De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia (1367–70) is, by genre, an invective, but it is a singularly self-effacing one.\(^1\) Not just impugning those who have accused him of ignorance, Petrarch assents to their charges and represents himself as willfully ignorant in the name of ancient wisdom and Christian piety. And he does so con brio with playful wit and gamesome paradox, droll sarcasm and lip-smacking one-upsmanship. There is ironic caricature and wry self-regard: “I have become a poor peddler of learning (mercator inops literarum),” Petrarch opines, but “what has been lost cannot be lost again, . . . [and] nothing can be less than nothing (minus nihil, nihil est).”\(^2\) There are sublime yet surprisingly jaunty comparisons, as of the author’s madness to “the madness (insania) of Saint Paul” upon embracing the doctrine of Jesus: “I console myself,” writes Petrarch, “for I am in the company of great men (magnis comitibus)” (238–39). And so he concludes: “I am the greatest ignoramus of all (et ego omnium ignorantissimum me),” but—here skipping a beat—“I except perhaps four others (imo quattuor fortassis excipiam” (346–47). De ignorantia scarcely attains the ludic energy, satiric thrust, and Lucianic ebullience of, say, Erasmus’s Praise of Folly, with which it compares in some ways. But in its good-natured, yet pungent and provocative manner, Petrarch’s treatise allows its author to overcome his opponents’ charge of inferior attainment, a charge so wounding at first that he seems to have removed it from his consciousness and replaced it with what Sigmund Freud calls “an ‘economy’ of verbal wit.”\(^3\)

By invoking Freud’s Jokes and Their Relationship to the Unconscious (1905) as I have just done, I want to draw attention to the psychic energy that infuses Petrarch’s invective against those who have accused him of ignorance. Civilization, writes Freud, has taught us to repress instinctual urges and egotistic impulses in the name of safeguarding the larger community
and guaranteeing some degree of social order. But in finding such renunciation very difficult, the human psyche turns to verbal wit to regain what has been lost. “Strictly speaking,” notes Freud, “we do not know what we are laughing at,” precisely because we have so deeply repressed the feelings and emotions that we are seeking to liberate through jocularity and witty repartee.¹ The problem for De ignorantia would be to ask what censored thoughts, what worried associations Petrarch might be seeking to protect. My discussion of the text will argue that De ignorantia deals stringently with the author’s anxieties about human friendship, the rational and irrational faith upon which all human friendship is based, and the social and economic order that in turn is based on such faith. Petrarch emerges as a “man in the middle,” neither part of the established social institutions that might proclaim his scholarly and intellectual competence, nor part of an emergently mercantile commercial order that might reward him with material wealth, communal prestige, and strategic influence. He is not even sure of his place within a small circle of friends, four of whom have maligned him in public. And therein lies the initial source of his anxiety.

Though Petrarch’s invective refers in passing to some contemporaneous philosophical schools and issues, its deeper focus aims elsewhere. It certainly exonerates the University of Padua, which Petrarch visited periodically during his residence in Venice (1362–68) and where he had friends such as the rhetorician Pietro da Moglio, the grammarian Lombardo della Seta, and the renowned polymath Giovanni Dondi, the last a member of the faculty of medicine and astronomy who would serve as Petrarch’s physician and a quondam poet who shared his humanist aversion to narrowly defined Aristotelian natural philosophy.² Nor does it aim specifically at other universities such as Paris, Oxford, or Bologna, with their Averroist, Ockhamite, and emergently materialist science, respectively, though it refers in passing to clownish exaggerations of such teachings.³ Its immediate target is four men who had maligned the author in 1365, each a public figure and self-proclaimed intellectual who lived and worked in Venice, none currently affiliated with any university or scholarly institution.⁴ They include two Venetian noblemen: Leonardo Dandolo, a member of the military elite and son of the late doge Andrea Dandolo (who had been a friend of Petrarch); and Zaccaria Contarini, scion of a distinguished family that had produced a yet earlier doge, and himself a senator with connections to Venetian bankers. The third was Guido da Bagnolo, a nobleman from Reggio-Emilia, who had been educated in medicine (likely at Bologna) and who had served as personal physician as well as political counselor to King Peter I of Cyprus. The fourth was Tommaso Talenti, a naturalized
Venetian citizen of Florentine origin and a prosperous silk merchant who had collected a library of over a hundred volumes and whose testament of 1347 would endow a chair of logic and philosophy in his adoptive city.8 These four shared with Petrarch certain interests in classical thought but were to diverge from him in their distinct preference for Aristotelian natural philosophy. Among them, the poet emerges quite conspicuously as an intermediate figure, betwixt and between, distinctly lower in his social origins, aspiring higher in his intellectual pursuits. Three of his accusers were noble-born; all were wealthy individuals, well connected with the military, diplomatic, merchant, and medical elite; each was representative of an ascendant governing, professional, or commercial class energizing and progressively enriching Venetian society.

