Andreas Kablitz

Petrarch and the Senses

Petrarch's Anthropology of Love and the Scholastic Transformation of Christian Ethics

The opposition between body and mind, between senses and reason constitutes one of the basic semantic coordinates of Western culture. And a firmly established hierarchy that determines the relation between both categories. Reason is superior to the senses, and, following from its ontological priority, has to govern the senses – a hierarchy that applies to Ancient philosophy as well as to Christian theology. The *incontinenti* in Dante's *Inferno*, to quote a famous example, prominently illustrate the theological reception of the philosophical hierarchy between emotions and reason which Christian thought owed to Antiquity.

Yet, within the framework of Christian beliefs, the superiority of reason over emotions has always been controversial. Unlike in pagan philosophy, virtue, is not based on the orderly use of reason, but on an affect: it is based on love – a love that *passeth all understanding*:¹ *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*.² Such coexistence of both ethical systems, again, becomes visible in Dante's *Commedia*, where *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* are constructed upon remarkably different orders of sin. As could be demonstrated in much more detail, Dante's hell implies a rational ethics, where virtue depends on the correct use of reason, whereas his purgatory refers to moral values based on love.³ The priority of love over reason, the concept of which is inherited from ancient philosophy in Christian ethics, therefore, produces a frequently re-emerging criticism of reason, a phenomenon which might be observed even in the secularized sphere of current humanities. The increasing interest in emotions is nothing but a symptom of a deep skepticism towards the productivity and moral integrity of reason, though such a attitude is suggested mainly by postmodernist thought that hardly could be called Christian.

The question to which this discussion is devoted primarily points to a different aspect of the intricate relation between reason and senses under the

1 Eph 3.19: "scire etiam supereminentem caritatem Christi", *Biblia Sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem*, Stuttgart 1975, 1811.

2 Mc 12.31: "diliges proximum tuum tamquam te ipsum", *ibid.*, 1596 f.

3 Cf. A. Kablitz, "Die Ethik der Göttlichen Komödie", in R. Antonelli, A. Landolfi, A. Punzi (eds.), *Dante, oggi, Critica del testo XIV/1* (2011), I, 25–80.

Andreas Kablitz, Universität zu Köln

conditions of Christianity. It addresses the problem of the very foundation of reason's metaphysical superiority as well as its agency resulting from that ontological priority. For it is these grounds that become controversial in the epoch of Petrarch. The traditional argument was already implicitly undermined in scholastic philosophy, especially in Thomas Aquinas' thought, as we will see later. But, it is the poetic discourse of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* where the tacit scholastic dismissal of the self-evident superiority and power of reason and its consequences are brought to light, as I will try to demonstrate in a close reading of Petrarch's famous sonnet No. 6:

Si traviato è 'l folle mi' desio
a seguitar costei che 'n fuga è volta,
et de' lacci d'Amor leggiera et sciolta
vola dinanzi al lento correr mio,

che quanto richiamando più l'envio
per la sicura strada, men m'ascolta:
né mi vale spronarlo, o dargli volta,
ch'Amor per sua natura il fa restio.

Et poi che 'l fren per forza a sé raccoglie,
i' mi rimango in signoria di lui,
che mal mio grado a morte mi trasporta:

sol per venir al lauro onde si coglie
acerbo frutto, che le piaghe altrui
gustando afflige più che non conforta.⁴

My passion's folly is so led astray by following
what turns and flees, and flies from Love's
light supple noose in front of my slow pace,

that the more I recall its steps to the safe road,
the less it hears me: nor does spurring on help
me, or turning about, resisting what Love does
by nature.

And then if the bit gathers me to him by force,
I remain in his sovereign power, so that my
state carries me sadly towards death:

only to come to the laurel from which is culled
bitter fruit, whose taste is a worse wound for
others, whom it does not solace.

This is the first sonnet of the *Canzoniere* that brings clearly into play the myth of Daphne and Apollo, though some hidden allusions might be found in the preceding poems in that book of songs. Its importance to Petrarch's poetry is beyond any doubt, as Laura's very name proves. The content of that myth is well known: Apollo, attracted by her beauty, pursued the nymph Daphne, with whom he fell in love. Anxious about losing her virginity, Daphne prays for help (either to the god Peneus or to Gaia), and is granted heavenly support as she is transformed into a laurel tree. But how does this myth come into play in Petrarch's sonnet? The question, as we will discuss now, is anything but easy to answer.

⁴ F. Petrarca, *Si traviato è 'l folle mi' desio*, VI, 1–14, in F. Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, M. Santagata (ed.), Milan 2004, 30. English translation of A. S. Kline: https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Italian/Petrarch.php#anchor_Toc13045775

The first hint to the famous myth is to be found in the second verse of sonnet No. 6, namely in the circumscription of Laura/Daphne, presented as *costei che 'n fuga è volta*. And the *lauro*/laurel is mentioned in verse 12. Both elements seem to be sufficient to evoke the famous myth, as no commentary of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* neglects to mention. However, much more striking than the presence of the ancient myth in this sonnet is the considerable change it undergoes, a transformation that eventually produces a total inversion of its plot and that, somehow astonishingly, nonetheless is not mentioned by the commentaries.

The critical change takes place in the lover, the sonnet's "I", who introduces himself as the author Petrarch and replaces the Greek god. One of the most momentous transformations is the identification of the lover as a horse. By means of this allegorical (re)interpretation of the traditional myth, Petrarch refers, as some commentaries do mention,⁵ to one of the most prominent Christian symbols of *luxuria*. And, no less a figure than Thomas Aquinas in his *Quaestiones de malo* uses this allegory to explain the basic features of lust.⁶ As we will see in detail, Petrarch refers, indeed, quite precisely to that text.

