Petrarch's "Trionfo dell'Eternità": Aesthetics of Conversion

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As the first of Petrarch's six *Triumphs*, the "Trionfo del Tempo," comes to an end, the poet affirms time's apparent victory over all things in the sublunar world. Not even fame is able to endure time's unrelenting and ultimately disintegrating onslaught:

che è questo però che sì s'apprezza?
Tutto vince e ritaglie il Tempo avaro;
chiamasi Fama, ed è morir secondo,
ne più che contra 'l primo è alcun riparo;
cosi il Tempo trionfa i nomi e 'l mondo!
("Trionfo del Tempo," vvs. 141-45)²

What is this that is so highly valued? Greedy Time overcomes and steals all away. Men call it Fame; but it is a second death, and against this, as against the first, there is no defense; thus does Time triumph over the world and Fame.

The speaker transforms this perception into a deep feeling of loss, almost despair, as the concluding *Triumph*, the "Trionfo dell'Eternità," begins:

Da poi che sotto 'l ciel cosa non vidi
stabile e ferma, tutto sbigottito
mi volsi al cor e dissi: "In che ti fidi?"
Rispose: "Nel Signor, che mai fallito
non à promessa a chi sì fida in lui;
ma ben veggio che 'l mondo m' à schernito,  
   e sento quel ch' i' sono e quel ch' i fui,  
e veggio andar, anzi volar, il tempo,  
e doler mi vorrei, né so di cui,  
         chè la colpa è pur mia, che più per tempo  
deve' aprir gli occhi, e non tardar al fine,  
ch' a dir il vero, omai troppo m'attempo.  
        Ma tarde non fur mai grazie divine:  
in quelle spero che 'n me ancor faranno  
alte operazioni e pellegrine."

(vvs. 1-15)

When I had seen that nothing under heaven is firm and stable, all dismayed I turned to my heart and asked: "In what do you trust?" "In the Lord," the answer came, "who always keeps his promise to one who trusts in Him." How well I see how the world has mocked me, and I know what I have been, and what I am, and see Time marching, rather flying, and I would complain, but of what I do not know, for the fault is surely my own: much sooner should I have opened my eyes instead of waiting to the end, for to tell the truth I have delayed too long. But divine mercies never come too late: in them I hope that in me they may still perform some deep and excellent transformation.

These verses, together with the statement of time's rapid victory which ended the previous Triumph, epitomize the spiritually debilitating struggle which characterizes so much of Petrarch's literary work. What strikes the reader in this passage is the confessional—almost catechetical—and penitential mode in which it is written. The speaker, profoundly distressed by the spectacle of time's victory over all things in the mutable universe, probes his mind for some remedy or reassurance. In doing so, he confesses (confession, in this instance, as a credal pronouncement—confessio fidei) that only in God, stable and immutable, can one effectively place one's faith and hope. He then confesses (here in a penitential sense—confessio peccati) that he has knowingly avoided acting in accordance with this knowledge until very late in life. The speaker ends his confession somewhat hopefully, however, stating that even though he has reached the extremity of his life, through God's ever-faithful and constant Grace he may yet be able to experience true conversion.
This confession, although written in a different genre, is reminiscent of Augustine’s *Confessions*, a work which presents the Saint struggling in a similar fashion to understand the nature of time, its relationship to eternity, and man’s relationship to both. Indeed, in Augustine’s dramatically articulated spiritual autobiography, Petrarch found the problematic tension man experiences as he lives in time and confronts the often frightening abyss of eternity—a tension which was to occupy his thinking and writing throughout his long life. As we shall see, the sixth *Triumph* provides ample indication that Petrarch profoundly understood the manner in which Augustine resolved the problem of time; yet, though he employs crucial elements of the Augustinian solution in his presentation, Petrarch’s own solution proves to be substantially—and significantly—different from that reached by the Saint.

