[PART VIII]

: I :

Ad Pulicem Vicentinum poetam, de materia et causa sequentium epystolarum Ciceroni ac Senece et reliquis inscriptarum.

1 In suburbano vicentino per noctem hospitatus novam scribendi materiam inveni. Ita enim accidit ut sub meridiem Patavo digressus, patrie tue limen attingerem vergente iam ad occasum sole. Ibi ne igitur pernoctandum an ulterius procedendum, quod et festinabam et longissime lucis pars bona supererat, deliberabundus herebam, dum ecce — quis se celet amantibus? — tuus et magnorum aliquot virorum, quos abunde parva illa civitas tulit, gratissimus
2 interventus dubium omne dimovit. Ita enim fluctuantem animum alligastis varii et iocundi fune sermonis, ut ire cogitans staret et non prius labi diem quam noctem adesse perpenderet. Et illo die et sepe alias expertus sum nulla re alia magis tempus non sentientibus eripi, quam colloquiis amicorum; magni fures temporis sunt amici, etsi nullum tempus minus ereptum, minus perditum videri
3 debeat, quam quod post Deum amicis impenditur. Illic ergo, ne infinita recenseam, meministi ut forte Ciceronis mentio nobis oborta est, que crebra admodum doctis hominibus esse solet. Ille tandem vario colloquio finem fecit; in unum versi omnes; nichil inde aliud quam de Cicerone tractatum est; simbolum confecimus

PART VIII

LETTERS TO THE ANCIENTS

: I :

To Pulice, poet of Vicenza, on the subject and origin of the following letters addressed to Cicero and Seneca and the others.

While I was staying in the suburbs of Vicenza overnight I found 1
new material for writing. It happened that after leaving Padua around noon I reached the entrance to your city when the sun was already setting.[1] So, undecided whether to spend the night or keep going, since I was in a hurry and the best part of the light was now over, I was dithering in deliberation when suddenly — who could conceal himself from his devotees? — your most welcome appearance, together with several of the important men whom that little community has produced in quantity, removed all my doubts. You 2
so bound my wavering spirit with the braid of your pleasant and variegated conversation that even as I planned to leave, I stayed put, and did not notice the day's disappearance before night was at hand. Both on this day and often at other times I have felt that time is never more stolen from us unawares than by the conversation of our friends. Friends are great time stealers, although no time should seem less stolen or wasted than what is spent on a friend, after time spent on God. There, not to repeat endless de- 3
tails, you remember how the mention of Cicero arose, as it quite often does among educated men. But his name put an end to our assorted discussion; everyone turned to the one topic; after that nothing was discussed except about Cicero; we assembled our

et palinodiam sibi, seu pangericum dici placet, alternando cecinimus. Sed quoniam in rebus mortalium nichil constat esse perfectum, nullusque hominum est in quo non aliquid quod merito carpi queat, modestus etiam reprehensor inveniat, contigit ut dum in Cicerone, velut in homine michi super omnes amicissimo et colendissimo, prope omnia placerent, dumque auream illam eloquentiam et celeste ingenium admirarer, morum levitatem multisque michi deprehensam indiciis inconstantiam non laudarem. Ubi cum omnes qui aderant sed ante alios senem illum, cuius michi nomen excidit non imago, conterraneum tuum annis verendum literisque, attonitos viderem novitate sententie, res poscere visa est ut codex epystolarum mearum ex archula promeretur.

Prolatus in medium addidit alimenta sermonibus; inter multas enim ad coetaneos meos scriptas, pauce ibi varietatis studio et ameno quodam laborum diverticulo antiquis illustrioribus inscribuntur, que lectorem non premonitum in stuporem ducant, dum tam clara et tam vetusta nomina novis permixta compererit. Harum due ad ipsum Ciceronem sunt: altera mores notat, altera laudat ingenium. Has tu intentis omnibus cum legisses, mox amica lis verbis incaluit, quibusdam scripta nostra laudantibus et iure reprehensum fatentibus Ciceronem, uno autem illo sene obstinatius obluctante, qui et claritate nominis et amore captus auctoris, erranti quoque plaudere et amici vitia cum virtutibus amplecti mallet quam discernere, nequid omnino damnare videretur hominis tam laudati. Itaque nichil aliud vel michi vel aliis quod responderet habebat, nisi ut adversus omne quod diceretur, splendorem nominis obiectaret, et rationis locum teneret autoritas,

tributes and offered him a palinode, or if you prefer to call it a panegyric, taking turns in our homage. But since in mortal matters it is agreed that nothing is perfect and there is no man without some flaw that can be rightly be criticized, so that even a moderate critic can find fault, it happened that while everything delighted me in talking about Cicero, whom, I hold, deserves love and worship above all others, while I was expressing admiration for his golden eloquence and heavenly intellect, I could not praise his volatility of behavior and instability, which I had detected from many incidents.[2] Then, when I saw that all present, but in particular an old man whose name I forget but not his appearance, your fellow citizen, entitled to respect for his age and literary attainments,[3] were astonished by the novelty of my opinion, the situation seemed to demand my book of letters to be brought out from its chest.

When it was presented to the group it fed fuel to our talk, for among many letters written to my peers there were a few addressed, in pursuit of variety and as a pleasant digression from my toil, to the more famous ancients, which would lead the unwary reader to confusion when he found such glorious and ancient names mixed in with the others. Two of these letters are to Cicero himself: the first censures his behavior, the second praises his intellect. When you had read these aloud with attentive listeners a friendly disagreement flared up, with some present praising our writings and declaring that Cicero deserved reproach, but this one old fellow put up an obstinate resistance: he was beguiled by the glory of Cicero's reputation and his love for the writer, and preferred to praise Cicero even when he was misguided and to embrace his friend's faults along with his virtues, rather than distinguish between them, in case he might seem to condemn anything in a man so admired. So he had no other answer to me or the others, but simply opposed every statement by putting forward the glory of Cicero's reputation, and authority usurped the place of

9 Succlamabat identidem pretenta manu: 'Parcius, oro, parcius de Cicerone meo'; dumque ab eo quereretur an errasse unquam ulla in re Ciceronem opinari posset, claudebat oculos et quasi verbo percussus avertebat frontem ingeminans: 'Heu michi, ergo Cicero meus arguitur?,' quasi non de homine sed de deo quodam ageretur. Quesivi igitur an deum fuisse Tullium opinaretur an hominem; incuntanter 'deum' ille respondit, et quid dixisset intelligens,
10 'deum' inquit, 'eloquii.' 'Recte,' inquam, 'nam si deus est, errasse non potuit; illum tamen deum dici nondum audieram; sed si Platonem Cicero suum deum vocat, cur non tu deum tuum Ciceronem voces? nisi quia deos pro arbitrio sibi fingere non est nostre religionis.' 'Ludo' inquit ille; 'hominem, sed divino ingenio fuisse Tullium scio.' 'Hoc' inquam, 'utique rectius; nam celestem Quintilianus in dicendo virum dixit; sed si homo fuit, et errasse profecto potuit et erravit.'

11 Hec dum dicerem, cohorrebat et quasi non in famam alterius sed in suum caput dicerentur, aversabatur. Ego vero quid dicerem,
12 ciceroniani nominis et ipse mirator maximus? Senili ardori et tanto studio gratulabar, quiddam licet pithagoreum redolenti; tantam unius ingenii reverentiam esse tantamque religionem, ut humane imbecillitatis in eo aliquid suspicari sacrilegio proximum haberetur gaudebam, mirabarque invenisse hominem qui plus me
13 illum diligeret, quem ego semper pre omnibus dilexissem, quique quam michi puero fuisse memineram, eam de illo senex opinionem gereret altissime radicatam, nec cogitare quidem posset ea etate: si homo fuit Cicero, consequens esse ut in quibusdam, ne
14 dicam multis, erraverit. Quod ego certe iam partim cogito, partim scio, etsi adhuc nullius eque delecter eloquio; nec ipse de quo

reasoning. He repeatedly protested, extending his hand in appeal: 9
"Speak with more restraint, I beg you, about my Cicero." And when he was asked whether he could believe that Cicero was never mistaken in any matter he shut his eyes and turned away his gaze as if the phrase had struck him, and repeated: "Alas! So is someone accusing my Cicero?" as if this were a matter not of a man but some deity. So I asked him whether he believed Cicero had been a god or a man, and he answered without hesitation: "A god"; then realizing what he had said, he added: "The god of eloquence." "You are right," I said, "for if he is a god he could not have been 10
mistaken, but I had never heard him called a god. But if Cicero calls Plato his god,[4] why can't you call Cicero yours? Except that it goes against our religion to fashion gods according to our whim." "I am joking," he said, "I know Cicero was a man, but one of divine intellect." "That is more like it," I said, "for Quintilian calls Cicero heavenly in his speaking,[5] but if he was a man, he certainly could be and was mistaken."

When I was saying this, he shuddered and flinched as if these 11
words were uttered not against the other man's reputation but his own life. What could I say, being myself the greatest admirer of Cicero's renown? I congratulated him on his old man's enthusiasm 12
and loyalty, though it savored of some Pythagorean tribute.[6] I was delighted that there should be such great reverence and awe for one man's mind that to suspect him of human frailty was almost sacrilege; I rejoiced and marveled that I had found someone who loved more than I did the man whom I had always delighted in more than any other. And I rejoiced that he bore as an old man 13
the deeply rooted opinion which I remembered holding as a boy: at this age he could not work out that if Cicero was a mortal it followed that he would be mistaken in some, indeed many, matters. Certainly I both think and know this, even if to this day no 14
man's eloquence thrills me more; and Cicero himself, whom we are discussing, is not unaware of and often laments his own mistakes;

loquimur, Tullius, ignorat, sepe de propriis graviter questus erroribus; quem nisi sic de se sensisse fateamur, laudandi libidine et notitiam sui ipsius et magnam illi partem philosophice laudis eripimus, modestiam.

15 Ceterum nos die illo post longum sermonem, hora demum interpellante, surreximus atque inde integra lite discessum est; sed exegisti ultimum ut, quod tunc brevitas temporis non sinebat, ubi primum constitissem, exemplum tibi epystole utriusque transmitterem, quo re acrius excussa, vel sequester pacis inter partes vel
16 siquo modo posses, tulliane constantie propugnator fieres. Laudo animum ac postulata transmitto; dictu mirabile, vincere metuens, vinci volens, ut unum noveris: si hic vincis, plus tibi negotii superesse quam putas. Pari etenim duello Anneus Seneca te poscit athletam, quem proxima scilicet carpit epystola. Lusi ego cum his magnis ingeniis, temerarie forsitan sed amanter sed dolenter sed ut
17 reor vere; aliquanto, inquam, verius quam vellem. Multa me in illis delectabant, pauca turbabant; de his fuit impetus ut scriberem, qui hodie forte non esset; quamvis enim hec propter dissimilitudinem materie ad extrema reiecerim, ante longum tamen tempus excuderam. Adhuc quidem virorum talium fortunam doleo sed non minus culpam, nec illud te pretereat non me Senece vitam aut Cic-
18 eronis erga rempublicam damnare propositum. Neve duas lites misceas, de Cicerone nunc agitur, quem vigilantissimum atque optimum et salutarem consulem ac semper amantissimum patrie civem novi. Quid ergo? Varium in amicitiis animum, et ex levibus causis alienationes gravissimas atque pestiferas sibi et nulli rei utiles, in discernendo insuper suo ac publico statu iudicium reliquo illi suo impar acumini, ad postremum sine fructu iuvenile al-
19 tercandi studium in sene philosopho non laudo. Quorum scito

indeed if we did not admit, in our lust for praising him, that he could be critical of himself, we would deny him self-knowledge and modesty, a great part of his glory as a philosopher.

