Accidia*, considered as one of the seven deadly sins, is a very complex term that denotes a mental state of sadness, boredom, pessimism and desperation. St. Thomas regarded *accidia* as “tristitia de spirituali bono”<sup>357</sup>, since it does not love God’s creations as is fitting. Such despair is well discussed in *De otio religioso* in which Petrarch writes that, even though a man has faith in God, he may still doubt his capacity to receive Grace, especially under the whims of arbitrary *fortuna*:

This is not because anyone entirely doubts the power of God—unless he is mad—but because man distrusts his own merit and does not dare wish or hope for as much as he sees freely granted to him without his having asked and therefore, comparing the magnitude of

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<sup>355</sup> Petrarca, “Petrarch’s Coronation Oration”, p.1244.

<sup>356</sup> Lee, *Petrarch and St. Augustine*, p.294.

<sup>357</sup> The detailed discussion of *accidia* is found in *Summa Theologica*, II-II, qu. 35.

the heavenly blessing with his own unworthiness, he begins to ask himself whether his happiness is real, or whether he is deceived by an illusion and as it were some blessed dream.<sup>358</sup>

It is interesting to note that in the *Secretum*, even Augustine himself had a tendency of *accidia*. It is seen how St. Augustine reminded Francis what a miserable creature man is:

Look at him when he is born, naked and unformed, crying and wailing, taking comfort from a little milk, quivering and crawling, needing other people's help, nourished and clothed by what we take from dumb animals; with a frail body, and an unquiet mind, subject to various diseases, a prey to innumerable passions, without understanding, wavering between joy and sadness, impotent of will, unable to restrain his appetites; ignorant of what or how much he needs, with no measure in his eating and drinking; obtaining only with great labour that nourishment which is so freely available to the other animals; drugged with sleep, bloated with food, overcome by drink, worn out with watching, reduced by hunger, parched with thirst; greedy and fearful, loathing what he has, lamenting what he has lost; worried about the present, and the past, and the future, all at the same time; proud in his wretchedness, and yet conscious of his frailty; lower than the lowest worm; with a short life; uncertain how short that life will be; whose fate is fixed, and who has so many ways to die.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>358</sup> De otio religioso, I,5: "non quia de potentia Dei quisquam omnino, nisi amens, dubitet, sed quia de suo merito diffidit homo neque tantum vel optare audeat vel sperare, quantum sibi ultro videt impensum, ideoque magnitudinem beneficii celestis cum indignitate sua conferens hesitare incipit secumque disquirere vera ne Felicitas sua sit, an prestigio et velut beato quodam somnio eludatur,?" The passage and its English translation is quoted from Lee's Petrarch and St. Augustine, Classical Scholarship, Christian Theology and the Origins of the Renaissance in Italy, p.129.

<sup>359</sup> Secretum, p.164. "Aspice nudum et informem inter vagitus et lacrimas nascentem, exiguo lacte solandum, tremulum atque reptantem, opis indigum aliene, quem muta pascunt animalia et vestiunt; 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 animalibus in aperto posita, multo labore conquerenda sunt; quem

His description is consonant with the quotation from *De otio religioso*, and both quotations focus on men's unworthiness and fragility compared to the greatness of God. Augustine's remark makes Francis feel sorry for being a human being. This pessimistic view on mankind is not entirely owned to the medieval tradition, but also incorporates the Stoics' pessimism on human nature.

However, the *accidia* discussed in *De otio religioso* and the despair of Augustine towards human nature are at variance with Francis's own *accidia*. The saint is right about Francis's lacking a firm confidence in God's salvation; however, he fails to appreciate Francis's endeavors to meditate on the tumults caused by *fortuna*, and he neglects Francis's attempt to combine his literary activities with the salvation of God. In fact, the Petrarchan *accidia* is more of a "humanistic vice" caused by "reflection on *fortuna* and the instability of the *humana conditio*."<sup>360</sup> Faced with the strokes of *fortuna*, Francis, instead of doing nothing, chooses to do something with his pen. Caught up between desperation and grace,<sup>361</sup> Petrarch endeavors to insist in his solitude and leisure as a practical program for his moral philosophy and Christian ethnics:

Part of this universe was under the control of fortune; the whole universe was in the hands of Divine Providence; nevertheless, fortune, at least as far as man initially experienced it and was able to comprehend it, seemed to operate independently of God. Somewhere caught between his divine destiny and his fortune was the individual man. Man never could master his fortune; at the most he could remedy it. By remedying it man drew closer to God and his heavenly destiny.<sup>362</sup>

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somnus inflat, cibus distendit, potus precipitat, vigilie extenuant, fames contrahit, sitis arefacit; avidum timidumque, fastidientem possessa, perdita deplorantem et presentibus simul et preteritis et futuris anxium; superbientem inter miserias suas et fragilitatis sibi conscium; vilissimis vermibus imparem, vite brevis, etatis ambigue, fati inevitabilis, ac mille generibus mortis expositum."

<sup>360</sup> Siegfried Wenzel, "Petrarch's Accidia", p.46, in *Studies in the Renaissance*, Vol.8, 1961, pp.36-48.

<sup>361</sup> Charles Trinkaus, *In our Image and Likeness, Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, The University of Chicago Press, 1970, vol. I, "Petrarch: Man between Desperate and Grace".

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid*, p.4.

Thus, it is not a medieval depression or classical *tristitia*, but an emotion that puts on the colours of Petrarch's personal experiences and of his grief in facing the unsteadiness and tumult caused by *fortuna*.

The Petrarchan silence, as we have argued, is less pessimistic than the Christian or the Stoic. Although *De vita solitaria* values the importance of solitude, it equally values an active life:

there was no activity "happier, more worthy of man, or more like to God than to save and help as many other people as possible. He who can do this and doesn't seem to me to reject that noble duty of man, and therefore to lose his human nature and the name of humanity."<sup>363</sup>

No wonder St. Augustine severely questions the purpose of his solitary life, because he might have sensed Petrarch's ultimate goal aiming for the secular world. The saint says: "Your leisure, your solitude, your indifference to so many human affairs, and those studies of yours all have glory as their goal."<sup>364</sup> It is the glory and the ambition for the fabric of self that has opened a new humanistic dimension within the medieval context of *accidia*, subjecting it to his literary enterprises.

Despite Petrarch's favouring of rhetoric, he is not a man blind to its negative sides of rhetoric, nor he is a man who makes an uncritical celebration of eloquence as his classic predecessors. Seldom could the unification and conformity be found in his opinions about rhetoric and eloquence: although Petrarch holds a constant enthusiasm for literature, he admits that in the years of his maturity, he gives up the study of poetics and classical literature, turning himself to moral philosophy and the works of the Christian Fathers: "Now my orators shall be Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory,

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<sup>363</sup> *De vita solitaria*, ed. G. Martellotti, in Petrarca, *Prose*, 322.

<sup>364</sup> *Secretum*, p.168. "ad quam otium, solitudo, incuriositas tanta rerum humanarum, atque ista tua te perducunt studia, quorum usque nunc finis est gloria.", p.39.



my philosopher shall be Paul and my poet David...” (*Fam*, XXII, 10). In his letter to Gherardo, he mildly criticizes his brother’s narrowness of mind for excluding poetry. He surely knows that the verbal enchantment can kindle the passions within human beings that stimulates the desire for virtue and for a better life, but he is sharply sensitive to language’s empty, vague nature, which may reduce it to a game between signifier and signified. At many times, its incapacity and insubstantiality is deeply felt especially when it is not able to express many things and concepts accurately:

Something to make you blush even more is that in ordinary everyday matters your language has often failed to meet the demands of things you consider beneath you. How many things there are in nature which have no names to be called by. Again, how many there are which do have their own names, and yet human speech is unable to reveal the worth of these things to someone who has not already come across them. How often have I myself heard you complain, how often have I seen you silent and indignant because neither your tongue nor your pen was able to express fully what was clear in your mind!<sup>365</sup>

Also, the distance between history and fable, as well as between the literary fabric of the self and the real self, caused by the insubstantiality of language can never be eliminated. Lee has argued that Petrarch neither sees eloquence and philosophy as contradictory enemies, nor does he boasts that eloquence should be placed above philosophy; rather, Lee contends that Petrarch finds a harmonious relationship between them. Nevertheless, despite Lee’s display of affinity between Petrarch and Augustine on the subject of rhetoric, we cannot deny that Augustine’s ultimate attitude is negative

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<sup>365</sup> Secretum, p.146. “Et hoc quidem sepe tibi contigit in rebus quotidianis atque vulgaribus, quo magis erubesceris, quas tuo inferiores arbitrabaris eloquio eas te verbis equare nequivisse. Quam multa sunt autem in rerum natura, quibus nominandis proprie voces desunt; quam multa preterea que, quanquam suis vocabulis discernantur, tamen ad eorum dignitatem verbis amplectendam ante ullam experientiam sentis eloquentiam non pervenire mortalium. Quotiens ego te querentem audivi, quotiens tacitum indignantemque conspexi, quod que clarissima cognituque facillima essent animo cogitanti, ea nec lingua nec calamus sufficienter exprimeret!”

towards eloquence: the saint insists that the expression of the self should move from speech to silence, from outward to inward, and *veritas in silentio* is always the highest norm for Augustine.

It is the practical power of rhetoric that makes Petrarch willing to undertake such dangerous task: avoiding the temptations of language while applying it to the service of God. Whereas Petrarch wishes to not only care for his own soul; he is, to a certain degree, ambitious to advocate virtues among the public. His emphasis on “outwards” leads to the credence on eloquence as a voice for propaganda and for communication of virtue among people, making it vivid and effective in men’s lives. This is at variance with the Augustinian *soliloquy* that eventually sinks into *silentio*: while Augustine’s *Confessions* has a monolithic voice heard in the garden of Milan, Petrarch’s works of failed conversions tend to have sparse and various voices that are always in tension and conflict.

## Struggles between Silence and the Pursuit for Glory

The debates at the opening of *Secretum* will continue, and more conflicts will be fermented as the conversations proceed. It is seen that Francis’s struggle between speaking and silence is the main reason for his postponed conversion in the third book. Jerrold E. Seigel believes that even though there might be different interpretations of the silence in the works of Petrarch, it mostly relates to his suspicious on rhetoric.<sup>366</sup> Silence traditionally symbolizes a contemplative life, but in Petrarchan texts, it also displays an absence of action and a lack of affirmation. “The Ascent of Mount Ventoux” is a good example: Petrarch’s peculiar silence on the peak of Mount Ventoux is similar to Augustine’s initial silence in the room of Francis, both of which show a suspicious reluctance to speak. Robert Durling makes a comparison between Petrarch’s conversion with that of Augustine in the garden and he finds the Petrarchan conversion appears to

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<sup>366</sup> Seigel, “Ideals of Eloquence and Silence in Petrarch”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, p.158.

be opposing to the Augustinian one,<sup>367</sup> but what makes Petrarch's behaviour so unusual is his sudden silence. Instead of speaking out loud about what he reads to his companion like St. Augustine did, he chooses to keep silent and does not even want to talk with his brother.<sup>368</sup> Actually Petrarch is not only silent himself, but he make his brother "silent", too. During the way back down, Petrarch does not mention Gherardo again, as if he has been left on the peak forever. The wordlessness of Gherardo makes him entirely absent from the plot—he cannot hear his own augury; neither can he speak a word. The rest of "Mount Venteux" has become a monodrama of Petrarch's psychological description. Silence leads to invisibility, to the absence of the self, and to the disappearance from readers.

During the climb, Petrarch has emphasized how different his way of life is from his brother's: becoming a monk, Gherardo seems to have chosen a difficult and rapid route, while Petrarch an easy but deviating road. The difficult route requires one to abandon earthly glory and sensual desires so that he can devote himself entirely to Good. There is no place for applause and laurel in such a silent life. Petrarch's difficulty in making choices is mostly reflected in the personage Francis, who, faced with Augustine's questioning, explains that: "I am not abandoning it: I'm just deferring it for a while."<sup>369</sup> , and he postpones conversion for his literary enterprises:

I'm inclined to think that the glory which one may hope for down here should be pursued while one remains down here. The other, the greater glory, is to be enjoyed in heaven, and no one who gets there will be interested in earthly glory any more. I think therefore that the natural order is this: among mortals a care for mortal things comes

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<sup>367</sup> Robert M. Durling, "The Ascent of Mt. Ventoux and the Crisis of Allegory", pp.19-22.

<sup>368</sup> Reading in silence is a common thing for us; however, Mazzeo has confirmed that "It was only in the late Empire that silent reading began to come into existence, and it seems to have remained an exceptional practice throughout the Middle Ages. There is abundant evidence that medieval *scriptoria* were noisy places filled with the sounds of the copyists reciting their texts." Joseph Anthony Mazzeo, "St. Augustine's Rhetoric of Silence", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Apr. - Jun., 1962), pp. 175-196.

<sup>369</sup> *Secretum* III, p. 264. "Haud equidem destituo; sed fortassis differo.", p.86

first; then immortal things take their place.<sup>370</sup>

It is not easy for him to abandon the writing of the praise of Rome, because such writing, besides the achievement of personal glory, shoulders an important task to revive the classic culture of ancient Rome. His writing through speaking out Rome's ancient glory, not only makes Rome re-know herself but also makes people of his age and Rome's descendants recognize her uniqueness both in culture and in history. Just as Francis has claimed, his love for Laura is an alternative way to heaven, Petrarch tries to justify his own ambiguity by the two roads. The glory of his work is the secular representation of the praise for God's Grace, the vernacular propaganda of virtues and the poetic revelation of Truth. The contrasts between clergy and lay men are solvable since their differences are not of essence but only of degree:

If this distinction between having faith and leading the life of a member of the regular clergy tends to be blurred, it could mean either that only the professional 'religious' was a true Christian and man of the faith or, on the other hand, that the layman could be just as much a man of faith except more exposed to the world's dangers and distractions.... The privileged and special position of sanctity and merit granted to the religious in medieval Catholicism was being diluted and that the difference between layman and regular clergy was becoming one of degree, or lesser degree.<sup>371</sup>

The mitigation of divergences between clergy and layman has fermented a tendency towards the internalization of faith which begins to focus more on personal spiritual status rather than on external procedures and customs—the religious rituals, the priesthood, *etc.* The inward turning draws more attention to the individual and his self,

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<sup>370</sup> Ibid, p.266. "Eam enim, quam hic sperare licet, gloriam hic quoque manenti querendam esse persuadeo ispe michi; illa maiore in celo fruendum erit, quo qui pervenerit, hanc terrenam ne cogitare quidem velit. Itaque istum esse ordinem, ut mortalium rerum inter mortales prima sit cura."p.87.

<sup>371</sup> Charles Trinkaus, "Humanist Treatises on the Status of the Religious: Petrarch, Salutati, Valla", *Studies in the Renaissance*, Vol. 11 (1964), p.19.

and the under-veil collective community begins to shed light on single members. Petrarch knows clearly that his solitary life will eventually lead back to secular life, with the aim to promote and communicate virtue to people. Temporary withdrawal is a nutrition of the soul that helps the pursuit and propaganda of virtue. He also wishes to continue his writing of *Africa*, so that he can leave to the descendants the glory and praise of ancient Rome. He wishes the glory of Rome will not be swallowed by the erosion of time under his literary endeavours. Rather than keeping himself in silence, Petrarch would like to speak out—not only for himself but for Rome.

In fact, St. Augustine is mistaken at first when he tries to persuade Francis to think deeply about death because Francis has already been thinking about this matter day and night: “I was lost in thought, considering as I often do the way in which I came into this world and the way in which I must leave it,”<sup>372</sup> It is this thinking that makes him realize the mortality and fragility of human being that further pushes him to search for eternal glory:

Morta colei che mi faccia parlare  
et che si stave de'pensier miei in cima,  
non posso, et non ò più sì dolce lima,  
rime aspre et fosche far soave er chiare.(*Can.* CCXCIII, 5-8)

In order to triumph over mortality, Francis feels the urgency to create a work that is immortal. Therefore, the more St. Augustine mentions men's mortality, the more Francis would like to continue his writing: the medicine of Augustine's rhetoric, therefore, proves to be useless for Francis. Then we may understand why Francis says in the beginning that he writes this book not for the public applause, but for something higher: “I have something greater in mind”<sup>373</sup> This “higher” matter apparently refers to the eternal glory of a poet. Most importantly, for Petrarch, the pursuit for glory does

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<sup>372</sup> *Secretum*, p.94. “qualiter in hanc vitam intrassem, qualiter ve forem rgressurus”.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid*, p.98 “michique altioribus occupato”.

not contract with the love for God because his writings are accompanied by and guaranteed with morality, virtue and the revelation of Truth, which deserves to be glorified and preserved.

