

even Greek and Latin with their declensions, would be better guides." McDermott, p. 31.
9. Perry, p. 265, qtd. from the Atlantic #144, 1929.

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The Road to Freedom

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Freedom is a value characteristic of contemporary life, and it so dominates the thinking of the modern age that we tend to forget its roots in the medieval tradition. One figure completely neglected in the complex and often murky history of freedom is Petrarch. He played a central role, as this chapter will show, in a new conceptualization of freedom, and, in so doing, he absorbed the speculations of the tradition—the views of St. Augustine, Boethius, Aquinas, and Dante, whose thinking, in turn, moved within the perimeter of the classical philosophical theories of Aristotle, Cicero, Lucretius, etc., and who essentially developed the notion of freedom as an issue central to ethics. Their questions on problems such as moral choice, randomness, predestination, and necessity both shape and hinge on the way they understood freedom and vice versa.

But in the fourteenth century, freedom was not circumscribed only within a moral, individual compass. Ever since the twelfth and thirteenth centuries at the University of Bologna (which Petrarch would eventually attend), in the tradition of the decretists, such as Huguccio of Ferrara, Irnerius, and Gratian, the moral principles of canon law and natural law, as inherent to human nature, were understood as the power to choose between good and evil. The unwritten law of the heart, which brought together the two major strains of thought—Roman law and Scripture—was explained by the Scholastics (Aquinas) as the power of reason, and nature itself

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The Humanities Review
Volume 6, Issue 2
Spring 2008 pp. 187-201.
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was identified as reason. Even the hastiest account of the development of the idea of freedom must mention its metamorphoses into a political issue. Within the orbit of middle thirteenth century and early fourteenth century political thought, there were many discussions on liberty in reference to the communal polity and republican, anti-imperial and anti-despotic governments. Theories brought forth by Brunetto Latini, Tolomeo of Lucca, and Remigio de' Girolami reestablished the centrality of Aristotelian-Thomistic principles of freedom within political communities. A further quick reflection on the problem shows the debates and challenges prominent in what for a time became the cultural hub of Europe: the city of Avignon. Marsilius of Padua's *Defensor Pacis*—a text written against the doctrine of the papal plenitude of power and ecclesiastic politics in Avignon—bears witness and responds to these debates. Marsilius' formulations of political sovereignty, coercive power, and the will of the subjects as the source of political authority find their counterpart in Ockham's altogether Franciscan concerns. Leaving aside his ethical-political views (opposition to the Church's plenary powers, his views of poverty, etc.), Ockham's work put forth a voluntarist and radical sense of freedom. In his view, the exercise of free will and choices shows that freedom—not the laws of nature—is the foundation of man's transcendence (*IV Sententiarum*, d. 16, q. 1).

In Avignon, Petrarch at first received these philosophical and political theories in existential terms, but later developed their political and conceptual implications. No doubt, both in Avignon and elsewhere later in his life, he played a subservient role to patrons and made peace with tyrants, but he never failed to grasp the sense of freedom both as an individual experience and as a way of life. Nor did he stop reflecting on its necessity and the ways of making it the condition for and the fundament of his larger, ambitious intellectual project, which in point of fact became a new paradigm of culture. The birth of a modern idea of intellectual freedom was slow and even painful, and Petrarch must be credited with developing it by following several routes.

In the perception of freedom as the trait and mark of the unique self, Petrarch owes a great debt to the doctrines of his intellectual forbearers (mainly St. Augustine, as we have seen) and he fused his thought to their teachings. I have shed light in the previous chapter on the challenges he mounts against Augustine exactly on the point of freedom and transcendence. Let me add that Augustine's separation of freedom from politics (and the consequent notion that freedom exists in the individual regardless of one's social status or bonds) entails the further conviction that freedom concerns man's own inner self, the interior moral space where slavery to vices and passions can be subdued and shattered. In this religious view, freedom is properly used when we act virtuously and avoid the tyranny of vices: "The will is truly free when it is not the slave of vices and sins." St. Augustine's sense of moral freedom from sin parallels his view of freedom from

politics, and both hinge on the skeptical argument that the moribund, corrupt Roman state could no longer offer security: "what do I care who governs me," he memorably writes in the *City of God*, "provided they do not make me sin?"

What awakened Petrarch to the subject and to a dramatic understanding of freedom are not just the philosophical writings musing abstractly about life's ethical order. Predictably, for a radically subjective, self-centered thinker such as he was, the concrete circumstances of his life, the awareness of a general crisis directly involving him forced him to re-orient his thinking. These circumstances did not really amount to one single traumatic crisis. They were cumulative and in time they grew on him. At any rate, we can pinpoint them between the years 1346 and 1348. In 1341, as we have seen, he had obtained the poetic laurel in Rome. In 1346, however, what must have been the creative excitement triggered by that occasion (and his heightened involvement in the secular history of Rome) gave way to the consciousness of an imaginative impasse.