So on that day when the hour made us break off after a long 15
conversation, we got up and left with the dispute unresolved. But you demanded a last service which the shortness of time did not allow, that wherever I first stopped my journey I should send you a copy of each letter, so that after examining the matter more thoroughly you should be either an umpire establishing peace between the sides, or if you could, become the defender of Cicero's consistency. I praise your spirit and pass on what you demanded, afraid 16
of winning the argument and eager to be defeated (strange to say), in order to let you know that if you win you have more trouble ahead than you think. For Seneca wants you as a champion in an equal contest, since my next letter scolds him. I have been sporting with these great intellects rashly perhaps, but with love and sorrow and, as I think, justly—certainly more justly than I would like. Many aspects of these lofty intellects delighted me, but a few dis- 17
turbed me; my urge was to write about these, although perhaps I no longer feel it. I have postponed these issues to the last because of the discrepancy in their content, but I had worked them into shape a long time since.[7] I still grieve for the misfortune of such men but equally over their responsibility for it; do not fail to notice that I am not condemning Seneca's life or Cicero's political policy. Do not confuse the two quarrels: my present subject is Cic- 18
ero, the most vigilant and best and most beneficial consul and a citizen always devoted to his country. What then? I cannot praise his shifting attitude to his friendships and his estrangements from trivial causes that were most harmful and destructive to himself and good for nothing, his judgment about his own and political circumstances, inferior to his sharpness of wit in other matters, and finally his unrewarding relish for bandying charges, a childish feature of a mature philosopher.[8] Know that neither you nor any 19

neque te neque alium quemlibet equum iudicem fieri posse, nisi omnibus Ciceronis epystolis, unde ea lis oritur, non a transcurrente perlectis. Vale.

III Idus Maias, ex itinere.

: 2 :

Ad Marcum Tullium Ciceronem.

1 Franciscus Ciceroni suo salutem. Epystolas tuas diu multumque perquisitas atque ubi minime rebar inventas, avidissime perlegi. Audivi multa te dicentem, multa deplorantem, multa variantem, Marce Tulli, et qui iampridem qualis preceptor aliis fuisses noveram, nunc tandem quis tu tibi esses agnovi. Unum hoc vicissim a vera caritate profectum non iam consilium sed lamentum audi, ubicunque es, quod unus posterorum, tui nominis amantissimus,
2 non sine lacrimis fundit. O inquiete semper atque anxie, vel ut verba tua recognoscas, o preceps et calamitose senex, quid tibi tot contentionibus et prorsum nichil profuturis simultatibus voluisti? Ubi et etati et professioni et fortune tue conveniens otium reliquisti? Quis te falsus glorie splendor senem adolescentium bellis implicuit et per omnes iactatum casus ad indignam philosopho
3 mortem rapuit? Heu et fraterni consilii immemor et tuorum tot salubrium preceptorum, ceu nocturnus viator lumen in tenebris gestans, ostendisti secuturis callem, in quo ipse satis miserabiliter
4 lapsus es. Omitto Dyonisium, omitto fratrem tuum ac nepotem, omitto, si placet, ipsum etiam Dolabellam, quos nunc laudibus ad celum effers, nunc repentinis malidictis laceras: fuerint hec tolera-

other man can be a fair judge unless he has read thoroughly all Cicero's letters, which are the source of this dispute, and not skimmed them. Farewell.

May 13, while traveling.

: 2 :

To Marcus Tullius Cicero.

Francesco sends greetings to his Cicero. I have been reading most 1
greedily your letters which I searched for long and hard[1] and found where I least expected. I listened to you saying and lamenting and shifting your judgment on many topics, Marcus Tullius, and although I had long since discovered what kind of teacher you once were for others, I finally recognized how you taught yourself. Now hear in return this one piece, not of advice but of grievance, wherever you are, a complaint that one of your successors, and most devoted to your renown, pours out with real tears. Troubled 2
and anxious as you are or, to confront you with your own words, "you precipitate and disastrous old man,"[2] what business of yours were all these disputes and profitless quarrels? Where did you abandon the leisure fitted to your age and career and position? What false glitter of glory involved you, an old man, in the warfare of young fellows and swept you, buffeted by every misfortune, to a death unworthy of a philosopher?[3] Alas, heedless of your brother's 3
advice[4] and so many wise recommendations of your own, like a traveler by night carrying a lantern in the dark, you showed your followers the path on which you yourself stumbled pitiably. I pass 4
over Dionysius, I pass over your brother and nephew, I pass over, so please you, even Dolabella, men you at times exalt to heaven with praises and at times savage with curses: these mistakes would

bilia fortassis. Iulium quoque Cesarem pretervehor, cuius spectata clementia ipsa lacessentibus portus erat; Magnum preterea Pompeium sileo, cum quo iure quodam familiaritatis quidlibet posse
5 videbare. Sed quis te furor in Antonium impegit? Amor credo reipublice, quam funditus iam corruisse fatebaris. Quodsi pura fides, si libertas te trahebat, quid tibi tam familiare cum Augusto? Quid enim Bruto tuo responsurus es? 'Siquidem' inquit, 'Octavius tibi placet, non dominum fugisse sed amiciorem dominum que-
6 sisse videberis.' Hoc restabat, infelix, et hoc erat extremum, Cicero, ut huic ipsi tam laudato malidiceres, qui tibi non dicam malifaceret, sed malifacientibus non obstaret. Doleo vicem tuam, amice, et errorum pudet ac miseret, iamque cum eodem Bruto 'his artibus nichil tribuo, quibus *te* instructissimum *fuisse* scio.' Nimirum quid enim iuvat alios docere, quid ornatissimis verbis semper
7 de virtutibus loqui prodest, si te interim ipse non audias? Ah quanto satius fuerat philosopho presertim in tranquillo rure senuisse, de perpetua illa, ut ipse quodam scribis loco, non de hac iam exigua vita cogitantem, nullos habuisse fasces, nullis triumphis inhiasse, nullos inflasse tibi animum Catilinas. Sed hec quidem frustra. Eternum vale, mi Cicero.

Apud superos, ad dexteram Athesis ripam,
in civitate Verona Transpadane Italie,
XVI Kalendas Quintiles, anno ab ortu Dei illius
quem tu non noveras, MCCCXLV.

perhaps have been forgivable.[5] I also pass beyond Julius Caesar whose undisputed clemency was itself a harbor for those who assailed him;[6] I am silent too about Pompey the Great, with whom it seemed you could have exercised any power by right of friendship.[7] But what madness drove you against Antony? Your patriot- 5
ism, I suppose, for the republic which, you admitted, had already collapsed utterly. If pure integrity and freedom drew you on, why did you have such intimacy with Augustus? What can you reply to your friend Brutus? He says: "If you give your approval to Octavius, you will seem not to be shunning a master, but seeking a more well-disposed master."[8] This was left for you, poor man, and 6
the worst outcome, that you should curse this man you praised so much, who did not, shall I say, wrong you, but offered no resistance to those who did. I grieve for your fate, dear friend, and I feel shame and pity for your mistakes and, like Brutus himself, "I give no credit to the skills in which I know you were expertly trained."[9] Indeed what is the point of teaching others, what the advantage of speaking in most elegant words about the virtues, if you don't listen to yourself? How much better it would have been, 7
especially for a philosopher, to have grown old in a calm country setting, thinking about that everlasting life (as you yourself write somewhere)[10] not about this petty life of ours, to have held no symbols of power, to have thirsted after no triumphs, for no Catilines to have puffed up your spirit. But these complaints are futile. Farewell for ever, dear Cicero.

From the world above on the right bank of the Adige
in the city of Verona in Transpadane Italy,
on the 16th of June in the 1345th year
after the birth of the God you never knew.

: 3 :

Ad eundem.

1 Franciscus Ciceroni suo salutem. Si te superior offendit epystola (verum est enim, ut ipse soles dicere, quod ait familiaris tuus in *Andria:*

Obsequium amicos, veritas odium parit),

accipe quod offensum animum ex parte mulceat, ne semper odiosa sit veritas; quoniam veris reprehensionibus irascimur, veris laudi-
2 bus delectamur. Tu quidem, Cicero, quod pace tua dixerim, ut homo vixisti, ut orator dixisti, ut philosophus scripsisti; vitam ego tuam carpsi, non ingenium non linguam, ut qui illud mirer, hanc stupeam; neque tamen in vita tua quicquam preter constantiam requiro, et philosophice professioni debitum quietis studium et a civilibus bellis fugam, extincta libertate ac sepulta iam et comploratа republica. Vide ut aliter tecum ago ac tu cum Epycuro multis
3 in locis sed expressius in libro *De finibus* agebas; cuius enim ubilibet vitam probas, rides ingenium. Ego nichil in te rideo, vite tantum compatior, ut dixi; ingenio gratulor eloquio ve. O romani
4 eloquii summe parens, nec solus ego sed omnes tibi gratias agimus, quicunque latine lingue floribus ornamur; tuis enim prata de fontibus irrigamus, tuo ducatu directos, tuis suffragiis adiutos, tuo nos lumine illustratos ingenue profitemur; tuis denique, ut ita dicam, auspiciis ad hanc, quantulacunque est, scribendi facultatem
5 ac propositum pervenisse. Accessit et alter poetice vie dux; ita enim necessitas poscebat, ut esset et quem solutis et quem frenatis

: 3 :

To the same.

Francesco greets his Cicero. If my earlier letter offended you (for, 1
as you yourself often say, and your friend Terence said in the *Andrian Girl:*

Flattery produces friends, but truth hostility),[1]

hear what will partly sooth your offended spirit, so that the truth will not always be offensive, since we get angry at true criticism but delight in true praise. With your leave, I shall say, Cicero, that 2
you lived like a man, spoke like an orator and wrote like a philosopher; it was your life I criticized, not your intellect or speech, as one who marvels at the former, and am struck dumb by the latter; and I find missing from your life nothing except consistency, the devotion to repose owed to the profession of philosopher and the flight from civil wars, once liberty was quenched and the republic already buried and lamented. See how I am treating you differ- 3
ently from the way you treated Epicurus in many places, but most explicitly in *On Moral Ends,* in which you approve his life everywhere but mock his intellect.[2] I am not laughing at any aspect of you, only sympathizing with your life. As I said, I congratulate you on your intellect and eloquence. Great father of Roman elo- 4
quence, not only I, but we all give you thanks, whoever among us is adorned with the ornaments of the Latin language: we water our meadows with your springs, we acknowledge freely that we are guided by your leadership, aided by your support and illuminated by your light; in sum it is under your auspices, so to speak, that we have reached this ability and purpose, such as it is, in writing. And 5
another guide joined you, in his case to the road of poetry; for necessity demanded this, that we should have someone to follow

gressibus preeuntem sequeremur, quem loquentem, quem ca-
nentem miraremur, quoniam cum bona venia amborum, neuter ad
utrunque satis erat, ille tuis equoribus, tu illius impar angustiis.
6 Non ego primus hoc dicerem fortasse, quamvis plane sentirem;
dixit hoc ante me, seu ab aliis dictum scripsit, magnus quidam vir
Anneus Seneca Cordubensis, cui te, ut idem ipse conqueritur, non
etas quidem sed bellorum civilium furor eripuit; videre te potuit,
sed non vidit; magnus tamen operum tuorum atque illius alterius
laudator; apud hunc ergo quisque suis eloquentie finibus circum-
7 scriptus college suo cedere iubetur in reliquis. Verum expectatione
torqueo; quisnam dux ille sit, queris. Nosti hominem, si modo
nominis meministi: Publius Virgilius Maro est, mantuanus civis,
de quo egregie vaticinatus es. Cum enim, ut scriptum legimus, iu-
venile quoddam eius opusculum miratus, quesivisses auctorem
eumque iuvenem iam senior vidisses, delectatus es, et de inex-
hausto eloquentie tue fonte, cum propria quidem laude permix-
tum, verum tamen preclarumque ac magnificum illi testimonium
8 reddidisti. Dixisti enim:

Magne spes altera Rome.