Anxious preoccupation with the instability and inevitable mortality of all things, as voiced in its opening verses, is the immediate concern of the “Trionfo dell’Eternità.” In response to his troubled probing meditation (“or, se non stanno / queste cose che ’l ciel volge e governa, / dopo molto voltar che fine avranno?”; TE, vvs. 19–20, 16–18), the speaker experiences what can best be described as an apocalyptic vision (in this case a dream within a dream). The poem’s eschatology depends on references to the apocalyptic traditions of the Bible, the time/eternity tension in Augustine, and the allegorical procession of the Church Victorious which Dante presents atop Mt. Purgatory. Yet despite the significant presence of such well-known material, this vision will prove to be not the victorious triumph of spiritual conversion and stable oneness with God, but perhaps the greatest example of what Umberto Bosco terms Petrarch’s “grande, impossibile sogno . . . cielo e terra conciliati.” For the final *Triumph* presents not the victory of the “Divinità” over its creation, but rather the problematic, if not somewhat heretical, triumph of classical humanism, represented in the advent of Laura—not the anticipated Christus—at the conclusion of the poem. Thus the poet introduces the reader into a Parnassus, a paradise of classical humanism, not the paradise of a redeemed Eden. What I hope to illuminate is how (and why) Petrarch replaces the expected conversion and apocalypse with the triumph of Laura and accordingly vindicates the poet’s desire for fame and immortality, the results of his skill at forging his self-image as a man “immobile in his perplexity from beginning to end.”

As he states in his confession, the speaker in the poem hopes that despite his late repentance he will still be able to experience the faithful remedy of Grace; the apocalyptic vision appears to his mind as if to show Divine approval for this change of heart. Petrarch incorporates several significant characteristics of this tradition: a new earth, no longer troubled by change and decay (“immobile et eterna”), appears and is governed by a corresponding new heaven (vvs. 20–24, 40–42); death is overcome, and through a process
of miraculous restitution renewed life, fame, and youth await the blessed (vv. 80–81, 127–34). The vision is a shared anticipation of the eschaton; and just like Christ’s “più fidi compagni,” the apostles, no one knows exactly when this prophetic vision will become a reality (vv. 100–02). But when it does, it will include a universal judgment in which all will be recompensed according to Divine law and not that of fallen man (vv. 103–20).8

Another feature of apocalyptic to receive a great deal of attention in the “Trionfo dell’Eternità” is the idea that time, being transformed into the image of a timeless present, ceases to exist and thus no longer threatens the spiritual peace of the speaker. In order to develop this notion, Petrarch draws substantially from similar discussions in Augustine’s Confessions. A close examination of the poem in relation to these will help locate Petrarch’s attitude toward time and define how it shapes his strategy in the poem:

Qual meraviglia ebb’io quando ristare
vidi in un punto quel che mai non stette,
ma discorrendo suol tutto cangiare!
E le tre parti sue vidi ristrette
ad una sola, e quella una esser ferma
sì che, come solea, più non s’affretté;
e quasi in terra d’erbe ignuda ed erma,
né “fia” né “fu” né “innanzi” o “indietro”
ch’umana vita fanno varia e ’ferma!

(TE, vvs. 25–33)

Such marvel did I feel when I saw standing in a single point that which never before had ceased, but had been wont in its course to change all things! And I beheld its three aspects reduced to but one, and that unchangeable: no swiftness now as there had been before. As on an empty and barren plain, I now could see no “shall be” or “has been,” no “before” or “after,” making mortal life so uncertain and infirm.

Quel che l’anima nostra preme e ’ngombra;
“dianzi, adesso, ier, deman, mattino e sera”
tutti in un punto passeran com’ ombra;
non avrà loco “fu” “sara” né “era”
ma, “è” solo in presente, ed “ora” ed “oggi”
e sola eternità raccolta e ’ntera
quasi spianati dietro e ’nnanzi i poggi
ch'occupavan la vista, non fia in cui
vostro sperare e rimembrar s'appoggi;
la qual varietà fa spesso altrui
vaneggiar si che 'l viver pare un gioco,
pensando pur: "che sarò io? che fui?"
Non sarà più diviso a poco a poco
ma tutto insieme, e non più state o verno
ma morto il tempo e variato il loco;

(TE, vvs. 64-78)

That which encumbers and weighs upon our
soul—"Before," "now," "yesterday," "tomorrow,"
"morning" and "evening"—all these will pass away
in one point like a shadow. "Was," "shall be,"
and "used to be" will be no more, but "is," "in the
present," "now," "today," and "eternity" alone,
gathered and whole. Future and past, like ills
that hid our view, are leveled now, and nothing
remains upon which hope or memory may
lean. Such variation often leads men to rave that
life is but a game and think "what will I become?
what have I been?" No longer will time be
divided bit by bit, but will be one: summer no
more, nor winter; time is dead and the world
transformed.