The bad-mouthing by these four men paradoxically affirms their admiration of him. It stems from “sacred friendship (sancta amicitia)” because friendship sets up expectations of equality that their varying public renown maliciously defeats. The object of their envy cannot be his material wealth (non opes certe), especially since theirs “exceeds mine (me superant)” (230–31). Here Petrarch refers to his resources as “modest (meiociere), shared with others (comunicabiles), . . . not sumptuous but humbly lacking in pomp or ostentation,” so much so that his defamers “wish me even greater wealth (maiores optant michi)” (230–31). They cannot even envy his eloquence, he concludes, because eloquence is something that they “despise as our modern philosophers do, and reject as unworthy of learned men” (232–33). Petrarch views this assault upon friendship all the more grievously because his attackers had formed their opinion of him while enjoying his hospitality and catching him off-guard: “It is quite easy to trick a trusting soul (fidente m)” who entertained them “with a happy face and even happier spirit” in a give-and-take that he believed a “faithful sharing (fi  delis participatio) of all the rest, including our knowledge” (262–63).

Here it is worth noting that in his dedicatory letter to Donato Albanzani, a Venetian grammarian born at Casentino in the Tuscan Appenines, Petrarch considers the material quality of this book, its physical shape and visual appearance, a testimony to his friendship with its recipient.9 It is a “small work on a vast subject (librum paruum de materia ingenti)” (222–23), hardly a book but rather a “colloquium” that recalls “my fireside chats on winter nights (me ante focum hibernis noctibus fabulantem)” (222–23), a trifle offered as “it is customary for friends to beguile each other” (222–23). It is moreover “laced with numerous additions and corrections, and all of its margins crammed with notes” (224–25), but its deformities constitute a material sign of friendship between giver and receiver, as long as the
latter accepts them with good will, and trusts the former’s best intentions.\textsuperscript{10} The insertions amount to some 200 lines, representing about 8 percent of the complete text. As it happens, the ink and pen strokes of two existing manuscripts, one the autograph presentation copy for Donato (begun in May 1367 and completed in June 1370, now at Berlin’s Staatsbibliothek), and the other Petrarch’s personal copy (dated from Arquà on June 25, 1370, now at the Vatican Library), reveal four layers of insertions and revisions incorporated between 1367 and 1370. Most of these layers amplify the treatise’s midsection on the ancients’ (particularly Cicero’s) thinking about religion, but a good number of them affect later sections of the treatise, where they introduce metacritical reflections on their own roles in exemplifying topics of friendship and calculation.

These two topics prove important to Petrarch’s sustained argument about knowledge and ignorance, as we shall see. Friendship, assurance, faith, and trust all constitute the moral basis of civil society, the ground upon which economic transactions and exchanges might operate. Without such a basis, there would be no commerce, trade, or professional institutions such as we know them. Petrarch can feel only dismay as his four friends, representatives of the social, political, professional, and mercantile hierarchy of Venice violate the very bond upon which their prosperous society depends. And he locates his dismay in a series of economic figurations when he avers that the objects of their envy, his learning and eloquence, are themselves so impoverished: “What a small amount (quantulum) is even the greatest knowledge (quantum cunque)” (250–51). No matter how vast the accumulation of human knowledge, one’s possession of it is “always slight in itself (semper exigua),” a claim strengthened by Saint Paul’s account of things that “we now know in part (qua ex parte nunc scimus)” (250–51, referring to 1 Cor. 13:9).