Through the discussions of several problems in the *Secretum*, it is possible to conclude that Truth's identity is actually the power of speaking which is capable of breaking the silence, making preparation for conversations. Communication, in this way, replace the mediating soliloquy. The power of speaking is not only confined to the realm of literature, but it can influence the world and have great effects on the common human lot.

Even though his pursuit of personal glory may relate him closer to his pagan predecessors, Petrarch is still a typical man of the medieval times. Petrarch does not want a glory that transgresses the confine between man and God: unlike the half-god Achilles who fought for eternal glory, he deeply realizes his identity as a human being, and he does not want to be a god. Rather than hiding himself in the convent, Petrarch is willing, though constantly suffering from the tumult and agonies brought by worldly matters, to stay in the secular world and experience what a man should experience during his life time: happiness and sadness, hope and desperation, sexual desire and pursuit of purity, contentedness and wanting... At the end of the *Secretum*, he makes Francis speak out his hope: all he wanted is earthly glory.

We must note that speaking and silence are not in contrast as they seem to be: on the one hand, although Francis inclines to the side of speaking, he never stops doubting the meaning and function of rhetoric. He holds a critical and cautious attitude towards human eloquence, trying his best to avoid the falsehood brought on by the human language; on the other hand, he does not entirely oppose silence—solitude, which he takes to be the necessity for the cultivation of virtue. What he does not accept from his master is the Stoic and medieval style of silence—the former proclaims to exclude all human contact while the latter holds the opinion that all speaking should sink into silence during the revelation of Truth. For Petrarch, the humanistic solitude can produce more fruitful thoughts and lead to a wider horizon of the world. Petrarch's hope to find

stability for his unquiet, uneasy soul s should be obtained from inward meditation combined with outward action: a solitary life provided by philosophy and a cultural renovation promoted by rhetoric. The conflicts between speaking and silence are settled down, though merely contemporarily, in Petrarch's project of moral propaganda and cultural revival.

## **The Presence and the Crisis of the Self Through Narrativity**

### The Presence of the Self through Writing and Reading

As has been discussed in the former passage, the phenomenon of silence is an interesting point to investigate Petrarch's attitude towards the conflicts between the active life and contemplative life. In the *Secretum*, silence usually presents an absence, a quenching of the desire of speaking, while voice acts as a vehicle through which one can be "present" textually and temporally. Voice, embedded in the action of writing and reading, proves to be the most effective way to make one "visible" transcending the temporal and spatial limits. According to Husserl, the existence of the self in space is to be heard, that is, the visibility of the self requires the action of making sounds that can reach others.

To be "present" has been the greatest concern in the life of Petrarch. Voice (*suono*) is curiously and intrinsically related to the self(*sono*) in the works of Petrarch: "Voi ch'ascoltate in rime sparse il **suono**...quand'era in parte altr'uom da quell ch'i'**sono**"(*sonnet 1-1-4*) . Through writing of poetry, letters, and of autobiographic stories and asking his imaginative audience to listen, Petrarch promises readers a picture of a *metamorphosis* of himself by making himself heard — the *suono* signifies the transformations of what *sono*. As a master of eloquence, he knows deeply the importance of narration to the *presence* of the self—the textual layout of selfhood, nurtured by its influence on readers, obtains a linguistic form of "living":

Furthermore, how much help eloquence can be to the progress of human life can be learned both in the works of many writers and from the example of daily experiences. How many people have we known in our time who were not affected at all by past examples of proper speech, but then, as if awakened, suddenly turned from a most wicked way of life to the greatest modesty through the spoken words of others! (*Fam.* I,9)

The thirst for such a “life” has been transformed into writing endeavors:

But once again you remark: “What need is there to work hard if everything advantageous to men has already been written during the past thousand years in so many volumes of a marvelous perfection by god-like talents?” Lay aside this anxiety, I say, and don’t ever let it drive you into laziness. This fear was already removed by certain of our great ancients, and I shall remove it from the minds of those who come after me. Let thousands of years flow by, and let centuries follow upon centuries, virtue will never be sufficiently praised, and never will teachings for the greater love of God and the hatred of sin suffice; never will the road to the investigation of new ideas be blocked to keen minds. Let us therefore be of good heart; let us not labor uselessly, and those who will be born after many ages and before the end of an aging world will not labor in vain. What is rather to be feared is that men may cease to exist before our pursuit of humanistic studies breaks through the intimate mysteries of truth. (*Fam.* I,9)

The action of narrating one’s self thus gains legitimacy place to its role in the promotion of virtue.

However, Petrarch also manifests brazenly his own narcissism: “Furthermore, how much delight I get from repeating the written words either of others or sometimes even my own ears. When through the power of an unusual sweet temptation I am moved to read them again, they gradually take effect and transfigure my insides with hidden powers” (*Fam.* I,9). To Petrarch, words are more than a linguistic tool for meditation of God, but it is a curing power that activates the inner self. Through the narration of the



self, Petrarch displays an unprecedented concern for the individual, as put by Trinkaus :  
 “A more important theme revealed by Petrarch’s method is his total focus on the individual as an individual, triumphing in his success and grieving on his sorrows.”<sup>374</sup>  
 Like babies would look into a mirror to gain an image of themselves, narration serves as such a mirror for mankind, and Renaissance humanists have perceived this fact more profoundly than any of their ancestors. For the first time, linguistic activities obtain a significance that can match the empirical experiences: “Rhetorical invention is the instrument by which men transcend their isolated individual shuddering before chaos and act upon the world by collective convention, agreeing to establish the human community and give it certain standard of justice and piety, which they then enforce.”<sup>375</sup>  
 Language distinguishes mankind from other creatures, and certainly represents the most human characteristics of men. Actually, it is not an exaggeration to say that any existence in the spectrum of human allow itself to be presented only within a narration. Petrarch is an author that never pretends to conceal his obsession with writing, and even considers it as his destination: “Poi che per mio destino /a dir mi sforza quell’accesa voglia”, (*Can.* LXXIII, 1-2) although it causes him so much pain: “che m’è sforzato a sospirar mai sempre” (*Can.* LXXIII, 3) and even brings him to pieces: “né per mi’ ngegno (ond’io pavento et tremo) / sì come talor sole.” (*Can.* LXXIII, 14-15)

The practice of writing is more than an activity for satisfaction, but reaches a new height in Petrarch: his literary enterprise serves as a method of establishment of identities that makes him an example to others. His image as a miserable, unfortunate lover, through writing, has been imprinted everywhere, and all people in town can “hear” the grave songs by reading his poems:

di ch’io son fatto a molta gente esempio;

ben che ‘l mio duro scempio

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<sup>374</sup> Charles Trinkaus, *The Poet as Philosopher: Petrarch and the Formation of Renaissance Consciousness*, Yale University Press, 1979, p.124.

<sup>375</sup> *ibid.*, p.36.

sia scritto altrove, sic he mille penne  
ne son già stanche, et quasi in ogni valle  
rimbombi il suon de'miei gravi sospiri, (*Can.* XXIII, 5-14)

In this way, Petrarch's identity as a love poet is presented and strengthened, and his personality and talent become accessible to others via textual and poetic construction.

However, to be presented in narration, the self inevitably faces the peril of alienation since a complete image of the self cannot be obtained when one is still unliving: only by looking backward, and by putting all events in certain order through narration can one understand the whole story. Such retrospection will re-fashion past experiences into narativity that require a cohesive theme and a structure that can be abstracted solely at the end, during the transformation from which the narrator, being separated from the self and standing outside from his past, has been alienated, because it is interpreted in a new way and incorporated in a new concept. The narrating self, under the newly emerging structure, is trying to kill the self in the past by substituting it with the textual self. This Oedipal behavior—killing the old self and marrying the new self — is originated from a literal desire: a man, by undergoing a textual and literary *Passion*, is permitted to regain a new self, one possessing of more logic and reason. The alienation of the self in the narration is also caused by the essential difference between real life and narrative life: the former is anti-narrative and anti-plot; while the latter is well plotted and structurally refined. Petrarch, instead of concealing such artificial deliberation, endeavors to project a complete structure in his autobiographical writing, which is destined to obtain a peaceful mind: “The well-ordered mind is the image of an undisturbed serenity and is always quiet and peaceful.” (*Fam I, I,9*) For instance, it is thought that Petrarch has deliberately incorporated a calendrical structure in his *Canzoniere*:<sup>376</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> The calendrical structure has been discussed in the former chapters, but here I would like to summarize it again. The text cited is from Marco Santagata, *I frammenti dell'anima, Storia e racconto nel Canzoniere di Petrarca*, Il Mulino, 2011 ; Nearly all scholars have stressed the importance of the day “6<sup>th</sup> April”, in which signifies the first

Le istanze di ordine e di (auto) controllo sono connarrate alla psicologia petrarchesca, ad esse possiamo rapportare sia la tensione progettuale, manifesta nel desiderio, o nella necessità, di inquadrare i propri atti di scrittura entro edifice pensati in grande, sia l'ansia di registrare con note e postille gli avvenimenti esterni e i loro riflessi, gli stessi accadimenti dello scivere.<sup>377</sup>

Still, he cannot hide himself from the disappropriation between reality and textual creation, that is, the implanted structure, which he knows clearly, is not ontologically granted to him in real life but rather is an invention by himself. Thus, this structure, standing within the autobiography itself, lacks the power to govern the whole situation.

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meeting with Laura, the death of Laura and the death of Christ, the significance of this date, please refers to Thomas P. Roche, Jr.'s "The Calendrical Structure of Petrarch's 'Canzoniere'", in which he did some calculation such as pointing out the four madrigali 52,54,106 and 121. The number of the first two (52 and 54) add up to the number of the third (106). However, lacking of corresponding texts and historical records, this assumption is, to certain degree, doubtful. But he, in considering each poem represents a day of the year, and 264 falls on the 25<sup>th</sup> December, birth of Christ, while the 264 is exactly the opening of Part II that narrates the death of Laura. For more details, it is suggested also to read Biancardi Giovanni's "L'ipotesi di un ordinamento calendariale del 'Canzoniere' petrarchesco". *Giornale Storico della Letteratura italiana*, Jan 1, 1995, pp.3-28. In Dennis Dutschke's studies of anniversaries poems in *Canzoniere*: "The Anniversary Poems in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*", *Italica*, Vol.58, No.2, 1981, pp.83-101, he thought that within the 15 anniversary poems, there is a circle of "fallen-indulge-weak up". Accordingly, they are divided into three groups: (1) 30, 50, 62; (2) 79, 101,107,118,122,145,212,221,266; (3) 271,278, 364. Finally, in the 364, it evidences the eventual spiritual turn of Petrarch: seeking help from Virgin, who has substituted his desiring Laura. However, in my point of view, whether the conversion is completed is greatly doubtful. Apparently, Petrarch has identified his sins and would like to turn to divine power for help, just like he did in the *Secretum*, but realizing it is one thing while taking action is another. It seems that Petrarch prefers to linger in a middle state, neither choose to converse nor fallen completely. From the view of Barolini, in "The Making of a Lyric Sequence: Time and Narrative in Petrarch's *Retum vulgarium fragmenta*", *MLN*, Vol.104, No.1, Italian Issue, 1989, pp.1-38, she thought that the two parts of *Canzoniere* (the life of Laura and the death of Laura) have adopted two different modes of narration: the part I aims to resist the flow of time by creating a circular narration: "in part I narrative is avoided because the goal is to stop time, resist death", p.37; while the part II, when Laura was dead, Petrarch "In order to signify her death, he permits a narrative sequence to enter the text, a fact that illuminates by contrast the dominant strategy of the *Fragmenta* up to now: it is a strategy that calls for fragmentation of the text into *rime sparse* precisely as a defensive bulwark against the forces of narrativity, time and death.", p.29, and "in part narrative is invoked because in order to preserve her as she was he must preserve her in time.", p.37.

<sup>377</sup> Santagata, *I frammenti dell'anima, Storia e racconto nel Canzoniere di Petrarca*, p.40.

Apart from writing, another literary practice—reading, also plays an important role in the treatment of the soul and the identification of the self:

How much I feel myself freed from serious and bitter burdens by such readings! Meantime I feel my own writings assisted me even more since they are more suited to my ailments, just as the sensitive hand of a doctor who is himself ill is placed more readily where he feels the pain to be. Such cure I shall certainly never accomplish unless the salutary words themselves fell tenderly upon my ears. When through the power of an unusual sweet temptation I am moved to read them again, they gradually take effect and transfix my insides with hidden powers. (*Fam*, I,9)

Also, by searching the ancient manuscripts and reading them intensively and extensively, Petrarch is confident of finding his proper position, and of avoiding to fall into the same mistakes as his predecessor Cicero. For him, the tragedy of Cicero lies in that he did not know himself well enough:

Many things delighted me in their writings, a few troubled me; it was the latter few that prompted me to write with a vigor that I would perhaps not have had today, ... I cannot praise his inconstancy in friendship and his serious and destructive quarrels upon slightest provocation, which availed neither himself nor anything else; his inability to understand his own position and the condition of the Republic, strange indeed for a man with his keen mind; and finally his childish mania for wrangling, all of which are so unseemly in a philosopher. (*Fam*. XXIV,2)

In comparing himself with ancient authors, Petrarch figures out what he is like, the reflection over which helps him get a clearer knowledge of his nature for the sake of virtues, as contended by Zak: “The period of writing (or reading) about the great men of the past is therefore accompanied for Petrarch by one of meditation in which he

reflects inwardly on the state of his soul, examining whether he is truly as virtuous and steadfast in the face of the vicissitudes of fortune as he would like to believe.”<sup>378</sup>:

There is nothing that moves me as much as the examples of outstanding men. They help one to rise on high and to test the mind to see whether it possesses anything solid, anything noble, anything unbending and firm against fortune, or whether it lies to itself about itself.”

(*Fam.* VI, 4)

Not only could reading produce a concrete image of the self, but it is also a cure for the soul and for the spiritual trauma. In another letter of *Familiari*, the way he consoled his friend in exile is to read:

Now devote yourself to them completely since nothing prevents it, and give yourself over to the better auspices of a new life by keeping your mind busy with such activities. Read again the history of antiquity. Read again the history of antiquity. There you will how many imitators there were of Roman leaders and indeed of illustrious men who wished either to be sent away from their homeland as soon as possible or to be called back a great amount of time had passed. Why was this so, I ask if not because it was pleasant to miss the sweetness of the native soil while finding elsewhere greater occasions for the exercise of virtue? (*Fam.* II,4)

Isn't it also a consolation for Petrarch himself, who has been born in exile: “I, begotten in exile, was born in exile,”(*Fam.*I,1)? Now by putting himself side by side with the illustrious men of Rome, his identity of a *man in exile* has been justified, the recognition of which is really important, since this very image is one of the most essential resources for Petrarch's literary self-fashioning. That man, born with sins, lives like a lonely traveler in the world is not a rare image since the ancient Greek, and such a concept

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<sup>378</sup> Zak, *Petrarch's Humanism and the Care of the Self*, p.100.

promotes that life in this world is in fact an exile. Man should endeavor to return to his own higher origin, like what has been described by St. Augustine in his *Confessions*: he was far away from God, travelling in a “region of utter unlikeness”( *regione dissimilitudinis*)<sup>379</sup> and trying to return to his own image—the image of God.

For a man who is in exile physically and spiritually like Petrarch, “refuge and return” is his favorite theme, as said by Cachey: “At the heart of his self-fashioning as a ‘wanderer everywhere,’ the paradoxical drive both to stay and to go fundamentally characterized Petrarch's practice as a writer, his autobiographical self-portrait, and the catalog of works he left behind”<sup>380</sup>, and his return signifies, however, the alienation of the self. The very first song of the *Canzoniere* starts with sentiments of outcast: “quand’era in parte altr’ uom da quell ch’i’ sono”(1:4) St. Augustine, in the *Secretum*, advices Francis to take refuge from his current status of alienation:

You ask what advice I have to give you. It might be a good idea to gather your forces and flee if you can, from one person to another.<sup>381</sup>

and return to himself:

For too long you have lived in exile from your homeland and from yourself: it’s time you went back. I want you, in your own words, that ‘it is getting dark and the night is friendly to robbers.’<sup>382</sup>

However, the attempts to return always are suffocated by Petrarch’s hesitations: unable to make the decisive turn, Petrarch finds himself stuck in the swamp of exile. Faced

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<sup>379</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book VII, 10.

<sup>380</sup> Cachey, “Poetry in motion”, p.16

<sup>381</sup> *Secretum*, p.232. “Quid igitur consulam, queres. Colligere aimum et effugere, si possis, ac de carcere in carcerem commigrare non improbo.”