In these verses the speaker envisions time standing still "in un punto";
that is, there is no succession, no distinction between past, present, and
future, all is "solo in presente, ed 'ora' ed 'oggi' e sola eternità raccolta
e 'ntera" (vvs. 68-69). The vanity of life, the constant uncertainty and
oscillation between memory of the past and anticipation of something
yet unattained (what Augustine calls being "spilled and scattered" in
time; Conf., XI.xxxiv.39), is described as "un gioco" between opposites. In
contrast the reader sees that all will be drawn together; all will be united
tutto insieme."

These themes and conditions, and even some of the very same expres-
sions, are found in Augustine's descriptions of the contrast between time
and eternity. Note the similarities in this passage from the Confessiones:

Thy years neither come nor go; whereas ours both
come and go, that they all may come. Thy years
stand together, because they do stand; nor are
departing thrust out by coming years for they pass
not away; but ours shall all be, when they shall
no more be. Thy years are one day; and Thy day
is not daily, but To-day, seeing Thy To-day gives
not place unto to-morrow, for neither doth it
replace yesterday. Thy To-day, is eternity....

(X.xiii.16)

Petrarch also uses unusual nature metaphors to describe the eternal stasis
he envisions: eternity is like an arid landscape, barren of all living vegetation ("quasi in terra d'erbe ignuda e erma," vs. 31), or like a smoothed or
levelled landscape ("quasi spianati dietro e 'nnanzi i poggi / ch'occupavan
la vista," vvs. 70–71); eternity is also described as a different place, a "variato
loco" (vs. 78). Petrarch's choice of such metaphors to describe eternity may
even be seen as a means of bringing to mind Augustine's definition
of time as a succession of rising and setting; of being born, maturing, and
dying:

Turn us, O God of Hosts, show us Thy counte-
nance, and we shall be whole. For whithersoever
the soul of man turns itself, unless toward Thee, it
is riveted upon sorrows, yea though it is riveted on
things beautiful. And yet they, out of Thee, and out
of the soul, were not, unless they were from Thee.
They rise, and set; and by rising, they begin as it
were to be; they grow, that they may be perfected;
and perfected, they wax old and wither; and all
grow not old, but all wither. So then when they
rise and tend to be, the more quickly they grow
that they may be, so much the more they haste
not to be. This is the law of them.10

(IV.x.15)

In Augustine's scheme, then, God simply IS, and only the angels and
redeemed creatures (and to a degree those like Augustine, who are granted
a foretaste of the pleasure of the eternal Present while still in mortality)
dwell in a state of timeless worship in which their essence is defined and
signified by the eternal I AM. All others—all mortal beings—are consigned
to participate in this relentless condition of "tending toward nothingness.”11

Another important aspect of the Augustinian dilemma of time also
tormenting Petrarch (which is alluded to in the previously cited pas-
sages, especially vvs. 32–33 and 73–75) is the awareness that time dissipates
man's efforts, clouds his intellect with false images, and separates him from
God:
But now are my years spent in mourning. And Thou, O Lord, art my comfort, my Father everlasting, but I have been severed amid times, whose order I know not; and my thoughts, even the inmost bowels of my soul, are rent and mangled with tumultuous varieties, until I flow together into Thee, purified and molten by the fire of Thy love.¹²

(XI.xxix.39)

What troubles Petrarch is not so much where his soul will reside after death (though I do not minimize this as an influence in his writings), but to what extent his fame vis-à-vis his many opere will find a lasting, even immortal place in future generations. Accordingly, while Augustine attempts (in the final books of the Confessions) to describe the redeeming transformation of man from time into God’s eternity, Petrarch evokes the very absence of time and, therefore, the dissipating threat of time.¹³ This Triumph, then, stands as a monument to one man’s desire for lasting fame and influence and the continued vitality of his creative genius.