Certainly the locale against which the writer plays off his ignorantia (“I sadly and silently acknowledge my ignorance,” 250–52) opposes material wealth to intellectual poverty in palpable ways. The site of conflict is Venice, a patrician republic built upon its wealth and economic abundance, as Petrarch notes sporadically in this “great and beautiful city” (260–61), a commercial “maritime city (nautica civitate),” (256–57), home of “seamen (nautes)” and long-distance merchants (344–45).\textsuperscript{11} Here his accusers have dabbled in philosophy as a secondary leisure activity, in effect commodifying it as a hobby or entertainment adjacent to the pursuit of wealth and recognition: “They think they are great (magnos) and indeed they are all rich (sunt plane omnes diuites), which is the only greatness mortals have today” (236–37). The author by contrast had negotiated his own formal educa-
tion in squalid Montpellier, Bologna, Toulouse, and Padua. In an idealized Naples he received public recognition from the philosopher-king Robert, to whom he was “no match (tanto impar) for his fortune” (254–55). The “greater . . . and most studious part” of his life has so far unfolded amid the opulence of papal Avignon. But for his studies and meditation, only the humble “trans-Alpine Helicon” (256–57) of Vaucluse has afforded him the quiet, solitude, and simplicity that he needed for genuine scholarly work.

Petrarch belongs to neither the patriciate of Venice, nor to a courtly entourage at Naples or Avignon, nor to a university collegium at Padua, Bologna, Montpellier, or elsewhere. He had always charted an independent career and had based it not on academic collaboration or clubbish camaraderie, but (in a threefold repetition of the verb legere, “read,” with an extra lego, “I read,” added in the margin) on acts of reading that bind him to the language of religion, law, poetry, and philosophy: “I still read the books of poets and philosophers, and above all the works of Cicero” (272–74). Here he avers that of all Cicero’s texts, the one that has fired him “most powerfully” is De natura deorum (272–73). This dialogue in three books written around 45 BCE imagines a conversation among three prominent Romans on the topic of divinity in Platonic, Epicurean, and Stoic philosophy. For Petrarch, it provides a model of civilized discourse, intellectual tolerance, and reasoned disagreement among philosophizing friends. The author’s lengthy quotations from it (about 140 lines, representing 5 percent of De ignorantia) complicate his own humanist enterprise with their concrete examples of Ciceronian style and eloquence. Weaving whole passages into his own composition, Petrarch attempts to mesh his style with Cicero’s.