Yet, the overshadowing event, indeed the very emblem of mid-fourteenth century history, was the breakout of the Black Death (1348), a nightmare that brought about (as we gather from the *Decameron*) the disintegration of the social fabric, and that spearheaded a generalized skepticism toward the value of the sciences. A no less poignant sign of the truly epochal rupture in this same stretch of history is embodied by the Avignonese papacy. So corrupt was the Curia, so transgressive of the divine economy of history appeared the attempted effacement of Rome, that Avignon came to mean the collapse of the very principle of order and authority. But other issues—both public and private—weighed at this time on Petrarch's mind: the death of his brother Gherardo; the election of Cola di Rienzo in 1347 to the office of tribune of the Roman people (an event originally hailed as the beginning of the restoration of a free Roman republic) and his subsequent failure and execution; the death of Laura and a loosening of the sense of bondage to love passion; the death of his patron Robert, King of Naples; the painful and yet unavoidable break with his other patron in Avignon, Cardinal Colonna; and, eventually, the war between France and England in what we now call the Hundred Years' War, that pushed him to the shadows of irrelevance—all these events wounded and engaged him directly.

These occurrences turned into poetic themes which Petrarch recorded in the twelve eclogues of his *Bucolicum Carmen*, most of which were written in 1347, completed in 1352, and revised in 1357. Together they come forth as an autobiographical account. In fact, the sequence of poems constitutes—this is my claim—a narrative with a unified concern: the search for and doubts about freedom as the fundamental condition for achieving (and expressing) the sovereignty of the self. Regrettably, scholars have not identified this thematic concern nor have they read the poem as a whole. Rather, by drawing from his letters, they have at best limited

themselves to providing useful glosses to clarify specific textual allusions in order to decipher the biographical details hidden under the veil of the allegories.

That freedom, the freedom of the poet's self, is the central question of the whole *Bucolicum Carmen* and is made immediately clear by Petrarch's borrowing of the Virgilian pastoral rhetoric to tell the story of these autobiographical self-reflections. From a formal standpoint, he capitalizes on the presuppositions of a genre that—from Theocritus to Virgil—implies the enjoyment of time off from the constraints of ordinary life. The pastoral, in this sense, embodies the dream and playground of freedom, and it is to be understood as freedom of the imagination. There is an overtly ironic counterpoint to this sense of freedom deployed in a clear dependence on the Virgilian model. Though its imitation is never slavish, it nonetheless acknowledges and places the claims and search for freedom within the context of an established tradition. And because the freedom promised by the genre is not really risk-free, the pastoral turns for Petrarch—as it did for Virgil—into the style of a double-talk, into an allegorical rhetoric that plays out the tension between revealing and concealing one's point of view.

Accordingly, the poet wraps himself and his other protagonists in the veil of allegory and deploys masks (Silvius, Tyrrhenus, Stupeus, Ganymede, etc.) for his representations. The masks dramatize an impossible public disclosure and shed an ambiguous light on the narrative of freedom. Whatever new course Petrarch will chart for his life, whatever direction he will impart to his intellectual project, it must be expressed cautiously, under the guise of a simple, even bland and unassuming cover known as the "humble style" of idyllic literature.

The main dramatic, existential premise of the *Bucolicum Carmen* lies in the poet's decision to leave the city of Avignon, its hustle and bustle, and to take up residence in nearby Vaucluse, the "closed valley" (*Familiars* X 1, 2) at the edge of history. This pleasant spot of fabled Provence, evoked as a narrow pastoral space, shelters Petrarch from the malicious quarters of the city and provides the artifice of nature for a reflective disengagement from the city's confusion. Roaming freely over fields and valleys of this *locus amoenus* awakens in him the need to break with the choices of the past and to take stock of his life's impasse: the captivity of love, the labyrinth of his art, the power of blind Fortune and fate, the failed liberation of Rome, and the possibly homoerotic bondage to Cardinal Colonna. Vaucluse, however, carries with it the sense of a cloistered, circumscribed perimeter and it suggests that the freedom it allows exists solely by drawing around its contour sharp boundaries and limits. Yet, bonds of nostalgia and affections, habits and old passions imprisoning him in cycles of guilt and fear of death cannot be altogether erased.