In this regard it is significant that while in Augustine’s meditations—his confessions—all things are deferred to God and receive their proper signification and changing ontological status by being mirrored against the Divine, Petrarch seems reluctant to include the Logos in his equation of eternity. To be sure, he includes Augustinian elements: time stands still as the distinctions between past, present, and future disappear, and those dwelling in this timeless state become immutable and whole. What is missing, however, is an unequivocal reference to God as the measure and definition of true eternity. Such references abound in Augustine; in Petrarch’s vision of eternity God is referred to only by the rather stylized and evasive phrase, “Quei che governa il ciel solo col cigno.”¹⁴ Petrarch describes God in mundane terms: He is defined by his control of the elements, but not in terms of time and eternity, terms which would invite comparison, as happens repeatedly in the Confessions.¹⁵ Further, the sense of personal integrity perceived in the speaker’s vision (“non sarà più diviso . . . ma tutto insieme”) is undermined when he describes the angels as being content to understand (“vedere”) not the One, the indivisible I AM, but only one part of his wisdom (“li angeli ne son lieti e contenti / di veder de le mille parti l’una,” vs. 58). This view contrasts strikingly with Augustine’s account of the angels’ mode of perceiving God:

Let them praise Thy Name, let them praise Thee, the supercelestial people, Thine angels, who have no need to gaze up at this firmament, or by reading to know of Thy Word. For they always
behold Thy face, and there read without any syllables in time, what will eth Thy eternal will; they read, they choose, they love. They are ever reading; And that never passes away which they read...  

(XIII.xv.18)

Petrarch situates his paradisiacal locus in a realm of language—words, syntax, grammatical relationships. He presents time not merely as a mental construction, but as the discrete relationships between words—adverbs, nouns, verbs—all of which, as one critic has observed, “distinguish states of mind and carry the weight of senses of time.” Petrarch draws attention to this theme by alluding to and amplifying one of Augustine’s discussions of the relationship between time, memory and expectation, and language. When Petrarch writes about hope—expectation—and memory (“sperare e rimembrar”) in vs. 72, in addition to highlighting once again the penitential frame of this triumph he refers obliquely to the following passage from Augustine:

What now is clear and plain is, that neither things to come nor past are. Nor is it properly said, “there be three times, past, present, and to come”: yet per chance it might be properly said, “there be three times; a present of things past, a present of things present, and a present of things future.” For these three do exist in some sort, in the soul, but otherwhere do I not see them; present of things past, memory; present of things present, sight; present of things future, expectation.

(XI.xx.26)

This comparison brings us to a crucial distinction between the purposes and methods of the two writers. In the mind, says Augustine, one is able to measure time. In other words, the customary notions of time—past, present, and future—are constituted in a consciousness which compares events evoked by memory for the purpose of restoring one’s relationship to God, as His presence is found in the scattered moments of one’s times. To be of any significance time must always be compared to and seen in relation to God. Of those who are unable or unwilling to perceive time in this manner, Augustine says:

[They] understand not yet how the things be made, which by Thee, and in Thee are made: yet
they strive to comprehend things eternal, whilst
their heart fluttereth between the motions of
things past and to come, and is still unstable.
Who shall hold it, and fix it, that it be settled
awhile, and awhile catch the glory of that ever-
fixed Eternity, and compare it with the times
which are never fixed, and see that it cannot be
compared. . . .

(XI.xi.13)

Elsewhere Augustine uses analogies based on verbal and syntactic constructs
(the recitation of a psalm compared with the actions, or parts, of a man’s
life, Conf., XI.xviii.38) to show how the distentio or comparing consciousness
orders time profitably. The end of this activity reveals to man that what he
has mistaken for time is really an illusion; time does not exist, for God is
the true present in which all times are ordered and clarified.