This citational strategy exposes Petrarch to the charge that he is simply emulating Cicero as slavishly as his opprobrious friends emulate Aristotle. In his tacit defense, the author reverts to economic figurations. On the one hand his borrowings amount to a bookish theft, an openly confessed literary plagiarism: “Even now I am carried along (raptus) by the unusual charm of Cicero’s subject and style. . . . I cram my little works (opuscula) with another’s words” (284–85). On the other, he has suffered the theft of his own name and reputation through an attack by friends, an attack more reprehensible since he considers himself a mere vehicle of transmission for writing perhaps greater than his own, a kind of commercial agent who has been defrauded by those whom he sought to help: “I have become a poor peddler of learning (mercator inops literarum), robbed (spoliatus) of my knowledge and fame by these four brigands (predonibus). Now that I have nothing of my own (michi proprium), poverty (paupertas) must excuse my importunity and impudence in begging from others (vi aliena mendicem)” (284–85).
The etymology of the key term “mercator inops” seals this identification. The noun mercator derives from the archaic Latin merx, a shortened form of the name Mercury, which Petrarch had etymologized in his Contra medicum as mercatorium kyrios, “lord of merchants.” This god of commerce and communication is a deity whose quicksilver wit lubricates profitable transactions and exchanges, but who, when assimilated to the Greek Hermes, also invented the lyre (for which Apollo bestowed divine powers upon him) and served as messenger of the gods, a transmitter of wisdom from the deities to humankind. The adjective inops derives from the name of the indigenous Roman deity Opis, wife of Saturn, “the sower” and goddess of the August harvest (both later assimilated to the Greek deities Rhea and Chronos). Signifying abundance and prosperity, the substantive noun ops in turn generates opus, “productive work,” and, as Varro had erroneously postulated, oppidum, “a fortified town,” a center of commercial activity and prosperity. The conflation of all these elements in the phrase “mercator inops”—abundance, prosperity, productivity, wealth, the invention of song, and the transmission of divine wisdom—points to the censored thoughts and worried associations that the author is trying to protect in De ignorantia. These associations concern the appropriation of intellectual capital and the contingencies of making positive and productive use of it. Petrarch spells out his concerns through an economic figuration when he invokes the historical personage of Averroes, the Arabic conduit of Greek thought to the Christian middle ages. Averroes, he claims, exaggerated Aristotle’s net worth when he spent the major part of his career in writing a commentary upon Aristotle’s work: in Petrarch’s words, “It all comes down to the old adage, ‘Every merchant praises his own merchandise (mercatores omnes suam mercem solitos laudare)” (322–23). Commentators, in another economic figuration that extends the argument to general academic practice, resemble craftsmen or artisans who peddle their own wares, and the greater the master-text such as Peter Lombard’s Sentences, the more “it has suffered at the hands of a thousand such workmen (opifices)” (322–23). Petrarch, on the other hand, would fashion the value of his own career in more generous economic terms. These terms summon the author’s continued investment in faith, trust, and candor. Confidence in the word of another is the basis for all human transactions and exchanges, subtending every legal, commercial, economic, institutional, and professional relationship. Since such activities depend upon verbal compacts, they depend upon how words are used, which is to say that they depend upon style or verbal eloquence. In this context, Petrarch’s apparent digression on style loops back to one of his dominant
questions: “How might a Christian man of letters (homo literatus) appear to those who say that Christ was an ignoramus?” (300–301). Right from the start, Petrarch contrasts such a plain-speaking person with latter-day Aristotelians whose “greatest glory is to make some confused and baffling statement (confusum aliquid ac perplexum) which neither they nor anyone else can understand” (302–3). In the ancient world, as he points out, Augustus Caesar “made it his chief aim to express his thoughts as clearly as possible,” and he “laughed at his friends who collected unusual and obscure words (insolita et obscura)” (302–3).

The hallmark of effective style is its “clarity (claritas), the supreme proof of one’s understanding and knowledge” (302–3), which enables a sharing of mind, a com-mentum or commentary on truth that articulates, if not absolute ineffable truth, at least such a responsive, shared approach to it as is humanly possible. And insofar as this style enables such a sharing of mind, it exemplifies amicitia in its highest form, the act of relating to another person as to one’s own self.

Petrarch explores this proposition with unsettling consequences for his argument. Referring to his critics’ assault on him, he cites Macrobius’s remark about Aristotle (in Somnium Scipionis [Scipio’s Dream], 2.15.18): “It seems to me that such a great man could not have been ignorant of anything” (310–11). The remark proves troublesome because its author’s possible irony, “whether he wrote in jest or in earnest (sive ioco, sive serio)” (310–11), sets no logical limit to understanding the intent: does Macrobius mean what he says, or does he mean the exact opposite? Petrarch’s exploration of metaphrasis, “change in phrasing,” slips into a demonstration of antiphrasis, “irony,” as it confronts the problem of double meaning. In response, he pressures his own writing to register a transparent statement of his attitude: “It seems to me just the opposite (prorsus contrarium) is true” (310–11). In a straightforward effort to specify a reason for his friends’ attack, he avers that overtly they lacerate him for rejecting Aristotle, but the real reason is that covertly they envy his fame: “For this they harass me; and although the root of their envy is something else [viz. their desire for Petrarch’s fame], this is the cause they allege: that I do not worship Aristotle” (310–11).

The problem with his accusers’ argument—again Petrarch expresses the concept through economic figurations—is that the “poverty (inops) of their intelligence or of their language (vel intellectus vel sermonis)” (312–13) limits their understanding. The task is not to suppress rhetorical nuance but to heighten it, not to flatten out one’s style but to empower it, not to diminish the verbal palate but to enhance its iridescence. And the compelling motivation to fashion such a style is grounded as much in caritas as in claritas,
in the Christian commitment to serve one another, in friendship as a means to attain it, and finally in the faith that words powerfully articulated convey truth. On these grounds, Petrarch faults Aristotle for a defective style: “I must confess now and admit that I take no great pleasure in the style of the famous man as it comes down to us” (312–13). And a page later he repeats the claim: Aristotle “teaches us the nature of virtue. But reading him offers us none of those exhortations, or only very few, that goad and inflame (stimulos ac verborum faces) our minds to love virtue and hate vice” (314–15).