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid*, p.240. “Nimis diu iam et a patria et a te ipso exilasti. Tempus est revertendi, «advesperascit enim et nox est amica predonibus.”.

with this torturing crisis, reading proves to be the most effective way to deal with pains and agony. Even in this alienation, reading still helps Petrarch to retain a clear self-reflection, leading him to anchor his own place in the river of history. But ironically, the problem is that Petrarch seems to only know what is good for him, but cannot turn it into real action. His knowledge from reading, as is condemned by Augustine, ends up being useless in correcting his *youthful mistakes*.

## The Presence of the Self in *Absence*

In the previous passages, we have discussed briefly the function of writing and reading in the fashioning of Petrarch's self, now we should come to a more specific, and more metaphysical question: what does it mean to be *present* in Petrarch? Peculiarly, Petrarch's presence of self is always articulated in the *absence*: in the form of fragments, in the confusion and chaotic inter-exchange of subject and object, or in the dazzlingly repetitious loop of cure and relapse, none of which can provide a crystalized or complete picture of his selfhood. On the contrary, his way of presenting the *self* only leaves readers an impression of ambiguity that situates the self behind a nebulous barrier that impedes its full *presence*.

## The Fragments of Souls

In the beginning of *Canzoniere*, Petrarch has told his readers that his poems are sounds of "rime sparse". The scattered souls, scattered songs and scattered thoughts are seen frequently in both the *Canonizere* and the *Secretum*, which lead us to see a Petrarch of so much contradictions and paradox.<sup>383</sup> Man, burdened with a sinful body, is not

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<sup>383</sup> To understand more of Petrarch's contradictions and sense of fragments, please refer to the classical work of Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch*, Duke University Press, 1993, in which he said: "Petrarch, howeverm envisions a new possible way of articling the relationship between fragments and unity. In fact, Petrarch allows us to speak

capable of rightly perceiving time: essentially, he is scattered by the trichotomous measure of time (past, present and future) that prevents him from understanding the union and *oneness* of eternity. St. Augustine, being aware of the miseries of the scattered self, lamented to God: “O Lord, my Father, art Everlasting; but I fall into dissolution amid the changing times, whose order I am yet ignorant of: yea, my thoughts are torn asunder with tumultuous vicissitudes, even the inmost bowels of my soul.”<sup>384</sup> Petrarch, as is discussed in the former chapter, was unable to reach the *nunc* of events and was instead trapped in the swamp of past. Future to him is more the horror of death and anxiety about fortune than a promised blessing from God. His soul fails to seek unity and entity through time and is lacerated between different temporal dimensions, and our poet constantly finds himself caught up by his past: the songs he claims to give up (“Or sia qui fine al mio amoroso canto”, *Can.* CCXCII,12) is now resumed: “consecrerò con questa stanca penna”. Even though years pass by, the fire in his heart never quenches.

Petrarch, troubled by the swiftness of time, feels startled: “i' mi riscuoto”, indicating a status of “just woke up from the dream”. The sentiment that the quick lapse of time makes life as a short dream (*breve sogno*) is knocking on the fragile mind of Petrarch, making him feel vulnerable to the phenomenon of existence trapped in the dimension of time:

O giorno, o hora, o ultimo momento,  
 o stelle congiurate a 'mpoverirme!  
 O fido sguardo, or che volei tu dirme  
 partend' io per non esser mai contento?

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of unity as a unity of fragments, as a unity of adjacent parts.”, p.4.

<sup>384</sup> St. Augustine, *St. Augustine's Confessions*, Loeb Classical Library, trans. by William Watts, Vol. II, “et tu solacium meum, domine, pater meus aeternus es. At ego in tempora dissilui quorum ordinem nescio, et tumultuosis varietatibus dilaniantur cogitationes meae, intima viscera animae meae” (Book XI, 29).



Or conosco i miei danni, or mi risento:  
ch' i' credeva (ahi credenze vane e 'nfirmi!)  
perder parte, non tutto, al dipartirme;  
quante speranze se ne porta il vento! (Can. CCCXXIX)

Like a sleeping person who always forgets, or deliberately ignores the essential mission of a mortal man, Francis is severely criticized by St. Augustine: “What I want to know is: have you noticed how your face changes from day to day, and how some white hairs have already begun to appear on your head?”<sup>385</sup> The sudden consciousness of time’s passing is also evoked in the letter of “Mount Ventoux”: “My mind thus was overcome by a new thought and was transferred from those places to these times. And I began saying to myself: “Today completes the tenth year since you departed from Bologna after completion of your youthful studies”. Ten years are not a short time, but even though human beings can divide life in years, months, or weeks, the span of life is as short as a day, as warned St. Augustine: “Imagine as many parts as you like: they will all vanish at the same time in the twinkling of an eye”<sup>386</sup> Thus St. Augustine, again and again, tells Francis that he should not think life was long, so that he can postpone his conversion arbitrarily.

Petrarch’s many contradicted “selves” converge in a single selfhood that cannot be solely resolved through the power of God, can nor the will or philosophical knowledge help to smooth them. As said by Trinkaus, fortune works side by side with the Providence of God:

Part of this universe was under the control of fortune; the whole universe was in the hands of Divine Providence; nevertheless fortune, at least as far as man initially experienced it and was able to comprehend it, seemed to operate independently of God. Somewhere caught between his divine destiny and his fortune was the individual man. Man never could

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<sup>385</sup> Francis Petrarca, *Secretum, Il mio segreto*, p.247. “Quero autem ex me: nonne vultum tuum variari in dies singulos et intermicantes temporibus canos animadvertisti?”

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid*, p.248, “Finge quotlibet particulas; omnes in ictu oculi prope simul evanescent.”

master his fortune; at the most he could remedy it. By remedying it man drew closer to God and his heavenly destiny.<sup>387</sup>

Confronted with two forces of power, the individual is hard to retain a *unity* in himself, the fact of which breaks the dream of a collective mind. Variety starts to invade the medieval unity and, as mentioned by Mazzotta, people should consider the whole as something consisting of “parts” instead of a whole united entity. Variety brings cracks, divisions and conflicts to Petrarch’s soul, and now let us examine a song of “parts”, and of desire and motion:

Quand' io son tutto vòlto in quella *parte*  
ove 'l bel viso di madonna *luce*,  
et m' è rimasa nel pensier la luce  
che m' arde et strugge dentro a parte a parte,  
i' che temo del cor che mi si parte,  
et veggio presso il fin de la mia luce,  
vommene in guisa d' orbo, senza luce,  
che non sa ove si vada et pur si parte.  
Cosí davanti ai colpi de la *morte*  
fuggo: ma non sí ratto che 'l *desio*  
meco non venga come venir sòle.  
Tacito vo, ché le parole morte  
farian pianger la gente; et i' desio  
che le lagrime mie si spargan sole. (*Can. XVIII*)

The light of love scatters Petrarch into fragments and divisions “m' arde et strugge dentro a parte a parte”, which eventually result in his reluctant silence “Tacito vo”. Forced to be silent, Petrarch would rather be invisible and insensible to the people, which causes his

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<sup>387</sup> Charles Trinkaus, *In our Image and Likeness, Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, The University of Chicago Press, 1970, vol. I, “Petrarch: Man between Desperate and Grace”.

self to be absent: “le lagrime mie si spargan sole”. The fragments and divisions of the poet further reinforce the alienation of the self. The first 8 verses of the song highlight a dramatic tension between light “luce” and fragments “parte”, and these two rhyme words interplay with each other, creating an image of a man of displacement. This image, again, recalls Petrarch’s own exile. He, unable to resist the seduction of light, is tempted to keep on walking like a blind man “vommene in guisa d’ orbo, senza luce”. The scattered self, generated by the failure in Petrarch’s eyes specifies a separation between soul and heart: “l’ *anima* esce del *cor* per seguir voi, et con molto pensiero indi si svelle” (*Can.* XVII, 13-14), leading to a journey towards grievous silence—the *absence* of self. Bound by the deadly words “le parole morte”, our poet could only cry in solitude “si spargan sole”.

The concept of “injured by light” also happens in the *Purgatorio* of Dante; however, unlike Petrarch’s eventual silence, the pilgrim is finally led to an elevation of intellect. Reading through the verses of *Purgatorio*, it is not difficult to find Dante always relating the description of sun with words of violence: *rompere, saettare, ferire, colpire, gravare*:<sup>388</sup> “Lo sol, che dietro fiammeggiava roggio,/ rotto m’era dinanzi a la figura.”(*Purg.* 3:16-17), “Come color dinanzi vider rotta /la luce in terra da mio destro canto,” (*Purg.* 3:88-89), and also “Poscia ch’io ebbi rotta la persona /di due punte mortali, io mi rendei” (*Purg.* 3:118-119). The violence of sunlight, instead of hurting Dante’s intellect, has brought his vision to a new level that helped him advance closer to the presence of God. Rather than being torn apart, Dante begins to understand more clearly both himself and the love of God; in other words, he is led to perceive the unity of God through the union of his intellect and body: no longer the lost pilgrim whose body listened not to his heart and always dragged him behind, now the education of light brought together two forces, both physical and willful, in Dante. Obtaining the spiritual harmony in self, Dante proceeded to the heaven destination smoothly, holding a clear goal in heart.

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<sup>388</sup> Jeffrey T. Schnapp, “Injured by the Light: Violence and Paideia in Dante’s *Purgatorio*”, *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, No.111, 1993, pp.107-118.

According to Virgil in *Purg.* XVIII, to bring soul and body together needs to love justly. Like the fire would rise, is created in nature to bend towards love. When a man loves someone/something, a desire for this beloved is born, which causes the mind to enter into desire, a spiritual motion (*moto spirituale*). This motion will never end until the desire is satisfied.<sup>389</sup> However, Virgil added, not every love is worth of pursuing, and not every desire is right to have: “però che forse appar la sua matra / sempre esser buona, ma non ciascun segno / è buono, ancor che buona sia la cera.” (*Pur.* XVIII, 37-39) Admittedly, the mind is not fault to bend towards love, but it is necessary to discern two love: the good one and the bad one. The essence of love is dependent of its object, and obviously, Petrarch has chosen a wrong object—a mortal woman—to love, which, according to Virgil, is a mistake of the blind “l’error de’ ciechi”. (*Pur.* XVIII, 18) His way of love for Laura, as condemned by Augustine in the *Secretum*, is to love things in a wrong way: “There can be no doubt, however, that excellent things may be loved dishonourably”<sup>390</sup>, which causes the loss of Reason and madness of mind: “Now you see where that error of yours will lead you: it will cast you down headlong into every kind of madness, with shame and awe and reason (that bridle on the passions) and all consciousness of the truth banished”<sup>391</sup>.

Sonnet XX further explores the agonies of poet’s silence resulted from the fragmentation of the self. Neither could he speak nor could he write! The effect brought by the failure in both speaking and writing languages is astonishing since our poet deliberately emphasizes that he could not “make a sound” in *every way* like a man does, which could explain why he is so divided (*per cui sola dal mondo i’ son diviso.*” *Can.*

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<sup>389</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio* 18, “L’animo, ch’è create ad amar presto, / ad ogni cosa e mobile che piace, / tosto che dal piacere in atto è desto. / Vostra apprensiva da esser verace / tragge intenzione, e dentro a voi la spiega, / sì che l’animo ad essa volger face; / e se rivolto inver’ di lei si piega, / quel piegare è amor, quell’ è natura / che per piacer di novo in voi si lega. / Poi, come ‘l’foco movesi in altura / per la sua forma, ch’è nata a salire / la dove più in sua matra dura / così l’animo preso entra in disire, / ch’è moto spiritale, e mai non posa / fin che la cosa amata il fa gioire.” (vv.19-33)

<sup>390</sup> *Secretum*, III, “Etiam pulcra turpiter amari posse certum est.”, p.204

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid*, “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.”, p.204.

XVII, 4). He is not only divided from the human world, but also from his soul, declaring his sorrowful *absence*. Thus, the light of *Can. XVIII* turns into irony compared to the Dantesque light of “education”. It tortures Petrarch to cry constantly in solitude, and according to Santagata, to cry in solitude alluded to St. Augustine’s pre-conversion moment,<sup>392</sup> when he runs into a room, crying, he hears the miracle voice asking him to “take up and read”. However, for Petrarch, the conversion moment is absent, and there is no voice guiding him to convert. More ironically, not only the scene lacks the mysterious voice of “take it, read it”, but Petrarch displays an image of dead, suffocating silence: his talent is frozen (*tutto s’agghiaccia*), his voice was imprisoned in the chest “in mezzo ‘l petto”, and his pen was defeated at the very beginning of this battle of love “rimaser vinti” (*Can. XX, 8, 10, 14*)

The division of the self has greatly alienated Petrarch from his real “image”—like a lost traveller, he knows not where he is heading for, nor what is like to be “himself”. Another *canzone* also describes the phenomenon of losing voice and alienation:

et un penser che solo angoscia d’alle,  
 tal ch’ad ogni altro fa voltar le spalle  
 e mi face obliar me stesso a forza,  
 ...

Lasso, che son? che fui? (*Can. XXIII, 17-19; 30*)

*Can. XXIII* is not only a song of metamorphosis, but also a song describing the loss and the alienation of one’s voice, parallel to the alienation of the self. At first, it is the song sung by our poet that triggers the attack of Love: “canter com’io vissi in libertade/ mentre Amor nel mio albergo a sdegno s’ebbe;/ poi seguirò sì come a lui ne’nerebbe/ troppo almente e che di ciò m’avenne,”(*Can. XXIII, 5-8*) Being the victim of love, the

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<sup>392</sup> *Confessions*, VIII, 12: “solitudo mihi ad negotium flendi aptior suggerebatur.”, referred in Rosanna Bettarini’s commentaries of *Canzoniere*. Francis Petrarca, *Canzoniere, Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, a cura di Rosanna Bettarini, Vol.I, Einaudi, 2005, p.83.

poet, miserably, finds himself having been transformed into a laurel, deprived of the ability to sing. In the second transformation, he takes in the shape of swan, and Petrarch seems to regain his voice: “et giamai poi la mia lingua non tacque/mentre poteo del suo cader malign, ond’io presi col suon color d’un cigno.” (*Can.* XXIII,57-60) But soon it reveals that he could never resume his own voice (his self), which forces him to sing in a strange voice (*estranea voce*), resulting in the deprivation of his previous ability to create sweets songs of love: “né mai in sì dolci o in sì soave temper/risonar seppi gli amorosi guai” (*Can.* XXIII,61-62). Later, even this strange sound is so unbearable to Love that he makes it forbidden in the poet: “Di ciò non far parola” (*Can.* XXIII,74), so he is transformed into a mute, stagnant stone, even worse than a living tree.

The ending is no less miserable than *Can.* XVIII, both of which result in the forfeiture of a voice. As the verses proceed, Petrarch brings his readers into the myth of Diana, in which he shows how the beloved has cruelly scattered him:

L’aqua nel viso co le man *mi sparse*.

Vero dirò; forse e’ parrà menzogna:

Ch’i’ senti’ trarmi de *la propria imago* (*Can.* XXIII,155-157)

His voice cannot resume, nor can he get back his own image. These various metamorphosis, constantly ripping him off his origin image, remind him of a sad truth: his literary capacity (singing or writing) cannot resist the violence of love that subjects him to the torture of laceration in fragments. Each form represents a piece divided from his own self. The disease of alienation causes severe symptoms in his mind, one of which is the oblivion of himself: “et un penser che solo angoscia dàlle, tal ch’ad ogni altro fa voltar le spalle/e mi face obliar me stesso a forza.”(23:15-19) The oblivion of the self occurs frequently in Petrarch, and, if we still remember, during his journey to Mount Ventoux, he said at the peak: “And I seemed somehow forgetful of the place to

which I had come and why”<sup>393</sup>, The forgetfulness of the self, accompanied with silence, contributes to the absence of the self among the dazzling images of “otherness”: Petrarch can be a tree, a bird, a stone, a fountain, everything but himself.

