CHAPTER ONE

A QUESTION OF ATTRIBUTION

1. Petrarch and St. Augustine

In a letter addressed to Dionigi da Borgo San Sepolcro, Petrarch described an ascent of Mont Ventoux which he made in the company of his brother, Gherardo, on 26 April 1336.1 As he relates, the two began their journey up the rocky slopes with enthusiasm some time before dawn, and were only spurred on by the stark warnings of an aged shepherd.2 As the day went on, however, tiredness set in, and the two brothers chose to travel by different paths. While Gherardo took a short-cut along the ridge of the mountain and reached the heights quickly, the easier paths which Petrarch had chosen seemed to veer downwards, and long after his brother had reached the top of the mountain, he was still wandering around in the valleys in search of a gentle route.3 When he eventually arrived at the summit, Petrarch gazed in wonder at the vista before him. Beyond the clouds which stretched out beneath him, he saw the icy peaks of the Alps, and glimpsed the skies above Italy.4 On the right, there rose the mountains around Lyons, and on the left, there could be seen the Rhône and, further away, the waters of the Mediterranean.5 Moved by this reverie, he turned to a copy of Augustine’s Confessiones and, opening the book at random, his eyes fell on a passage of breathtaking appropriateness: ‘And men go abroad to wonder at the heights of the mountains, the lofty billows of

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2 Fam. IV, 1, 6–8.
3 Ibid., 9–10.
4 Ibid., 18.
5 Ibid., 25.
the sea, the long courses of rivers, the vast compass of the ocean, and the circular motions of the stars, and yet pass themselves by.\textsuperscript{16}

Although there is good reason to doubt the veracity of some aspects of the letter,\textsuperscript{7} Fam. IV, i was intended to function primarily as an allegory, at the heart of which stood Petrarch’s struggle between virtus and voluptas. Allowing his thoughts to drift while resting in a valley, Petrarch drew a comparison between his experience of the physical landscape and the life of the spirit. ‘The life which we call blessed,’ he mused

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is situated in a high place; and the route to it is, as they say, narrow. Many hills stand in the way, and it is necessary to walk by clearly marked stages from virtue to virtue; at the summit is the goal of all things and the end of the route, to which our journey is directed.\textsuperscript{8}
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The routes which he and Gherardo had taken to reach the blessed life were, however, different. While the path followed by his brother, a Carthusian renditus, was harder,\textsuperscript{9} Gherardo had reached the summit of virtue more readily than Petrarch, who had sought an easier route. His path had been that of earthly pleasure, and his journey to virtue, once begun, had, he realised, been made harder by the burdens imposed by his earlier desire to seek happiness in the fleeting attractions of the temporal world. As he progressed towards the peak, Petrarch’s mind was called back con-

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\item \textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 26–8: ‘Que dum mirarer singula et nunc terrenum aliquid saperem, nunc exemplorum animum ad altiora subveherem, visum est michi Confessionum Augustini librum, caritatis tue munus, inspicere; quem et conditoris et donatoris in memoriam servo habeoque semper in manibus: pugillare opusculum, perexigui voluminis sed infinite dulcedinis. Aperio, lecturus quicquid occurreret; quid enim nisi pium et devotum posset occurrere? Forte autem decimus illius operis liber oblatus est. Frater expectans per os meum ab Augustino aliquid audire, intentis auribus stabat. Deum testor ipsumque qui aderat, quod ubi primum defixi oculos, scriptum erat: “Et eunt homines admirari alta montium et ingentes fluctus maris et latissimos lapsus fluminum et oceani ambitum et giros siderum, et relinquunt se ipsos.” Obstupui, fateor…’ Quoting Augustine, Conf., X, viii, 15.
\item \textsuperscript{7} Rossi, ‘Sulla formazione delle raccolte epistolari petrarchesche,’ 68–73; G. Billanovich, ‘Petrarca e il Ventoso,’ Italia Medioevoale e Umanistica 9 (1966): 389–401; idem, Petrarcha Letterata, 88ff, 192ff; Wilkins, The Making of the Canzoniere, 312ff; Baron, From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni, 17–20.
\item \textsuperscript{8} Fam. IV, 1, 13: ‘Equidem vita, quam beatam dicimus, celso loco sita est; arcta, ut aiunt, ad illam ducit via. Multi quoque colles intereminent et de virtute in virtutem preclaris gradibus ambulandum est; in summum finis est omnium et vitae terminus ad quem peregrinatio nostra disponitur.’ Quoting Matt. 7:14.
\item \textsuperscript{9} On Gherardo, see H. Cochin, Le Frère de Pétrarque et le Livre du Repos des Religieux (Paris, 1903); R. J. Lokaj, ‘Petrarch vs. Gherardo: a Case of Sibling Rivalry Inside and Outside the Cloister’ (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2001). It is worth noting that Gherardo only entered the Carthusian monastery at Montrieux c. 1342, and this fact has led Rossi (amongst others) to doubt that the letter could have been composed in April 1336: Rossi, ‘Sulla formazione delle raccolte epistolari petrarchesche,’ 68–73.
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