Quod dictum ex ore tuo auditum, adeo sibi placuit inseditque
memorie, ut illud post annos viginti, te pridem rebus humanis
exempto, divino operi suo eisdem penitus verbis insereret, quod
opus si tibi videre licuisset, letatus esses de primevo flore tam cer-
tum te venturi fructus presagium concepisse; necnon et latinis
gratulatus musis, quod insolentibus graiis vel reliquissent ambi-
9 guam vel certam victoriam abstulissent. Utriusque enim sententie
auctores sunt; te, si ex libris animum tuum novi, quem nosse
michi non aliter quam si tecum vixissem videor, ultime assertorem

in the ease of prose and a different guide when reined in by verse,
one man for us to admire in speech and another in song, since,
with both men's leave, neither was enough for both skills: he could
not match your broad expanses nor you his compression. Perhaps 6
I would not be the first to say this, though I clearly thought it, but
it was said by others and written by that great man Seneca of
Cordova, whom the frenzy of civil war, not his age, robbed you of
seeing him, as he himself complains.[3] He could have seen you; yet
he did not, but he was a mighty admirer of your work and that
other genius; according to him each man restricted in the bounds
of his own eloquence is ordered to yield to his colleague in the
rest. But I torment you with suspense; you want to know who that 7
guide may be. You know the man, if you just recall his name: it is
Publius Virgilius Maro, citizen of Mantua about whom you, Cic-
ero, uttered wonderful prophecies. For as we read[4] you marveled at
a youthful work of his and asked who was the writer and when in
your old age you saw this young man you were thrilled, and from
your unquenchable spring of eloquence you paid him a tribute,
mixed to be sure with your own self-praise, yet true and glorious
and magnificent. You called him: 8

Second hope of mighty Rome.

Overhearing this saying of yours so pleased him and so sank into
his memory that twenty years after, when you were long since re-
moved from human life, he inserted it in exactly the same words
into his divine poem. And if you had been allowed to see this epic,
you would have rejoiced to have conceived so sure a prophecy of
the future harvest to come from his early flowering, and would
have congratulated the Latin Muses for either leaving the victory
over the arrogant Greek Muses in dispute or achieving a sure vic-
tory. There are sources to support each opinion,[5] but if I know 9
your nature from your books—you whom I seem to know as if I
lived with you—I do not doubt that you would have supported

futurum, ut que in oratoria dedisti sic in poetica palmam Latio daturum, atque ut *Eneydi* cederet *Ylias* iussurum fuisse non dubito, quod iam ab initio virgiliani laboris Propertius asseverare non ti-
10 muit. Ubi enim pyerii operis fundamenta contemplatus est, quid de illis sentiret et quid speraret aperte pronuntiavit his versibus:

Cedite romani scriptores, cedite graii;
Nescio quid maius nascitur Yliade.

Hec de altero latine duce facundie magneque Rome spe altera; nunc ad te revertor.

11 Quid de vita, quid de ingenio tuo sentiam, audisti. Expectas audire de libris tuis, quenam illos exceperit fortuna, quam seu vulgo seu doctioribus probentur? Extant equidem preclara volumina, que ne dicam perlegere, sed nec enumerare sufficimus. Fama rerum tuarum celeberrima atque ingens et sonorum nomen; perrari autem studiosi, seu temporum adversitas seu ingeniorum hebetudo ac segnities seu, quod magis arbitror, alio cogens animos
12 cupiditas causa est. Itaque librorum aliqui, nescio quidem an irreparabiliter, nobis tamen qui nunc vivimus, nisi fallor, periere: magnus dolor meus, magnus seculi nostri pudor, magna posteritatis iniuria. Neque enim satis infame visum est ingenia nostra negligere nequid inde fructuosum perciperet sequens etas, nisi laboris etiam vestri fructum crudeli prorsus et intoleranda corrupissemus incuria; profecto namque quod in tuis conqueror, et in
13 multis virorum illustrium libris accidit. Tuorum sane, quia de his michi nunc sermo erat, quorum insignior iactura est, hec sunt nomina: reipublice, rei familiaris, rei militaris, de laude philosophie,

the latter hypothesis, giving to Latium the palm of victory in poetry which you bestowed in oratory, and you would have ordered the *Iliad* to give way to the *Aeneid*[6] — something Propertius was already not afraid to declare when Vergil first began this task. For when he considered the foundations of the Pierian work, he 10
openly declared what he believed and hoped about them in these verses:

Give way, you Roman writers, Greeks give way:
A greater work than the *Iliad* is coming to birth.[7]

This is my verdict about the other guide in Latin eloquence and the "second hope of mighty Rome," but now I come back to you, Cicero.

You have heard what I feel about your life and your intellect. 11
Are you waiting to hear about your books and what fortune befell them, how they are approved by either the common crowd or more learned folk? Certainly glorious volumes have survived, ones we are barely equal to listing, let alone reading thoroughly. The fame of your deeds is most renowned and your name is mighty and resonant: but real scholars are very rare. Either the hostility of the age is the reason, or the dullness and sloth of intellects, or, as I think more likely, greed that drives men in other directions. So 12
some of your books, perhaps irretrievably, have been lost for us who are living now, if I am not deceived: it is a great grief to me, a shame to our age, and a wrong done to posterity. Nor have we thought it enough shame to neglect our intellects so that the following age may derive no profit from them, but by our cruel and intolerable indifference we have even corrupted the product of your labor; this I lament in the case of your work but it has happened to many books of distinguished men. However, those of 13
your works, since these are my present subject, whose loss has been more conspicuous, include: *On the Republic, On Household Matters, On Warfare, On the Praise of Philosophy, On Consolation, On*

de consolatione, de gloria, quamvis de his ultimis spes michi magis
14 dubia, quam desperatio certa sit. Quin et superstitum librorum magnas partes amisimus, ut velut ingenti prelio oblivionis et ignavie superatis, duces nostros non extinctos modo sed truncos quoque vel perditos sit lugere. Hoc enim et in aliis multis, sed in tuis maxime oratoriis atque achademicorum et legum libris patimur, qui ita truncati fedatique evaserunt, ut prope melius fuerit periisse.

15 Reliquum est ut urbis Rome ac romane reipublice statum audire velis, que patrie facies, que civium concordia, ad quos rerum summa pervenerit, quibus manibus quantoque consilio frena tractentur imperii; Hister ne et Ganges, Hiberus, Nilus et Tanais limites nostri sint, an vero quisquam surrexerit

Imperium Occeano, famam qui terminet astris,

aut

super et Garamantas et Indos
Proferat imperium,

16 ut amicus ille tuus mantuanus ait. Hec et his similia cupidissime auditurum te auguror; id michi pietas tua suggerit et amor erga patriam usque in tuam pernitiem notissimus. Verum enimvero tacere melius fuerit; crede enim michi, Cicero, si quo in statu res nostre sint audieris, excident tibi lacrime, quamlibet vel celi vel erebi partem tenes. Eternum vale.

Apud superos,
ad sinistram Rodani ripam Transalpine Gallie,
eodem anno, XIV Kalendas Ianuarias.

Glory, though about these last works I nurture uncertain hopes rather than outright despair.[8] Indeed, we have lost large portions 14
of the surviving works, so that like those overwhelmed in a great battle of forgetfulness and sloth, we have to mourn our leaders as not only deceased but mutilated or missing. We suffer this loss in many other cases but especially in your books on oratory and the *Academica* and *Laws* which have emerged so mutilated and disfigured that it would almost have been better for them to be lost.[9]

What is left is that you want to hear about the state of the city 15
of Rome and the Roman republic, the condition of your country, the harmony among your citizens, the men upon whom leadership has fallen, and by what hands and with what policy the reins of empire are being handled, and whether the Danube and Ganges, Ebro, Nile and Don are our boundaries,[10] or whether some man has arisen

to bound our empire by the Ocean and our glory by the stars,

or

beyond the Garamantes and the Indians
extend our empire's sway,

as your Mantuan friend puts it. I am sure you will listen most ea- 16
gerly to these and other such details; your loyalty suggests this to me and your love for your country, so famous it almost brought your own ruin. But surely it would be better to keep silent, for believe me, Cicero, if you hear the condition of our affairs you will shed floods of tears, whatever part of heaven or the underworld[11] you occupy. Farewell for ever.

In the world above
on the left bank of the Rhône in Transalpine Gaul,[12]
December 19th in the same year.

witness the effects during his mission to Paris on behalf of the Visconti (see on §86 above).

22. Tarentum and Capua had been powerful cities already in antiquity and had gained new importance under the Normans in the eleventh century, while Ravenna, already a key harbor under the Romans, had seen its moment of greatest splendor under the Byzantines in the sixth century.

23. Petrarca was still living in Venice in early 1368, though about to move to Padua.

24. For the derivation of the name Veneto from a legendary king Henetus, see the note on VI.8.26. The name *Venetia*, as indicating the city itself, originated only in late antiquity, but, as Rizzo 2006–14, *ad loc.*, observes, Petrarca may have been misled by the interpretation of a passage by Pliny the Elder, who lived under the emperor Vespasian, where the name *Venetia* (referring to the region, not the city) is mentioned within a list of city names (see *Natural History* 6.218).

25. The Latin name of Florence, *Florentia*, means "the flowering (or flourishing) city." It was founded only in the first century BCE, when Rome was already a great power.

26. Bologna was the site of Italy's greatest university, especially for the study of canon and civil law, where Urban V had once taught; this is why Petrarca treated the city as particularly dear to the pope. Compare his comments on the recent ruin of Bologna's city walls and its government in IX.1. More recently, Cardinal Albornoz had restored the city to the rule of the Church in 1360. According to Rizzo 2006–14, *ad loc.*, the reason why Petrarca calls Bologna "happiest" (*felicissimam*) under Vespasian probably reflects a misreading of Pliny, *Natural History* 3.115.

27. Saint Ambrose, *Letters* 2.8.3. Among the cities listed in Ambrose's passage, only Piacenza and Modena were founded as Roman settlements around the time of the Second Punic War (218–202 BCE); Bologna and Reggio Emilia (*Regium Lepidi*), on the contrary, were created a few years later, more with a view to protecting Italy from renewed Gallic invasions than from the defeated Carthaginians.

28. A long appeal for Urban to persevere in remaining at Rome occupies the final section of the letter (§§167–239); this is yet again intertwined with Petrarca's retorts to some of the cardinal's arguments against Rome (in particular, its insalubrious air and its ruined and deserted aspect).

29. Luke 9:62.

30. Orpheus' journey to Hades to recover Eurydice was foiled by his own weakness in looking back, contrary to the orders of the gods of the underworld: the versions of this very famous story best known to Petrarca are likely to be Vergil, *Georgics* 4.453–527, and Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.1–77. The story of Lot's escape from Sodom with his wife and daughters is told in Genesis 19 (the quotations are from 19:17 and 26).

31. See Vergil, *Georgics* 2.534, and Horace, *Secular Hymn* 9–12.

32. This is surely an allusion to Nero's "Golden House" (*Domus Aurea*), the pleasure palace he built for himself after the great fire of Rome: see Suetonius, *Life of Nero* 38.

33. Aristotle, *Economics* 1.6.1345a.3–4, probably known to Petrarca through the Latin translation of Durandus de Alvernia.

34. Psalm 135:4.

PART VIII

VIII.1. To Pulice (*F.* 24.2)

The last book of the *Familiares* contains a series of nine fictitious letters addressed to ancient writers, framed by three letters (*F.* 24.1–2 and the conclusive *F.* 24.13 [= I.3]) addressed to three different friends. *F.* 24.1, to Philippe de Cabassoles, opens the book looking back at the years gone by since the beginning of the epistolary collection and moves to a long meditation on the swift passing of life and the always imminent onset of death. Death certainly casts its shadow on this entire book, since, except for the first two letters, all of Petrarca's correspondents are dead: both his beloved ancient models and his dearest friend Socrates (Ludwig van Kempen), to whom he addresses the closing letter, just shortly after receiving the news of his passing away (see Part I). Yet it is not death that

dominates the closing book of the *Familiares*, but rather the human attempt of ultimately defying it through memory: Petrarca feels a very real closeness to those men who lived many centuries before him and whose works he loved so much and in many cases pulled out with his own hands from dusty and forgotten repositories, bringing them back to light—and to life. So in spite of death, he writes letters addressed to them in the underworld, and he addresses the correspondents in frank and intimate terms—really as old friends. In the same way, I.3 addresses Ludwig van Kempen as if he were still alive, and closes the book and the collection with a homage to the man in whose name the collection had been opened. Within this frame, the present letter, addressed to Enrico Pulice from Vicenza (see Appendix III), has the function of providing an explanatory introduction to the novelty of letters to the ancients as a whole, though it names only the first three of them (VIII.2–3 to Cicero and VIII.4 to Seneca); it also recalls Petrarca's original performance/reading of them, explicitly dated to his journey of 1351 from Padua to Mantua through Vicenza and Verona (see II.7).