Besides the alienation from the true image, the phenomenon of absence is also reflected in Petrarch’s “division”: “scattered thoughts”, “scattered footprints” and “scattered ashes” (“*pensieri sparsi*”, “*passi sparsi*” and “*cenere sparso*”): “Quand’io mi volgo indietro a mirar gli anni/ ch’ ànno fuggendo i miei pensieri sparsi,” (*Can. CCXCVIII,1-2*); “O passi sparsi, o pensier vaghi et pronti,” (*Can. CLXI:1*); and “or vo piangendo il suo cenere sparso.”(*Can. CCCXX,14*) The scattered thoughts are usually related with scattered footprints: tortured by the painful love that makes him fragmented, Petrarch does not stop looking to see Laura. The laceration in soul stimulates his wanderings: on a mountain, in a dark forest, on the river bank, in the valley...And he wandered in lamed foot—a symbol of a handicap in will: “saldin le piaghe ch’i’ presi in quel bosco/folto di spine, ond’i’ ò ben tal parte/che zoppo n’esco, e’entravi a sì gran corso!” (*Can. CCXIV, 22-24*)

Wandering is a peculiar movement that is specifically Petrarchan. Compared to a pilgrimage, it moves without a specific direction. Thus, even though the external space has changed, the status is not. Unlike Dante who moves from underground to the heaven, Petrarch seems to have lost track of his voyage: his scattered selves (internal) exactly correspond to his scattered footprints in various locations (external), and since Petrarch fails to reach a union of his fragmented pieces, he also fails to find a right route that can string up these places, making them akin to a complete pilgrimage.

## The *Secretum*: Letter Y — The Conflicts in Two Poles

As is already shown in previous passage discussing about silence and speaking,

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<sup>393</sup> Le Familiari, IV, 1. “et quem in locum, quam ob causam venissem, quodammodo videbar oblitus.”

Petrarch's divided selves are largely related to the contradictions caused by conflicts between his mortal identity and the quest for eternal glory. Such contradiction is shown by Francis contradicted attitude towards virtue in the *Secretum*. When the two are talking about virtue, Francis makes a bold claim that he wishes to live an entirely independent life. Augustine, upon hearing his desire, says that he is asking for too much:

A: So you really think that you – caught up in the whirlwind of human affairs, with things changing so quickly, and with the future so uncertain, in the hands of Fortune in fact – you really think that you, out of all the millions of people who exist, are entitled to a life free from care?<sup>394</sup>

Francis wishes to live a “god-like” life which is obviously out of the ability of a mortal man; but when Augustine has advised to pursue the heavenly glory, he, instead of keeping his initial attitude, replies that he is a mortal and only wishes for earthly glory: “I’m inclined to think that the glory which one may hop for down here should be pursued while one remains down here”<sup>395</sup> Francis’s conflicte attitude signifies on one hand his awareness of the predicaments that every mortal faces; on the other hand manifests his obsessive lingering in the earthly glory. His inconsistency reveals a deeper humanist aspect in his thought, in which the Christian ethics and hope for another world is not valued as an absolute domination; rather, his eyes start to look upon the earthly matters and discover values in them. However, Petrarch’s new perspective of the secular world does not entirely exclude him from the medieval world where his essential thought is shaped, which contributes greatly to his conflicted selves. As is suggested by Hans Baron, Petrarch: “As a faithful son of the Church, he was fully satisfied with her teachings and did not need another guide in the labyrinth of this life, in this respect

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<sup>394</sup> *Secretum*, p.188. “Tu ne igitur in tanto rerum humanarum turbine, tanta varietate successuum, tantaque caligine futurorum et, ut breviter dicam, sub imperio positus fortune, solus ex cuntis hominum milibus carurum vacuam etatem ages?”.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid*, “Eam enim, quam hic sperare licet, gloriam hic quoque manenti querendam esse persuadeo ipse michi;”, p.267. “



particularly under the spell of his great model Augustine.”<sup>396</sup> Ronald G. Witt even directly points out that Petrarch is always confronting the choice between two kinds of life—one is the life of a poet: “Whether as creative artist or as philologist, the grammarian requires the quiet of the study or of solitary places. He leads a private life, a *vita contemplativa*,”<sup>397</sup> and the other is the life of rhetorician, whose type of life is the *vita activa*, and who “Essentially an orator, he best realizes his objectives in public assemblies or the marketplace.”<sup>398</sup>

His spiritual laceration has vividly been represented by the letter *Y*, and this is how he describes in *Familiars* this Pythagorean letter:

This letter, a two-horned symbol, points to the heavens with its narrower right horn, while with its broader left horn it seems to curve toward the earth. The left horn, as they say, represents the path to hell, and while indeed the approach is rather pleasant, the destination is very sad and bitter, so miserable that it could not be more so. For those who enter the path on the right, the rewards are as great as the toil required. Rarely can anyone ever by sufficiently on guard, cautious, or diligent, to compensate for the nature of the danger involved. (*Fam.* XII, 3)

From his explanation, readers get the main impression that the letter *Y* in the *Secretum* mainly represents two ways of life: one to the heaven and the other to the depraved hell.

In the *Secretum*, St. Augustine points out Francis’s spiritual torments are caused by various earthly occupancies: “There are many things which absorb your mind (Sono davvero tante le cose che con le loro *ali* funeste sollevano il tuo animo), till it can’t think of anything else...”<sup>399</sup> The metaphor of “wings” (“*ali*”) in the saint’s words easily

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<sup>396</sup> Hans Nachod, introduction abstracted from *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, selections in translation, edited by Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller and John Herman Randall, Jr., The University of Chicago Press, 1948, p.24.

<sup>397</sup> Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients: the Origins of Humanism from Lavato to Bruni*, p.11.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid*, p.11.

<sup>399</sup> *Secretum*, “Quam multa sunt que animum tuum funestis alis extollunt et sub insite nobilitatis obtentu”, p.144.

draws the readers to ponder on the Dantean allusions, where in the *Divine Comedy* Dante's use of such a metaphor is always related to crazy, irrational or erotic desires. In *Inferno* V, Dante the pilgrim has described the miserable cripple like this: "Quali colombe dal disio chiamate/ con l'ali alzate e ferme al dolce nido/ vegnon per l'aere, dal voler portate" (As doves, called by their desires, with wings raised and steady come to their sweet nest through the air, borne by their will, vv.82-84). Also in *Inferno* XXVI, Dante's metaphor of wings, directed to a deadly desire, is just like the amorous desire that chains Francis up: "e volta nostra poppa nel mattino, /de' remi facemmo ali al folle volo,/ sempre acquistando dal lato mancino." (and, turning our stern toward the morning, of our oars we made wings for the mad flight, always gaining on the left side. vv.124-126.) That such a crazy desire drives the boat onto the left side indicates a hard medieval sign directing to the sexually guilty desire of human beings, just like Petrarch exclaimed that love hurt him by his left side: "E'ncomincio: "Madonna, il manco piede [the left foot] /giovererro po'io nel costui regno,/ Ond'altro ch'ira et sdegno/Non ebbi mai; (*Can.* CCCLX, 9-12)

Occupied by many things ("tante le cose"), Francis is restrained from pursue the virtue with full heart. But Augustine's condemnation also reflects that Francis' pursuit of virtue is of multi-dimensional, which involves both corporeal and psychological participations. Trinkaus argues that: "The message of the *Secretum* is that virtue is not a matter of easy rational perception but the attainment of a deep and continuous emotional experience that transforms the will and the *desiderium* into one concentrated on salvation alone."<sup>400</sup> Here, Petrarch's humanism raises an essential problem concerning the "corporeal" side of mankind. The body is heavy, but it is the essential part of man: it preserves existence. Just like the long-past ancient world, it is the "*corpo*" of texts that make it survive till today. Of course, the later Christians, opposing the platonic loath of the body, made clear that the sin was rooted within the soul, not the body itself. More precisely, it is the sin that contaminates the flesh, rendering it as the

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<sup>400</sup> Trinkaus, *The Poet as Philosopher: Petrarch and the Formation of Renaissance Consciousness*, p.88.

fallen “body”. However, Christian cannot avoid condemning the fragile body which makes man subjected to external seductions. In Christian context, the body, under various kinds of seductions—sex, greed, vanity—is shameful. A final triumph is urgent and necessary.

This is, however, not the case of Petrarch: we see that he is almost, without exaggeration, obsessed with exposing the sufferings that arise from these seductions, and even in the *Canzoniere*, he implicitly and poetically expressed his erotic feelings about Laura. While displaying his torments, he does not promise readers a Christian triumph, which is the reason why his words upset many readers. For him, instead of displaying a spiritual triumph over the body, it is more important to exhibit the real existence of human beings: the constant conflict between body and soul, between the limits of lifespan and eternity, and between a monastic life and a secular one. It is these sufferings that most manifest what makes a man “a man”.

More dramatically, Petrarch does not stop at describing his mental dilemma but attempts to bring this problem further to the focus on the self. Captive in the erroneous desires and in his choosing the “left side” of the *Y*, Petrarch finds himself having lost the power to impose his will. The impure soul, distracted and divided by tangling and contrary desires and intentions, cannot even possess a complete authority in itself:

I love, but something I would like not to love, and would like to hate. Nevertheless I love,  
but unwillingly, constrainedly, sorrowfully and mournfully...Between these inclinations a  
very insistent and uncertain battle for control of my two selves has been going on for a  
long time in my mind. (*Fam.* IV,1)

Drawn away from the just road to the highest virtue, Petrarch’s self is incomplete and crippled, and correspondingly, his writing is full of metaphors of antithesis, which are to represent the agony caused by the opposite poles of two roads represented by the letter *Y*. For example, the *Canzoniere* CCXCVII and CCXCVIII are full of such terms: body and soul, heaven and earth, high and low...

## CCXCVII

*Due gran nemiche* in seme erano agiunte,  
*Bellezza et Honestà*, con pace tanta,  
 che mai rebellion l' anima santa  
 non sentí poi ch' a star seco fur giunte;  
 et or per Morte son sparse et disgiunte:  
*l' una è nel ciel*, che se ne gloria et vanta;  
*l' altra sotterra*, che' begli occhi amanta,  
 onde uscìr già tant' amorose punte.  
 L' atto soave, e 'l parlar saggio humile  
 che movea d' *alto loco*, e 'l dolce sguardo  
 che piagava il mio core (anchor l' acenna),  
 sono spariti; et s' al seguir son tardo,  
 forse averrà che 'l bel nome gentile  
 consecrerò con questa stanca penna.

## CCXCVIII

Quand' io mi volgo indietro a mirar gli anni  
 ch' ànno fuggendo i miei *penseri sparsi*,  
 et spento 'l foco ove agghiacciando io arsi,  
 et finito il riposo pien d' affanni,  
 rotta la fe' degli amorosi inganni,  
 et sol *due parti* d' ogni mio ben farsi,  
*l' una nel cielo et l' altra in terra starsi*,  
 et perduto il guadagno de' miei danni,  
 i' mi riscuoto, et trovomi sí nudo,  
 ch' i' porto invidia ad ogni extrema sorte:  
 tal cordoglio et paura ò di me stesso.  
 O mia stella, o Fortuna, o Fato, o Morte,

o per me sempre dolce giorno et crudo,

come m' avete in *basso stato messo!*

So much emphasis is placed on the poetic representation of contradiction, in which the tension of different locations is greatly stressed: her beautiful body is buried beneath the earth “l' altra sotterra”, while her noble spirit is elevated to heaven “l' una è nel ciel”. Her speech is from high place (“alto loco”) but the author has now found himself, after the loss of his beloved, having nothing but his old, feeble body down on earth. Realizing how unreachable the distance between heaven and earth is, he feels so startled and empty (“sí nudo”) and begins to lament the miseries Fate and Heaven have brought to him. His tragic status might echo those depraved souls at the riverside in the *Inferno*, who are also naked, weary, cursing their unfortunate destinies: “Ma quell’anime, ch’eran lasse e nude cangiar colore e bibattero i denti, ratto che ‘nteser le parole crude. Bestemmiavano Dio e lor parenti, l’umana spezie e ‘l loco e ‘l tempo e’l seme di lor semenza di lor nascimenti.” (*Inf.* 3:100-105) Death has scattered Laura “l' una nel cielo et l' altra in terra starsi,” and her fragmentation further scatters the poet, who has been put in a shifting, turbulent status dominated by various opposite forces that have left him nothing but “scattered thoughts”: “fuggendo i miei pensieri sparsi”.

Fragments not only are the description of Petrarch’s status, but the reason of the absence: because of the laceration, Petrarch laments that he has forgotten himself, lost his way, and has relapsed into the old status. Rather than establishing firmly a solid image of “the narrative I”, Petrarch, under his pen, displays a self that is feeble, vulnerable to discursion and division, and desperate to gain a complete authority over the self. The self lacerated by the two opposing poles reflects Petrarch’s moral predicament in choosing over two kinds of lives; but more importantly, the scattered self offers an alternative way to look at Petrarch’s selfhood not in the Augustinian way that values the unity but in a way that accepts more possibilities and varieties of the individual. By writing about his dilemma facing with two roads, Petrarch turns his desperation—the incapacity of obtaining a united “self”—into his poetic narrativity, which makes evident of his novel concept of the self.

## The Obsession of Ruins and Fragments

Petrarch's divided self is reflected through his way of looking Rome. In his eyes, Rome is a special place with most of her splendid past preserved in the form of scattered ruins. When he and his friend are roaming around the modern streets of Rome, they see these ancient ruins—stones, half-standing pillars, stairways. A sense of wonder arises from these contradictions between new and old, modern and ancient, present and past. Ruins in themselves are a state of peculiar existence between presence and absence, since they not only presents the past, but *the past in the current presence*. However, its presence does not refer purely to a simple existence, but to an existence long disappeared and vanished in time, leaving behind only the corporeal remains that remind what has been passed. What makes it so ambivalent is that, ruins are left to present “what is absent” and “what is empty”—the signifier (ruins) and signified (history) are placed in opposite position creating an appealing intension simultaneously connecting the past and now. On the one hand, their physical existence—stones, pillars—show a prominent continuity with the long lost antique world; on the other hand, this continuity is made of discontinuities and ruptures, since the ruins—signifier—are found loss in the flowing river of history, failing to reach the signified—ancient Rome again. These fragments, they although can compensate and bring back, to a certain degree, the classical epoch of Rome physically because it can evoke the past memories and historical events; but spiritually, it indicates a vacancy that can never be fulfilled. It is this sense of “eternal absence” that most arouses viewers' sentiments about the rise and fall of Rome.

His aesthetic sense of Roman ruins, according to Waller, is paralleled to his poetic practice. Petrarch sees Rome as scattered parts, and similarly he treats the *RVF* as fragments:

To Freccero's description of the *Canzoniere* as a series of lyrics “fragments”, discontinuous poetic instants “strung together like pearls on an invisible strand,” whose

juxtaposition does not add up to any structural totality or thematic resolution, we might add that the behavior of Petrarch's language thus displays the syntactic consequences of his reorganization of history.<sup>401</sup>

Full representation of the past history, as is known to all, is nearly impossible, and he realizes that he can only recognize Rome not as a unity but as a collection of fragments—for him, the ancient Rome, now displayed in ruins, is the *real Rome*; also, he can only represent Rome in the form of an *absence*—a set of incomplete pieces, for the physical presence of ruins in turn points to the *absence* of the original image of Rome.

For Petrarch, besides apart from as an emotional console, ruins serve as a connection linking his age to the past, which provides him with a tunnel to “travel back”:

[the Secretum]here was the palace of Evander, there the shrine of Carmentis, here the cave of Cacus, there the famous she-wolf and the fig tree of Rumina with the more apt surname of Romulus, there the overpass of Remus, ... here Perses was brought, from here Hannibal was driven away, here Jugurtha was destroyed as some believe, others indeed believe that he was slain in prison. Here Caesar triumphed, here he perished... from here, according to tradition, the old Augustus, following the Sibyl's advice, saw the Christ child... On these stones still survives after so many centuries the great rivalry in talent and skill between Praxiteles and Phidias; here Christ appeared to his fleeing Vicar; here Peter was crucified; there Paul was beheaded; here Lawrence was burned, who after being buried here, was succeeded by Stephan. (*Fam.* VI, 2)

Petrarch's experiences in Rome is vivid and alive: when he is wandering around these ruins, he is reading, imaging and picturing a lost Rome, starting from the its establishment to its current presence. Nevertheless, these images of Rome, like those

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<sup>401</sup> Waller, *Petrarch's Historical Theory and Poetic Practice*, p.11.

of Laura, are not images of unity but are scattered: they are made up of a string of discontinuous events. They are well selected, and arranged according to the chronicle, aiming to create an illusion of a continuous landscape; however, as admitted by Petrarch, he cannot list all of them in one short letter, and even if he can, the presence of all important events cannot guarantee a complete picture of Rome. The Rome presented in ruins is no more than an *absence*.

Petrarch also finds it impossible to record his memories about ruins in his words: “But all things are changed: the place is not present, the day has passed, the idle mood is gone” (*Fam.* VI, 2). Rome is present, but Petrarch is presenting its absence. Curiously, before subjecting himself to the memorization of Roman ruins, Petrarch has discussed shortly about the philosophy, and he expresses his own swiftness and varieties: “Therefore I am at one time a Peripatetic, and at another a Stoic and sometimes an Academic” (*Fam.* VI, 2). His recognition of the self is not united, but fragmented and divided, similar to the scattered outlook of Rome: there is parallel between Petrarch’s perception of himself and his opinion about Rome, which magically produces consonance between individual and city.