For Augustine’s logology and theology of presence, there can be
only one Present. This mode of perception, in turn, becomes a cen-
tral way of pointing referentially beyond words and things to God.
Augustine’s discussion of the comparing consciousness—as the auto-
biographical first nine books of the Confessions illustrate—is a way of
presenting his belief that to write (and to think) about oneself is to write
(and to think) about God. This is certainly one of the didactic purposes of
the Confessions. In terms of the divine economy, the Confessions ends properly
with a meditation on the eschaton, the Heavenly Jerusalem, which exists
beyond the apparent motion of time. There all citizens, together with
the angels, enjoy the very presence of God; that is, they come face to
face with their true identities now recovered from the confusion of time.

Petrarch’s attitude, however, is strikingly different from that of the Saint.
Lacking Augustine’s strong religious orientation and, therefore, his insistence
on the present as the locus for discovering the presence of God in life, the
speaker views the present with a comparing consciousness of an altogether
different kind. In his present, the stimuli of memory and expectation come
turbulently together, provoking the poet to seek new modes for expressing
his thoughts and emotions in words. Through his humanistic endeavors, the
poet seeks to restore (to remember, in a sense) what he finds noteworthy
in the past and to project his own fame into the future (hopeful anticipa-
tion) by creating works of supreme virtuosity and diversity. Petrarch’s literary
works and many letters persistently suggest his belief that poetic language
has the power, when eloquently and masterfully used, to effect change and
even to confer a degree of ontological reality upon verbal constructions.23
The “Trionfo dell’Eternità,” then, may be viewed as a verbal representation
giving shape and therefore physical reality to a configuration of thoughts
in the mind of the poet—thoughts which find new yet recurring expression in all his writings.

Like Augustine, Petrarch concludes his apocalyptic *Triumph* with a glimpse at the true, eternal present which the penitent, newly converted speaker fervently desires. The poet has prepared the reader carefully for this climactic moment, but instead of the anticipated advent of Divinity, “Quei che governa il ciel solo col ciglio / che conturba ed acqueta gli elementi” (vv. 55–56) and the possibility of any recuperative moral lesson, the reader witnesses the triumphal appearance of Laura.

Ma innanzi a tutte ch' a rifar si vanno,  
è quella che piangendo il mondo chiama  
con la mia lingue e con la stanca penna;  
ma 'l ciel pur di vederla intera brama.  

(TE, vv. 135–38)

Before all who go to be made new is she for whom the world, weeping still, calls her with my tongue and weary pen; but heaven too desires to behold her body and soul.

Laura's appearance is clearly problematic. For while her location at the head of the triumphal procession awards her the place of preeminence among all those worthy of eternal fame, it is the ever-faithful, ever-weeping poet who has created and obtained immortality for her. In fact, if Heaven truly does wish to see her, it is because of the mastery and skill of her *artifex*, Francesco Petrarca! This unexpected elevation of Laura forces one to ask who or what is actually being celebrated in the “Trionfo dell’Eternità.”

The final verses of the poem provide further insights to help resolve this dilemma. At the moment Laura and her procession appear, the poet, instead of being overcome by unspeakable joy and bliss (thoughts befitting such a solemn vision), returns “ancora” to the very genesis of his idolatrous love:

A riva un fiume che nasce in Gebenna  
amor mi diè per lei si lunga guerra  
che la memoria ancora il cor accenna.  

(TE, vv. 139–40)

Beside a stream that rises in the Alps love gave to me on her account such long warfare that my heart still bears its memory.
These are profound sentiments, but not necessarily those of one whose mind and heart should have been purged, corrected, and redirected through conversion.

Does then no substantial change actually take place? It seems clear that the poem’s apparent moral progress, the transcendence explicitly indicated as one triumph gives way to the next—Cupidity overcome by Chastity, Chastity conquered by Death, and so forth until Eternity triumphs over all—is subverted by the return of the themes of Love and Fame: a circular structure is substituted for the expected linear trajectory of salvation history. This self-enclosing, circular structure reveals how far removed the *Triumphs* actually are from the conceptual framework of the *Confessions*. Petrarch, like Augustine, is writing of himself; yet his words never transcend the level of verbal constructs, never refer to the eternal Logos, for that would be anathema to his poetic designs. Rather, they refer reflexively to the poet, to the possibilities of poetic expression and the fear that someday his voice may fail, thus depriving him of his true being and the possibility of lasting fame.