1. Petrarca left Padua on May 4, 1351: see the note on II.7.1.

2. The key to Petrarca's criticisms, *levitas* and *inconstantia*, recalls what he says at §18, below, in this letter; in general, see the notes on VIII.2–3.

3. According to Dotti 2004–9, *ad loc.*, this old man might be a certain Bartolomeo Popolo, *doctor grammaticae* from the same town as Enrico Pulice.

4. See Cicero's phrase "that god of ours, Plato" in *Letters to Atticus* 4.16.3.

5. See Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory* 10.2.18.

6. According to Cicero, *On the Nature of Gods* 1.10, Pythagoras' followers believed in anything he said without questioning it; it was enough for them to say, "Ipse dixit (He himself said it)."

7. Petrarca started composing his fictitious letters to the ancients already in 1345, right after discovering in Verona Cicero's epistolary collections to Atticus, Brutus, and Quintus: see the notes on VIII.2.

8. See Petrarca's arguments in VIII.2.

VIII.2. To Marcus Tullius Cicero (*F.* 24.3)

Both this letter and the next addressed to Cicero are explicitly dated to 1345 (on Cicero see Appendix III). The first one is presented as composed shortly after Petrarca's sensational discovery of Cicero's *Letters to Atticus, Brutus,* and *Quintus* in the Biblioteca Capitolare (Chapter Library) of the Verona Cathedral, and it springs from Petrarca's reaction to reading those texts. The letters exposed Petrarca to an image of Cicero much different from that of the noble statesman and "holy philosopher" that seemed to emerge from his other works. Cicero's letters show him shifting loyalties through difficult political relationships, being trapped by extenuating doubts on what course of action to take, and often being caught by impotent despair. Cicero's letters supply a record of a man who lived through a period of extreme political unrest and through a civil war, and who ultimately died in it. Petrarca himself admits he no longer shared the feelings that initially drove him to "respond" to Cicero's letters and to feel so much disappointment in the character they reveal (see VIII.1.17). Petrarca's criticism above all focuses on Cicero's poor judgment of the political situation and certainly does not take into sufficient account the effect of Caesar's autocracy on senatorial government as Cicero knew it. Given the near-worship of Julius Caesar in Petrarca's generation, it is not surprising that Petrarca should take particular offense at Cicero's condemnation of Caesar, once the dictator's death had restored his freedom of political comment.

1. The phrase echoes Cicero, *In Defense of Sulla* 73.

2. The self-reproach comes from Ps.-Cicero, *Letter to Octavian* 6.

3. Cicero wrote more than once that after his consulship he hoped to enjoy "leisure with prestige" (*otium cum dignitate*, see, for example, *On the Orator* 1.1), but the later course of his life convinced him that this was not an option; after Caesar's victory and the Egyptian assassination of Pompey in 48 BCE, he refrained from political activism until the death of Caesar in 44 BCE. At that point Cicero was over sixty years old, yet he engaged in a fierce contest with Mark Antony, Caesar's political successor, who in the end had Cicero killed by his henchmen while he was trying to flee to Greece.

4. See Cicero, *On the Orator* 3.13, recalling Quintus' advice to look at the downfall of many powerful men and avoid dangerous enmities.

5. Dionysius was a learned slave who taught Cicero's son Marcus in the 50s BCE. Cicero greatly exalted him in his earlier *Letters to Atticus* (Books 4–6; see, for example, 4.11.2), but in equal measure criticized him after their relation grew colder (beginning with Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 7.7.1 through Books 7–10; see, for example, 9.12.2), and then again welcomed him in his favor (see *Letters to Atticus* 13.2b and 33). Cicero's correspondence also attests to the ups and downs in his relations with his brother and his nephew (both named Quintus): in the case of his brother it goes from very affectionate terms in earlier letters to much harsher tones following their disagreements in 49 BCE over the conflict between Pompey and Caesar. Quarrels went on even longer with the younger Quintus, for various reasons. In a few years, however, they were all reconciled (see, for example, *Letters to Atticus* 16.5.2) and all suffered proscription by Mark Antony and the triumvirs in 43 BCE. Cornelius Dolabella was fiercely attacked, along with his ally Mark Antony, in Cicero's *Philippics*; yet the *Letters to Atticus* show that Cicero had a very different attitude toward him earlier on, not only because Dolabella had been his son-in-law for a few years but also because Cicero had tried political collaboration with him: see, for example, the high praises addressed to him in *Letters to Atticus* 14.17a, which Atticus himself considered a bit excessive, and 14.18, attesting how the relationship with Dolabella had become tense on several issues.

6. To Petrarca and many later students of Rome, Caesar's western conquests made him a hero. Cicero appreciated his learning and intellect but could not forgive him for overriding the Senate's authority as consul in 59 BCE and illegally invading Italy in 49 BCE. While Cicero had earlier cooperated with Caesar in public works, in 49 BCE he felt obliged to support Pompey. After Pompey's defeat at Pharsalus, Cicero refused Caesar's invitation to take part in what he considered a sham political life. Apart from a short-lived hope of renewed liberty when Caesar pardoned Marcus Marcellus in 46 BCE (thanks in part to Cicero's speech *In Defense of Marcellus*), Cicero became consistently more hostile to Caesar's autocracy and ultimately applauded his assassination. Cicero's correspondence fully

displays his progressive shifting of opinions and allegiances and above all his moments of uncertainties and weakness in choosing sides and deciding what course of action to take.

7. Cicero very frequently stresses his close relationship with Pompey in his *Letters to Atticus* (see, for example, 1.12.3, 1.17.10, 2.20.1) and he adduces it as the reason for offering himself as a mediator between him and Caesar on the eve of the civil war (see *Letters to Atticus* 9.11a).

8. The quotation comes from *Letters to Brutus* 1.16.7: this letter from Brutus to Cicero, harshly blaming him for supporting Octavian, is generally considered a spurious rhetorical exercise later merged in the collection. Cicero, in fact, had mixed feelings toward Octavian, thinking he was bright but too young to be reliable. The *Letter to Octavian*, transmitted along with those to *Atticus, Brutus, and Quintus* in the manuscripts, is spurious, but Petrarca believed its harsh criticism for Octavian's sudden siding with Antony was authentic and blamed it as the reason why Cicero was left without allies at the mercy of Antony.

9. Cicero, *Letters to Brutus* 1.17.5, another letter by Brutus, preserved within the collection but now considered spurious.

10. The allusion is to Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 10.8.8, written in 49 BCE during the civil war conflict.

VIII.3. To Marcus Tullius Cicero (*F.* 24.4)

This letter was composed in 1345, only a few months after VIII.2, and is intended as a sort of *amende honorable* to Cicero. It is chiefly important for its evidence of Petrarca's familiarity with Cicero's works and awareness of those that had not yet been rediscovered (§§11–14).

1. See Cicero, *On Friendship* 89: in this dialogue it is in fact Laelius who quotes this line by Terence (*The Andrian Girl* 68), calling him a friend (*familiaris meus*); both Laelius and Terence belonged to the circle of Scipio's friends and protégés.

2. In Book 2 of *On Moral Ends*, Cicero criticizes Epicurus extensively for the odd discrepancy between his austere way of life and the theory of hedonism expressed by his philosophy.

3. This is not Seneca the philosopher, but his father, the Elder Seneca: on this medieval misunderstanding, see the note on VIII.4. In *Controversies* 1, preface 11, echoed here, the Elder Seneca laments that of all the greatest orators he missed hearing only Cicero, not because he belonged to another generation but because Cicero had died too soon in the civil wars. The comparison between Cicero's and Vergil's different fields of expertise comes from *Controversies* 3, preface 8, where it is reported as an example used by the contemporary orator Cassius Severus to justify the fact of being a brilliant orator in court but a much inferior one when it came to the genre of declamatory exercises.

4. The story comes from Servius' commentary on Vergil, *Eclogues* 6.11. According to Servius, Cicero happened to be present at an alleged early public reading of Vergil's *Eclogue* 6 (the collection of *Eclogues* was in fact not finished before 39 BCE, four years after Cicero's death), and he loved it so much that he praised the poet as *magnae spes altera Romae*, a phrase Vergil himself uses in *Aeneid* 12.168 to describe Aeneas' son, Ascanius. Vergil became the Italian humanists' chief model in poetry, as Cicero was in prose.

5. See Juvenal, *Satires* 11.180–81, and Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, Books 5–6: as Dotti 2004–9, *ad loc.*, points out, both sources were also mentioned in the comparison between Latin and Greek poetry in Petrarca's *Things Worth Remembering* 2.25.3.

6. This was Petrarca's own judgment, but he had very little knowledge of the Homeric texts at the time he was writing this letter (see VIII.9).

7. Propertius salutes the *Aeneid* in *Elegies* 2.34.61–66; Petrarca probably draws the reference from Donatus' *Life of Vergil* 30.

8. The loss of many of these works by Cicero is lamented also at II.6, III.1, and III.9. Petrarca knew only the parts of *On the Republic* preserved by Macrobius' commentary on the *Dream of Scipio* (from the final book of *On the Republic*), along with some excerpts in Lactantius and in Augustine. *On Household Matters* is Cicero's lost translation of Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* (see III.1.4). *On Warfare* refers to a spurious work, abridging Vegetius' longer treatise. *On the Praise of Philosophy* refers to Cicero's lost dialogue *Hortensius*, which Petrarca knew from the excerpts quoted by

Lactantius and by Augustine (see III.9.8). Also, the *Consolation* Cicero composed after his daughter's death is lost and known only through references in Lactantius and in Jerome (see II.6.17). For *On Glory*, II.6 describes how Petrarca believed he had found two copies of this text but lost them when they were borrowed and pawned by his old teacher Convenevole da Prato.

9. Cicero's main works on oratory (*Brutus*, *On the Orator*, *Orator*) were known in Petrarca's time only from truncated manuscripts (the *mutili*). The *Academica* went through two editions while Cicero lived, but only parts of each edition survive. Three books of *On the Laws* survive out of a probable five.

10. These rivers marked the outermost boundaries of the known world in ancient times, and so did the Ocean, the Indians, and Garamantes (an ancient Libyan tribe) mentioned in the following two Vergilian quotations. Both quotations are drawn from prophetic representations of Augustus' future glory: in Jupiter's prophecy, at *Aeneid* 1.287, and Anchises' vision, at *Aeneid* 6.794–95.

11. Petrarca uses the mythical term "Erebus" to indicate a generic pagan underworld or hell, as opposed to Christian Heaven.

12. Petrarca is at Avignon.

VIII.4. To Annaeus Seneca (*F.* 24.5)

The letter is dated from Parma in 1348, three years after the letters to Cicero, and was later revised around 1365 (see note on §17 below). Petrarca was familiar with all the texts of Seneca known to us and with other texts attributed to him that we now believe to be inauthentic; but he also shared the confusion of his time about the two Senecas (see Appendix III). Petrarca lacked a major source for Seneca's life, the sections of Tacitus' *Annals* recording the reigns of Claudius and Nero (Books 11–16) discovered by Boccaccio in 1371. Nor could he read Cassius Dio's Greek histories of Nero's reign, which were not translated until 1533. Petrarca's Seneca here depends entirely on Suetonius' imperial biographies and internal references in Seneca's own works.

1. According to Rossi 1933–42, *ad loc.*, Petrarca may here refer to a passage in Seneca the Elder (*Controversies* 1, preface 6–7).

: 2 :

Posteritati.