Although “ruins” and “fragments” can both be used to refer to the Roman heritage, they are different in some aspects. Ruins are substances left behind by the pass which are already over; thus they are immune to change and mutation. Fragments are different: they are intentionally left unfinished. Waiting to be completed, they possess the potential for progress and transformation. While ruins are closed to themselves, fragments are “opere aperte”. That is why Petrarch chooses “fragments” to name his poems—the story of his young love, started from adolescence, is continuing and will continue till his old age. Petrarch, standing at the cross-roads, is unable and also unwilling to decide his eventual turning. His works, therefore, are suspended between definite and unfinished. However, this *unfinished state* does not in fact require an ending: it is just waiting to be fulfilled, and it is exactly the waiting that makes up the core of the whole work, just like he is waiting for one’s Godot.



## The Crisis of Language in Petrarch's Narration of Self

Building up the self through autobiographical writings is not without danger. Once in the narration, the authenticity of the experience is at risk of being twisted into some kind of inauthenticity:

The ironic language splits the subject into an empirical self that exists in a state of inauthenticity and a self that exists only in the form of a language that asserts the knowledge of this inauthenticity. This does not, however, make it into an authentic language, for to know inauthenticity is not the same as to be authentic.<sup>402</sup>

According to Waller, it is impossible for Petrarch to abandon his writing even though he realizes the unsteadiness of language. He is the one who writes, but he is not the one who can guarantee his language to be consistent:

though he does not lie, the *Secretum* cannot tell the truth. On the one hand, signs (like snow and sun) are operating according to some internal logic, but, on the other hand, the poet cannot stabilize this operation by guaranteeing that the relationships between sets of signs will remain constant<sup>403</sup>

Petrarch finds himself being captured by language, trapped in his dilemma over whether to change or to act.

In many occasions, Petrarch himself is the one who accelerates the fermentation of language's swiftness, by exchanging the roles of signifier and signified: our poet deludes his readers by confusing object and subject, metaphor and thing, and victim and criminal. His sense of the instability of language is often expressed as "la lingua

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<sup>402</sup> Paul de Man, "Rhetoric of Temporality", p.197, as quoted by Marguerite Waller, *Petrarch's Poetics and Literary History*, The University of Massachusetts Press, 1980, p.85.

<sup>403</sup> , Waller, *Petrarch's Poetics and Literary History* ,p.50.

mortale”: “ma: TAci, grida il fin, /ché farle honore è d' altri homeri soma che da' tuoi... se non che forse Apollo si disdegna/ch' a parlar de' suoi sempre verdi rami/lingua morta-l presumtiosa vegna.”(*Can.* V, 7-8, 12-14) “Tacito vo, ché le parole morte/farian pianger la gente; et i' desio”( *Can.* XVIII,12-13). Finding that he is not able to capture Laura—the woman who should belong to the heaven—with his human language, Petrarch feels so miserable that he has to force himself to stop singing. The same feeling is expressed in sonnet XLIX of the *Canzoniere*, in which Petrarch blames and curses his own language as a “treacherous” friend when he needs its help: even though his heart is full of desire and passion of speaking “sola la vista mia del cor non tace” (*Can.* XLIX:14), his language fails him: “ingrata lingua, già però non m' ài/renduto honor, ma facto ira et vergogna:/ché quando piú 'l tuo aiuto mi bisogna/per dimandar mercede, allor ti stai/sempre piú fredda, et se parole fai./son imperfecte, et quasi d' uom che sogna.”( *Can.* XLIX:3-8)

The difficulties Petrarch encounters in his writing are not uncommon, for his great predecessor Dante has already expressed to the extreme this linguistic predicament: the impossibility that the language(signifier) could fully represent its object (signified). Note also that Dante’s theme is not a usual theme: it is the song of the Almighty God, the highest object ever:

e così, figurando il paradiso,  
 convien saltar lo sacro poema,  
 come chi trova suo cammin riciso.  
 Ma chi pensasse il ponderoso tema  
 e l’omero mortal che se ne carca,  
 nol biasmerebbe se sott’ esso trema: (*Par.* XXIII 61:66)

For Petrarch, Laura is an “angel” that belongs in heaven:

“Lingua mortale al suo stato divino

Giunger non pote; Amor la spinge et tira

Non per elezion ma per destino.”(*Can.* 247:12-14)

Both poets share the same situation, but unlike Dante who readily acknowledges the great gap between his poetry and his object, Petrarch suffers a lot from the insatiable desire that drives him to fill the gap. Look at the Sonnet XX of the *RVF*, which describes his frustration about his writing abilities:

Vergognando talor ch'ancor si taccia,  
donna, per me vostra bellezza in rima,  
ricorro al tempo ch' i' vi vidi prima,  
tal che null'altra fia mai che mi piaccia.

Ma trovo peso non da le mie braccia,  
né ovra da polir colla mia lima:

*però l'ingegno che sua forza extima  
ne l'operation tutto s' agghiaccia.*

Piú volte già per dir le labbra apersi,  
poi rimase la voce in mezzo 'l pecto:  
ma qual sòn poria mai salir tant' alto?

Piú volte incominciai di scriver versi:

*ma la penna et la mano et l' intellecto*

*rimaser vinti nel primier assalto. (Can. XX)*

The talent, turning into ice “*s' agghiaccia*”, is assimilated to the cold, ungrateful tongue that betrays him “*sempre più fredda*”(*Can.* XLIX, 7), his failure in mastering “*la penna et la mano et l' intellecto*” recalls the “*fredda una lingua et duo belli occhi chiusi*”(*Can.* CCIII,13), imprisoning him in a situation of “paralysis of speaking”. Different from the intentional silence in the *Secretum*, the silence in the *Canzoniere*, stemming from a suppressed ambition, is unwilling and full of dismay. The silence in the *Secretum* can

be regarded as a preparation for speaking, the meditation for the future action, while that of the *Canzoniere* represents the fact that the purest and most drastic desire to speak has been violently quenched.

As the process of writing goes on, Petrarch grows to realize how the language distances him further and further from the real Laura—the frustration in writing has turned into the disappointment in language itself. The gap between “parole” and “cose” has become the origin of desire: like Apollo chasing Daphne, the more she rejects him, the more she arouses his erotic ambition. Petrarch’s frustration with his language is well expressed in songs CCCVII-CCCIX: the three of them share a common theme, in which Petrarch’s poetics finds themselves unable to reach the divine part of Laura: it is tired, exhausted, feeling overwhelmed by such a heavy task assigned to it by Love.

### CCCVII

I' pensava *assai destro* esser su l' *ale*,  
non per lor forza, ma di chi le spiega,  
per gir cantando a quel bel nodo eguale  
onde Morte m' assolve, Amor mi lega.  
Trovaime a l' opra via *più lento et frale*  
d' un picciol ramo cui gran fascio piega,  
et dissi: A cader va chi troppo sale,

né si fa ben per huom quel che 'l ciel nega.  
Mai non poria volar *penna d'ingegno*,  
nonché stil grave o lingua, ove Natura  
volò, tessendo il mio dolce ritegno.  
Seguilla Amor con sí mirabil cura  
in adornarlo, ch' i' non era degno  
pur de la vista: ma fu mia ventura.

### CCCVIII

Quella per cui con Sorga ò cangiato Arno,  
con franca povertà serve ricchezze,  
volse in amaro sue sante dolcezze,  
ond' io già vissi, or me ne *struggo et scarno*.  
Da poi piú volte ò riprovato indarno  
al secol che verrà l' alte belleze  
pinger cantando, a ciò che l' ame et preze:

*né col mio stile il suo bel viso incarno*.  
Le lode mai non d' altra, et proprie sue,  
che 'n lei fur come stelle in cielo sparte,  
pur ardisco ombreggiare, or una, or due:  
ma poi ch' i' giungo a *la divina parte*  
ch' un chiaro et breve sole al mondo fue,  
*ivi manca l' ardir, l' ingegno et l' arte*.

### CCCIX

L' alto et novo miracol ch' a' di nostri  
apparve al mondo, et star seco non volse,  
che sol ne mostrò 'l ciel, poi sel ritolse  
per adornarne i suoi stellanti chiostri,  
*vuol ch' i' depinga a chi nol vide, e 'l mostri*,  
*Amor, che 'n prima la mia lingua sciolse*,  
*poi mille volte indarno a l' opra volse*

*ingegno, tempo, penne, carte e 'nchiostri*.  
*Non son al sommo anchor giunte le rime*:  
in me il conosco; et proval ben chiunque  
è 'nfin a qui, che d' amor parli o scriva.  
Chi sa pensare, il ver tacito estime,  
ch' ogni stil vince, et poi sospire: –Adunque  
beati gli occhi che la vider viva.

Comparing Laura to the Sun, the poet imagines himself to be the tragic hero Icarus who wishes to reach the sun but in the end falls to his death into the ocean. Drawn by his inappropriate desire, this crazy flight, again, is an allusion to the “folle volo” of Dante’s Ulysses. However, Petrarch is more like Ulysses after the shipwreck, who, in retrospection, confesses his arrogance. When Ulysses told Dante how he and his men sailed on the ocean, he said: “e volta nostra est nel mattina, de’ remi facemmo *ali* al folle volo, sempre acquistando dal *lato mancino*.” Their oars, gaining on the left side, are not a good sign in the medieval context, which Ulysses failed notice. Petrarch, while looking back, confesses that he thought his “wings” (*ali*) are strong enough (*assai destra*). It is interesting to note that, “*destra*” also means “the right side”. Thus, he thinks he is on the “right” track while in fact, he is on the *lato mancino* like the irrational Ulysses.

Another point that relates these two scenes is that both pertain to the fraudulence of language. According to Waller, Ulysses’ fraudulence lies in that he hid up his deception behind an eloquent speech:

He abused the power of language to be abstract—to structure or govern contingency retrospectively—by “forgetting” or “stealing away” the whole complex of relationships that generates and supports these abstractions.<sup>404</sup>

This is one of the most deceptive aspects of language. Ulysses, having discovered the deadly crash, told the pilgrim that “Noi ci allegrammo, e tosto tomo in pianto” (*Inf.* XXCI, 136)—the change in emotion reveals again the miserable ending brought by linguistic fraudulence. While Ulysses endeavors to conceal this very aspect of language, Petrarch, beaten by frustration, chooses to admit it: “né col mio stile il suo bel viso incarno.” His poetic language, though ingeniously constructed, still cannot bridge the gap between “parole e cose”. In losing her fading beauty, Petrarch cries that her

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<sup>404</sup> Waller, *Petrarch's Poetics and Literary History*, p.47.

sweetness has turned into bitterness, making him in miserable dismay. The emptiness of human language, different from the Word of God, can never fulfill its desire to be a “thing”.

It is also interesting to note that, while Dante depicts his paradise in a world of light, in which souls are grabbed in strong lights, bright faces, sunlight and flame, Petrarch would like to describe his picture in the nocturnal surroundings, or the loss of sun. “L’alto et novo miracol ch’a’dì nostril/apparve al mondo et star seco non volse” (*Can.* CCCIX:1-2) and the metaphor of stars “che ‘n lei fur come stele in cielo sparte,” (*Can.* CCCIX:10) “che sol ne mostrò ‘l Ciel, poi sel ritolse/ per adornarne I suoi stellanti chiostrì,” (*Can.* CCCIX:3-4) The differences between their metaphors—between “darkness” and “light”—somehow reflects Petrarch’s authentic frustration about the nature of human language. Chiarenza draws our attention to a passage in St. Augustine, who distinguishes two existences: the natural existence of a creature and its existence in God. These two existences lead to two modes of knowledges: only the knowledge of a creature in God is real while the natural knowledge is nearly nothing. The divergence between the two modes of knowledge is, according to Augustine, as great as the difference between night and day.<sup>405</sup> Petrarch’s nocturnal poetics, drastically divergent from Dante’s brightly lit verse, has put his own language into a shadow of insubstantiality. Dante’s frustration about his inability of describing Paradise is not a frustration about language itself, but about the limitations of mankind, while Petrarch’s desperate feelings is the result of his clear awareness of the fate that all literary works must face—mortals can never create something immortal, and words will fade.

Dante and Petrarch’s different attitudes towards language is further reflected by their poetic strategies. Dante is required to tell his vision in the heaven: “Ma nondimen,

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<sup>405</sup> “Multum quippe interest inter cognitionem rei cuiusque in verbo Dei et cognitionem eius in natura eius, ut illud merito ad diem pertineat, hoc ad besperam. In comparatione enim lucis illius, quae in verbo Dei conspicitur, omnis cognitio, qua creaturam quamlibet in se ipsa novimus, non immerito nox dici potest: quae rursus tantum differt ab errore bel ignorantia eorum, qui nec ipsam creaturam sciunt, ut in eius comparatione non in congrue dicatur dies.”, as quoted in Chiarenza, “The Imageless Vision and Dante’s Paradiso”, p. 79, originated from *Op.cit.*, Book IV, 23, pp.122-123.





The linguistic retreat of Dante, resulting in the dissipation of images, predicts the coming of the highest vision—God. In the meantime, Dante, with his increased vision, is able to perceive God directly and without an intermedium. However, when he comes back to earth, he needs to tell these experience again with medium. In order to re-present, as much as possible, his instinctive perception of God, Dante has to make his language ineffective. If one thing can still be captured by language, it does not belong to heaven; in other words, Dante deliberately fails his own language in order to prove the authenticity of his experience in heaven. He does not necessarily to see all images in order to perceive God:

The mind, the pilgrim's and the reader's, absorbs totality in its separate parts but is destined to transcend that separation. This principle is ture of the poem also. The pilgrim does not see the last page of the book in God's face, he sees the book bound together, for when the poem is complete it is no longer a sequence but a unity.<sup>407</sup>

When he sees all the separate pages “Nel suo profondo vidi che s'interna, legato con amore in un volume,” (*Par.* XXXIII, 85-86) he believed he has seen a complete image of God's face “La forma universal di questo nodo credo ch'i' vidi,” (*Par.* XXXIII, 91-92). It is in God's mind that the fragments are pieced up orderly and unitedly.

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<sup>407</sup> Chiarenza, “The Imageless Vision and Dante's Paradiso”, p.80.

On the contrary, Petrarch only sees Laura's beauty is like "numberless stars", confusing him and failing his intellect, rendering him ignorant of the real image:

che fur mio sol?" "Non errar con li sciocchi,

né parlar," dice, "o creder a lor modo.

Spirito ignudo sono e'e Ciel mi godo; (*Can.* 359: 58-60)

In this way, the unity of Dantesque poetics is contradicted to the fragmentation of Petrarchan language. Our poet endeavors to use a collection of concrete material elements (roses, lilies, sun, trees, gold, pearl, wind) in order to capture the real Laura, determining her fleeting beauty with something certain. However, the more images are employed, the more Petrarch felt he has been overwhelmed because the hollow he wishes to fill is one without limitation: as Derrida says, infinite signifiers are required to compensate the absent signified. The eternal absence of Laura is the result as well as the *reason* of Petrarch's unexhausted play of words. Petrarch would like to leave his fragments scattered, just like stars scattered in the sky "che 'n lei fur come stelle in cielo sparte, /pur ardisco ombreggiare, or una, or due." (*Can.* CCCVIII, 10-11) There is no ontological center that can bound all elements together, so that Laura is not a typical center like God. There is no transcendental reason for her to be higher and more absolute than other things; after all, she is a mortal. It cannot say Dante does not have the desire to represent heaven, but in front of God, he realizes how insubstantial his language is and how much it constrains his desire. Petrarch, on the contrary, continues

to have his poetics committed to the “crazy flight”.

## Failure of the Eloquence in the *Secretum*

The three dialogues in the *Secretum* have displayed the crisis of eloquence in which Petrarch has expressed the paleness of speaking language—how the eloquence fails as a cure to soul during his conversion. Long established from the Platonic tradition, speaking language is considered to be the most effective representation of the presence of the *self* and of authority, since the direct intuition of the *logos* can stimulate souls more profoundly. That is why Truth wants St. Augustine to speak directly with Francis: she emphasizes that “a human voice” will be more appropriate for the ears of a mortal man — the living voice can be a better pharmacy to the mental disease of Francis rather than the abstract words of God. However, Petrarch has created a Saint Augustine who fails to convince Francis with his rhetoric skill.