Thomas Aquinas analyzes the very nature of *luxuria* in the following lines of his *De malo*:

Ad quantum dicendum quod concupiscentia secundum quod pertinet ad originale peccatum non est concupiscentia actualis sed habitualis. Sed intelligendum est quod ex habitu efficiuntur habiles ad aliquid. Dupliciter autem aliquod agens potest esse habile ad aliquid agendum: uno modo ex aliqua forma inclinante ad hoc, sicut corpus graue ex forma sua quam habet a generante inclinatur deorsum, alio modo ex subtractione eius quod impendebat, sicut uinum effunditur fractis circulis qui effusionem impendebant, et equus concitatus praecipitanter uadit rupto freno quo retinebatur. Sic igitur concupiscentia habitualis potest dici dupliciter: uno modo aliqua dispositio uel habitus inclinans ad concupiscendum, sicut si in aliquo ex frequenti actuali concupiscentia causaretur concupiscentia habitus, et sic

At fourth it has to be said that concupiscence insofar it is related to original sin is not an actual concupiscence, but an habitual one. Yet, it has to be noticed that by habit we become able to do something. Because in two ways something can be able to do something. One is by natural propensity, as a heavy body which by his nature that he got from the Creator falls down. The other one is by the loss of that what hindered to follow the natural propensity, as wine is pouring to the ground when the wine hose is broken that should prevent its effusion, and as a rushed horse runs overhastily when the reins that should retain it are torn. In this sense the habitual concupiscence can be a double one. In one way, it can be a disposition or an habitual propensity to desire if in someone by frequent actual concupiscence an habitual concupiscence

⁵ Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, M. Santagata (ed.), 32.

⁶ Cf. J. Küpper, "Mythologie und Philosophie bei Garcilaso de la Vega," in *Romanistisches Jahrbuch* 55 (2004), 339–356, esp. 344 f.

concupiscentia non dicitur esse originale peccatum; alio modo potest intelligi habitualis concupiscentia ipsa pronitas uel habilitas ad concupiscendum, quae est ex hoc quod vis concupiscibilis non perfecte subditur rationi, sublato freno originalis iustitiae; et hoc modo peccatum originale materialiter loquendo est habitualis concupiscentia.⁷

is produced; in this sense, concupiscence is not called original sin. In another way the habitual concupiscence can be considered as the very inclination or propensity to desire that is caused by the deficiencies of reason to control covetousness. In this sense, original sin, materially speaking, is habitual concupiscence.

The allegory of an impetuous horse that Thomas Aquinas unfolds in these lines is part of a manifold distinction, aiming at a precise definition of that type of *concupiscentia* which is identical with original sin. The first distinction in this passage is a differentiation between *concupiscentia actualis* and *concupiscentia habitualis*, between an actual and a habitual desire, the latter being defined more precisely. To that purpose, Thomas seems to use the similarity between the two words. To possess a *habitus* means to be able to cause something (*esse habile ad aliquid agendum*), as their common etymon, the verb *habere*, suggests.

The ability resulting from a *habitus* is further differentiated into two different categories whose difference is due to their respective causes. Any ability can be due to a natural disposition, to a *forma*, to that quality which, according to Aristotle, constitutes the very essence of something. Or it can be due to the impediment of a natural disposition: *ex subtractione eius quod impediabat*. To illustrate this second type, Thomas is not content with only one example, as in the case of the illustration of a natural cause by the image of a heavy body that, by nature, tends to fall to the ground. Now, however, he adds to an example taken from inanimate nature – the wine pouring out of a broken container – one taken from animated nature: the horse that rushes off (*preaecipitanter vadit*) when the reins that retained it are torn (*rupto freno quo retinebatur*). And this is precisely the image to which Petrarch refers in sonnet No. 6 of his *Canzoniere*.

Nonetheless, both cases of ability that Thomas identifies as different ones are based on a natural disposition. For the stone falling to the ground as well as the wine pouring out of its container are subject to their natural properties. If they were hindered from doing so, it was due to an artificial device. And the same applies to the horse that is kept by the rider's reins. In both cases, *techné*, a device

⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de malo*, q. 4 a. 2 ad 4, in *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera Omnia Iussu Leonis XIII P.M. edita*. Tomus XXIII *Quaestiones disputatae de malo*, cura et studium fratrum predicatorum, Rome/Paris 1982. All translations of quotes from Aquinas are mine.

invented by man, hinders a natural reaction. Apart from this, it is important to note that both examples are based on a causal relationship, although Thomas uses the verb *agere*, which refers to intentional effects. In this sense, the notion of “ability” also means nothing other than a natural property. Although the words used in this context refer to a concept of intentional acting, here, they denote exclusively causal relationships. Yet, acting, in the narrow sense of the word, comes into play in the case of keeping wine in a container and bridling a horse, for these comparisons are both based on deliberate actions.

The importance of that difference between a causal relationship and intentional acting that Thomas himself tends to make disappear, will come to light in Thomas’ application of his distinction between different types of dexterity to the *concupiscentia habitualis*, opposed to *concupiscentia actualis*. A habitual desire that results from frequent cases of *concupiscentia actualis* is his first category of *concupiscentia habitualis*. The second kind, instead, is based on reason’s inability to totally control desire. This type, according to Thomas’ argument, is due to the loss of a human ability that Man was given by God in the *status naturae*, before his fall. Thomas calls this ability *iustitia originalis*. As he explains elsewhere in *De malo*, the so-called *iustitia originalis* consists in an orientation of the human mind towards God that enables Man to fulfil God’s will. In the passage just quoted, it is characterized metaphorically as a *rein: vis concupiscibilis non perfecte subditur rationi, sublato freno originalis iustitiae*. Thomas had initially used this example to illustrate a specific sort of *habitus*, that which results from the impediment of a natural disposition, yet, now, the same argument returns as a metaphor. The galloping horse appears to be an allegory of habitual lust, and this variety of *concupiscentia habitualis* is identical to Man’s general propensity toward sinful desire due to his original sin.

Before going back to Petrarch’s sonnet for a close reading with Thomas’ *Quaestiones de malo* in mind, we have to reflect for a moment, about Thomas’ own use of metaphors in his theoretical text. Why does he find it necessary to recur to a metaphor in order to characterize the nature of original sin? To answer this, we should keep in mind that, by the image of the galloping horse, Thomas goes back to a phenomenon that he himself had described before as natural behavior. The horse behaves in accordance with its nature, if, without being held by reins, it rushes off. Insofar as the horse’s behavior corresponds to the nature of that animal, it is also morally correct. But this is precisely what changes when human behavior comes into play. Man not only constitutes an animal, but an animal endowed with reason as the specific characteristics of the *animal rationale*. And the very existence of reason transforms into sin that which is morally correct, or neutral, for any other animal – to be more precise, as an ethical evaluation of behavior itself depends on the existence of reason. But *why*, in the

case of Man, the *animal rationale*, must something be considered a sin that elsewhere is not? Thomas' illustration of human behavior by verbal images of causal behavior tends to obscure the distinction between natural causality and intentional acting. At the same time, it becomes clear that the specific condition of human life is grounded in Man's being composed of different *naturae* competing within himself.