1 Fuerit tibi forsan de me aliquid auditum; quanquam et hoc dubium sit, an exiguum et obscurum longe nomen seu locorum seu temporum perventurum sit. Et illud forsitan optabis nosse: quid hominis fuerim aut quis operum exitus meorum, eorum maxime quorum ad te fama pervenerit vel quorum vel tenue nomen audieris. Et de primo quidem varie erunt hominum voces; ita enim ferme quisque loquitur, ut impellit non veritas sed voluptas: nec laudis nec infamie modus est. Fui autem vestro de grege unus, mortalis homuncio, nec magne admodum nec vilis originis, familia, ut de se ait Augustus Cesar, antiqua, natura quidem non iniquo neque inverecundo animo, nisi ei consuetudo contagiosa nocuisset. Adolescentia me fefellit, iuventa corripuit, senecta autem correxit, experimentoque perdocuit verum illud quod diu ante perlegeram, quoniam adolescentia et voluptas vana sunt; imo etatum temporumque omnium Conditor, qui miseros mortales de nichilo tumidos aberrare sinit interdum, ut peccatorum suorum, vel sero, memores sese agnoscant. Corpus iuveni non magnarum virium sed multe dexteritatis obtigerat; forma non glorior excellenti, sed que placere viridioribus annis posset: colore vivido inter candidum et subnigrum, vivacibus oculis et visu per longum tempus acerrimo, qui preter spem supra sexagesimum etatis annum me destituit, ut indignanti michi ad ocularium confugiendum esset auxilium. Tota etate sanissimum corpus senectus invasit, et solita morborum acie circumvenit.

: 2 :

To Posterity.

Perhaps you will have heard something of me, though even this is 1
questionable, whether my humble and obscure name will have traveled over the distance, whether of place or time. And maybe you will desire to know what sort of man I was, or about the success of my works: most of all of the works whose fame has reached you, or of whose reputation you have faintly heard. In fact men's judgments about the first question will be different, since that is how each man speaks, not driven by the truth, but as his pleasure inclines him; there is no limit to glory nor infamy. Now I was one of your own tribe, a mortal fellow of neither great nor humble origin, from an ancient family, as Augustus says of himself,[1] by nature of no mean or immodest spirit, except when infectious company had caused it harm. My boyhood misled me, my young 2
manhood carried me off, but old age corrected me and taught me by experience the truth that I had read diligently long before, that youth and pleasure are hollow;[2] rather it was the Creator of all ages who taught me, who sometimes lets wretched mortals, who are arrogant without any grounds, go astray, so that they may be mindful of their sins, however late, and come to know themselves.[3] As a young man my body was not one of great strength 3
but quite agile; I do not boast a handsome appearance but one that was able to please in my greener years; my complexion was fresh, somewhere between fair and dark, my eyes were lively and for a long time I enjoyed very keen eyesight, which suddenly abandoned me after my sixtieth year, so that I reluctantly resorted to the aid of spectacles.[4] Old age assailed my body, which had been perfectly healthy all my life, and surrounded me with the usual battalions of disease.

4 Divitiarum contemptor eximius: non quod divitias non optarem, sed labores curasque oderam, opum comites inseparabiles. Non michi, ut ista cura esset, lautarum facultas epularum: ego autem tenui victu et cibis vulgaribus vitam egi letius, quam cum exquisitissimis dapibus omnes Apicii successores. Convivia que dicuntur, cum sint comessationes modestie et bonis moribus inimice, semper michi displicuerunt. Laboriosum et inutile ratus sum ad hunc finem vocare alios, nec minus ab aliis vocari; conviveor autem cum amicis adeo iocundum ut eorum superventu nil gratius
5 habuerim, nec unquam volens sine sotio cibum sumpserim. Nichil michi magis quam pompa displicuit, non solum quia mala et humilitati contraria, sed quia difficilis et quieti adversa est. Amore acerrimo sed unico et honesto in adolescentia laboravi, et diutius laborassem, nisi iam tepescentem ignem mors acerba sed utilis extinxisset. Libidinum me prorsus expertem dicere posse optarem quidem, sed si dicam mentiar. Hoc secure dixerim: me quanquam fervore etatis et complexionis ad id raptum, vilitatem illam tamen
6 semper animo execratum. Mox vero ad quadragesimum etatis annum appropinquans, dum adhuc et caloris satis esset et virium, non solum factum illud obscenum, sed eius memoriam omnem sic abieci, quasi nunquam feminam aspexissem. Quod inter primas felicitates meas numero, Deo gratias agens, qui me adhuc integrum et vigentem tam vili et michi semper odioso servitio liberavit. Sed ad alia procedo.

7 Sensi superbiam in aliis non in me; et cum parvus fuerim, semper minor iudicio meo fui. Ira mea michi persepe nocuit, aliis nunquam. Intrepide glorior, quia scio me verum loqui, indignantissimi

I was exceptional in my scorn for wealth, not because I did not 4
desire riches, but because I shunned the toils and anxieties that are inseparable companions of wealth. I did not have the resources for elegant dinners to cause me that trouble; instead I spent my life more happily with a plain diet and ordinary foods than all of Apicius' successors with their immensely refined banquets.[5] Dinner parties, as they are called, always offended me, since feasts are the enemies of moderation and good behavior. I thought it toilsome and harmful to invite others for this purpose, and no less to be invited by them, whereas spending time with my friends was so enjoyable that I found nothing more welcome than their visits, and never willingly took a meal without a companion. Nothing of- 5
fended me more than display, not only because it is bad and opposed to humility, but because it is inconvenient and hostile to calmness. I suffered in my youth from a most passionate but single-minded and honorable love, and would have suffered longer, if a bitter but beneficial death had not put an end to my now fading passion.[6] I would have liked to be able to say I was quite innocent of lust, but if I said so I would be lying. This I could say without doubt, that although I was swept into it by the heat of youth and my constitution, I always cursed that vileness in my heart. But soon, approaching my fortieth year, when I still had 6
heat and strength enough, I cast away not only that obscene activity but its entire memory, as though I had never looked upon a woman.[7] This is something I count among my first good fortunes, thanking God that he had freed me of such a low and always loathsome enslavement while I was still healthy and vigorous. But I move on to other things.

I felt pride in others but not in myself, and when I was little I 7
always appeared inferior to my own judgment. My anger very often harmed me, but never others. I make this boast without fear because I know I am telling the truth. My spirit was prone to

animi, sed offensarum obliviosissimi, beneficiorum vero permemo-
ris. Amicitiarum appetentissimus honestarum et fidelissimus cul-
tor fui, sed hoc est supplicium senescentium: ut suorum sepissime
8 mortes fleant. Principum ac regum familiaritatibus et nobilium
amicitiis usque ad invidiam fortunatus fui. Multos tamen, eorum
quos valde amabam, effugi: tantus fuit michi insitus amor liberta-
tis, ut cuius vel nomen ipsum illi esse contrarium videretur, omni
9 studio declinarem. Maximi regum mee etatis et amarunt et co-
luerunt me; cur autem nescio: ipsi viderint. Et ita cum quibusdam
fui ut ipsi quodammodo mecum essent; et eminentia eorum mul-
10 lum tedium, commoda multa perceperim. Ingenio fui equo potius
quam acuto, ad omne bonum et salubre studium apto, sed ad
moralem precipue philosophiam et ad poeticam prono; quam ip-
sam processu temporis neglexi, sacris literis delectatus, in quibus
sensi dulcedinem abditam, quam aliquando contempseram, poeti-
11 cis literis non nisi ad ornatum reservatis. Incubui unice inter multa
ad notitiam vetustatis, quoniam michi semper etas ista displicuit;
ut nisi me amor carorum in diversum traheret, alia qualibet etate
natus esse semper optaverim et hanc oblivisci, nisus animo me alias
semper inserere. Historicis itaque delectatus sum; non minus ta-
men offensus eorum discordia, secutus in dubio quo me vel ver
12 similitudo rerum vel scribentium traxit auctoritas. Eloquio, ut
quidam dixerunt, claro ac potenti; ut michi visum est, fragili et
obscuro. Neque vero in comuni sermone cum amicis aut cum
familiaribus eloquentie unquam cura me attigit; mirorque eam
curam Augustum Cesarem suscepisse. Ubi autem res ipsa vel locus
vel auditor aliter poscere visus est, paulo annisus sum; idque quam
efficaciter, nescio: eorum sit iudicium coram quibus dixi. Ego

indignation but also to forgetting wrongs, while I keenly recalled
kindnesses. I was most eager for honorable friendships and most
faithful in tending them, but here is the punishment of those who
grow old, that they are often in tears at the deaths of those they
love. I was enviably blessed by the intimacy of princes and kings 8
and by the friendship of noble men. But I avoided many of them,
even those I greatly loved; so great was my innate love of liberty
that I shunned intently anyone whose very name seemed hostile to
it. The greatest kings of my generation loved and paid court to me, 9
why I don't know; but that is their business.[8] And I spent time
with some of them in such a way that they were spending time on
my terms, and experienced no boredom from their distinction, but
many advantages. I was even-tempered rather than sharp-witted, 10
well fitted to every good and healthy pursuit, but particular in-
clined to moral philosophy and to poetry; yet I neglected this
too with the advance of time, taking delight in sacred writings,
in which I felt a hidden sweetness which I had once despised,
keeping poetic composition only for adornment.[9] Amongst many 11
choices I devoted myself uniquely to the knowledge of antiquity,
since the current age always offended me, so that if the love of
those dear to me had not pulled me in the opposite direction I
would always have longed to be born in another age and to forget
this one, striving to insert myself in spirit into other periods. So I
took pleasure in historians, yet was alienated by their disagree-
ment, following the interpretation, in matters of doubt, to which
either probability or the authority of the writers attracted me. As 12
some said, I was gifted with a brilliant and powerful eloquence,
but as it seemed to me it was frail and dim. Attentiveness to elo-
quence did not interest me either in general conversation with
friends or with acquaintances; I am amazed that Augustus took
such pains over it.[10] But when the occasion or the place or audi-
ence seemed to require something special, I put in additional ef-
fort, though I don't know how effective it was; let my audience be

modo bene vixissem, qualiter dixissem parvifacerem: ventosa glori
est de solo verborum splendore famam querere.

13 Honestis parentibus florentinis origine—fortuna mediocri, et
ut verum fatear, ad inopiam vergente—sed patria pulsis, Aretii in
exilio natus sum, anno huius etatis ultime que a Cristo incipit
14 MCCCIV, die lune ad auroram XIII kalendas Augusti. Tempus
meum sic vel fortuna vel voluntas mea nunc usque partita est.
Primum illum vite annum neque integrum Aretii egi, ubi in lucem
me natura protulerat; sex sequentes Ancise, paterno in rure supra
Florentiam quattuordecim passuum milibus, revocata ab exilio ge-
netrice; octavum Pisis, nonum ac deinceps in Gallia Transalpina
ad levam Rodani ripam—Avinio urbi nomen—ubi romanus pon-
tifex turpi in exilio Cristi tenet Ecclesiam et tenuit diu, licet ann
paucos annos Urbanus quintus eam reduxisse videretur in suam
15 sedem. Sed res, ut patet, in nichilum rediit, ipso—quod gravius
fero—tunc etiam superstite et quasi boni operis penitente. Qui si
modicum plus vixisset, hauddubie sensisset quid michi de eius
abitu videretur. Iam calamus erat in manibus, sed ipse confestim
gloriosum principium, ipsum et vita destituit. Infelix! Quam feliciter ante Petri aram mori et in domo propria potuisset! Sive enim
successores eius in sua sede mansissent, et ipse boni operis auctor
erat; sive abiissent, et tanto ipsius clarior virtus, quanto illorum
culpa conspectior. Sed hec longior atque incidens est querela: re-
deo ad ordinem.

16 Ibi igitur, ventosissimi amnis ad ripam, pueritiam sub parenti-
bus, ac deinde sub vanitatibus meis adolescentiam totam egi. Non

the judges. So long as I lived rightly I would not care much how I spoke: it is a windy kind of glory to seek fame just from the splendor of one's words.

My origin was from honorable Florentine parents (perhaps only 13
middle in rank and to speak truly, approaching poverty), but exiled from their native land, and I was born at Arezzo in exile in the one thousand three hundred and fourth year of this last age that began with Christ, on a Monday at dawn, on the 20th of July.[11] This is how either fortune or my own will divided my life. I 14
spent that first year of life, not quite complete, at Arezzo, where nature had brought me to birth, then the next six years at Incisa, on my father's estate fourteen miles from Florence, when my mother was restored from exile; I spent the eighth year at Pisa, and my ninth and subsequent years in Transalpine Gaul on the left bank of the Rhône (the city is called Avignon),[12] where the Roman pope keeps and has long kept the Church of Christ in shameful exile, although a few years ago Urban V seemed to have restored it to its proper place. But as it appears, the attempt came 15
to nothing even while—something I mind more deeply—he himself was still alive and apparently regretting his honorable enterprise. If he had lived just a little longer I don't doubt he would have realized what I felt about his withdrawal. The pen was already in my hands but he rapidly deserted his glorious beginning, as life deserted him. Unhappy man! How happily he could have died before the altar of Peter and in his real home! If his successors had stayed in their proper place he too would have had the credit for a good undertaking, or if they had deserted, his own virtue would have been as much more glorious as their guilt was more conspicuous. But this is too long a complaint, and intrusive. I return to my narrative.