The suspicion towards rhetoric can also be found in the letter of “Mount Venteux”, in which Petrarch shows how a living voice is defeated by the curiosity aroused by written text. If we do not forget, Petrarch’s desire for hiking is stimulated by his reading of the ancient author—Livy. He says in the letter that “The idea for this trip had been in my mind for many years.” (*Fam.* IV,1), but the final straw is that “The drive to do what I did today finally overcame me, especially after having re-read some days ago in Livy’s history of Rome.” The climb has been extremely difficult, and then he and his companions encounter an old shepherd, who “made every effort with many words” to

keep them from climbing. It is interesting to note that this old man, in order to persuade them, has used his own experiences as an example, just like St. Augustine who uses his pre-conversion experience to convince Francis. Nevertheless, the same experience, conveyed in speaking language, cannot hold Petrarch back. Neither the old shepherd nor the saint is successful with their eloquence. The written text of Livy triumphs over the old man's speaking voice, and the writing of *Africa* has postponed Francis's conversion in the *Secretum*. The power of eloquence has been compromised when faced with writing in Petrarchan texts, which proves to be an inversion to the Greek tradition.

Rather than Augustine's words being impressed deeply on Francis's heart, he often appears to be forgetful of what the saint has said in the first part of their dialogue: the voice of Augustine fails to reach the soul of Francis, making itself feel merely as "parole che volano, non ne resta nulla." (words which simply escape our lips and disappear.) The method of Saint Augustine's treatment, first of all, is to use his patient's memory, requiring him to remember the noble nature of human being as well as his mortality. The first sentence he spoke to Francis was to tell him to "remember" and not to "forget": "Have you completely forgotten your unhappy state? Have you forgotten you are mortal?"<sup>408</sup> It is obviously a platonic *cliché*: memory and forgetfulness constitute an important theme in the exploration of the soul, because according to Socrates "But all souls do not easily recall the things of the other world; they may have seen them for a short time only, or they may have been unfortunate in their earthly lot, and, having had

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<sup>408</sup> *Secretum*, p.100. "miseriarum ne tuarum sic prorsus oblitus es n non te mortalem esse meministi?"

their hearts turned to unrighteousness through some corrupting influence, they may have lost the memory of the holy things which once they saw.”<sup>409</sup> Forgetfulness thus indicates a loss of self, just like Petrarch’s famous declaration “For who can doubt that Rome would rise again instantly if she began to know herself?” (*Fam.* VI,2)

Recalling again their noble roots and thus stirring one’s ability to rationalize means to know oneself, which serves as an essential factor in the confessions of Saint Augustine, who comes to realize his own mission on earth. By confessing his own past in the activity of memorization, he gradually crystallizes his youth errors and the contradictory dimensions within the nature of all human beings. At once being the noblest creature of God and the mortal who is vulnerable to death and sensual seductions, man is put in a “middle status”. By organizing his life experiences into a narration that is repeated in his mind, he becomes the outsider who *reads* about his own deviations—all these prove to be the preparation for the final turning. He is benefited from *reading* silently in his heart about his experiences. St. Augustine urges Francis to do the same thing—to *read* silently his memories.

Provoking the mortality of man, Saint Augustine tries to draw him to meditate on the issue of death and of the fragility of men, which is peculiarly contracted with his previous intention: intending to lead Francis to remember mankind’s noble origin, the saint ends up making him see the tragic side of man. He always uses the terror of death to provoke Francis, which further weakens his ability to memorize:

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<sup>409</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, Translated with an introduction by Benjamin Jowett, ebook@Adelaide, University of Adelaide.

F: I did know that, but terror made me forget it.<sup>410</sup>

And we could see how Augustine terrifies his patient:

No one who is not completely insane is so stupid that he does not think occasionally of his own frailty; there is no one who would not, if he were questioned, deny that he was a mortal dwelling in a perishable body...Think, in addition, of the funerals of friends, which are so often in front of your eyes, and which strike terror into the hearts of those who see them; anyone who accompanies a contemporary to the grave must, while he trembles at the other's death, also start to worry about himself.<sup>411</sup>

After a few deductions, Francis begins to forget where their starting point is if Augustine does not remind him: "I was beginning to forget, but now I'm beginning to remember."<sup>412</sup> This kind of forgetfulness accompanied with Francis during the first dialogue: "What agreement? And how else should I express myself?"<sup>413</sup>, in which case he even cannot remember the requirements of Augustine. We might assume that it is

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<sup>410</sup> *Ibid*, p.142. "Sciebam, sed memoriam terror abstulerat".

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid*, p.121-123. "Nemo tam demens est, nisi idem prorsus insanus, cui non intetdum conditione proprie fragilitatis occurrat; qui non, si interrogetur, respondeat se esse mortalem et caducum habitare corpusculum...Adde, quod et ex funeribus amicorum, que assidue preter oculos vestros eunt, spectantium animis terror incutitur; quia, dum equevum quisquid comitatur ad sepulcrum, necesse est ipse etiam alieni casus precipitium contremiscat, et de se incipit esse sollicitus".

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid*, p.106. "Oblivisci ceperam, sed incipio recordari".

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid*, p.112. "A quali patti ti richiami(memoras), e quali parole mi esorti ad usare?"

Augustine's rhetoric skills that impair his effort, and now we see Augustine again repeats the miserable nature of human beings that will terrify his student:

A: You will have to put off your humanity and become a god if you wish to lack for nothing.

Do you not know that man is the most needy of all creatures?

F: have often been told so, but I would like you to refresh my memory.<sup>414</sup>

Augustine's efforts in provoking Francis's memories have continued even on the third day of their conversation, and his constant endeavors, ironically, display the paleness of the effects of his speaking(voice). To convince Francis to abandon his secular love, the saint tries to remind him of his own initial steps towards the fall: "So tell me: do you recall your boyhood days, or have your present troubles blotted out the memory of that time?"<sup>415</sup>; however, he finds his guidance on memories has little effects on his patient: "It would surprise you less if you were not so forgetful."<sup>416</sup> Being forgetful shows the ambiguous attitude of Francis towards the voice of the saint: the living voice is not a guarantee for the cure of divisive souls, nor can it help Francis to get rid of his two chains.

On the other hand, the eloquence of Saint Augustine is not that perfectly constructed.

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<sup>414</sup> *Ibid*, p.165. "A: Dovresti spogliarti della tua umanità e diventare un dio, per ottenere di non avere più bisogni. Non sai che l'uomo è il più bisogno di tutti gli animali? F: L'ho sempre sentito dire, ma vorrei che tu integrassi il mio ricordo."

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid*, p.219. "Ora dimmi: ricordi gli anni della fanciullezza, o le tue attuali preoccupazioni ti hanno fatto svanire ogni memoria di quell'età?"

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid*, p.225. "Te ne meravigli solo perché il tuo animo è immerso nell'*oblio*."

For example, it is Petrarch who sometimes points out that the saint is digressing:

F: But, meanwhile, have you not forgotten my first question?<sup>417</sup>

Also, his condemnation and logic deductions are often ambiguous for his audience, which makes Francis uncertain. Especially at the start of their dialogue, almost all of Francis's answers are full of questions and confusions:

F: I don't quite understand what you are saying.

F: I don't see how your conclusion follows.

F: I don't know what you mean. However, I'm already going red in the face.<sup>418</sup>

As can be seen, Francis often cannot understand where Augustine's speaking is leading him, nor he is clear about the meaning of his speaking. Even though the saint endeavors to use his arguments, deductions and rhetoric skills to convince his patient, the result is not that promising or, to put it more precisely, the pharmacy of rhetoric fails to penetrate the soul of Francis.

Actually, the privilege of speaking is not without problem. In fact, the historical Augustine was suspicious of the solidness of speaking language and in his *On Christian*

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<sup>417</sup> *Ibid.*, p.133, "Nunquid non prime questionis oblitus es?", p.21.

<sup>418</sup> These four quotations of Francis are respectively from *Secreum*, pp.101,103 and 105. "Qualiter, queso? Non enim clare intelligo que narras." "Consequentiam istam ego non video" "Quid pares ignoro. Iam nunc tamen frontem meam rubor invasit."



*Doctrine*, he argues that:

The signs of words [*signa verborum*] are established by letters since, once the air has been struck [*verberato aere*], words [*verba*] immediately pass away and last no longer than they sound. Thus words [*voces*] are shown to the eyes, not in themselves, but by the signs which pertain to them” (2.4.5).<sup>419</sup>

The corporeal presence of the author cannot ensure the “truth” of the speaking voice, as Augustine has doubted in the *Confessions*, in which he imaged having a conversation with Moses: “But how would I know whether he spoke the truth? And if I could know this, would I know it from him?” (*Conf.* XI, 3) This, as explained by Freinkel, is because that “Such a voice ‘speaks’ in the absent-present now of figure”<sup>420</sup>. She continues to argue that:

The condition for hearing Moses speak is that he is no longer here before us: his words mark his very disappearance. But even if Moses were before us, we would read his words as if he were absent.<sup>421</sup>

Her opinion has been predicted in *La voix et le phénomène*, in which Derrida reveals

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<sup>419</sup> Quoted from book of Lisa Freinkel, *Reading Shakespeare's Will—The Theology of Figure from Augustine to the Sonnets*, Columbia University Press, 2002, p.36.

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid*, p.37.

<sup>421</sup> *Ibid*, p.37.

the illusion of the priority of speaking language (one's voice) — to the listener, in other words, the speaking voice is not equal to the presence of the voice maker.

*En effet quand j'écoute autrui, son vécu ne m'est pas présent « en personne », originellement. Je peux avoir, pense Husserl, une intuition originelle, c'est-à-dire une perception immédiate de ce qui en lui est exposé dans le monde, de la visibilité de son corps, de ses gestes, de ce qui se laisse entendre des sons qu'il profère, mais la face subjective de son expérience, sa conscience, les actes par lesquels en particulier il donne sens à ses signes, ne me sont pas immédiatement et originellement présents comme ils le sont pour lui et comme les miens le sont pour moi.<sup>422</sup>*

Just as what Derrida writes in his *La pharmacie de Platon*, that the domination of speaking language is an invented mythology, an illusionary center which results from the suppression of the margin — the written language; but in the real conversation, even this guarantee is somewhat shaky:

En effet, dans le discours réel, communicatif, etc., l'expression cède la place à l'indice parce que, l'on s'en souvient, le sens visé par autrui et, d'une manière générale, le vécu d'autrui ne me sont pas présents en personne et ne peuvent jamais l'être.<sup>423</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> Jacques Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène*, introduction au problème du signe dans la phénoménologie de Husserl, Presses universitaires de France, 1968 Epiméthée, 1993, p.41-42.

<sup>423</sup> *Ibid.*, p.99.

The instability of language is inevitable since it is “an act irremediably trapped in temporality, contaminated with the mutable, incapable of that simultaneity which is denied all mortal discourse”.<sup>424</sup> Once spoken, it is trapped in the irreversible succession of time, and is scattered by the trichotomy of time (pass, present and future). Thus, the narration of the self — a way to construct *self* which is based on language — is dangerous.

### The Significance and Crisis of Reading in the *Secretum*

Reading serves as an important bridge to Petrarch’s anachronistic communications with ancient authors. Peppering his writings with quotations and allusions from classical texts, Petrarch reveals to readers that his sense of history, his concept of dark age, his feeling of being an outsider of his own age, his awareness of the break between his time and the precedent epochs, and also his understanding of himself in the flow of history are fermented, formulated, constructed and configured based on his reading of the past. His understanding of the history and of his own age is, therefore, derived from his awareness of being an innovative, avid reader not only in reading the actual texts of authors such as Cicero, Virgil and Seneca, but also in reshaping their thoughts into something new that can be adapted to his own intellectual enterprises.

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<sup>424</sup> Greene, *Light in Troy*, p.126.

For Petrarch, classical texts are not only letters, but contexts that can produce a mental landscape, simulating, revoking and configuring history, permitting one to travel in the past, and helping to him construct a deep understanding of a far-away time:

He read ancient and medieval literature with a hitherto unheard of sense for historical interrelations, and his ability to interpret a text critically was just as new. Since he as such a keen observer of actual life and so lovingly devoted to the investigation of the human heart, *all the records of the past became a living reality to him*, and he felt himself sharing in the drama related as if he had an active part in the cast.<sup>425</sup>

The strong sense of participation and resonance to the history draws Petrarch out of his own age for which he feels contempt, and distinguishes him from his contemporaries. The intellectual uniqueness acquired from reading summons him to a solitary life and to a land of silence which creates a unique poetic space that can accommodate his anxieties generated by the acute awareness of identity—that is, his concept of “he being himself”. However, his *avant* acknowledge of the *self* brings him more anxiety than security since it may be contrary to the Medieval meaning of man, which emphasizes man’s entire dependence on God’s grace, rather than a reliance on his own will. His contemporaries can hide safely under the *veil* mentioned by Burckhardt.

Apart from providing him with spiritual shelter, reading helps him overcome the

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<sup>425</sup> “Introduction” in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, trans. by Hans Nachod, p.25.

anguish of a scattered soul. This brings about the birth of his little book the *Secretum*. It is the same for the birth of the *Secretum* that Petrarch wanted to enjoy in privacy: “Therefore, little book, avoid the places where men assemble, and content to stay with me, remembering the name which I have given you. You are my secret book, and so you shall be called. When I think about important matters, what you have recorded in secret will be recalled in secret.”<sup>426</sup> Throughout the three dialogues, Petrarch has described his attempt to “collect the fragments of his own soul”: “But I hope that God will grant me His pardon, since every single day I am sunk in such thoughts, and even more at night when the mind is freed from the cares of the daytime and is left to itself.”<sup>427</sup> To piece the fragments up means to have a united self that serves to give a complete image of Petrarch’s complicated identities:

I beg you to pray for them so that having been tossed about hither and yon, they may be directed to the one, the good the true, the certain and the stable. (*Fam*, IV, 1)

The process of unification is realized through silent reading. When he opens the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine, he does not read it out loud; instead, he reads the passage in silence:

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<sup>426</sup> *Secretum*, p. 99. “Tuque ideo, libelle, conventus hominum fugiens, mecum mansisse contentus eris, nominis proprii non immemor. *Secretum* enim *meum* es et diceris; michique in altioribus occupato, ut unumquodque in abdito dictum meministi, in abdito memorabis”.

<sup>427</sup> *Secretum*, p. 130. “Sed sic michi Deus venie largus sit, ut ego per dies singulos in has cogitationes immergor precipueque noctibus, cum diurnis curis relaxatus animus se in se ipsum recolligit.”

I confess that I was astonished, and hearing my eager brother asking for more I asked him  
not to annoy me (*Fam.* IV, 1)

Here, the silence of Petrarch creates a vacuum that guarantees the words he has read are *only* available to himself. Refusing to turn outwards, Petrarch has internalized the letters which realizes a specific Petrarchan moment. Augustine's words, made public a book, has turned the privately personal under the effect of the Petrarchan silence. Reading<sup>428</sup>, in this way, proves to be a method of self-therapy for the collection of the soul's fragments.<sup>429</sup>

Written language is fairly important to Petrarch, in an age when the acknowledgement of antiquity is reviving and ancient manuscripts are being pursued and collected: it is not an exaggeration to say that written language is the material vehicle of classical spirit. If one wants to know a past era, or a late person, all he can do is to look for the records which could be in various forms: letters, photos, videos, images... If one were to live in Petrarch's age, when photography and massive printing

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<sup>428</sup> In this article, reading, in general sense, refers to textual reading, which is unlike to the "reading" projected by Gur Zak, who, in his *Petrarch's Humanism and the Care of Self*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, said: "This attempt to decipher the true nature of Franciscus' desires is ultimately presented in the work as an act of reading – the reading of Franciscus' "book of experiences.", p.108.

<sup>429</sup> According to Garin, humanists' philosophy is closely related to philology, with an essence of rhetoric and poetics: "This philology is an altogether new method of looking at problems, and is therefore not, as some have believed, to be considered side by side with traditional philosophy, as a secondary aspect of the civilization of the Renaissance. It was essentially an effective philosophical method", from Eugenio Garin, *Italian Humanism; Philosophy and Civic Life in Renaissance*, trans. by Peter Munz, Harper& Row, 1965, p.4.

did not exist, the method available is quite limited, and is for him to study history. We cannot imagine if Petrarch wants to read an ancient text, he can search online or just walk into a bookstore to get a printed copy. At that time, even texts in foreign languages proved to be nearly inaccessible to him. For example, Petrarch is never able to read Plato in Greek because of the sudden disruption of his Greek lessons. Thus, Petrarch's knowledge of ancient time is principally textual:

Books please inwardly; they speak with us, advise us and join us together with a certain living and penetrating intimacy, nor does this instill only itself into its readers, but it conveys the names and desire for others. To cite some examples, Cicero's *Academicus* made Marcus Varro dear and attractive to me; and the name of Ennius I heard in his books on *Offices*; from a reading of the *Tusculan Disputations* I first felt my love for Terence...Augustine prompted me to start looking for Seneca's book, *Against Superstitions*...and likewise the budding brevity of Annaeus Florus prompted me to seek the remains of Titus Livy. (*Fam.* III, 18)

The experience of reading a book serves as a link between Petrarch and the past, and such a link is trans-chronological: Augustine's works lead him to Seneca, and Seneca's admiration of Cicero brought him further back in an age more antique. Reading a book does not end there, but "conveys the names and desire for others". In his explanation for the great thirst for books, Petrarch claims how he feels in love with the ancients through textual descriptions: he cannot personally know any of the characters he cites

as example, but he indeed loves them—textually.