The thematic unity behind the fragmentary sequence comprising the *Bucolicum Carmen* can be quickly drafted. The first eclogue, *Parthenias* (Virgil's other name, and thus an overt recognition of his mastery), stages two speakers,

Silvius and Monicus, who, as one reads in the expounded version of the allegory in *Familiars* X, 4, stand, respectively, for Petrarch himself and his brother Gherardo, a Carthusian monk. Quite literally, then, the *Bucolicum Carmen* begins with a descent to the two deeper sources or origins of the poet's life: he retrieves his double heritage, his biological and his poetic lines of descent. His brother and Virgil stand as the enduring soil in which the poet's self-understanding is rooted and nurtured, and he must interrogate them in order to grasp what they might mean to him in his present predicament.

The metaphoric bond between poetry and Virgilian pastoral is hardly unusual. At the threshold of the Garden of Eden (*Purgatorio* XXVII 127-42), Virgil fulfills his promise to the pilgrim Dante and "crowns" him as a sovereign and free subject. The scene harks back to Cato's quest for freedom ("libertà") dramatized in the opening canto of *Purgatorio* (I, 71), and both scenes open up a specifically Roman-Christian perspective on freedom as a political-moral property of oneself. Together, they also show that, for Dante, freedom is not a natural gift (we are born under the tyranny of sin), but a hard-gained spiritual condition. Thus, Virgil had led the pilgrim, he says, there where the master himself can discern no farther and can no longer teach and guide him: "libero, dritto e sano è tuo arbitrio / e fallo fora non fare a suo senno" (*Purg.* XXVII, 140) [free, upright and whole is your will and it would be wrong not to act according to its pleasure].

There is no question about how complex are the resonances of these lines in the dramatization of the pastoral and Edenic landscape of the *Divine Comedy*. Through them, Dante sanctions the Garden of Eden as the space of moral freedom, and freedom in turn emerges as the possession of self-sovereignty or self-mastery. Further, Virgil's statement obliquely denies the political principle that one's freedom can be defined as mastery over others. More importantly, Virgil's "coronation" formula marks the conjunction of intellect and will, and it implies that *liberum arbitrium* is an issue concerned with the simultaneous exercise of the two faculties of the soul. In the dramatics of the poem, the pilgrim's regained freedom of choice introduces him to the realm of future action. In this regained state he is able to begin something new (which is the essence of freedom). To be really free (and in this Dante is thoroughly Augustinian) is to be born again and to start anew, and the pilgrim's confession to Beatrice (*Purg.* XXXI) is meant to mark a turning point in his life. The decisively future-oriented stance triggers the insight into freedom as openness even to the possibility of error ("e fallo fora non fare a suo senno"). Yet, this sort of freedom is not identifiable as a theory of mere possibility or a state of philosophical contemplation. It bears repeating that, for Dante, freedom is the power of moral action turned to the future. On the other hand, the capacity to undo or reverse what has been done in the past—so does Virgil imply and the action of the poem will show (*Purg.* XXXI, 1-105)—belongs

to Beatrice's power to forgive (the act of authentic opposition to past time's hold over us), and that forgiveness alone—a crucial theological perspective—removes the tyranny of the past.

For all the radical quality of Dante's figuration of his "libero ... arbitrio" in the Garden of Eden (where, paradoxically, Adam turned freedom into bondage to sin and death), Petrarch, no less radical, faces the perplexities of freedom. His first eclogue focuses on the will to freedom, which is understood as the risk of the road he wants to undertake. Monicus, the one-eyed contemplative, has escaped from the dangers of human affairs and calamities outside of history and of politics. He lives "hidden" in a quiet cavern, where the noise of the city stands still and the "sweet psalms" of the shepherd David can be heard. By contrast, Silvius, a lover of woods, lives in the natural world and gazes simultaneously at the things of heaven and earth.

For all their pastoral stylization, the two evocations of the natural world by the two speakers bear a peculiar affinity to each other. In both, the natural world appears shapeless and dangerous, made of caves and dark alleys. Above all, this nature transcends the powers of self and even threatens to destroy it. On his own, without a guide (line 16), Silvius makes his way into the forest where beasts roam and nymphs praise his verse. Unlike Monicus, for whom the pastoral inspires images of simplicity and harmony within the divine plan, Silvius is a restless quester, who resists his brother's appeal to "transcendere limen" (46) [Step over the threshold]. Compelled by the love of the Muses, he will continue his endless quest. Freedom is, for him, the way or a process, a road, actually, and not the point of arrival and rest. The eclogue, thus, ends with Monicus bidding Silvius circumspection as he faces the "hazards of the road." This ongoing quest will lead him to his multifaceted future experienced as a poet and a public intellectual.