So I spent my boyhood on the bank of that most windy river[13] 16
under my parents' control, and then spent my entire youth at the whim of my own frivolities. But my stay there was not without

tamen sine magnis digressionibus: namque hoc tempore Carpentoras, civitas parva et illi ad orientem proxima, quadriennio integro me habuit; inque his duabus aliquantulum grammatice dyaletice ac rethorice, quantum etas potuit, didici; quantum scilicet in scolis
17 disci solet, quod quantulum sit, carissime lector, intelligis. Inde ad Montem Pessulanum legum ad studium profectus, quadriennium ibi alterum, inde Bononiam, et ibi triennium expendi et totum iuris civilis corpus audivi: futurus magni proventus adolescens, ut multi opinabantur, si cepto insisterem. Ego vero studium illud omne destitui, mox ut me parentum cura destituit, non quia legum michi non placeret auctoritas, que absque dubio magna est et romane antiquitatis plena, qua delector, sed quia earum usus nequitia hominum depravatur. Itaque piguit perdiscere quo inhoneste uti nollem, et honeste vix possem, et, si vellem, puritas inscitie tribuenda esset.

18 Itaque secundum et vigesimum annum agens domum redii. Domum voco avinionense illud exilium ubi ab infantie mee fine fueram: habet enim consuetudo proximam vim nature. Ibi ergo iam nosci ego et familiaritas mea a magnis viris expeti ceperat; cur autem nescire nunc me fateor et mirari, tunc equidem non mirabar, ut qui michi, more etatis, omni honore dignissimus viderer.
19 Ante alios expetitus fui a Columnensium clara et generosa familia, que tunc romanam curiam frequentabat, dicam melius: illustrabat. A quibus accitus, et michi nescio an et nunc, sed tunc certe indebito in honore habitus, ab illustri et incomparabili viro Iacobo de Columna, lomberiensi tunc epyscopo, cui nescio an parem seu viderim seu visurus sim, in Vasconiam ductus, sub collibus Pireneis estatem prope celestem multa et domini et comitum iocunditate

great detours, for at this time Carpentras, a little city near to Avignon on the East, kept me for a full four years,[14] and between the two cities I learned a certain amount of grammar, dialectic and rhetoric, as far as my youth was able; as much in fact as is usually learned in schools, and you know, dear reader, just how little that is. From there I set out to Montpellier to study the law and spent 17
another four-year period there, and from there to Bologna, where I spent three years and attended lectures on the entire corpus of civil law and was judged, as many thought, to be a young man of great promise, if I would stick to my undertaking.[15] But in fact I soon abandoned the whole discipline when deprived of parental guidance, not because I disliked the authority of the laws, which is undoubtedly great and full of Roman antiquity,[16] which delights me, but because their application is perverted by the wickedness of men. So I was not satisfied to learn thoroughly what I was unwilling to use dishonestly, and could scarcely use honorably, and if I wished, my purity would be attributed to ignorance.[17]

So during my twenty-second year I returned home. I call "home" 18
that exile in Avignon where I had lived since the end of my infancy, since familiarity has a power near to that of nature. There I began to be known and great men sought my friendship. But I admit I don't know now and I wonder why they did so, but then I did not wonder, since because of my youth I thought myself most worthy of every honor. I was courted by the famous and 19
noble family of Colonna before all others; at that time they attended the Roman Curia, or better, gave the Curia brilliance. Summoned by them and treated with honor beyond my deserts (I won't say whether it is still undeserved, but certainly it was at that time), I was taken to Gascony by that brilliant and incomparable man Giacomo Colonna, then bishop of Lombez—and I don't know whether I have ever seen or will ever see his like. I spent an almost heavenly summer enjoying the pleasant company of my master and companions under the Pyrenaean hills, so that I shall

20 transegi, ut semper tempus illud memorando suspirem. Inde
diens sub fratre eius Iohanne de Columna cardinali, multos
annos non quasi sub domino sed sub patre, imo ne id quidem,
cum fratre amantissimo, imo mecum et propria mea in domo
Quo tempore iuvenilis me impulit appetitus ut et Gallias et Ge
maniam peragrarem. Et licet alie cause fingerentur ut profectio
nem meam meis maioribus approbarem, vera tamen causa er
21 multa videndi ardor ac studium. In qua peregrinatione Parisius
primum vidi, et delectatus sum inquirere quid verum quidve fabu
losum de illa urbe narraretur. Inde reversus Romam adii, cuius
vidende desiderio ab infantia ardebam; et huius familie magnan
mum genitorem Stephanum de Columna, virum cuilibet antiquo
rum parem, ita colui atque ita sibi acceptus fui, ut inter me e
quemlibet filiorum nil diceres interesse. Qui viri excellentis amo
et affectus usque ad vite eius extremum uno erga me semper te
nore permansit; et in me nunc etiam vivit, neque unquam desine
22 nisi ego ante desiero. Inde etiam reversus, cum omnium sed p
primis illius tediosissime urbis fastidium atque odium, naturaliter
animo meo insitum, ferre non possem, diverticulum aliquod qua
portum querens, repperi vallem perexiguam sed solitariam atque
amenam, que Clausa dicitur, quindecim passuum milibus ab Avi
nione distantem, ubi fontium rex omnium Sorgia oritur. Capta
loci dulcedine, libellos meos et meipsum illuc transtuli. Longa er
historia si pergam exequi quid ibi multos ac multos egerim pe
23 annos. Hec summa est: quod quicquid fere opusculorum mio
excidit, ibi vel actum vel ceptum vel conceptum est; que tam multa
fuerunt ut usque ad hanc etatem me exerceant ac fatigent. Fue
enim michi ut corpus sic ingenium: magis pollens dexteritate
quam viribus; itaque multa michi facilia cogitatu, que executu
24 difficilia pretermisi. Hic michi ipsa locorum facies suggessit ut Bu
colicum carmen, silvestre opus, aggrederer, et Vite solitarie libro

always sigh for that unforgettable time.[18] On my return I worked 20
for his brother, Cardinal Giovanni, for many years, not serving
him as a master but as a father — no, not even that, but as though
he were a most loving brother. In fact it was like being with my
own self and in my own home. At that time my young man's in-
quisitiveness sent me to travel across the Gauls and through Ger-
many.[19] And though I invented other reasons to win approval for
my journey from my superiors, the real motive was my passion
and enthusiasm to see many sights. On this journey I saw Paris 21
for the first time and was delighted to investigate which tales told
about that city were true and which were fanciful. After my return
from Paris, I went to Rome which I had been passionate to see
from my infancy. And I paid such respect to Stefano Colonna, the
greathearted progenitor of that family, a man equal to any of the
ancients, and was so welcome to him that you would say there was
no distinction between me and any of his sons. The love and affec-
tion of that excellent man endured consistently to the very end of
his life, and still lives in me, nor will it ever cease unless I myself
have ceased to be.[20] When I returned to Avignon, since I could 22
not bear the distaste and loathing of everything but especially of
that most distasteful city, which was innate in me, I sought out a
place apart like some haven, and found a tiny valley, lonely and
pleasing, called "The Enclosed Valley," fifteen miles from Avignon,
where the Sorgue surfaces as king of all springs. Enchanted by the
sweetness of this place, I moved my books and myself there. It will
be a long tale if I try to follow in detail what I did there for many,
many years. In sum, however, almost any work I ever happened to 23
write was either completed or begun or conceived there; and these
were so many that up to my present age they still harry and weary
me. For my intellect was like my body, more effective in agility
than strength: so I left aside many works as easy to conceive, but
difficult to execute. Here the actual aspect of the place prompted 24
me to attempt the *Bucolic Poem*, a pastoral work, and two books *On*

duos ad Philippum, magnum semper virum sed parvum tun
epyscopum cavallicensem, nunc magnum sabinensem epyscopu
cardinalem; qui michi iam solus omnium veterum superstes, no
me epyscopaliter, ut Ambrosius Augustinum, sed fraterne dilex
25 ac diligit. Illis in montibus vaganti, sexta quadam feria maiore
hebdomade, cogitatio incidit, et valida, ut de Scipione Africano
illo primo, cuius nomen mirum inde a prima michi etate carum
fuit, poeticum aliquid heroico carmine scriberem (sed, subiecti de
nomine, Africe nomen libro dedi, operi, nescio qua vel sua vel me
fortuna, dilecto multis antequam cognito), quod tunc magno ce
tum impetu, variis mox distractus curis intermisi.

26 Illis in locis moram trahenti—dictu mirabile!—uno die et a
urbe Roma senatus, et de Parisius cancellarii Studii ad me litte
pervenerunt, certatim me ille Romam, ille Parisius ad percipie
dam lauream poeticam evocantes. Quibus ego iuveniliter glor
abundus et me dignum iudicans quo me dignum tanti viri iudica
rent, nec meritum meum sed aliorum librans testimonia, parumpe
tamen hesitavi cui potius aurem darem. Super quo consilium Io
hannis de Columna cardinalis supra nominati per literas experi
27 Erat enim adeo vicinus ut, cum sibi sero scripsissem, die alter
ante horam tertiam responsum eius acciperem. Cuius consiliu
secutus, romane urbis auctoritatem omnibus preferendam statu
et de petitione et de approbatione consilii eius mea duplex ad Io
lum extat epystola. Ivi ergo; et quamvis ego, more iuvenum, rerum
mearum benignissimus iudex essem, erubui tamen de me ipso
testimonium meum sequi, vel eorum a quibus evocabar; quod pro
culdubio non fecissent, nisi me dignum oblato honore iudicasse

Solitary Life dedicated to Philippe, always a great man but at that time a modest bishop of Cavaillon, and now the mighty cardinal bishop of Sabina;[21] he is now the only survivor of all the old friends, a man who has always loved me and still loves me not like a bishop, as Ambrose loved Augustine,[22] but like a brother. As I 25
wandered in those hills on the sixth holy day of the Easter week, the idea came to me, and it was a powerful one, of writing some poem in epic verse on the first Scipio Africanus, whose marvelous name had been dear to me from my earliest years; but I gave to the book the name *Africa* based on its theme—a work, I am not sure whether by its good fortune or mine, that was loved by many even before it was known. But though it was begun with great enthusiasm at the time, I soon suspended work on it, distracted by various anxieties.[23]

When I was lingering in those places—wondrous to relate—I 26
received on the same day letters both from the senate of the city of Rome and from the chancellor of the University of Paris, who competed in summoning me, the former to Rome and the latter to Paris, to receive the laurel of poetry. In youthful pride, judging myself worthy because such great men thought me worthy, weighing up not my deserts but other men's recommendations, I still hesitated a little while as to whom I should obey, and I asked advice from Cardinal Giovanni Colonna, whom I mentioned above, by letter.[24] But actually he was so near that although I wrote to 27
him late in the day I received his reply the next day before the third hour. Following his advice I decided the authority of the city of Rome should be preferred to all others; and my two letters to him are still extant in which I requested his advice and approved it once received. So I went, and although like most young men I was a most generous assessor of my own abilities, I blushed to follow my own self-commendation, or that of the men who had summoned me; but beyond doubt they would not have done so if they had not thought me worthy of the honor they offered.