However, to Petrarch, the crisis of reading cannot be neglected. His doubts of the “reading” experience are designed to put in the mouth of St. Augustine in the *Secretum*. On one hand, Augustine wishes to use his speaking (the living voice) as a medicine to cure Francis, but his ambiguous rhetorical skill and plausible deduction have made this medicine not as effective as he expects. On the other hand, his doubts on the action of reading and his condemnation of Francis’s identity as a reader of the classics further deepens the divergence between himself and Francis. For instance, he criticizes Francis’s reading as pride, one of the biggest sins that deviates man from God:

A: You put your trust in your intellect and in all those books you have read; you pride yourself on your eloquence, and delight in the beauty of a body which is destined to die.<sup>430</sup>

He also refutes the significance of Francis’s reading of books, assuming that his reading brings no benefit to his sick mind.

A: What good has it done you, reading it and remembering it? Ignorance would have been some excuse. Aren’t you ashamed that, for all your white hair, no change has come about in you?<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>430</sup> *Secretum*, p.145. “Fidis ingenio et librorum lectione multorum; gloriaris eloquio, et forma morituri corporis delectaris.”

<sup>431</sup> *Secretum*, p.253. “Quid vel legisse vel meminisse profuit? Excusabilius erat ignorantie clipeum posse pretendere. Nonne enim pudet doc scienti canos nil mutationis attulisse?”



A: And so it would be better to put into practice what you've learnt, rather than try to add to your knowledge, when there is always more to learn and no end to one's researchers.<sup>432</sup>

The uselessness of Francis's reading lies in the fact that what he has experienced through letters cannot translate into a realization in his real life. Ironically, Augustine, in his persuasion of Francis, can do nothing but refers back to his own writings:

However, I am not surprised to see you entangled in the very perplexities which used to torment me while I was trying to find a better way of life...And then, as soon as I really wanted to change, I was able to, and with amazing speed I became a different person, the story of whose life I think you know from my Confessions.<sup>433</sup>

Here, Augustine has recalled the history of his conversion as an outsider, as another person that is totally distinguished and has been separated from the "past" Augustine.

Thus Augustine, who is talking with Francis is sharing the experiences not of his *self*

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<sup>432</sup> *Secretum*, p.258,260. "Erat igitur potius quemadmodum in actum produceres experiendo tentandum, quam in laboriosa cognitione procedendum, ubi novi semper recessus et inaccesses latebre et inquisitionum nullus est terminus".

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid*, p.113-115. "Nec tamen admiror te in his hunc ambagibus obvolutum in quibus olim ego ipse iactatus, dum novam vite viam carpere editarer...Itaque postquam plene volui, ilicet et potui, miraque et felicissima celeritate transformatus sum in alterum Augustinum, cuius historie seriem, ni fallor, ex *Confessionibus* meis nosti".

but of his narrative *self*. At first Francis agrees with the encounter of Augustine's narrative self: "at times I have the impression that I am reading not of someone else's but of my own wandering"<sup>434</sup>. However, this sense of affinity quickly elapses when it touches upon his own life experience, because Augustine's narrative moment of conversion "subito ho potuto" (suddenly I am able to) is contradicted by Francis's life experience which is full of relapses. The failure of transformation dissuades Francis from following Augustine even if he shares an emotional common ground with Augustine's written book.

The crisis of reading, therefore, turns out to be the contradiction between the narration and real life. The core of such a contradiction is, however, brought on by the paradox of the narrative self. Francis restrains in following his tutor is more due to his discredit of Augustine's narrative self than of Augustine's authentic self. In other words, even though the real Augustine himself appears in front of Petrarch, it is very likely that he would refuse Augustine's advice. In one sense, Augustine the person wishes to persuade Francis to imitate his success in the *Confessions*; in other sense, Augustine the figure (the narrative self in books) is, after all, un'*altro Agostino*. Therefore, the person and the figure, though both are named Augustine, are not the same. Augustine's persuasion is only effective when the author and the personage are the same person, but

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<sup>434</sup> *Secretum*, p.115. "letis non sine lacrimis interdum legere me arbitrer non alienam sed propriam mee peregrinatiois historiam".

unfortunately, they are *not*. Now let us come to our third and last point to see the essential contradictions rooted in the narrative self.

## The Paradox of the Narrative of the Self

When Petrarch is constructing his narrative self, he cannot help not to notice the “disappropriation” and “distortion” between the self and the subject in the narration<sup>435</sup>, which makes him confess the following when he is required by the emperor to write down his life:

My life from the day I was born until now, shall I speak of it as fable or history? (fabulam dicam an hisoriam) (*Fam.* XIX,3)

Even Petrarch himself cannot decide whether he should talk about “himself” or the “self in the representation of narration”, for he has realized that the distance between reality(history) and narration(fable) is inevitable. When such doubt is generated in our poet’s mind, it fully highlights the dilemma encountered by Petrarch who is forced to face his narrative self directly: which “self” should be taken as authentic? In other words, which self should be considered as the nature of a man? The discursive, historical one, or the chronical, narrative one? Paradoxically, this disappropriation is

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<sup>435</sup> Paul L. Jay, “Autobiography and the Problem of the Subject”, *MLN*, Vol. 97, No.5, Comparative Literature, 1982, pp.1045-1063, “for the ‘disappropriation’ as it occurs in the very activity of thinking the ‘self’ into ‘being’”, p.1046.

not caused by a fraudulent intention or deliberate self-flattering but by the change of context in which events are interpreted, because one has more resources and angles to interpret the former events with successive events. The interpretation of the events of chronology, as is said by Petrarch, can be natural or invented: on the level of embryology and phenomenology, they are natural and they have actually happened; on the level of literature or sociology, however, they are made to fit for a certain ideology or specific habits. In fact, no one can clearly separate these two interpretive modes.

Autobiography is a combination of the two—it is *made* to be *natural*. If autobiographic narration were to mimic the real life faithfully, it should be fragmented, repetitious and discontinuous, just as Roland Barthes said: “I am not contradictory, I am dispersed.”<sup>436</sup> Barthes opposes the view that autobiography should be confessional, promoting the idea that the current self is *better than* the past self, and that it can judge and correct the erroneous “past”. On the contrary, there should be no privilege of one over the other, and it is a literary creation that allows the writer to re-experience the events in a new way: “My hope is that I may, whenever I read it, experiencing once again the pleasure which I had in the conversation itself”<sup>437</sup>. The pleasure, ironically, is not from the conversation *per se*, since Francis, in the three-day long talk, is neither relieved nor joyful; in fact, his spirit is undergoing a severe inquiry and experiencing blame. His pleasure is generated from the reading, from the re-experience of the pain

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<sup>436</sup> Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard, Hill and Wang, 1977, p.142.

<sup>437</sup> *Secreum*, p.98. “sed ut dulcedinem, quam semel ex colloquutione percepi, quotiens libuerit ex lectione percipiam”.

and torture in a textual activity that provides him a distant, more “mature” angle for observation as well as a way to rejoice in his own survival. Now the author, the “I” can sit at leisure, and read about himself in retrospection—it is just like recalling the toil and violence on sea when returning to the harbor.

For Petrarch the narration of self must lead to fragments. According to Zak, Petrarch’s paradoxical self lies in the problem of time, that is, his narrative self has to face is the conflict between narrativity and circularity:

The source of this failure, this chapter argues, is precisely the poet’s opposite effort to abolish time completely by means of his desire and writing and the circularity embedded in them, creating in the collection a constant and irresolvable tension between narrativity and circularity.”<sup>438</sup>

A subject or an event, once put inside a narration, it becomes scattered, because language itself is scattered in time. No explanation is clearer than the one in the *Confessions*, where Saint Augustine has elucidated the relationship between “sound” and “time”, in which he has shown how human language must function within time:

Suppose, now, the voice of a body begins to sound, and does sound, and sounds on, and list, it ceases; it is silence now, and that voice is past, and is no more a voice. Before it

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<sup>438</sup> Gur Zak, *Petrarch’s Humanism and the Care of Self*, p.57.

sounded, it was to come, and could not be measured, because as yet it was not, and now it cannot, because it is no longer. Then therefore while it sounded, it might; because there then was what might be measured. But yet even then it was not at a stay; for it was passing on, and passing away. Could it be measured the rather, for that? For while passing, it was being extended into some space of time, so that it might be measured, since the present hath no space. If therefore then it might, then, lo, suppose another voice hath begun to sound, and still sounded in one continued tenor without any interruption; let us measure it while it sounds; seeing when it hath left sounding, it will then be past, and nothing left to be measured; let us measure it verily, and tell how much it is.<sup>439</sup>

The narrative of the self highlights even more urgent such crisis, because its subject is the author himself, this problem occurs: past does happen in a chronological form but it does not exist anymore. The word “exist” refers not to the natural, historical being, but to the being of the consciousness, since the subject—at the same time the author—did not and could not consider something to be past while he was experiencing it. As suggested by Augustine: if the past time has passed, how we can experience it? Thus, the past events to him are out of chronology, but the author intends to make them chronological which is the most treacherous aspect about autobiography. Nevertheless, he still cannot restrain his desire to speak. Such desire puts him in a state of confusion about his own identity: “Lasso, che son? Che fui?” (*Can.* XXIII, 30), and he finds

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<sup>439</sup> *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. by Edward B Pusey, Book XI, 27,35-36.

himself unrecognizable: “quand’era in parte altr’uomo da quell chi’i’ sono,” (*Can.* I, 4). Petrarch the author, even when he is writing, still does not possess the absolute authorial point, since his “self” is still in the process of changing, while the narrative self, once made into words, is forced to stagnate.

The status of stagnancy of the narrative self can only be achieved through the experience of conversion: when the soul *has made* the decisive turning, it has come to the point of termination. It is not “is making”, “will make” nor “made”, but “has made”. The perfective tense of the description symbolizes the finality of change, and that’s why it is called “perfect”. Unfortunately, our poet does not possess the firm standing of St. Augustine nor of Dante. Steadiness is strange to Petrarch since such status signifies exclusion of all possibilities of internal contradictions and of conflicts between opposites. In *De Remediis utrisque Fortuna*e, Petrarch displays his knowledge of the philosophy of Heraclitus that emphasizes the fleeing and motions of all things in the world. All is made of contradictions and antagonism exists in all things: Petrarch presented a list of nature phenomenon and social phenomenon to prove that our world is moved by dissension and by the conflict of opposites:

He speaks of the perpetual agitation of the sea, of the turmoil of the winds, of the generality of war. Dissension exists among all living beings: fish, birds, beasts, and men. One species is pitted against the other, the lion against the wolf, the wolf against the dog, the dog against the hare... Antagonismi s 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. It is not only external but internal.<sup>440</sup>

Nothing stays still, and fluctuation is universal. Petrarch even claims that nothing he ever read or heard can rival the impact brought by Heraclitus' ideas: "Ex omnibus quae vel mihi lecta placuerint vel audita, nihil pene vel insedit altius vel tenacius inhaesit, vel crebrius ad memoriam rediit, quam illud Heracliti, omnia secundum litem fieri."<sup>441</sup>

Following such logic, it is not hard to understand why Petrarch may find the philosophy of conversion not plausible since it posits a life without changes and fluctuations and it believes that after conversion, one is immune to "transformation". It is a status most approaching the motionless perfection of God: in the context of the history of philosophy, perfection is often another word for "changelessness". Petrarch's credit in the philosophy of Heraclitus and his unique view of time explain why the narrative self in the allegory of conversion can be such a threat to his project of self-establishment. On the one hand, our author discovers the inevitable erosion brought by time to both "selves"; the literary construction is not the way to *eternity*; on the other hand, Petrarch's sensitivity to various kinds of motion in the world again strengthens his doubt in the philosophy of conversion. Even if he can write a perfect story of conversion, but what about the reality—the self that dwells in the earthly life? The life will continue but may not make any progress, and the "reading experience" of

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<sup>440</sup> Marcel Françon, "Petrarch, Disciple of Heraclitus", p.266, from *Speculum*, vol.1, no.2, 1936, pp.265-271.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid*, p.266. The original text is from Petrarch's *De Remediis*, Francisci Petrarcae poetae oratorisque clarissimi *De Remediis utriusque Fortunae Libri II*. (Lyons, 1585), p.418.



conversion cannot be copied and applied to another person. Realizing these facts, Petrarch would like to tell readers his failures. Only by pointing to the individual existence, can we fully understand Petrarch's effort and predicament in constructing his narrative of the self in the story of conversion.

# Conclusion

Petrarch may not be unique, but he is surely different.

Although I do not intend to read him according to his aura of “Father of Humanism”, I constantly feel an unneglectable connection with modernity. Many times, it seems to me that Petrarch does not seem to be an author who was born in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, but an author of my own day and age. This similarity does not decrease, even from eyes of a Chinese student, so far removed from the Western point of view. This makes me think: why does the charm of Petrarch appear to be so intimate?

Many Petrarchan scholars and students would like to attribute this feeling to the transformations in the fields of politics, economics, culture, religion, *etc.* that took place during the 14<sup>th</sup> century. These perspectives of research do reveal much about Petrarch and his age; however, social transformations influence people, bringing in new thoughts that are different from the old ones—this is a *cliché* everyone knows about. The problem with this kind of explanations lies in the fact that they cannot exclude many irrelevant elements, and cannot give a persuasive explanation pertaining to a specific question. However, they all point to one important aspect—the emerging of individualism in Petrarch’s mind.

There are countless studies on the emergence of individualism and numerous investigations of the exploration of the self. Using Burkhardt’s terminology, people begin to step outside the collective veil that hovers over the Middle Ages, and they start to cast a look on their own selves. I will not delve into the details of individual thought

or selfhood in my thesis, since my main concern does not lie there. Instead of attempting to reach a concrete definition of such a complex and vexed term, I would like to explore what exactly does “individualism” mean to Petrarch. Simply put, I intend to probe the fact that, while much of Petrarch’s thoughts remain under a medieval veil, Petrarch instead views himself as an relatively independent individual. So, how does his mind stretch outside the wall of medieval thought? When I am reading Petrarch, I always feel a sense of urgency concerning the idea of individual existence. Why? Because in his writings, he often expresses anguish, desperation and anxiety towards the shortness and shiftiness of one’s life. The expression of such a sentiment about time is not rare among literary authors; however, Petrarch may be the first one who makes suggestions about how to use time effectively and at the same time account for its shiftiness and irreversibility. He is also the first author to internalize time as the urgency of existence of the self and as a platform through which the self evolves. In other words, his economic view of time actually reveals a more realistic problem—the crisis of the individual existence.

The close relationship between time and the existence of the self in Petrarch’s thought, in turn, makes his individualism particularly prominent, and that is the reason why I begin my thesis with a chapter about the investigation of the concept of time. In general terms, time can be divided into two kinds: linear time and circular time. Circular time is closely related to the teachings of the philosophers in ancient Greece, who considered the development of time like a circle that ends up where it began. Linear time, on the contrary, assumes the existence of a progressive path in history, with an

ontological aim. This teleological view of history makes linear time more suitable for the narrative of Christianity, with its purported eschatology—a fulfillment of human history realized by the Advent of Christ. These two kinds of time seem to demonstrate two contradictory beliefs. However, Petrarch's thought can accommodate both of them. His view of human history adapts to the idea of linear time, which displays a historical path that proceeds from the Dark Ages to the modern period—termed by us the “Renaissance”. His view on private history—the history of the self—follows the idea of circular time, displaying a man's life full of relapses and repetitions. Chapter One, in this way, shows this Petrarchan contradiction in historiography, a contradiction that is excluded from both Augustine's and Dante's thought. It is Petrarch's contradictory views of human history and private history that make him fail to accomplish the conversions. Chapter Two mainly investigates three failed conversions in Petrarch's works to support the previous chapter. The circularity in the development of his own self is also opposite to the idea of conversion, which requires one to believe that the development of an individual is progressive and ever advancing.