The argument reveals Petrarch’s own wounding defect. Without having directly experienced Aristotle’s style in the original Greek text, he can only surmise that its translators have rendered as “harsh and rough (durus scaberque)” what Cicero and other ancients have declared to be “sweet, copious, and ornate in his own tongue (in sermone proprio et dulcem et copiosum et ornatum)” (312–13). The author recurs to the humanist tenet that we can fully understand a text only in its original language. But in this case, it is a tenet that he cannot observe, “since Greece is deaf to our speech (quoniam Gracia nostris sermonibus surda est)” (314–15), or, more properly through antiphrasis: We are deaf to Greek speech. Here, in a moment of stunning self-exposure, Petrarch’s focus on rhetoric foregrounds his most censored thought. His strongest claim reveals his greatest weakness and his besetting ignorance: he cannot read Greek. Subsequently, the author bases his long peroration in praise of Plato to the detriment of Aristotle (325–35) on the material evidence of possessing Plato’s written words in physical form: “I have in my home at least sixteen of Plato’s books” (328–29). And he fineses the powerful countercharge that he cannot effectively read these words because the death of his teacher in Greek, Barlaam the Calabrian, “cut short this noble undertaking” (328–29).

His friends’ attack on him amounts to a breach of trust, with regard both to their faith in God, which philosophy should reinforce, and to their support of the author, for whom amicitia means “loving another as oneself” (338–39). The consequences of this breach play out in a quantified economic context. His accusers “love me wholeheartedly, but not all of me (non totum me)” (338–39). Friendship should thrive on parity, but his accusers “seek equality in our friendship (in amicitia pares esse)” as they detract from his merits so that “we are all obscure (simus omnes obscuri)” (340–41). Petrarch seeks to defuse their assault by handing over his property to them: “I leave my spoils (exuuias meas) to these dear brigands (raptoribus caris), . . . if fame can be given to a robber as money (pecunia) is snatched from its owner. . . . I shall be happier and richer (ditior) . . . than they are
with their proud spoils (*superbis spoliis*)” (342–45). Such wealth and fortune ought to impress his friends, since they inhabit Venice, a “most noble and excellent city (*urbe nobilissimam atque optimam*)” distinguished by “the magnitude and manifold variety of its populace (*populi magnitudinem multiplicemque uarietatem*)” (344–45). Its citizens enjoy “great liberality in many things (*multa enim rerum omnium libertas*),” referring to the scope of its coffers, but also to the extent of its cultural capital, “including an excessive freedom of speech, which I would call its only or its greatest evil (*uerborum longe nimia est libertas*)” (344–45).

Such liberality, registered in a syntax in which the single noun *libertas* governs both physical *rerum* and cognitive *uerborum*, has invited the penury of small-mindedness, envy, and grudge. Envy, after all, focuses not on any solid truth but on the prestige of an “empty name (*uani nominio*)” (348–49). Petrarch appears troubled by this predicament. On the one hand, he construes the bulk of his textual revisions in *De ignorantia* as a sign of the care that he has taken in presenting his case. One marginal insertion calculates human knowledge in terms of economic magnitude: “Those who are thought rich (*ditissimi*) are themselves truly paupers (*uere inopes*)” (350–51). In yet another marginal insertion, this “dire lack of knowledge (*scientie inopia*)” can only generate “a great discrepancy of opinions (*quanta opinionum contrarietas*) . . . a number of factions and differences (*sectarum numerus que differentie*)” (350–51). The upshot is a profusion of Scholastic energies, a paradoxical multiplication of schools with endless dialogue and debate, “uncertainties about things (*rerum ambiguitas*), . . . perplexity about words (*uerborum perplexitas*)” (350–51), a situation in which “we may argue with equal force on both sides of any question (*ad utranque partem*)” (350–51).19 But at least the participants in these sophistic exercises, the members of schools and academic institutions, hold something that Petrarch does not possess: they belong to recognized faculties and they share at least some collegiality, however chaotic it might be. The four friends whose breach of confidence had motivated this invective did not formally belong to such schools. But as scholars whose interests were amateur, they enjoyed the support of other institutional structures beyond Petrarch’s purview associated with the Venetian nobility, the merchant class, and the medical establishment.