28 Unde Neapolim primum petere institui; et veni ad illum sum-
mum et regem et philosophum Robertum, non regno quam liter-
clariorem, quem unicum regem et scientie amicum et virtutis no-
tra etas habuit, ut ipse de me quod sibi visum esset censeret. A
quo qualiter visus et cui quam acceptus fuerim, et ipse nunc mirer
et tu, si noveris, lector puto mirabere. Sed longa nimis historia est.
29 Audita autem adventus mei causa, mirum in modum exhilaratus
est, et iuvenilem cogitans fidutiam et forsitan cogitans honorem
quem peterem, sua gloria non vacare, quod ego eum solum inde-
cem ydoneum e cuntis mortalibus elegissem. Quid multa? Post
innumeras verborum collationes variis de rebus, ostensamque sib
Africam illam meam, qua usqueadeo delectatus est ut eam sib
inscribi magno pro munere posceret — quod negare nec potui cert
nec volui —, super eo tandem pro quo veneram certum michi de-
putavit diem, et a meridie ad vesperam me tenuit. Et quoniam
crescente materia, breve tempus apparuit, duobus proximis diebus
idem fecit. Sic triduo excussa ignorantia mea, die tertio me dig-
num laurea iudicavit. Eam michi Neapoli offerebat et, ut assenti-
rer, precibus etiam multis urgebat; vicit amor Rome venerandam
30 tanti regis instantiam. Itaque, inflexibile propositum meum cer-
nens, literas michi et nuntios ad senatum romanum dedit, quibus
de me iudicium suum magno favore professus est. Quod quidem
tunc iudicium regium et multorum et meo in primis iudicio conso-
num fuit; hodie et ipsius et meum et omnium idem sentientium
iudicium non probo: plus enim in eum valuit amor et etatis favor
quam veri studium. Veni tamen; et quamlibet indignus, tanto ta-
men fretus fisusque iudicio, summo cum gaudio Romanorum, qu
illi solemnitati interesse potuerunt, lauream poeticam adhuc
scolasticus rudis adeptus sum. De quibus etiam et carmine et so-
luta oratione epystole mee sunt. Hec michi laurea scientie michi

From there I began first to make for Naples and I came to Rob- 28
ert, that supreme philosopher and king, distinguished greatly for
his monarchy but even more in literature, the only king whom our
age possessed as a friend to both knowledge and virtue, so that he
would pass judgment in person of how I seemed to him.[25] And I
marvel now how he looked upon me and how welcome I was to
him, and you, reader, would marvel too, I think, if you knew. But
the story is too long. Now when he heard the reason for my com- 29
ing he was marvelously cheered, both thinking of my youthful
confidence and perhaps that the honor which I was seeking did
not lack glory for him, inasmuch as I had chosen him as the only
adequate judge among all mortal men. In short, after countless
verbal exchanges on various topics and after I had shown him my
Africa, which so delighted him that he asked as a great tribute that
I should dedicate it to him (which I neither could nor wanted to
deny him), he appointed a fixed day for the hearing I had come to
seek, and kept me from noon to the evening. And as the material
increased and the time seemed too short, he did the same thing on
the next two days. When he had explored my ignorance over three
days he judged me worthy of the laurel on the third. He offered
the laurel to me at Naples and even urged me with many supplica-
tions to consent; but the love of Rome overcame the urgency of so
great a king. So seeing my intention was inflexible, he gave me a 30
letter and dispatches to the Roman senate in which he declared his
judgment on me with great favor. This judgment of the king
matched that of many and indeed my own, but today I do not ap-
prove of his verdict or mine or of all those who shared this opin-
ion; for his affection and favor to my youth was stronger than his
devotion to the truth. Still I came, and unworthy as I was, relying
and trusting on so great a verdict, with the great rejoicing of the
Romans who were able to take part in this ceremony, I obtained
the laurel of poetry while still a raw student. And there are letters
of mine in both verse and prose about this.[26] This laurel won me

plurimum vero quesivit invidie; sed hec quoque historia longior est quam poscat hic locus.

31 Inde ergo digressus Parmam veni et cum illis de Corrigia viris in me liberalissimis atque optimis, sed inter se male concordibus, qui tunc urbem illam tali regimine gubernabant, quale nec ante in memoria hominum habuerat civitas illa, nec etate hac, ut augur, 32 habitura est, aliquantulum tempus exegi. Et suscepti memor honoris, solicitusque ne indigno collatus videretur, cum die quodam in montana conscendens forte trans Entiam amnem reginis in finibus silvam que Plana dicitur adiissem, subito loci specie percussus, ad intermissam Africam stilum verti, et fervore animi qui sopitus videbatur excitato, scripsi aliquantulum die illo; post continuis diebus quotidie aliquid, donec Parmam rediens et repostam ac tranquillam nactus domum (que postea empta nunc etiam mea est) tanto ardore opus illud non magno in tempore ad exitum deduxi, ut ipse quoque nunc stupeam. Inde reversus, ad fontem Sorgie et ad solitudinem transalpinam redii. [. . .] Et intra breve tempus extincta illa Columnensium gloriosa, sed, heu, nimium caduca familia, iterum ad Italiam redii, cum iam quartum et quadragesimum etatis annum post terga relinquerem diuque et Parme et Verone versatus, et ubique, Deo gratias, carus habitus multo amplius quam valerem.

33 Longum post tempus, viri optimi et cuius nescio an e numero dominorum quisquam similis sua etate vir fuerit (imo vero scio quod nullus), Iacobi de Carraria iunioris, fame preconio benivolentiam adeptus, nuntiisque et literis usque trans Alpes quando ibi eram, et per Italiam ubicunque fui, multos per annos tantis precibus fatigatus sum et in suam solicitatus amicitiam, ut, quamvis de

no knowledge but a great deal of ill will; but this story too is longer than this letter requires.

So departing from Rome I came to Parma and spent some 31
small time with the family of da Correggio, who were excellent men and generous to me but in conflict with each other; they were ruling the city at that time with a kind of government which that city-state had not had in previous memory, nor will it have, as I reckon, in this generation.[27] Keeping the honor received in my 32
mind and anxious that it would not seem conferred on someone unworthy, one day when I was climbing the hills I happened to come to the wood called Selvapiana, after crossing the river Enza in the territory of Reggio: immediately struck by the beauty of the place I set my pen to work on the interrupted *Africa*, and once the passion was roused which had seemed drugged, I wrote something on that day. Afterward on successive days I wrote a passage every day until I returned to Parma and acquired a calm and secluded house (which I subsequently bought, and it is still mine)[28] and in no great time I brought that work to its end with such passion that I myself am amazed even now.[29] When I left I returned to the source of the Sorgue and my Transalpine solitude. [. . .][30] And within a short time that glorious but alas too mortal family of the Colonnas was extinct,[31] and I returned to Italy when I had already left behind me my forty-fourth year and had passed a long period both at Verona and Parma, thanks be to God, held far more dear everywhere than I deserved.[32]

After a long while I won from the publicity given to my fame 33
the generosity of the younger Giacomo of Carrara, that most excellent man; I don't know whether any prince was his equal in his generation—or rather I do know there was none.[33] Through messengers and letters sent far beyond the Alps when I was there, and wherever I was across Italy, he wearied me with such powerful prayers over many years, urging me to friendship with him, that although I expected nothing from wealthy and successful men I

felicibus nil sperarem, decreverim tandem ipsum adire et videre
34 quid sibi hec magni et ignoti viri tanta vellet instantia. Itaque, sero
quidem, Patavum veni, ubi ab illo clarissime memorie viro non
humane tantum sed sicut in celum felices anime recipiuntur accep-
tus sum, tanto cum gaudio tamque inextimabili caritate ac pietate
ut, quia equare eam verbis posse non spero, silentio opprimenda
35 sit. Inter multa, sciens me clericalem vitam a pueritia tenuisse, ut
me non sibi solum sed etiam patrie arctius astringeret, me canoni-
cum Padue fieri fecit. Et ad summam, si vita sibi longior fuisset,
michi et errorum et itinerum omnium finis erat. Sed—heu!—ni-
hil inter mortales diuturnum, et siquid dulce se obtulerit amare
mox fine concluditur. Biennio non integro eum michi et patrie et
mundo cum dimisisset, Deus abstulit, quo nec ego nec patria nec
36 mundus—non me fallit amor—digni eramus. Et licet sibi filius
successerit, prudentissimus et clarissimus vir, et qui me per pa-
terna vestigia carum semper atque honoratum habuit, ego tamen
illo amisso cum quo magis michi presertim de etate conveniebat
redii rursus in Gallias, stare nescius, non tam desiderio visa mille
revidendi quam studio, more egrorum, loci mutatione tediis con-
sulendi.

decided to approach him at last and find out what the great ur-
gency of so important a man toward an unknown implied. So, al- 34
beit late, I came to Padua, where I was welcomed by that man of
glorious memory, not just with human courtesy but as the blessed
souls are given welcome in Heaven, with such delight and such
inestimable affection and piety that, since I cannot hope to match
it in words, it must be buried in silence. Among many other fa- 35
vors, knowing I had observed the discipline of a cleric from my
boyhood, he had me made a canon of Padua to bind me more
closely not only to himself but to his country.[34] In effect, if his life
had been longer, this would have been the end of all my wandering
and traveling. But—alas—nothing is lasting among mortals and if
anything sweet is offered, it soon ends bitterly. Within less than
two years God, who had given him to me and his country and the
world, took him away, a man of whom—love does not deceive
me—neither I nor his country nor the world was worthy. And 36
though he was succeeded by his son, a most prudent and distin-
guished man, who always followed in his father's footsteps, keep-
ing me dear and well honored, still, having lost the friend whom I
matched especially in age, I returned to the Gauls, not knowing
how to stay still, and not so much from the longing to see again
what I had seen a thousand times, as from the desire, like that of
sick men, to heal my boredom by a change of place.[35]

sified with the Mongol invasions since the thirteenth century, and Venice was an important hub in Italy for this kind of commerce.

58. These lines are not from Ovid's autobiographical exile poems, but from his fantasy of personified Hunger in *Metamorphoses* 8.797–800.

59. Ecclesiastes 7:11.

60. See §§36 and 130–32 above.

61. Petrarca by *societas* here probably is referring collectively to the "free companies" of unemployed mercenaries who roamed France and Italy in the later fourteenth century and made their living by plunder and holding cities to ransom. See William Caferro, *Mercenary Companies and the Decline of Siena* (Baltimore, 1998).

62. The Florentine guilds of artisans and merchants grew, since the twelfth century, into a very strong commercial and political system that allowed the city to become internationally powerful and its industry, especially that of woolen textiles, to thrive throughout Europe.

63. Associations of pilgrims were active in numerous cities.

64. As Dotti 2002–13, *ad loc.*, points out, Petrarca here may be alluding to the Great Company of Werner von Urslingen, which was formed around 1340 and caused widespread devastation in northern Italy during the years that followed.

65. For the money extorted by Bertrand du Guesclin from Pope Urban V in 1365, see on §61 above. For the pope's reaction and Petrarca's comment on it, see VII.6.200.

66. Petrarca did not know the terrifying description of the plague of Athens in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* 2.47–58, nor the one by Lucretius at the close of his *On the Nature of the Universe* (a poem rediscovered only in 1417 by Poggio Bracciolini), but he could still read, for example, Ovid's description of a plague on the island of Aegina (*Metamorphoses* 7.523–614) and, of course, the references to epidemics attested by Latin historical writers.

67. The first onset of the plague was in late 1347 and, before the date of this letter, it had returned to Italian cities in 1361, 1362, and 1363. On the impact of the plague of 1348, see II.3.

68. Numerous earthquakes, erupting in either Italy or the Mediterranean basin, are recorded by Roman historians (e.g., Livy 22.5.6, or Suetonius, *Life of Tiberius* 48.2). Book 6 of Seneca's *Natural Questions* and also Pliny's *Natural History* 2.191–211 investigate the causes of this natural phenomenon.

69. This is the earthquake of January 25, 1348, with its epicenter in the Alpine region of Carinthia; Petrarca refers to Vergil's mention of an Alpine earthquake among the portents following Julius Caesar's death, in *Georgics* 1.475.

70. The earthquake of 1349 hit the region of Lazio as well as Campania and south Tuscany; at Rome, in particular, it heavily damaged the Torre dei Conti and the basilicas of Saint Paul Outside the Walls and the Lateran. At *F.* 11.7.3–5 Petrarca, some time after the event (in June 1351), writes about this to Ludwig van Kempen.