In spite of the natural kinship binding them, Monicus and Silvius embody two incommensurable world-views, two aesthetic strains within the one and the same pastoral genre. One identifies himself with the chant of David (whom Dante calls the "singer of the Holy Spirit"). The other inscribes himself in the tradition of the classical poets—Virgil, Orpheus, and Homer. The classical and Biblical poetic traditions (or worldviews) stand dissociated from each other. Monicus incarnates the Christian poetic-theological voice and the contemplative freedom it promises. Silvius' aesthetics, on the other hand, leapfrog over his brother's incantations. It would be meaningless to ask which of the two perspectives is superior to the other. The real question underlying the two voices is whether Petrarch reconciles them and envisions and keeps open a genuine "dialogue" (which is the form of the poem) between them.

These two distinct strains of the pastoral mark the birth of modern consciousness, whereby freedom arises from the awareness of the *difference* between two

autonomous conceptions of both life and of the natural world. In medieval allegories of Nature (such as *De Planctu Naturae* or the *Tesoretto*), Nature provides the "ground" for grasping, respectively, the decadence of the world and the possible moral-political renewal of the city. By contrast, Monicus sees nature's lures and dangers, and takes his distance from them. In the process, he sketches the radical Biblical idea (in Genesis) of freedom—the freedom to break loose from subjection to nature and from the view of nature as a divine entity. His contemplative understanding of freedom, to stand out of time, counters Silvius' desire to unravel nature's secrets in time, to value contingency, and thereby to change nature into history.

What joins the two brothers together, moreover, is their common belief in the absolute value of the self and its choices. Monicus rejects all commitments to the "world." Silvius chooses the risks of a time-bound existence, the possible drifting of the road, and refuses to close off his quest prematurely. The way to freedom, so he argues, is found by traveling along it, for no pre-given route is available. Plainly, they both choose to be alone, and by *choosing* themselves they choose the absolute. Viewed in this perspective, the eclogue prefigures the concern with solitude as intellectual freedom articulated in *De Vita Solitaria* and in so many poems of the *Canzoniere*. At this point, however, both Monicus and Silvius grasp the sense of freedom as an experience of self-assertion and will, in the consciousness that to choose is to be free. Whereas Aquinas envisions freedom as a God-given gift, as the component of man's nature (we are free because we are created, and Creation guarantees an inalienable human freedom), Petrarch (in the wake of Virgil's *Aeneid*, in which Aeneas must steadily erase the lure of the past, to which he is nonetheless beholden) suggests that man makes himself free and can start his history all over again.

By a sudden and deliberate shift in focus, eclogue II recalls the poet's public engagement in the world of the court of Robert, King of Naples, whose death ushered in the disappearance of that golden world. The King was Argus, who, God-like, saw everything, sheltered the courtiers, and provided peace and freedom for all. Freedom was then happily (and delusively) flanked by dependence, and, under the benevolent gaze of the king, it coincided with security. Now, deprived of the political authority of the king (who gave his world order and coherence), Petrarch is brought face to face with freedom, which is experienced as both a deprivation and as a dangerous state of fear.

The probing into the puzzle of freedom—as simultaneously both a journey and an impasse, as excitement and fear—is woven into a more complex pattern by further reflection on topics central to the poet's experience. Two eclogues (III and XI) take us into the shadowy interiority of the poet. In the economy of his passions, the bondage of love gains prominence. We are shown Daphne as she flees

a love whose contours are marked by "snares," "deceits" (8), and delusions. How can Daphne, who has spurned Apollo's pursuit and enjoys her freedom (49), yield to the love-captive Stupeus, the poet's autobiographical self-projection? And yet love, though a savage, powerful and cruel tormentor, is a welcome despot capable of inspiring poetry. Stupeus' poetic songs, in turn, are invested with the power to charm and rule over their listeners. By the end, in an overt reversal of the Ovidian fable of Apollo chasing Daphne in vain, Petrarch, defeated, has Daphne lead him to the slopes of Olympus.

By a series of subtle signs, then, the eclogue highlights Petrarch's consciousness of the limits of freedom and its endless shifts in the imaginary multiple forms of despotic power over others. There is nothing absolute or sacrosanct about freedom, nor is it ever a concept immune to the challenges mounted by the powers (love, the discipline of art, poetic *hubris*) seeking to subordinate it. In effect, the practice of poetry links together freedom and constraints, and it explores freedom in the light of power. Huge claims are staked for poetry. It transgresses all limits and cannot be confined to a corner in the house of knowledge. The power of poetry appears evident. Because of poetry all possible reversals occur: laws are imposed; flocks follow "on the heels of their guides" (135); victorious shepherds adorn their heads with garlands (132); and gold taken from the Hyperboreans is put to noble use (139). Yet, Petrarch, who seems to shift his ground the more he discovers about himself and about the bond between poetry and power (the power of love turns into the power of poetry), must delve further back into the nature of poetry and the impulses operating in the mind.