Indeed, Thomas explicitly stresses that Man, as an organic being, shares with plants and animals a *natura vegetativa* and with animals a *natura sensitiva*. Thus, he constitutes the synthesis, the *summa* of all living creatures and, at the same, he is a specific, unique being, the only earthly creature endowed with reason. Yet, as we shall see, it is this very combination of different *naturae* in Man which made it necessary to confer to him, by grace, a specific gift that is not part of his natural equipment. This is why God gave him the so-called *iustitia originalis*, a grace-filled gift that orients Man's mind reliably toward God's will.

As for this *iustitia originalis*, Thomas claims that without the fall of Man, Adam would have passed on this supernatural gift, although conferred by grace, to his descendants:

Est autem considerandum quod primo homini in sua institutione datum fuerat divinitus quoddam supernaturale donum, scilicet originalis iustitia, per quam ratio subdebatur Deo, et inferiores vires rationi, et corpus animae. Hoc autem donum non fuerat datum primo homini ut singulari persone tantum, sed ut cuidam principio totius humane nature, ut scilicet ab eo per originem deriuaretur in posteros.⁸

Now we must observe that to man, at his creation, was given by God a certain supernatural gift, id est the original justice, by which reason is subdued to God, the inferior powers to reason and the body to the soul. This gift, however, was not given the first man as to a singular person, but as a kind of principle of human nature, in order to transmit it to his descendants.

A somewhat strange ambivalence characterizes *iustitia originalis*. It is a grace-filled gift that, however, is transmitted by physical means from one generation to the next. Such ambivalence between grace and nature might also explain why Thomas explicitly states the necessity of the gift of a supernatural *iustitia originalis* to Man, whose natural equipment could not discharge its duties without it:

⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de malo*, q. 4, a. 1 co.

Set praeter hoc auxilium necessarium fuit homini aliud supernaturale auxilium ratione suae compositionis. Est enim homo compositus ex anima et corpore et ex natura intellectuali et sensibili : que quodammodo si suae nature relinquuntur, intellectum aggravant et impediunt ne libere ad summum fastigium contemplationis pervenire possit. Hoc autem auxilium fuit originalis iustitia, per quam mens hominis sic subderetur Deo ut ei subderentur totaliter inferiores vires et ipsum corpus, neque ratio impediretur quominus posset in Deum tendere.⁹

But besides that aid Man needed necessarily a further supernatural aid because of his mixed nature. For Man is composed of soul and body, of his intellectual and his sentient nature; when those are, so to say, left to only their own nature, they weigh down upon the intellect and prevent it to reach the highest degree of contemplation. This gift, however, was the original justice, by which, if the spirit of Man were subdued to God, the inferior powers and the body itself were entirely subdued to his spirit in order to not prevent reason to tend towards God.

Man is unable to orient his mind towards God's will by his own efforts. Human nature, left to itself, cannot impose the predominance of Reason and therefore needs a supernatural gift to that purpose. Yet, if original sin consists in the loss of a supernatural property of Man, and Man, by that loss, is left to his own nature, the *status naturae lapsae* also becomes a natural condition of life. It is no longer possible to consider it as only depraved nature, damaged in punishment of Man's outrageous rebellion against God's command. And, in particular, this transformation constitutes the core of the critical change that traditional Christian anthropology, mainly influenced by Augustine, undergoes in Thomas Aquinas' thought. His rationalization of the traditional dogma is, obviously, paralleled by a naturalization of the fallen world.

But why does Thomas incur the risk of a change of traditional dogma that, as will be seen, is quite subversive? The answer to this question might be found in his scrupulous analysis of the cause of Man's fall:

Ad undecimum dicendum quod originalis iustitia fuit superaddita primo homini ex liberalitate divina. Set quod huic animae non detur a Deo, non est ex parte eius, sed ex parte humane nature, in qua invenitur contrarium prohibens.¹⁰

The original justice was super-added to the nature of the first man by God's generosity: But, whatever is not given to this soul by God, does not belong to him, but to human nature, where some resistance can be found.

On closer consideration, these words prove remarkably hazardous, as they tend to hide the divine origin of Man's nature (*humanae naturae*). However, accord-

⁹ *Ibid.*, q. 5, a. 1 co.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, q. 4, a. 1, ad 11.

ing to Christian belief, Man's natural equipment, as well as any graceful gift to the creatures, is also a gift of the Creator himself: *Credo in unum Deum, Patrem omnipotentem, factorem caeli et terra, visibilium omnium et invisibilium*. There is no exception to this principle. On the other hand, Thomas' tacit contradiction with one basic assumption of Christian dogma, according to which everything that exists originated from the Almighty, reveals all the more clearly the specific interest underlying Thomas' precarious argument. It looks as if, at any cost, he has to find a means to deny or, at least, to, somehow, hide God's responsibility for Adam's sin, even at the cost of other incongruence. The rationalization of Christian dogma by scholastic philosophy obviously makes this problem a central issue: How could it happen that God's most noble creature on earth failed so substantially and so quickly? The traditional, mainly Augustinian, answer, centered on the reprehensible action of a rebellious creature in God's perfect Creation, no longer suffices to guarantee the integrity of the omnipotent and omnibenevolent Creator. This is why Thomas attempts to identify an autonomous area of nature, given exclusively into the responsibility of Man, in order to get the chance to play off Adam's ingratitude for a graceful gift against the deficiencies of his natural equipment. As helpful as this argument might appear at first sight, it affects the very base of God's uniqueness and omnipotence. The solution it offers to the intricate problem which it intends to resolve, therefore, proves quite precarious. Accordingly, Thomas' transformation of the status of *naturae lapsae* into the natural equipment of Man produces a number of quite remarkable consequences that seriously menace the integrity of Christian belief. It is these side effects that come to light in the Italian literature of the 14th century as Petrarch's sonnet No. 6 and its transformation of ancient myth can paradigmatically demonstrate.

If one reads Petrarch's sonnet in the light of Thomas Aquinas' allegory of lust, a strange discrepancy between Thomas' argument and the plot told by Petrarch's poem becomes visible – a discrepancy that also affects the ancient myth. Unlike Apollo in the traditional version of that story, Petrarch, although sitting on a horse, hardly moves forward, whereas the Greek God used nothing but his feet to run. But why is the rider so slow?