Chapter Three analyses Petrarch's view of time in more depth, taking to account the field of historiography by introducing the concept of narrative, the necessary method for Petrarch to express his own self. It is found here that through his narrative of the self, Petrarch comes to understand both linear time and circular time, and their configuration in the historical development of the self. Chapter Four analyzes the ideas suggested in the previous chapter in more depth, by giving a detailed analysis of the text of the *Secretum*, the little book dealing with death, eternal glory, and the meaning

of literature.

The most profound idea about time, which is brought to Petrarch through the use of narrative is the meditation on death: by reading and writing, Petrarch tries to probe the meaning of death and, consequently, of life. To Petrarch, to understand time is to understand the meaning of death; the passing of time signifies the approaching of death and the erasure of one's existence in the secular world. Death pushes him to meditate constantly on the ultimate problem faced by all of us. In other words: what is the meaning of life? What does it mean to be human? Here, the contradictions and paradoxes of Petrarch's view of time are most prominent, due to the fact that he realizes that a mortal man is doomed to die while the life of great Rome can last forever. His situation strongly reminds me of the positions of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger. Robert Durling's studies on Petrarch's fragmental selves and John Freccero's work on Petrarch's idolatry in turn led me to discover a "Derrida" side to our poet. Both studies reveal the "lack of unity", the "absence of a center" and the "play of signifiers" in Petrarch's poetics, which I have discussed in detail in my last chapter.

This contradiction, moreover, drives Petrarch to attach himself, emotionally and geographically, to Rome. The meditation on "space" is central to our understanding of Petrarch: his experience of exile and his fascination with Rome drives me to investigate the motivations behind this attitude. In fact, when we talk about "time and existence", we can hardly avoid talking about "space", since existence itself implies the occupation or inhabitation of a certain space. The acknowledgement of the role of space in the construction of the self is closely related to the recognition of identity, that is,

knowledge about the self. “Dichterlich wohnt der Mensch”—Heidegger’s famous quotation from the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin—perfectly reflects the meaning of space in our existence. The “poetic dwelling” resonates with Petrarch’s aversion to the noisy city life and with his love for the solitary life. However, to Petrarch, poetry is parallel to theology. For Petrarch, to live poetically cannot be enough: one must also live morally.

In recent years, the problem of international refugees and the increasing attention paid to the feminist movement constantly call our attention to the relationship between space and identity. What is the meaning of being a man, and what does “civilization” mean? What makes men and women different, at home and at work? How does our position and our “space” define who and what we are? Probing around these tangled thoughts, I struggle to drag myself back to Petrarch’s problem: why is Rome so important to him? How does spatiality influence Petrarch’s self? Remember, because of Rome, he comes to re-define the Dark Ages; because of Rome, he develops a different view of both “contemporary” and “antique”. Finally, because of Rome, he insists on receiving and perpetuating classical culture. It is Rome that endows him with a permanent and stable identity as a crowned poet, and it is Rome that leads him to pursue the same earthly glory that in turn consolidates his own identity. By providing him with a permanent location, Rome seems to put an end to his status of homeless poet and exile—even though Petrarch continues to describe himself as a wanderer. Petrarch often wants to arrive at a safe port; contradictorily, he is not wholeheartedly ready to be situated in one single place. For him, the sense of homelessness is like a drug, making

him addicted and at the same time desperately exhausted. Rome has become an ideal place, a spiritual paradise and a comforting place for his impulsive soul.

As much as Petrarch has experienced fragmentation in his existence, the feeling that strikes his heart most frequently and most drastically is the eagerness to collect the scattered pieces of his own selves, and to organize his discursive mind as well as his dispersed works, and to pin down his shifty identities, making all of them into *one*. Hölderlin's later writing coincidentally responds to Petrarch's status: "being one is god-like and good, but human, too human, the mania which insists there is only the One, one country, one truth, and one way." The German poet's famous words—"human, too human"—highlight the collective dream of mankind: mortals wish to be immortal, and the temporary wishes to be eternal. While our Greek ancestors always wish to transgress on their humanity, humanist thinkers appear to be more constrained, since as much as they adore the exalted dignity of men, they clearly know that there is a hard boundary between man and God. They are deeply aware that man is "man", and that he is different from God, the *One*.

Difference, according to Derrida, exists because of the boundary: it is the frame of the painting that makes a painting what it is. Thus, to retain the boundary between man and God is actually to retain the uniqueness of human beings. Petrarch's desire to approach the *One* is of the same type: maybe his creation of Laura is idolatrous, but at the same time, he well realizes that his Laura cannot act as a substitute for God or the *center*. Such an awareness makes him feel anguished—just like the half-god Achilles felt anguished when he realized his mortal limitations. However, within his anxiety,

Petrarch finds “humanism”—the character of being a man: indeed, it is from within the mortal limitations that we can see both man’s greatest willpower for continued existence and his struggle when facing his mortality. Thus, Petrarch keeps writing and reading until the last moment—he wishes to leave as many witnesses of his limited life as possible to future generations. He knows that his narrative “I” may be alienated and twisted; nevertheless, his persistence and passion in the pursuit of literature and culture somewhat manages to counterbalance such drawbacks. Through constant writing, Petrarch, to the greatest degree, has reproduced in a vivid picture to his readers what he *is* like while he *is* living. Such a vivid immediacy (the status of the *now*) does not rely on the Word of God, but are instead founded on the words of a mortal man, that is, Petrarch himself.

To Petrarch, his writing becomes the way for him to reach the *One*. However, writing proves to be as much of a solution as a problem. I noticed this problem with time while I am reading Augustine’s *Confessions*. The event of conversion is only a trope, a textual substance. On the one hand, the a-temporal nature of conversion, which is contrary to the pace of narrative, makes the narration of conversion an illusion; on the other hand, it is impossible to have a true and secure “perspective of the end” within this life. As for Petrarch himself, he is well known as being an author who refuses to have any “perspective of the end” in his own life story. The contradiction in Petrarch’s view of time, plus his own personality, makes conversion a thought predicament for him, since it brings about more problems than the ones it solves. Petrarch does not know when such a mysterious moment will come for him, neither does he find it easy to separate



his past self from the present one.

While he is still living in this life, Petrarch can never have enough knowledge to judge whether this is *the* moment. In his *Secretum*, he has made Francis question the reason why he still failed, since he has willed enough, desired enough. “No”, Augustine shook his head, “not enough”. Sometimes our poet optimistically thinks that he has escaped from Love’s prison, but the next moment he finds himself relapsing again. Therefore, Augustine’s conversion can only be Augustine’s, as Dante’s can only be Dante’s. Their experiences are universal, but they are also intimately individual. When their real experiences are transformed into words and examples, many people forget the “individualism” behind their seemingly universal philosophy of salvation. Even though Petrarch endeavors to copy the Augustinian conversion on the summit of Ventoux, he can only imitate the external act of reading, while the internal act of turning is absent from his actions.

To conclude, the time in Augustine’s and Dante’s narration of conversion displays no conflict with the time in the narration of Christian history. As I have discussed in my thesis, conversion is actually an individual miniature of macro-history: both of them are founded on the idea of linear, progressive time; and both of them depend on a decisive moment to separate the past from the present. They also believe that there is an ultimate aim for history: for a man, it is salvation; for the whole of human history, it is fulfillment.

<b>Conversion</b>	<b>Christian History</b>
micro	macro
individual	collective
moment of turning	Advent of Christ
individual salvation	historical fulfillment
from low to high, from fallen to blessed	from fallen to final salvation

Like the bridge in Dante's *Inferno*, Christian history is destined to experience a drastic rupture—the death of Christ—that entirely separates human history into two distinct parts. Before Christ, there is no hope for salvation, and human history is immersed in darkness; after Christ, men are promised a return to paradise. From the perspective of Christianity, human history depends on one single event to change everything. The narration of Christian history, therefore, has been guaranteed a “better” future because the future is already programmed. In this way, history after Christ is been transformed into a lengthy process of expecting the future, in which the future will be turned into a verification of the *present*. It is not concluded, but it is already fulfilled. The *present*—the Advent of Christ— extends itself both backwards and forward, incorporating both the past and the future into one unified scheme in the mind of God. The belief of the *present* is explained as “faith”. Augustine found his faith in discovering this *present* through the human soul, while Dante found his faith in bringing the *present* into his poetic creation.

In the case of Petrarch, things go rather differently. His essential concept of time is,

in many aspects, at odds with Christian history. Based on his personal experience, Petrarch finds time to be linear, but also circular, at the same time. Petrarchan time is not always progressive, but stagnant and relapsing. Stagnancy and constant relapses produce anguish in his heart, robbing him of a sense of security and certainty. It is our human nature to search for order, arrangement and regulation amid the countless events and issues in our lives, and this is why Santagata has argued that the ultimate aim of Petrarch's revision of the *Canzoniere* is to put these discursive poems in order, and to give them a meaning inside the whole. Apart from the passion invested in the revision of his works, Petrarch's obsession with the important religious dates in his own personal life also reveals his desire for some certainty. The famous 6<sup>th</sup> April is the best example: Petrarch would like to relate all his significant dates to this one date—this way of marking time not only makes his life feel more mystical, but also makes it reasonably “predictable”.

However, despite all these efforts, Petrarch still finds it hard to escape the diversions of life and the arbitrariness of fate. Like Francis in the *Secretum*, he really wanted to, but could not. Over his head, there is not only the Providence of God, but also the heavy wheel of Fortune. The participation of Fortune (even though Petrarch is still unsure of its existence) adds an element of variety to the plan of God. If the Augustinian conversion is like a linear equation ( $ax+b=0$ ), then Petrarch's is like a linear equation in two unknowns ( $ax+by=0$ ). There will be countless answers to this equation and this, while creating numberless possibilities for his development, at the same time forces him to face the extreme instability of his life. Thus, as Trinkaus said, Petrarch is a man

caught between desperation and hope: the former is controlled by Fortune and the latter is in the hands of God.

What makes Petrarch *different* from his medieval predecessors, his contemporaries and from later humanists is the fact that he always puts himself in the middle of a fork in the road and at the approximation of a bifurcation, that is, between the two forces—God and Fortune, certainty and arbitrariness. He does not try to abandon either of them, nor does he try to revolutionize them. Even though he has failed so many times in pursuing a sort of spiritual turning, he realizes the dissonance between his consciousness of private time and that of Christian history. Overall, Petrarch never stops leading himself to a safe port and wishing to end with a peaceful death and these desires make him still a typical medieval man. In his story, readers are provided with many chances to see how conflicts are formed and evolved: such conflicts, unlike Augustine's two wills, are battles between two cultures that have different views of the status of existence and of individualism. It is absurd to say that Petrarch has already formed a clear concept of individualism. However, he knows there is something he is struggling to forge—some kind of identity, or some acknowledgement about himself—which forms in his mind a nebulous concept of a man independent from any sort of ontology. This is a man defined not by the collective community of faith, but by his own self. As Pico said, a man is free to choose to be what he likes: a god or a beast. Such freedom can only originate when man is an independent subject.

Does this not sound familiar? In the *Iliad*, the half-god Achilles perfectly displays the contradiction between beast and god. Simone Weil has highlighted the most

dramatic moment in the poem: “Somebody was here, and the next minute there is nobody here at all; this is a spectacle the *Iliad* never wearies of showing us...The hero becomes a *thing* dragged behind a chariot in the dust.”<sup>442</sup> Hector is dead. The simplicity of this fact makes Achilles’s violence most prominent —his fury has alienated him from men and gods. At this very moment, he is no more the exalted son of Zeus, but a thing, and even worse than a beast. Refusing to return Hector’s corpse, Achilles wished to make the Trojan hero as degraded as a beast, since if a dead man is deprived of the chance of having a funeral, he is no different from a beast. After all, only beasts do not have funerals held by the state and attended by their families. By turning himself into a thing and Hector into a beast, this force brings out the darkest side of man. However, this is not the core of the *Iliad*: behind this dark force, Homer wished to manifest the struggles of Achilles and his desire to combat with the morality of a man. His bestiality is the obligatory sacrifice for the state and for his friendship, but Achille’s ultimate aim is to be “god-like”. In the Middle Ages, this kind of bestiality was condemned as a sin. The conflict between man and beast is not as poignant as in Greek culture. Alienation is the price to pay for one’s deviation from God.

It is not until in the Renaissance that man begins to have concerns of self-existence and self-development. This concern has led us to focus on the “free will” of man. Whether to be a beast or a god, to be fallen or to be blessed, it is a man’s own choice. However, behind the name of free will, the wall of morality begins to show some cracks.

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<sup>442</sup> Simone Weil, “The *Iliad*, or the Poem of Force”, p.6, *Chicago Review*, vol.18, no.2, 1965, pp.5-30.g

Human dignity is put side by side with bestiality, a moral stain that we must face every day. Of course, Petrarch is far away from these disputes. For him, the desire for erotic love and fame is depraved enough; however, many of our moral dilemmas, predicaments and controversies are indeed rooted in Petrarch's inner struggles. In modern society, we can feel the humanistic ray, but also the darkest horror of human nature; and more horrifyingly, even the force of morality has turned into killing violence in many circumstances. The boundary between the beast and the god has become blurred, depriving us of the possibility of making a clear judgement on the matter. This is a price we must pay in the face of cultural pluralism and the freedom of our own will.

To investigate Petrarch's knowledge and his establishment of the self bears more meaning than merely defining the word "individualism". On the one hand, the probing of Petrarch's self has a comparative concern, which leads to the meditation of the meaning of the self in the context of Chinese culture. In the framework of Chinese philosophy and ethics, the self is not treated independently and separately. It is politically related to the state and ethically related to "heaven" (or, Tian). So, the evolution of the self is in harmony with the movement of Heaven. In addition to that, Chinese ethics emphasize the idea that the self should always be conscious of its own position—that is, a sheer awareness of order. This order contains a strict hierarchy that includes the political and domestic relationships. For example, there is one saying by Confucius "There is government, when the prince is prince, and the minister is minister; when the father is father, and the son is son." The self should perform according to its own position within such a hierarchy. Thus, the individualism that is typical of modern

western culture cannot find its counterpart in China, and we should be aware of the different context in which this term is born and used.

The study of Petrarch's self-establishment is revealing, in that it inspires me to investigate how the western meaning of the self is introduced and transmitted in China. What are we actually talking about, when we talk about the self and individualism? Petrarch's knowledge of the self, one of the earliest acknowledgements of individualism, is based on a complex network involving God, state and earthly fame, Fortune, death and individual love. These aspects are essential to the formation of the self, especially considering man's relationship to God. However, in China, people usually forget this relationship, and they only emphasize the independence of the self. Such an unbalanced emphasis may lead to alienation and to the abuse of "free will", which, as noted previously, represents the dark side of human beings.

On the other hand, the study of Petrarch's self can help us draw a clearer image of the nature of man; it can also allow us to outline the history of the evolution of the self. With the development of modern society, the meaning of the self is becoming increasingly unclear. Due to the burgeoning role of cyberspace, digitalization and the ever expanding virtual world, the plethora of "selves"—or virtual clones—becomes a real phenomenon, while the real self becomes de-territorialized and alienated by its cyber selves. At the same time, the boundary between subject and object has become blurred, since the existence of cyborgs has threatened to replace the sheer existence of a body, by claiming to be able to transfer the "mind" into a mechanic *corpus*. Thus, the canonical dichotomy between body and soul has been replaced by the myth of the

cyborg, which seems to offer a solution for the problem of how to prolong the existence of the self—the so-called “humachine” is the final result. The “humachine” generates new possibilities of preserving the self, while at the same time robbing humans of some of the features within us that we usually identify as “humanity”. Facing the virtual clone of the self, one is lost among multiple identities, which may lead to confusion about gender, nationality and even ethics. At the critical moment, we must ask ourselves these questions. What is the self? What is humanity? In order to answer these questions, we find ourselves, once again, being directed back to the Renaissance, or to the ancient times.

Technology invites us to look forward, but the humanities ask us to take a retrospective view—to turn back and face the past. This is also the core of conversion: to always look back and to review the past. Thus, conversion is not only about writing the confessions of the self, neither is it only about the demonstration of the spiritual triumph of the self over earthly seductions, but it is also an essential practice for all of us to understand the self in the contexts that are governed by time and space. To study Petrarch’s conversions and to find out the reasons why he fails to accomplish any real conversion is important. It is equally important that we, through reading his narrative of conversion, take our time to look backward at our own past (“vacate e vedrete”) in such an age where progress and advancement are believed to provide us with the only golden rule.



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