Petrarch’s strategy in placing Laura at the head of the *Triumph of Eternity* will become more apparent if we consider briefly the two chief sources of inspiration from which Petrarch drew. These are Beatrice’s triumphal arrival atop Mt. Purgatory in the *Divina Commedia* and the Roman *Triumphus*. That a woman, especially one of such superlative qualities, should stand in a place generally reserved for Christ is an important aspect of Dante’s allegory. When Beatrice appears in what Charles Singleton has termed her “triumph,” there is no reason to suggest, however, that she is being worshipped per se. As for Laura in the “Trionfo dell’Eternità,” evidence for maintaining a similar analogous relationship with Christ is, in the final analysis, lacking. The apparent allegory breaks down as it becomes increasingly obvious that the *Trionfi* are neither a christological poem nor a moral exemplum: rather than Christ, it is Laura and her poet, together in the stasis of their problematic relationship, whom Petrarch considers and perhaps even praises.

In this regard, the tradition of the Roman Triumph is a much more reliable model for reading Petrarch’s processional poem than is the Christian Advent. The triumph may be described simply as a ceremony honoring the power of Rome, its conquests, and the skills of its soldiers in the person of their commander. In his thorough and informative study, *Triumphus*, H. S. Versnel notes that during the procession the honored leader, the *triumphator*, “has a status which appears to raise him to the rank of the Gods…” so that “it seems as if Jupiter himself, incarnated in the *triumphator*, makes his solemn entry into Rome.” Because of Petrarch’s propensity for things Roman, the *triumphus* may provide a humanistic anti-type (or at least a source of equal appeal) to
the Christian moral allegory found in Augustine, Dante, and many other medieval writers.\textsuperscript{27}

The conclusion of the poem, then, enables us to resolve the ambiguity between the expected advent of Christ as Victor over the world (and thus over Petrarch's own youthful errors) and the actual appearance of Laura. Laura is no simple analogy for Christ; instead, and as always, she is the inspiration, the creation and the very desire of Petrarch, all of which are now given the characteristics of changelessness by being enshrined in a poem which makes insistent allusions to Augustinian paradigms of immutability as well as the medieval allegory of spiritual progress.\textsuperscript{28} That the real identity of the honoree of the final triumph could be kept uncertain for so long is due, in large part, to the sequential structure of the Trionfi. This poem is Petrarch's most obvious attempt at making time, particularly his own personal time, his subjective reality, manageable. In doing so he considers various traditional forms of happiness and resolution. By deliberately choosing Laura over all other possibilities, Petrarch creates a memorial to his self-portrayal as a man caught between deep religious and ethical feelings and his own desire for fame and renown.\textsuperscript{29} Like the circularly constructed Canzoniere, the Trionfi form a poetic testament to one's failure to achieve any lasting change in one's life: the weeping, composing lover ever lost in spiritual torment is, as John Freccero has observed, "the reflection, the thematic translation, of Petrarch's autoreflexive poetics."\textsuperscript{30} Yet in the measure that his poetry sustains this intense autoreflexivity, while creatively continuing to explore and expand the possible limits of his craft, one can only conclude that this "failure" is actually the heart of his great poetic achievement and lasting influence.\textsuperscript{31}

\textbf{NOTES}

1. All quotations are from Francesco Petrarca, \textit{Rime, Trionfi e poesie latine}, ed. R. Neri, G. Martellotti, E. Bianchi, and N. Sapegno; \textit{La letteratura italiana: Storia e testi}, VI (Milan-Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1951). All subsequent references to the \textit{Triumphs} under discussion will be abbreviated: TT for "Trionfo del Tempo" and TE for "Trionfo dell'Eternità." The unifying theme of the six \textit{Trionfi} is the allegorical journey leading from the world of transitory passions upward to the ever-steady realm of Divine eternity. The reader learns that all pursue Cupidity during mortality, but that some are able to rise by seeking Charity instead; Death overcomes all, but for a worthy few Fame may vanquish even this. In its turn, Time overcomes all things and Eternity claims even Time as its own. (The final triumph was suggestively called the "Triumphus Divinitatis" by the influential commentator Bernardo da Pietro Lapini da Montalcino in 1495; see Francesco Petrarca, \textit{Trionfi e Canzoniere}, 2 vols. in 1, comm. on the \textit{Trionfi} by Bernardo da Pietro Lapini da Montalcino; comm. on the \textit{Canzoniere}, Francesco Filelfo [Venezia: Petrus de Plasiis, 1490].)
2. Translations are based on The Triumphs of Petrarch, trans. Ernest Hatch Wilkins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962). Changes have been made freely where greater clarity or literalness has been deemed necessary.