An answer to this question might be found if we consider the information given in the second stanza more closely, where the reader is mainly told three things: The rider calls back the horse that deviates from the right path; he spurs it and tries to force it to return. The meaning of the substitution of Thomas' galloping by Petrarch's slow horse becomes more evident if we take into account Petrarch's tacit reference in these lines to another famous text of Italian literature: Dante's *Commedia*. Never mentioned explicitly, Dante's epos is omnipresent in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, being, however, much more subject to contradiction than to affirmation. Even the syntagmatic structure of Dante's poem is mirrored in that

intertextual dialogue. The whole series of the opening sonnets of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* is characterized by an implicit dialogue with the beginning of Dante's *Commedia*, especially with the first canto of *Inferno* (whereas as the end of Petrarch's book of songs, refers to the end of the *Commedia*, the last *canzone* of *Canzoniere*, No. 366, undertaking a dialogue with St. Bernard's prayer to the Virgin in Paradiso XXXIII, the last *canto* of the *sacro poema*). Petrarch's sonnet No. 6, more precisely, refers to the very first lines of the *Commedia*, its famous opening verses:

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura
ché la diritta via era smarrita.¹¹

In the middle of the road of our life I found
myself in a dark forest, because I had lost the
right path.

As the commentaries to the *Canzoniere* prove, it is well known that Petrarch alludes to Dante's *Commedia* from the very beginning of his sonnet, by the participle *traviato*, and by his further mentioning of the horse's deviation from the right path. But the semantic effect of this intertextual hint becomes evident only if one notices much more the differences than the similarities between both texts, because Petrarch uses the parallel between them predominantly as a means of marking distance. Whereas Dante, at the beginning of *Inferno* I, claims that he has lost the right path (*ché la diritta via era smarrita*), Petrarch's horse strays from the safe road (*secura strada*). By this transformation, a double change takes place, the result of which is obvious. For in both cases moral connotations are suppressed by Petrarch's formulations. Instead of a *via*, an age old ethical symbol of life, Petrarch uses the much more technical term *strada*. And the adjective *dritta* is replaced by *secura*. Whereas Dante's term *dritta* evokes a moral norm, Petrarch refers to the *safe* road, that is to say, the road that allows one to reach one's destination reliably. The rider tries to call his horse onto that road, and, as his acoustic efforts are ineffectual, he spurs the horse and uses its reins to bring it back there by physical force. For the horse, by its own efforts, does not pursue his goal consistently enough. The behavior of the rider is characterized by increasing violence to impose his will.

A second difference in relation to the beginning of Dante's *Commedia* should be noted. In the opening lines of *Inferno* it is the poet himself who has lost the right path. On the contrary, the poet in Petrarch's sonnet knows quite well where to go and how to get there as fast as possible. Yet, it is the *desio* that refuses to

11 D. Alighieri, *Inferno* I, 1–3, in D. Alighieri, *Commedia*, E. Pasquini and A. Quaglio (eds.), Milan 1987, 43.

obey and is about to lose sight of his goal. In particular, the second attempt of the rider to gain control of his horse by spurring it deserves attention. The rider tries to drive his animal. It is he who does what in Thomas' allegory of desire the galloping horse does just by his own nature (and what, here, the horse itself obviously does not).

But what are the semantic consequences resulting from the changes Petrarch undertakes in comparison with the original version of Thomas' allegory, to which this sonnet unmistakably refers and which stands for sexual desire? In the case of Petrarch's sonnet, reason does not want to gain control over the horse in order to stop its desire, but it uses some devices, spurs and reins, to drive the animal and orient it toward a specific goal which is nothing other than the goal of the *desio* itself. The loss of control, here, is understood as the deficiencies of an instrumental reason that has itself adopted the *desio*'s intentions. Reason now only aims to control the most effective realization of the *desio*'s plan, but it no longer tries to deflect the horse, i.e. desire, from its intention of pursuing Laura who is trying to escape.

This reading of Petrarch's sonnet implies some consequences for a correct interpretation of the very first line of the poem, and, especially, for its juxtaposition of the two seemingly synonymous adjectives, *traviato* and *folle*: *Sì traviato è 'l folle mi' desio / a seguitar costei che 'n fuga è volta*. The traditional reading of the sonnet, in accordance with Thomas' allegory of the galloping horse, would suggest that the folly of the *desio* in pursuing Laura has to be understood as its moral error. Both adjectives, *traviato* and *folle*, would refer to the moral deficiency of desire. However, the logic of the poem's language and, particularly, its syntax, not only suggest, but require a different reading: *mi' desio*, that is to say, the poet's highly eroticized love for Laura, symbolized by the horse, is mad (*traviato*) because it is directed toward a woman whose chastity will, in all probability, prevent the fulfilment of his wishes. And this *desio* deviates from the right, i.e. appropriate, path, because it does not follow consistently enough the goal to which the poet's "I" wants to direct it. Consequently, the desire is *traviato* as it deviates from its own path. Petrarch only superficially seems to refer affirmatively to Thomas' allegory. On closer consideration, its quotation is equivalent to its undermining, as reason, in Petrarch's case, does not even attempt to prevent *desio* from following its goal. On the contrary, reason encourages, or even forces the *desio* to pursue its objective with more determination. Comparing the results of our interpretation of Petrarch's poem with Thomas' typology of different kinds of *concupiscentiae*, the moral situation of the poet described in this sonnet – or, more precisely in its octave – corresponds to a *concupiscentia actualis* that has not yet become a *concupiscentia habitualis*.

However, this state of affairs obviously changes with the beginning of the sonnet's sextet: *Et poi che 'l fren per forza a sé raccoglie, / i' mi rimango in signoria*

di lui. These verses, again, seem to create an expectation that does not come true. If they say that the *desio* – allegorically, the horse – seizes the reins, they seem to suggest that only now does this animal gain control of the rider. But, reading more precisely, the wording of the poem says something quite different. The critical question in this regard is the interpretation of *poi che*. Does this conjunction open a temporal or a causal preposition? The key to answering this question is given by the verb of the main clause: *rimango*. The meaning of this verb makes it impossible to assume that the horse only now gains power over the rider, as it is seizing the reins in this very moment. But *rimango* indicates that the rider continues to be under the control of the horse. This verb makes clear that from now on, the *io* is irrevocably dominated by the *desio* because the horse now permanently holds the reins. As a consequence, however, we must conclude that from the very beginning, the poet's "I", in other words, his reason, had adopted the *desio*'s goal as his own. Yet, from now on, it loses any power over his horse's desire. To put it in Thomas Aquinas' terms: the rider's *concupiscentia actualis* becomes a *concupiscentia habitualis*.