By contrast, the author construes the tangle of his revisions as a sign chiefly of his intimacy with Donato Albanzani, to whom he sends his blotted manuscript: “For you’ll understand how special a friend you are to me when I write in this way, hoping that you regard my additions and corrections as so many tokens of our friendship and affection” (224–25).
Petrarch, writing amounts to a colloquium with the self and is shared by friends. It is above all a colloquium with the texts that one reads, linking other readers to a past that cannot be fully retrieved or entirely grasped.\textsuperscript{20} One function of the schools and academic institutions that Petrarch disparaged is that they provide a social framework and collegial support for work in the disciplines they embrace. Petrarch enumerates successive generations of teachers in rhetoric and philosophy who had nurtured their disciples in agreement with or opposition to such principles: from Arcesilas, Gorgias, Hermagoras, and Hypias to Epicurus, Metrodorus, Chrysippus, and Zeno. The last boldly insulted Socrates with invective, “using the Latin word \textit{scurra} (‘buffoon, trifler, know-it-all,’ as Cicero recounts in \textit{De natura deorum} 34.94],” in order, as Petrarch speculates, “to give the jibe more bite” (358–59).\textsuperscript{21} As Petrarch further points out, Cicero’s rivals turned the same taunt against him because of “the remarkable wit (\textit{festivitatem}) of his tongue” (358–59). This lesson, registered in the treatise’s penultimate insertion, is not that such scholars are cruel or uncharitable but that they use such invective to unite their adherents in defending “the equal validity (\textit{paritas}) of great men’s views, which inspires divergent judgments in their followers” (358–59).

This idea of bonding within academic communities, though often a source of dissention, contrasts with Petrarch’s forbearing dismissal of his friends’ attacks on him. Compared with earlier invectives, “all the stinging barbs of my judges are easily tolerated jests (\textit{ludi}), to be borne with a serene mind (\textit{equissimo animo})” (360–61). But this forbearance itself hardly conceals the writer’s wound, one smarting in his sense of being exceptional, unique, and alone. A man in the middle with no recognizable or at least conventionally defined institutional affiliations, no stable forms of economic protection, and few firmly established networks of cultural support, Petrarch perceives his scholarly career as adrift in the evolutionary sea change of late fourteenth-century communal, economic, and commercial relations. His final marginal addition to the text recalls from \textit{De natura deorum} 1.33.93 an invective that “a Greek woman named Leontium, whom Cicero calls a prostitute (\textit{meretricula}), dared to write against the great philosopher Theophrastus” (360–61). Using this gendered figure of the \textit{meretricula} to evoke the selling and buying of commodified bodies in a public marketplace, Petrarch locates his own career in a comparable environment. “Hearing this,” he writes, “how could one be indignant when attacked, when such figures were attacked by such critics” (360–61). His four accusers live in a world where social hierarchy, material wealth, and commercial activity mean so much to so many. Petrarch sees himself on the
margins of this world, tugged by the competing claims of a quite different medieval caritas and communitas on the one hand, and on the other an emergent but narrow scholarly public and literary professionalism, to which the commercial revolution of the mid-fourteenth century is both complementary and antithetical.  

Petrarch called his collected letters to friends and associates Epistolae familiarium, as though in addressing the latter he were part of an extended community that embraced them all, a familiariis among familiares, each serving one another’s material needs and spiritual interests. This title projects a vision of caritas and communitas, imbued with more than a classical tinge of the political amicitia that has brought them together. But even as his letters multiply, Petrarch expresses the pain of separation, of a drift backward and forward as old identities are destroyed, new identities are taken on, boundaries are transgressed, and familiar categories are breached. In this respect he is exquisitely aware of his involvement in multiple zones of readership with diverse rules for diverse audiences, for which his sense of the distinctive otherness of the past serves as a beacon. In his incipient humanism, Petrarch gravitates toward an unfamiliar environment where bonds of faith, trust, and loyalty impel new divisions of labor in the world of literature, philosophy, thought, and letters, shadowing new divisions in the world of politics, trade, and public commerce. Such may be the censored thoughts that find their utterance in the wordplay of De ignorantia.