The examination of the stark power of poetry in eclogue III extends to eclogue IV, titled "Daedalus." It does so by questioning the free and yet arbitrary origins of the poetic gift. Two characters, Gallus and Tyrrhenus, a Frenchman and a Tuscan poet (Petrarch himself) debate precisely this question: the origin of ingenuity, the inborn capacity to produce a work of art. Why is one elected? And to what extent is election a form of predestination (which, as such, denies one's freedom)? Gallus, driven by jealous rivalry, wonders as to who invented the lyre: was it the supreme craftsman, Daedalus, and why was Tyrrhenus chosen to inherit it? A digression on the birth of poetry follows. At his birth, Tyrrhenus received the lyre from Daedalus, and now refuses to sell it to Gallus for, by virtue of the lyre, he is free of "... Fortune's incessant onslaughts and poverty" (57). By virtue of the music he performs and uses as his shield, he crosses all woods and wanders fearlessly through the night.

The point is clear. Tyrrhenus was chosen over Gallus to be a poet, and the principle of election, with its mixture of arbitrariness and determination, entails a peculiar predicament: we are chosen and, thus, not naturally free. But more emerges from the myth of Daedalus. In *Aeneid* VI (14-19), Daedalus, who erected

the temple of Apollo, built the labyrinth, whose first prisoner he himself becomes and gets caught by his artwork and craft. Yet he frees himself by gluing wings to his shoulders and flapping them away from the sun. Obliquely, Petrarch lays bare a familiar aspect of his thought: the imaginative link between the labyrinth of poetry and the labyrinthine discourse of love. Within the limits of the labyrinth, as within the contingencies of chance election, the creative autonomy of the poet takes shape and coincides with his power, his freedom with the prison-house he himself built.

Eclogue XI, "Galatea" and eclogue X, "Laurea Occidens," reflect, in different ways, on love's predicament and compulsions. In eclogue X, Socrates and Sylvanus—the masks of, respectively, philosophy and poetry—take up the question of grief over Laura's death. How can Sylvanus write poetry now that she is dead? He answers that poetry is the posthumous language of the dead: Pindar, Virgil, Catullus, Sappho, Callimachus, Propertius, and a host of other poets are defined by and honored for their ability to overcome grief through poetic language. Eclogue XI, on the other hand, re-focuses on the relation existing between love passion, death, and the human mind. Laura has died, and the lover, who visits her tomb, reflects on death as a paradoxical event of freedom: for all its tragic quality, her death might break the chains of his passion. The liberation contains a glimmer of despair, for the love for Laura—a yoke for the poet—was also the chain holding together the universe. The harsh ambivalences of freedom—just as the ambivalences of love and poetry—in the face of death emerge forcefully: her death may free the lover, yet death in turn becomes Laura's prison-house. To be dead is to disappear into dust, to be pigeon-holed in a small tomb and acquire an invisible anonymity.

The uncharted inner world of drives, phantoms, and fears in the mind put Petrarch on a new path. Is freedom a state of mind (just as the pastoral evokes a place of the mind)? The question embroils him in a necessary, further quest: he must find a way out of his actual psychology, out of the bondage to the ruling passions of the self and grasp how his impulse for freedom can be yoked to the principle of responsibility. The answers arise within the framework of a mythical-allegorical dream, which stages three women—who may be viewed as counterparts to Dante's three women. The psychological concept of freedom develops through the interaction of Niobe, who was turned into stone by grief, Fusca, and Fulgida, and these personifications stand, as Benvenuto da Imola allegorizes them, as the three powers or active agents of the soul (wrath, concupiscence that obfuscates the mind, and reason, which masters grief).

With Niobe's petrification (a "Petrarchan" sense of impotence to act) the source of freedom must be sought in rationality. At any rate, these faculties of the mind are caught in a conflict with one another: Niobe is unable to accept the

death of Galatea, willed by inexorable Fate. Fusca, on her part, recalls the vanity of being trapped in retrospection and urges forgetfulness of past love in the belief that "death alone can free us from bondage" (48). Fulgida, the figure of rationality who takes the perspective of eternity on the contingencies of life, recommends hope, the virtue of the future, as a remedy to loss. Moreover, Fulgida—as a poetic agent—will carve an inscription on the tomb for men yet unborn. Her epitaph will stress how Galatea, now dead, is "free at long last" (79) to partake of the feast of the gods and leave behind the "cherished prison" (89)—riches, beauty, birth, etc.—of the world.