71. This earthquake occurred on October 18, 1356, and damaged a large area of Basel.

72. Petrarca visited Basel in 1356 because he had been commissioned by the Visconti to negotiate with the Holy Roman emperor Charles IV; when after a month Charles had still not arrived in Basel, Petrarca set off to find him in Prague ("the remotest barbarian region"), where he stayed for a month at the imperial court (see II.17.20). As Rizzo points out (2006–14, *ad loc.*), Petrarca left Basel in June, that is, almost four months—and not just a few days—before the earthquake: the deliberate inaccuracy makes the account more dramatic.

73. The bishop of Basel at the time was Johannes von Münsingen.

74. Petrarca is referring back to §§36, 130–32 and 135.

75. Petrarca contrasts his equality of age with Guido Sette with Guido's higher status. Compare *S.* 8.8, to Boccaccio, written on Petrarca's sixty-third birthday, in July 1367.

IX.2. To posterity (*S.* 18)

Petrarca's *Letter to Posterity* is, unlike the previous letter, a straightforward autobiography, which, after the introductory paragraph, is organized in two parts: a general portrait of the author, both moral and physical, in

§§2–11, and a chronological narrative going up to 1351, in §§12–30. According to Dotti, *Vita di Petrarca*, 431–32, n. 139, and Elvira Nota in Dotti 2002–13, 5:211, a first draft of the text was composed between 1350 and 1355, then later reworked around 1371–72 (as internal references prove: see on §§3, 15, and 24), but it was never carried to completion. As Elvira Nota (in Dotti 2002–13, 5:209–11) has hypothesized, the unfinished nature of the letter and the daunting task of dealing with Petrarca's intricate drafts may explain why the posthumous editors of the *Seniles* decided to separate it from the rest of the collection, which was otherwise much more polished. Yet these editors reported the heading ("to Posterity") at the end of Book 17, which suggests that Petrarca, at least at some point, may really have meant this letter to future readers to stand at the close of his last epistolary collection. In fact, the letter "to Posterity" would match those to the ancients in the closing book of the *Familiares* and, like them, represent a human attempt to defy the barriers of death and time; it would also work as a sort of *sphragis*, as a personal seal affixed by the writer to his lifelong epistolary collections.

According to a persuasive article by Karl Enenkel, "Modeling the Humanist," Petrarca's autobiography, which is unique in its time, was certainly inspired by the tradition of classical Latin biography, particularly the lives of Vergil, Horace, and Terence, derived from Suetonius' *On Illustrious Men* and commonly used to introduce the manuscripts of these authors' works in the Middle Ages. This model, characterized by the organization of the biographical material through thematic rubrics, appears conflated with that of Ovid's poetic autobiography at *Sorrows* 4.10, which instead progresses through a chronological narrative and, like the present letter, is addressed to posterity. But above all Enenkel establishes a close relation between this letter and the biography of Petrarca written by Boccaccio in late 1341 or early 1342 under the influence of Petrarca's fame, thanks to his crowning with the laurel, even before they met. Boccaccio's brief biography, *De vita et moribus domini Francisci Petracchi* (in Boccaccio, *Vita di Petrarca*, ed. Villani), like the present letter, shows the influence of both Ovid's *Sorrows* 4.10 and the genre of Latin biography, but in particular Boccaccio draws on Suetonius' *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, the form of which is followed in Boccaccio's text: a first chronological narrative up

to "coronation" (§§1–17 Villani), followed by a second part sketching a general portrait, both moral and physical (§§18–27 Villani); to this "Suetonian" structure Boccaccio adds a third part, at §§28–30, consisting of a list of Petrarca's works. Boccaccio's biography is colored by his desire to enhance Petrarca's family and life circumstances while tracing his uninterrupted ascent to fame: it is an open eulogy composed by a great admirer. Petrarca knew this work and, as Enenkel has illustrated, he seems to be rewriting it with the aim of modifying the tone of its content to a more modest self-presentation, in keeping with a man writing about himself—especially when the man is a Christian, whose main virtues should be humility and contempt for worldly glory. Petrarca's agenda in the present letter is to leave an image of himself that fits those values of modesty without obscuring his life's achievements, an image that highlights his ability always to maintain his freedom without obscuring the great favor he had enjoyed with some of the greatest men of the time.

1. Petrarca recalls Suetonius, *Life of Augustus* 2.3.

2. See Ecclesiastes 11:10.

3. "Know thyself" was inscribed on the temple of Apollo at Delphi; see S. 2.1.34.

4. This would date his resort to spectacles (for reading, surely) and this letter to after 1364.

5. The Roman gourmet M. Gavius Apicius (early first century CE) was known for extravagance and is said to have committed suicide when he deemed he had not enough money left to maintain his luxurious standards: see Seneca, *Consolation to His Mother Helvia* 10.8–9. Apicius is also the author of a cookbook, titled *De re coquinaria*, that has come down to us in a late antique, expanded form.

6. Petrarca's beloved, the chaste married woman Laura, died, as Petrarca records on the flyleaf of his Vergil, in 1348, but Petrarca continued his love poetry after her death.

7. This is surely an ungrateful claim, given that he had a son and a daughter, perhaps by different women, in 1337 and 1343, respectively, shortly before this supposed repudiation of his sexuality, here dated to

around 1344 (i.e., when he turned forty); but an earlier letter (*S.* 8.1.15) claims he rejected sex after 1350.

8. In particular, Petrarca felt close to King Robert of Naples and the Holy Roman emperor Charles IV.

9. Compare III.17, probably composed in 1360, on his new preference for sacred over profane writings. Petrarca's "conversion" to sacred writing had a first realization in 1346–47, during his third stay at Vaucluse, where he composed *On Solitary Life*, *On Religious Leisure*, the *Bucolic Poem*, and shortly after, the *Penitential Psalms*; many of his later works reflect such renewed religious inspiration (certainly the *Secret Book*, but also the biographies of Old Testament figures added to the collection of *On Illustrious Men* or the final series of *Triumphs*); yet Petrarca never abandoned his "profane" works and kept revising many of them till the end of his life.

10. See Suetonius, *Life of Augustus* 84.2.

11. Petrarca's father, grandfather, and great-grandfather had all been notaries, roughly equivalent to English solicitors, and were given the title of respect "Ser," equivalent to "Mr.," a step below "Messer" (my lord); the latter honorific indicated a rank equivalent to a barrister, judge, chancellor, or knight.

12. See Appendix I.

13. The Rhône, flowing past Avignon.

14. Petrarca was at Carpentras from 1312 to 1316, where he received his primary education.

15. See Appendix I.

16. Much of late medieval training in civil law consisted of the study of Justinian's *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, particularly the *Digest*.

17. In III.14 Petrarca provides young Marco of Genoa, who was seeking advice about the law as a career, with his fullest treatment of the history of law as a discipline, along with a bitter complaint about the degradation of modern lawyers, who are deemed ignorant of the great classical legislators and deeply dishonest, seeking only profit that can be made from petty lawsuits.

18. The friendship contracted with Giacomo Colonna at Bologna was the most important of Petrarca's youth, just as that brief summer in Lombez (Gascony) became a blessed memory: along with his other two great friends, Ludwig van Kempen and Angelo Tosetti, Petrarca had accompanied Giacomo to his new bishopric in Lombez in 1330.

19. Petrarca remained under the protection of Cardinal Giovanni Colonna from 1330 to 1347, when their relationship grew colder, probably also as a consequence of Petrarca's support for Cola di Rienzo, who was in conflict with the Colonna family at Rome. For Petrarca's trip to France and Germany in spring 1333, see *F.* 1.4–5 and 3.1.

20. Petrarca first visited Rome in 1337, when he met Stefano Colonna the Elder. Born around 1265, Stefano was the head of the whole family; he would have been seventy-two when Petrarca met him. He lived on to lose numerous members of his family (see the note on IX.1.102 and Petrarca's belated letter of condolence, *F.* 8.1). While Petrarca's reverence for Stefano is real and born out by his letter *F.* 8.1, here he is glossing over his rupture with Cardinal Giovanni, just as in §32 below he will introduce a lament for the decline of his patrons, the Colonna, without admitting how his own behavior contributed to the rupture between them.

21. See Appendix III.

22. Augustine's *Confessions* describes his first encounter with Ambrose at 5.13.23, where Ambrose "took Augustine up" (the word used of a father acknowledging a child) in a fatherly fashion, offering the guidance and protection of a bishop.

23. See Appendix II for Petrarca's work on the *Africa*.

24. Petrarca gives his award of the laurel crown of poetry five chapters in this short unfinished biography. The letters consulting Cardinal Giovanni are III.2 and 3, dating from September 1340.

25. Petrarca met King Robert at the end of February 1341 and spent several days with him. See Appendix I.

26. Book 4 of the *Familiares* follows Petrarca's visit to and the subsequent ceremony at Rome in April 1341; on the ceremony see in particular II.5–6 and the *Metrical Epistle* 2.1.

27. Petrarca went directly from Rome to Parma, newly liberated by the da Correggio dynasty from Mastino della Scala, in May 1341 and stayed until spring 1342. Shortly after, however, the da Correggio family lost its rule over Parma again, due to internal feuds among the brothers Azzo, Simone, Giovanni, and Guido.

28. According to Dotti 2002–13, *ad loc.*, Petrarca had certainly bought his house at Parma, which is still visible, by 1344. For further details of his sojourns in Parma, see Appendix I.

29. After having begun his *Africa* at Vaucluse in 1338–39 (see on §25 above), Petrarca resumed its composition at Selvapiana, a woody area at the foot of the Apennines south of Parma, right across the river Enza, which marked the boundary between the territory of Parma and that of Reggio Emilia. Yet, contrary to what he claims here, he never finished this poem: though the *Africa* does have a properly grandiose ending, with Scipio's triumph after Zama, it clearly lacks final revision.

30. Petrarca returned to Vaucluse at the beginning of 1342 and remained there until September 1343. The narrative at this point completely skips the years 1342 to 1347, that is, Petrarca's second stay at Vaucluse (1342–43), his second trip to Naples, the period spent in Parma and Verona (1343–45), and his third stay at Vaucluse (1345–47). The account resumes, in fact, with his return to Italy in 1347. If not intentional or simply due to the unfinished nature of the text, this gap in the narrative may be the result of a lacuna in Petrarca's original draft at this point, possibly caused by the loss of a leaf from his manuscript (see Elvira Nota in Dotti 2002–13, 5:231–32).

31. Petrarca is skirting an important reason for his departure from Avignon and rupture with Cardinal Giovanni Colonna in 1347, that is, his support of Cola di Rienzo in Rome, who was fiercely opposed by the Colonna family: it was precisely the fight against Cola di Rienzo that occasioned the death of Pietro, Stefano the Younger, and his son Giovanni in that year. Cardinal Giovanni and their father (Stefano the Elder) both died in 1348, while Giacomo had died in 1341.

32. The closing sentence of §32, following the lacuna, shows elements of inconsistency that derive from the unfinished nature of the text and reflect the difficulties its first editors must have encountered in their attempt to impose order on a working draft full of erasures, marginalia, and insertions of uncertain placement. Elvira Nota gives the text we read in the manuscripts that preserve this letter, thus trusting the judgment of its earlier editors, but parts of this sentence may belong elsewhere (on different hypotheses by modern scholars, see Nota in Dotti 2006–14, 5:230–32 and 369 *ad loc.*). Petrarca left Avignon in November 1347, and since he was born in July 1304, he must have still been forty-three, not forty-four, at the time.

33. Giacomo II da Carrara ruled Padua from 1345 to 1350. After Giacomo's assassination in 1350, his son Francesco inherited power and continued his father's offers of hospitality, but Petrarca clearly felt less at ease with the younger generation. Petrarca would spend more and more time at Arquà in his last years, where he wrote V.6, addressed to the younger ruler.

34. In April 1349 Petrarca accepted Giacomo da Carrara's offer of a rich canonry in the city of Padua and a house near the cathedral. Though he never became a priest, Petrarca had for a long time been in minor orders, which enabled him to hold such benefices.

35. Petrarca returned to Vaucluse in the summer of 1351. For changing places as a mark of human restlessness, see Horace, *Epistles* 1.11.27.