This final loss of power is, unequivocally, denoted by the poet's remark that the horse is acting against the rider's will: *mal mio grado a morte mi trasporta*. Typically, here, but only here, the moral sense of the horse's allegory comes to light. For death caused by lust means "sin": deadly sin that triggers eternal punishment. Only in the moment of its total loss of control over desire does reason recognize its moral fault.

The conclusion we just have drawn and according to which the erotic desire represented by the allegorical horse is the desire of the lyrical "I," puts into question one of the basic features of Christian ethics, namely, the opposition between reason and emotion. As the example of Dante's *incontinenti* paradigmatically demonstrated, the task of reason is the control of affects, the failure of which leads to sin. But, on closer consideration, Thomas' analysis of human action is far from simply continuing the traditional opposition of reason and emotion. If, from a categorical point of view, they are still opposite entities, they nonetheless operationally lose their distinctiveness to some extent in the very process of acting.

According to the basic principle of human action, every object of human desire must be something good – a principle that Man shares with all of nature. Unlike other creatures, however, in his evaluation of external objects, Man is not guided by instinct, as the *animalia bruta* are, but follows the instructions of his reason. On the other hand, as they are corporal creatures too, human beings also are influenced by their senses. Consequently, human behavior is determined by two different powers, by his *appetitus sensitivus* and his *appetitus intellectivus* or *rationalis* which is identical with his will. And, as any *appetitus*, will is also

exclusively an inclination toward something good.¹² Yet unlike any other kind of *appetitus*, the *appetitus rationalis* is subject to error. Its capacity for judgment includes its susceptibility to errors, which is due in large part to the relation between will and the senses. To understand their interaction, it is, therefore, indispensable to describe the interplay between the *appetitus sensitivus* and the *appetitus rationalis*. However, such description presupposes a precise distinction between both entities that is hard to establish.

The difficulties involved here come to light by Thomas' ascription of an intermediate position to will, located between reason and *appetitus sensitivus*: *Ad secundum dicendum quod voluntas media est inter rationem et concupiscibilem, et potest ab utroque moveri*.¹³ At first sight, this statement is obviously opposed to Thomas' previous clear distinction according to which the *appetitus sensitivus* is determined by sensual perception, whereas the *appetitus rationalis* follows an evaluation made by reason.¹⁴ Both appetites share the evaluation of their object as something good, as all appetites follow only an apprehended good.¹⁵ But who is the subject of this evaluation? In the case of the *appetitus rationalis* the answer is evident, as reason itself is responsible for that assessment. But by whom is the object of the *appetitus sensitivus* evaluated?

12 *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Summa Theologiae*, I–II, q. 8, a. 1 co., Turin 1988: “Respondeo dicendum quod voluntas est appetitus quidam rationalis. Omnis autem appetitus non est nisi boni. Cuius ratio est quia appetitus nihil aliud est quam inclinatio appetentis in aliquid. Nihil autem inclinatur nisi in aliquid simile et conveniens. Cum igitur omnis res, in quantum est ens et substantia, sit quoddam bonum, necesse est ut omnis inclinatio sit in bonum. Et inde est quod Philosophus dicit, in I *Ethic.*, quod bonum est *quod omnia appetunt*.” (“The will is a rational appetite. Now every appetite is only of something good. The reason of this is that the appetite is nothing else than an inclination of a person desirous of a thing towards that thing. Now every inclination is to something like and suitable to the thing inclined. Since, therefore, everything, inasmuch as it is being and substance, is a good, it must needs be that every inclination is to something good. And hence it is that the Philosopher says (*Ethic.* i, 1) that ‘the good is that which all desire’.”)

13 *Ibid.*, II–II, q. 155, a. 3, ad 2. (“The will stands between reason and the concupiscible, and may be moved by either.”)

14 *S. Thomae Aquinatis Scriptum Super Sententiis Magistri Petri Lombardi*, lib. 2, d. 24, q. 3, a. 1 co., recognovit atque iterum edidit, R.P. Maria Fabianus Moos, Parisiis 1933: “Appetitus autem sensitivus est qui ex praecedenti imaginatione vel sensu consequitur, et hic vocatur motus sensualitatis. Appetitus autem rationalis est qui consequitur apprehensionem rationis, et hic dicitur motus rationis, qui est actus voluntatis.” (“The sensual appetite follows some previous imagination or sensation; this is why it is called ‘sensual.’ The rational appetite is the one that follows an evaluation by reason. This is why it is called a movement of reason, which is an act of will.”)

15 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I–II, q. 30, a. 3, ad 2: “Obiectum autem appetitus est bonum apprehensum” (“The object of the appetite is the apprehended good.”)

It is precisely here that difficulties begin, as, with regard to the sensual appetite, the operations of reason and senses can no longer be clearly distinguished. For the good apprehended by the senses is evaluated by reason too. Remarkable in this sense is an argument advanced by Thomas Aquinas in his *Scriptum super Sententiis*, where he not only emphasizes the dependence of the evaluation of the *bonum sensibile* on reason, but also discusses the ontological base of the relation between the *natura sensitiva* and the *natura rationalis*:

Quia autem, ut dicit Dionysius, 7 cap. *De Divin. nomin.*, «divina sapientia conjungit fines primorum principiis secundorum», quia omnis natura inferior in sui supremo attingit ad infinitum naturae superioris, secundum quod participat aliquid de natura superioris, quamvis deficienter; ideo tam in apprehensione quam in appetitu sensitivo invenitur aliquid in quo sensitivum rationem attingit. *Quod enim animal imagnetur* formas apprehensas per sensum, hoc est de natura sensitivae apprehensionis secundum se; sed quod apprehendat illas intentiones quae non cadunt sub sensu sicut amicitiam, odium, et hujusmodi, hoc est sensitivae partis secundum quod attingit rationem. Unde pars illa in hominibus, in quibus est perfectior propter conjunctionem ad animam rationalem, dicitur *ratio particularis*, quia confert de intentionibus particularibus; in aliis autem animalibus, quia non confert, sed ex instinctu naturali habet hujusmodi intentiones apprehendere, non dicitur ratio, sed aestimatio.¹⁶