The psychology of freedom is laid out in full array through the divisions within the soul: the passions (grief and libido or Niobe and Fusca) permanently rebel against reason, and each of them acts separately, anarchically from both the others and Fulgida. An inexorable hierarchy is established. It posits the mind as a complex of feelings, passionate desires, thoughts, and sovereign rational will, which are at odds with each other, but with each of them capable of acting freely and thereby disrupting the order of the mind. As in a Platonic and Dantesque conjunction of city and soul, this psychology provides the basis for a politics of freedom and casts freedom as an intellectual, professional problem. The Stoics are wrong—so Petrarch argues—to repress the passions. The neo-Aristotelians, who upheld the primacy of reason, stifle and bypass the value of the passions.

By contrast, Petrarch has explored freedom in existential terms (his poetic vocation, his love, the question of death, and his solitude), but he does not relegate freedom to the realm of psychology. Dante, on his part, identified freedom as a spiritual condition figured in the Biblical story of Exodus, in the journey away from slavery to sin to the peace of the Heavenly Jerusalem. Petrarch evokes the political tyrannies of his time and, unlike Marsilius of Padua, he will acquiesce to forms of tyranny.

Eclogue VIII, "Divortium," features Ganymede, the most beautiful of mortals and the cup-bearer of Jupiter (*Aeneid* V, 252-57; *Thebaid* I, 548-51) as the figure for Cardinal Colonna, and Amyclas, the fearless, poor fisherman, who stands for Petrarch himself. We do not know the exact reasons why Petrarch decided to break up with his patron. We know he did, and this eclogue fits the thematic pattern of the quest for freedom running through the *Bucolicum Carmen*. Ganymede, like a rejected lover, wants to know why Amyclas abandoned him: a man of "free spirit," "libera mens," such as he, Ganymede says, could not have thought of himself as a slave. Petrarch justifies himself by asserting that love of liberty ("libertatis amor," l. 90) cannot give offense to Colonna. Above all, through the obliquities of allegorical language, Petrarch reveals how crippled he felt in Avignon on account of the insolence of the Curia and Pope Clement V. Weary of his own past glories and recognition, he will venture out into new seas and will break loose from the

stable forms in which he has grown to fame. Freedom, thus, comes forth as a project for the future.

But the crucial way Petrarch weaves the fabric of his freedom (and his poetic renewal) comes out of the awareness of other crushing political realities of his day. Eclogue V, "The Shepherd's Filial Piety," was sent to Cola di Rienzo in Rome. No doubt, Petrarch is now engaged in a retrospective self-reflection of his own political myths and attachments. Wrapped in the enigmatic, impenetrable veil of allegory, the text evokes Rome as the stage of internecine wars between the Orsini and the Colonna families. Recognizing the difficulty of deciphering the allegory, he glosses its hidden sense in a letter to Cola. A straightforward discourse becomes impossible in the turbulent political context of Roman power play. On the other hand, the private self-interpretation, available in the letter to Cola, slides into a mode of imperious exegetical self-assertion.

Two brothers who are Roman citizens, Martius (war-like and loyal to the city) and Apricus (a cook and *bon-vivant* given to Epicurean pleasures) lament the decay of ancient mother Rome, disfigured by time. Moved by apparent filial piety, they wonder whether they should restore the Capital and the Milvian Bridge over the Tiber. Apricus argues from the standpoint of the principle of Nature that eschews force (13). Martius wants to bring Rome out of the darkness in which it lies buried. Festinus—the mask of Cola—interrupts the argument and announces that Rome has disowned her two children and a younger brother is rebuilding the house and the bridge. "Under the feelings of the wild beasts," writes Petrarch in his letter to Cola, "I have concealed the names or armorial bearings of some of the tyrants. You are the younger brother."