7. Bosco, Francesco Petrarcha, p. 9. Bosco seems to doubt the principle of progress in the life and works of Petrarch and hence the possibility of writing autobiography:

\[
\text{noi non possiamo in alcun modo ravisare una linea di sviluppo, uno svolgimento...in tutto il Petrarcha. Egli è senza storia, se lo si considera, come si deve, nel concreto di tutta l’opera sua.}
\]

(p. 7)


Anni tui nec eunt nec ueniunt: isti enim nostri eunt et ueniunt, ut omnes ueniunt. Anni tui omnes simul stant, quoniam stant, nec euntes a ueniens

10. Conf. IV.x.15:

Deus uirtutum, conuerte nos et ostende faciem tuam,
et salui erimus. Nam quoquouersum se uerterit anima
hominis, ad dolores figitur alibi praeterquam in te,
tametsi figitur in pulchris extra te et extra se. Quae
tamen nulla essent, nisi essent abs te. Quae oriuntur
et occidunt et oriendo quasi esse incipiunt
et crescent, ut perficiantur, et perfecta senescunt
et intereunt: et non omnia senescunt et omnia
intereunt. Ergo cum oriuntur et tendunt esse, quo
magis celeriter crescent, ut sint, eo magis festinant,
ut non sint. Sic est modus eorum.

11. The bibliography of Augustinian studies is vast. The standard bibliographies

12. Conf. XI.xxix.39:

Nunc vero anni mei in gemitibus, et tu solacium meum,
domine, pater meus aeternus est; et ego in tempora
dissiliui, quorum ordinem nescio, et tumultuosus
uarietatibus dilaniuntur cogitationes meae, intima
uiscera animae meae, donec in te confluam purgatus
et liquidus igne amoris tui.

In fact the only reference to Christ in the Triumphs is to note that the empty tomb has been abandoned by the Christian world to the infidel ("Trionfo della Fama," II, 142–44):

gite superbi, o miseri Cristiani,  
consumando l'un l'altro, e non vi caglia  
che 'l sepolcro di Cristo è in man de' cani!


The locus classicus for defining God as eternal and unchanging is Exodus 3:14: "God said to Moses: I AM WHO I AM. He said: Thus shalt thou say to the children of Israel: HE WHO IS, hath sent me to you" (Douay version). This statement stands firmly behind all of Augustine's discussion of the difference between time and eternity, heaven and earth, the angels and man, God's language and human speech, in the Confessions. See for example, Confessions VII.x.16: "O aeterna uestitas et aera caritas et cara aeternitas! Tu es deus meus, tibi suspiro dei ac nocte." See also XIII.xxxi.47; IV.x.24, where wisdom, another essential definition of God, is said to be eternal; but especially Book XI where Augustine discusses the relation between Creator and creatures and the nature of time and eternity.

16. Conf. XIII.vx.18:

laudent nomen tuum, laudent te supercaelestes populi  
angelorum tuorum, qui non opus habent suspicere  
firmamentum hoc et legendo cognoscere uerbum  
tuam. vident enim faciem tuam semper et ibi legunt  
sine syllabis temporum, quid uelit aeterna voluntas  
tua. legunt, eligunt et dilegunt; semper legunt et  
nunquam praeterit quod legunt. eligendo enim et  
dilingendo legunt ipsam incommutabilitatem consilii tui.