The very *natura sensitiva*, because of its capacity of estimation, is part of reason. The metaphysical grounds for their partial conjunction relies in every nature's inclination to participate in the next higher nature. In the case of Man, this conjunction is called *ratio particularis*. It does not take into account the general good (*bonum*) but focuses on particular aspects. Here, it comes to light why nature necessarily required some gift given by God's grace without which it could not align reason with His will. The opposition between reason and senses is, on closer consideration, one between different powers of reason, between *ratio particularis* and *ratio universalis*. From this point of view, the opposition of reason and

16 Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super Sententiis*, lib. 3, d. 26, q. 1, a. 2 co. ("But, as Dionysius says in the seventh chapter of *De divinis nominibus*, divine wisdom unites the ends of first things to the beginnings of second things, as the summit of a lower nature touches the base of the higher nature, and thus, though deficiently, has part in its nature; therefore in the sensual apprehension as well as in the sensual appetite something in which the sensual nature touches reason can be found. That any animal imagines the forms that it has apprehended by the senses, follows from the very nature of sensual apprehension; but, that it apprehends also the intentions which do not fall under the sensual, as friendship, hatred and other similar entities, belongs to the sensual part that touches reason. Therefore, that part in Man, where it is more perfect than in other animals because of its conjunction with the rational soul, is called "particular reason" as it deals with particular intentions; in all other animals, as it does not compare, but apprehends such intentions by natural instinct, it is not called reason, but estimation").

senses, with regard to human action, is an only superficial one, as reason always plays a role in the evaluation of sensual objects.

However, the intersection of *appetitus sensitivus* and reason has considerable influence on will that, as a consequence, cannot be simply described as *appetitus rationalis*. Central in this regard is the intermediate position of *voluntas* between *appetitus sensitivus* and reason just mentioned. Whereas, on the one hand, Thomas explicitly states that only an evaluation by reason causes the movement of will, other statements that obviously diverge from this position can be found as well. In a continent man, for instance, will is moved by reason, in an incontinent one, however, it is moved by the concupiscible.¹⁷ Consequently, the *appetitus sensitivus* itself has to be considered as a kind of will. Indeed, we saw that reason plays a part in the evaluation of any *bonum sensibile*, as it is operated by the *ratio particularis*. In this sense, the *appetitus sensitivus* is an *appetitus rationalis*, too. It is only logical that, as a result of that intersection of reason and senses, Thomas Aquinas also distinguishes between different forms of will, opposing a *voluntas deliberata* to a *voluntas non deliberata*.¹⁸

This ambivalence of will deeply influences the concept of *amor*, which plays a major part in Thomas' action theory. *Amor* is the general principle of movement of any *appetitus*.¹⁹ In the case of *appetitus sensitivus* as well as in the case

17 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II–II, q. 155, a. 3, ad 2: “Ad secundum dicendum quod voluntas media est inter rationem et concupiscibilem, et potest ab utroque moveri. In eo autem qui est continens, movetur a ratione : in eo autem qui est incontinens, movetur a concupiscibili. Et ideo continentia potest attribui rationi sicut primo moventi, et incontinentia concupiscibili : quamvis utrumque immediate pertineat ad voluntatem sicut ad proprium subiectum.” (“The will stands between reason and the concupiscible, and may be moved by either. In the continent man it is moved by the reason, in the incontinent man it is moved by the concupiscible. Hence continence may be ascribed to the reason as to its first mover, and incontinence to the concupiscible power: though both belong immediately to the will as their proper subject.”)

18 Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super Sententiis*, lib. 2, d. 24, q. 3, a. 1 co.: “Sed rationis apprehensio dupliciter esse potest. Una simplex et absoluta, quando scilicet statim sine discussione apprehensum dijudicat, et talem apprehensionem sequitur voluntas quae dicitur non deliberata. Alia est inquisitiva, quando scilicet ratiocinando, bonum vel malum, conveniens vel nocivum investigat, et talem apprehensionem sequitur voluntas deliberata.” (“But, the apprehension of the reason can come into being in two different ways. One of them is simple and absolute, when reason judges the apprehended object without any discussion. And this apprehension the will which is called not deliberative. The other one aims at research and investigates if something is good or bad, appropriate or harmful. And this apprehension is followed by the deliberative will.”)

19 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I–II, q. 26, a. 1 co.: “In unoquoque autem horum appetituum, amor dicitur illud quod est principium motus tendentis in finem amatum.” (“Now in each of these appetites, the name ‘love’ is given to the principle movement towards the end loved.”)

of will, love appears as pleasure in the good toward which the appetite tends.²⁰ This is why love initiates a movement toward that good which is called desire (*desiderium*).²¹ However, this identification of *amor* and *appetitus sensitivus* does not go without some metaphorization. *Amor* is defined as passion, as an *effectus agentis in patiente*.²² Consequently, the *appetitus sensitivus* is moved by the object of its desire.²³ This way, *amor* basically constitutes an *appetitus sensitivus*. Only by a certain extension of the concept of *voluntas* might *amor* be defined as will.²⁴ Whereas will can only be called *amor* metaphorically, reversely, only in an improper way the *ratio particularis* might be defined as reason. Both love and reason become metaphorical concepts as soon as they are intermingled with each other; yet, in spite of their then only metaphorical status, they seem to remain indispensable for any explanation of human action.

The natural state of Man, deprived of the benevolent effects of *iustitia originalis*, is characterized by a deep ambivalence of the relation between reason and senses. Consequently, the use of reason becomes contingent, as it is explicitly said that sensual desire is not *completely* subdued to reason: *vis concupiscibilis non perfecte subditur rationi*. It is entirely unpredictable when reason is able to impose its natural predominance. It is these inconsistencies of scholastic action theory that are represented by Petrarch in his *Canzoniere*.

In this regard, it is significant that the birth of a *concupiscentia habitualis*, that is to say of a habitual, permanent and, therefore, obvious desire in the poet provokes a visible change in the lady's attitude. In ballata No. 11 of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, the setting of which, by references to the code of courtly love, is

20 *Ibid.*: "Et similiter coaptatio appetitus sensitivi, vel voluntatis, ad aliquod bonum, idest ipsa complacentia boni, dicitur amor sensitivus, vel intellectivus seu rationalis." ("In like manner the aptitude of the sensitive appetite or of the will to some good, that is to say, its very complacency in good is called 'sensitive love', or 'intellectual' or 'rational love'.")