In 1347, Cola had avowed to reconstruct Rome upon the foundations of the ancient republic. The historic dream of bringing forth, out of the depths, the rebirth of Rome seemed close to becoming real for the way it called into question the authority of the Avignonese papacy. No doubt, Cola's rebellion jolted Petrarch out of his own Avignonese subjection and made him realize its contingent duration. Though he was, for a while, carried away by Cola's grand political fantasies, the thick veil of this eclogue's allegory betrays a self-consciously cautious poet who covers up his tracks rather than vent his passions. The awareness of a double world, which is signaled by Petrarch's draft of the opaque public poetic statement and the clear private gloss provided to Cola, betrays the poet's need to dissimulate. The term "dissimulation," all too gleefully bandied about in discussions of Baroque literature, actually entails an idea of the self as capable of sheltering in its cloistered interiority a secret truth. An ethics of inwardness while on the public stage—the subject hiding within the self to avoid likely violence—is born. This ethics translates itself into a number of corollaries: the discovery of the power of poetry over and against the coercions and violence of political power; the fear that

freedom by itself may be a dangerous sham and fantasy; and the conviction that self-preservation prompts one to subtle action.

This lesson can be evinced from eclogue XII, "The Conflict," which tells of the war between the two superpowers of the time, France and England. Because of a reference to the Battle of Poitiers—September 17, 1356—we know that the poem was revised in 1357. The philological detail suggests the persistence and progressive maturation of Petrarch's intellectual convictions. In writing *De viris illustribus* he tried to evoke the peerless majesty of Roman history and the greatness of its immortal heroes capable of decisive actions. In eclogue XII, contemporary history appears as the equal (though potentially disruptive) of the greatness and immortality of nature the pastoral genre celebrates. Yet, whereas the past Roman heroes were viewed as exemplary figures (inimitable and yet imitable or worthy of imitation), the contemporary war between England and France unveils the utter futility of the self and the impossibility of action. In short, this international crisis shakes the poet's confidence and casts him as a *subject*, one who is thrown down and under by powers he cannot control and with whom he cannot identify. The only truth touching him at this point is the truth of his powerlessness. But from this powerlessness emerges a new will to act, and the glimmer of intellectual action in the public realm (the lure of which was felt in the correspondence with Cola) defines the genuine horizon of freedom.

In a way, the consciousness of the historical world as the space where the self (and the freedom it aspires to) is overwhelmed recalls Monicus' perception in the first eclogue and his choice of contemplative solitude over and against Silvius' choice of roaming—figuratively and literally—over the fastness of Provence and the regions of the mind. It could be argued that Silvius, retrospectively, traces his way back to the hut of his brother's solitude and that he comes to the discovery that solitude does not paralyze or lock his will, as he feared it would, and that his dialogue with Gherardo cannot but continue.

Such a reading of the *Bucolicum Carmen*, far from being arbitrary, is actually sanctioned by the tract Petrarch wrote in Vaucluse in 1346 and modified till well into 1366, *De vita solitaria*. The treatise is a praise of solitude, and solitude is praised because it enables the solitary mind to diagnose the moral distortions (greed, anxiety, busyness, etc.) of active life. Solitude allows one to become the spectator of the world, though this role runs the risk of tearing the solitary man away from any sense of rootedness in the realities of the world, of throwing him into the margins, and inducing a loss of oneself. Along the way, *De vita solitaria* recasts the essential concerns of the pastoral and redefines Petrarch's understanding of a specifically intellectual freedom. Let's see how.

Dedicated to Philip, Bishop of Cavaillon, it gets going with a proem that grapples with a discussion of truth, deceits, and lies:

Namque neque de sincero et niveo candor etui pectoris fictum fucatum ve aliquid suspicor, neque fictionem, siqua esset, tam diu tegi potuisse arbitror. Ut enim immortalis est veritas, sic fictio et mendacium non durant. Simulata illico patescunt: ... (*De vita solitaria*, Proem)

[Nor as a matter of fact do I suspect anything false or artificial in the genuine and snow-white candor of your soul. Nor, if there were some lies, do I believe they could have remained so long hidden: for just as immortal is truth so fictions and lies do not endure. Simulations are quickly discovered.]

Petrarch writes that neither Cavaillon nor he hide the truth because they both know how precarious and unstable the practices of deception are. The ease and trust between them are born out of the love they freely bestow on each other, out of the voluntary and free association they have chosen. The fear of detractors and critics (such as the ones Cicero himself laments in his *De optimo genere dicendi*) hovers over these pages: in order not to be misunderstood or attacked by "vulgar minds" and neo-Aristotelians, Petrarch admits he has often considered the option of silence. But because he enjoys a widespread popularity, he will relax his self-surveillance and will put himself on public display.