Bosco notes that "il Petrarca confonda il concreto reale col verbale" (Francesco Petrarca, p. 207). Also useful is Mazzotta's discussion of Sonnet 5, "Quando io movo i

18. See Waller, Petrarch’s Poetics, pp. 126-27.


20. Conf. XI.xx.26:

Quod autem nunc liquet et claret, nec futura sunt nec praeterita, nec proprae dicitur: tempora sunt tria, praesens et futurum, sed fortasse proprie dicetur: tempora sunt tria, praesens de praeteritis, praesens de praesentibus, praesens de futurus. Sunt enim haec in anima tria quaedam et alibi ea non uideo, praesens de praeteritis memoria, praesens de praesentibus contuitus, praesens de futuris expectatio.


22. Conf. XI.xi.13:

nondum intellegunt, qumodo fiant, quae per te atque in te fiunt, et conantur aeterna sapere, sed adhuc in praeteritis et futuris rerum motibus correorum uolitatem et adhuc uanum est. Quis tenebit illud et figet illud, ut paululum stet et paululum rapiat splendorem semper stantis aeterinitatis et comparat cum temporibus numquam stantibus et uideat esse incomparabilem.


If Petrarch through his poetry “became a spiritual individual and recognized himself as such” (Burckhardt), he tried to persuade others to do
so through his letters and treatises based on classical moral philosophy. In this way the poet became a philosopher and sought to make his own subjective insights universal. Through establishing the centrality of his own and every other man's subjectivity, he laid the basis for much of modern philosophy and spirituality.... The poet describing what the human condition might be becomes the philosopher making subjective statements concerning individuals[, statements] that simultaneously acquire the nature of universals. And this is what Petrarch meant when he thought of himself as a poeta theologicus.


When Beatrice comes at the summit of Purgatory, in that awesome and splendid procession which is her "triumph," unmistakable signs and suggestions attend her to proclaim that her coming should be seen as an Advent. This is evident even as the procession gradually comes into view, disclosing itself to be, in figure, the coming of the Word of God in history. The reader has been given to expect Beatrice to appear, but before she comes, cries and utterances and yet other signs seem instead to herald an advent of Christ; by deliberate poetic strategy expectation is made ambiguous. There is in all this, of course, no affirmation that Beatrice represents Christ, even in this figure. That, indeed, is quite excluded by the fact that Christ, in this procession, is represented by the Gryphon. Much less, of course, is any sort of equivalence suggested, as if Beatrice might somehow be Christ. There is quite another principle at work here, one which a mediæval poet had reason to think might be less subject to misunderstanding than has proved to be the case. The principle is analogy.

(p. 72)

Le sue fatiche di erudito gli hanno acquistato uno de' primi luoghi fra i benemeriti delle lettere; ma la gloria, il nome di grand'uomo glieli hanno acquistato le sue rime. [Petrarca] è giunto a noi, accompagnato con Laura.

See also Waller, *Petrarch's Poetics*, p. 131.


27. The tradition of the triumphus was known to both Dante and Petrarch. Descriptions of the event, as well as insights into its significance, were available in both Roman histories and medieval compilations. For information and further bibliography, see Pierre de Nolhac, *Pétrarque et l'humanisme* (Paris: Librairie Honore Champion, 1907), and Paget Toynbee, *Dante Studies and Researches* (London: Methuen, 1902). I am currently completing work on a study which will address this interesting problem in more detail.


29. Mazzotta’s comments on the *Canzoniere* apply equally to this Trionfo, and to the work as a whole. See his *Dante, Poet of the Desert*, p. 274:

> We reach with Petrarch the historical moment when Humanism forges its own simulacra and erects its own monuments. Petrarch gathers his three hundred and sixty-six fragments into a *florilegium*, the ephemeral leaves into a flower. But this unity is fictive and illusory and... from Dante’s viewpoint this faith in the self is a work of madness. The flower’s name is Narcissus.


31. In this regard, Robert Durling’s observation on Petrarch’s achievement is apt: “Petrarch heralds the modern world, in which the sense of kinship among men is based... on the shared plight of being natural.” See Robert M. Durling, *The Figure of the Poet in Renaissance Epic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 87.