21 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I–II, q. 26, a. 2 co.: "et ex hac complacentia sequitur motus in appetibile, qui est desiderium" ("and from this complacency results a movement towards that same object, and this movement is desire")

22 *Ibid.*

23 *Ibid.*: "Sic etiam ipsum appetibile dat appetitui, primo quidem, quandam coaptationem ad ipsum, quae est complacentia appetibilis; ex qua sequitur motus ad appetibile." ("In the same way the appetible object gives the appetite, first, a certain adaptation to itself, which consists in complacency in that object; and from this follows movement towards the appetible object.")

24 *Ibid.*: "Sic ergo, cum amor consistat in quadam immutatione appetitus ab appetibili, manifestum est quod amor et passio: proprie quidem, secundum quod est in concupiscibili; communiter autem, et extenso nomine, secundum quod est in voluntate." ("Since, therefore, love consists in a change wrought in the appetite by the appetible object, it is evident that love is a passion: properly so called, according as it is in the concupiscible faculty; in a wider and extended sense, according as it is in the will.")

remarkably different from the scenario in sonnet No. 6, the reader is told that Laura changes her behavior toward him, as she notes the poet's now unmistakable intentions:

Lassare il velo o per sole o per ombra,
donna, non vi vid'io
poi che in me conosceste il gran desio
ch'ogni altra voglia d'entr'al cor mi sgombra.

Mentr'io portava i be' pensier' celati,
ch'anno la mente desiando morta,
vidivi di pietate ornare il volto;
ma poi ch'Amor di me vi fece accorta,
fuor i biondi capelli allor velati,
et l'amoroso sguardo in sé raccolto.
Quel ch'i' più desiava in voi m'è tolto.²⁵

I have not seen you, lady, leave off your veil in
sun or shadow, since you knew that great desire
in myself that all other wishes in the heart
desert me.

While I held the lovely thoughts concealed, that
make the mind desire death, I saw your face
adorned with pity: but when Love made you wary
of me, then blonde hair was veiled, and loving
glances gathered to themselves. That which I
most desired in you is taken from me.

The poet loses the lady's favor as his intentions become obvious. We learn of his *gran desio* that it chases all other desires out of his heart. Thus, in retrospect we also learn why, at first, the desire in sonnet No. 6 so inconsistently pursued his objective. The initial inability of the allegorical horse was, probably, due to a lack of concentration, i.e. to the fact that it did not sufficiently focus on that one goal. It might have borne other pleasures at heart as well. Only now, as reason has definitively lost its power over the affect and Laura recognizes what the lover is up to – and therefore withdraws her former favor – does the moral significance of his behavior become evident. Interestingly, moral insight determines reason's conduct only when it has already lost all control of actions. Again, it becomes clear what reason wanting to bring desire to the *secura strada* means – to the path that leads directly to the envisaged goal, i.e. Laura. At the beginning of the sonnet, reason operates in a purely technical way. It aims to control the effectiveness of desire, of *his* desire, and not to defend its moral integrity. Moral issues become relevant only when the fulfilment of desire becomes hopeless.

A quite remarkable conclusion results from this interpretation of both poems. The poet's change in attitude towards his love brings to light that he was willing to accept moral death, that is to say to neglect his moral fault, as long as the *desio* still promised pleasure. Only the loss of any prospect of pleasure leads to an insight into moral deficiency. Petrarch's *Canzoniere* portrays a remarkably carefully calculating reason.

²⁵ Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, XI, 1–10, 52. English translation of A. S. Kline: http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Italian/Petrarch.htm#anchor_Toc13045780

The reference to the moral death that the sole suffers by sin in line 11 of sonnet No. 6 continues to be evoked in the following verses of this poem. The change in Laura's behavior described in balata No. 11 comes to light in sonnet No. 6 by a further change of the ancient myth of Daphne and Apollo, to which the poet alludes explicitly only in the first and last stanza of the sonnet, but which, as we have seen, is present in the entire poem. Unlike what is written in the sonnet's last three verses, nowhere in the rendering of that myth by Ovid, who is Petrarch's source, is the laurel's fruit mentioned. On the contrary, in Petrarch's version, it gains significant importance.

Petrarch's mentioning of the *lauro* refers to that moment of the mythical story when Daphne in Ovid's version is transformed into a laurel. Therefore, in accordance with the traditional myth, its fruits are bitter, as they cannot offer anything but deception to someone who is eager to take carnal pleasure from them. However, the precise formulation used by Petrarch bears a significant hint to its specific meaning (though none of the commentaries refers to it). Implicitly, the term *acerbo frutto* quotes a saying from St. Ambrosius' treatise *De lapsu virginis consecratae liber unus* that became a kind of proverb in the Middle Ages. It concerns, as the title of that treatise suggests, the fall of a consecrated woman:

O quam acerbus fructus luxuriae! Amari-
or felle, crudelior gladio.²⁶

How bitter is the fruit of lust! More bitter than
bile, more cruel than a sword.

As the story of Adam's seduction by Eve in *Genesis* suggests, apples are, for quite obvious reasons, a popular symbol of lust. This is why they draw attention to the fall of Man. Thus, in Petrarch's sonnet, the myth of Daphne and Apollo is combined with the Biblical story of the origin of all sin in the Garden of Eden. By this reference to the fall of Man, the poet's *desio* appears as a representation of original sin, as a manifestation of the *peccatum originale* that Thomas allegorically expressed by the image of the galloping horse.²⁷

By means of the *acerbo frutto*, the *lauro* of our sonnet combines both symbolic features with which it operates. On the one hand, the bitter fruits of the tree, the effects of which the last verse mentions, refer to the lover's bad experiences:

²⁶ Ambrosius, *De lapsu virginis consecratae liber unus*, 10, 46. (PL 16, 381).

²⁷ Thus, Petrarch combines an allegorical interpretation of myth with its transformation. In contrast to a widespread opinion, Petrarch by no means gives up the medieval allegorical interpretation of ancient myth in order to re-establish its original narrative integrity. On the contrary, he not only continues the traditional moral exegesis of myth but combines it with a considerable modification of its plot. And he is not the first to do so. I only mention canto 26 of Dante's *Inferno*, where the myth of Ulysses undergoes some quite important changes.

gustando afflige più che non conforta. His desire is not satisfied. The contradictory experience of love, the paradoxical nature of which is also implied in that verse, is expressed almost everywhere by the *Canzoniere*, as is generally known, in seemingly endless oxymora. Yet, at the same time, the bitter fruit of lust represents the moral risk of ephemeral pleasures punished by eternal pains.