The preamble sharply contrasts the poet's overt claims of sincerity with the pretenses of the life of his enemies enslaved by intellectual fashions. The rhetorical self-reflexiveness on the language of truth and lies (as much as the presence of masks and allegorical veils in the *Bucolicum Carmen*) signals Petrarch's constant awareness of his ambivalent postures and sheds light on the radical novelty of *De vita solitaria*. Enfolded in the articulation of his exposition, one confronts the novel relation between solitude and liberty. He does not love, he says, the solitary recesses and their silence as much as he loves "que in his habitant otium et libertas" (p. 276). And he continues stating: "... quod michi conversatione hec et libertatis studium notusque literarum ac solitudinis amor prestant. (374) [This intimacy I have with you, the aspiration to freedom and my customary love for literature and solitude, make possible all this.]

The connection between solitude and freedom is provisionally bracketed, but it does not disappear. In fact, solitude is praised because it allows for freedom of thinking. For now, however, two problems arise as Petrarch reflects on this relation between solitude and freedom: their links to time and place as the coordinates of either. Solitude removes one from an objective context and from a particular place. Any determinate place (rivers, woods, and fields) is irrelevant to solitude, for the soul is its privileged place. Accordingly, book 2 of *De vita solitaria* reviews the choice made by contemplative monks, hermits in the desert (from Antony to Peter Damian and Ambrose and Augustine who leave Milan and move

to, respectively, a wood nearby and Cassiciacum) and the Biblical patriarchs—Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Elijah on Mount Carmel (390–526).

To the loss of geographical/historical coordinates corresponds a re-definition of time. The value of solitude consists in one's will to escape one's time and its pressures for the sake of free time and in order to float freely over the stream of life. Yet Petrarch also stresses that we can never really step out of the skein of shared experiences, and that the present time is always grounded in the past, in the memory of tradition and in the historical roots of our existence. From the point of view of the voices of the past, life is never context-free. The paradigms of a utopian, absolute freedom break down. Even Epicurus, he says, called for a degree of socialization. In point of fact, it would be incoherent to think of freedom as a mere evasion of responsibility. After all, the very pastoral forms of his eclogues, as we have seen, did not mean an escape from responsibility.

The critique of *negotium* (business) he launches, from the standpoint of *otium* and the praise of the leisure of contemplation, develops into a theory of philosophical or intellectual solitude and its bearing on freedom. Solitude, as the numberless pages written on philosophers, poets, theologians, and hermits show, is the source of thinking and of a moral life. Thus, the solitude of the contemplative life frees one from the pressures of practical concerns. In effect, solitude entails a rejection of the world as is, as well as the rulers who neglect the realities of the world (474). From this standpoint, *De vita solitaria* entails a radical transformation of the Scholastic understanding of the moral precept of the theories of natural law. These theories presuppose a universally valid view of reason and nature, and, consequently, an espousal of the world. By interposing, as philosophers, hermits, and theologians had done, a distance between self and world, however, Petrarch writes a critique of the world.

At the heart of his text, therefore, lies the notion that the freedom of a solitary life both allows the expression of thought and becomes the condition for thinking. In this sense, freedom can only be intellectual freedom or freedom of thinking, and it means the freedom to subject the world and oneself to critical analysis, to allow a confessional self-introspection, and to unveil the shame, fear, and regrets of one's life. In Petrarch's vast network of texts that he wrote, the project is expressed through dialogues, polemics, refutations of alternate viewpoints, quarrels, power to dissent, the *psychomachia* which is the sinew of his poems, and the self-contradictions into which he systematically plunges.

But *De vita solitaria* touches also a public understanding of freedom. By the end of the tract, its scope widens and its private presuppositions are overhauled as Petrarch evokes the political history of Rome and of Christian Europe. Cicero's *De republica* and St. Augustine's *De civitate Dei* (which he calls *Celestis reipublice libri*) (p.476) frame Petrarch's argument. The love of material life weakens the care of

one's soul and the defense of one's country against encroachments from the outside. But the turn to the political realities of Europe at the culmination of what begins as a defense of the solitary life carries other implications.

Almost scandalously and for all his self-centeredness, Petrarch casts freedom as a political problem. The awareness of the dire realities of the larger world makes him escape from the shadows of St. Augustine's call for a withdrawal of oneself from the decadence and tragic history of Rome. Freedom cannot be limited only to oneself, as the Epicurean sages would have it. A genuine freedom coincides with intellectual action and it demands a public space. The move is itself Augustinian. To be sure, Augustine escapes the limitations of the self by taking on the historic public role he will play till the end of his life as he turns into a bishop of the Church. As Petrarch looks at the political desolation of Italy and Europe, he casts his intellectual freedom as the necessarily tacit condition for a cultural project, which amounts to the construction of a new culture to be nourished by freedom. The likes of this cultural project had never been seen in Europe since the times of Varro. Unlike Varro, Petrarch had come to understand that only by his works, wherein thinking becomes action, he would achieve freedom. ■