Chapter Seventeen

1. The circumstances of its composition are as follows: In September 1362 Petrarch moved from Milan and Padua to Venice with the intention of bequeathing to the Republic a permanent public library based on his books; in spring 1365 he initiated a friendship with four men who would malign him the following fall while he was visiting Padua. Upon his return to Venice in January 1366, another friend, Donato Albazani, informed him of their slander, but he did not respond to the charges until May 1367, when he began writing De ignorantia during a trip to Pavia. In January 1368 he wrote to Donato (Seniles 13.5) about revising the project. The following March he left Venice permanently, taking up residence first in Padua and then two years later (after trips to Pavia and Milan) at his house in Arquà (on land given by Francesco da Carrara). There he completed De ignorantia and dated his personal copy on 25 June 1370.


6. Only one passage in *De ignorantia* refers to Averroes (twice in two paragraphs, 322–23, to be cited below). Another passage offers a mocking parody of certain philosophers whose mania for quantifying “how many hairs a lion has” (238–39), perhaps evokes the Oxford Calculators at Merton College, heirs of William of Ockham’s terminist logic. The ensuing examples are con-
ventional, derived from such thirteenth-century encyclopedic texts as Vincent of Beauvais’s *Speculum naturale*, Alexander Neckham’s *De rerum naturis*, or Bartholomaeus Anglicus’s *De proprietatibus rerum*. An allusion to those who fix their eyes on “some god . . . that desires iniquity” (242–43) might evoke William of Ockham’s thought experiment about *odium dei*. Petrarch expresses contempt for the Scholastic argument of double truth (300–301) which might validate conflicting claims of philosophy and theology, an argument long since condemned by the bishop of Paris in 1277. Elsewhere the invective alludes briefly to the Pythagorean doctrine of metempsychosis (294–97), the Democritean and Epicurean doctrines of atomism (296–97), and the Aristotelian theory of the eternity of the material world (296–97, 304–11).

7. They are identified in two fifteenth-century glosses, one printed for the first time by Giovanni Degli Agostini in 1752, the other by Emmanuele Cicogna in 1830. See Paul Oskar Kristeller, “Petrarch’s Averroists,” *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters, II* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1985), 209–16; and *De sui ipsius* (ed. Fenzi, 105–7).

8. For the impact of this endowment, see Bruno Nardi, “Letteratura e cultura veneziana del Quattrocento,” in *La civiltà veneziana del Quattrocento* (Florence: Sansoni, 1957), 99–146.

9. Donato Albanzani taught grammar at Venice; among his pupils was Giovanni Malpaghini, who became Petrarch’s copyist in summer 1364; after 1370, Albanzani volunteered a translation of *De viris illustribus* into Italian. See Wilkins, *Later Years*, 75, 92–93, 117–21, 173, 201; and Carmine Jannaro, “Donato Casentinese, volgarizzatore del Petrarca,” *Studi Petrarcheschi* 1 (1948): 185–94.

10. All revisions are carefully noted in Marsh’s edition, 480–89, with the translator’s gracious acknowledgment of assistance by James Hankins in editing the Latin text.


17. Petrarch draws his account from Suetonius *Divus Augustus* 86.1–5, where Augustus criticizes Maecenas and Marc Antony for their convoluted styles, as noted by Marsh (*Invective contra medicum*, 510, n. 105).

18. He declines to say how much Greek he really knows, which is actually very little, perceptibly attested by his faulty transcription of ΜΕΤΕΜΨΙΚΟΣΙΣ (for the correct ΜΕΤΕΜΨΥΧΟΣΙΣ), 294–95.

19. Basing his example upon a misreading in medieval manuscripts of Seneca *Epistulae* 38.43, Petrarch identifies the author of this claim as the philosopher Pythagoras rather than the rhetorician Protagoras.


Chapter Eighteen