Yet, on closer consideration, the congruence of both symbolic layers appears to be nothing but superficial. Crucial in this regard is the way in which the dogma of original sin comes into play. The poem alludes to that dogma by evoking a bitter fruit that only a lover desires to pick from a tree. But in this way, the lover's undoing is caused by something that, from the point of view of orthodox moral theology, has to be considered as Laura's virtue, namely her chastity. The lover's desire is, therefore, directed to something uncontroversially good. He is attracted by a perfection that also includes a moral integrity which is linked with bodily beauty.²⁸ Paradoxically, sinful desire is directed to perfection. But this paradox seems to suggest that the penalty imposed on Man to punish his fault not only triggers an inversion of the natural hierarchy between reason and senses, but also corrupts the enjoyment of perfection. It looks as if, through the perversion of nature as a consequence of Man's fall, perfection, especially, causes perdition.

The orthodox concept of original sin is based on ideas of power. As Man was unwilling to accept God's supremacy, by way of punishment for his rebellion against the Creator's will, the natural hierarchy within his own nature is perverted. This is why the (ontologically inferior) emotions gain power over the (metaphysically superior) *ratio*. Petrarch's sonnet, at first sight, seems to confirm these conditions of power. For, also in his poem, reason is controlled by *desio*. Yet, this accordance with traditional dogma is only a superficial one. For the predominance of the affect is nothing else but the continuation and confirmation of

²⁸ To avoid any misunderstanding, unlike the poets of the so-called *dolce stil novo*, Petrarch does not, as is frequently pretended, adhere to the neo-Platonic principle according to which corporal beauty is an expression of moral perfection. On the contrary, both beauty and virtue are considered to be opposite entities: "Due gran nemiche insieme erano agiunte, Bellezza et Honestà, con pace tanta che mai rebellïon l'anima santa non sentì poi ch'a star seco fur giunte" (CCXCVII, 1–4). ("Two great enemies were brought together, Beauty and Chastity, in such peace that her sacred spirit never knew rebellion, from the moment they were joined in her"). In Petrarch, the relation between beauty and virtue is by no means based on correspondence, but is an agonal one, as beauty is not the expression of chastity, but its continuous threat. Beauty produces desire in the man who is addicted to corporal attractiveness, and it exposes the beautiful woman to permanent seduction. The agonal relation between beauty and virtue therefore implies that beauty, increasing the risk of losing chastity, makes it all the more precious. (For more detail cf. A. Kablitz, *Zwischen Rhetorik und Ontologie. Struktur und Geschichte der Allegorie im Spiegel der jüngeren Literaturwissenschaft*, Heidelberg 2016, 129 f.)

a state of affairs that, at first, reason itself had deliberately created and which, finally, becomes, irreversible. From the very beginning, *desio* is *mi'desio*, reason's own desire. Therefore, the impediment of enjoyment is, finally, considered by reason as the primary disaster. Only insight into the impossibility of pleasure produces a (delayed) moral attitude.

Thomas' allegory of *concupiscentia* confronts two abstract categories: reason entering into conflict with desire. But in Petrarch's sonnet the opposition between both categories is suspended from the very beginning. From its first line, desire is *il folle mi'desio*, and the slow move of the horse is denoted by the poet's "I" as his own slowness. Here, reason is always involved in sensuality. The dogma of original sin, described by Thomas as the loss of *iustitia originalis*, is here taken with radical seriousness. We should remember in this connection that Thomas had defined this *iustitia originalis* as a supernatural gift to Man by God. By his fall, Man thus lost his mind's orientation toward God, meaning that he also lost it in general, i.e. completely. As a consequence of that loss, he is left to his own nature. Strictly speaking, under the conditions of a fallen world, Man has no other choice than to always be involved in sensuality. And as such, the desire for perfection becomes a cause of perdition. The logic of Petrarch's sonnet, which, at first sight, is based on an inversion of the logic of Thomas' allegory of *concupiscentia*, on closer consideration, only draws some critical conclusions from this allegory that are already implied in itself.

Because desire is also always the desire of reason, its resistance to the senses can, at most, be the criticism of a lack of ability to pursue its goal. Yet, under the conditions of original sin, Thomas' logical distinction between *concupiscentia actualis* and *concupiscentia habitualis* becomes ineffective, for, here, every actual desire is already bound to the habitual desire which is identical to the *peccatum originale* itself. Thomas thus makes a distinction between two categories, the existence of which is important to Man under the conditions of his *status naturae*, but which loses all significance under the conditions of a fallen world. In other words: Thomas marginalizes the consequences of original sin in his ethical theory. As a result, by his transformation of Thomas' allegory – a transformation that, on closer consideration, equals a total inversion – Petrarch brings about the deficiencies of Thomas Aquinas' theoretical approach. He does nothing other than draw explicitly some conclusions from Thomas' argument that he himself was unwilling, or unable, to do. Under the conditions of original sin, the possibility of a distinction between *concupiscentia habitualis* and *concupiscentia actualis* proves obsolete; Man's reason always is bound to his senses.

Yet, by Petrarch's inversion of Thomas' allegory, it is not only this symbolic representation of sin that loses its identity. The same applies to the ancient myth. What is particularly missing in Petrarch's rendering of the age-old plot is any kind

of metamorphosis. Laura's transformation into a laurel, in this sonnet, is only a verbal one. It replaces the initial circumscription of the poet's beloved woman, in verse 2, by a word that alludes to her name and illustrates her character. Laura now *demonstrates* her refusal to fulfil the lovers wishes, but she is still the same. The narrative metamorphosis is, strictly speaking, replaced by a change of the allegorical representation of her chastity. Her (now successful) attempt to escape as well as the figure of the laurel is nothing else but different symbolic representations of her virtue. They illustrate Laura's inaccessibility as well as her beauty. Consequently, the logic of the plot becomes less conclusive. Any transformation of Laura into a laurel becomes useless, if she is easily able to escape because the rider is so slow, and unlike Apollo, he has no chance of reaching her. The loss of conclusiveness, which characterizes this narrative plot, is due to Petrarch's transformation of the traditional myth and vividly mirrors the consequences which the tacit implications of the dogma bring about – consequences which are made evident in Petrarch's sonnet. The lack of conclusiveness of the dogma comes to light, not least through the disintegration of the ancient myth.

This is the twist Petrarch gave to the medieval allegorical interpretation of myth: no longer must the myth reveal the truth of dogma; instead, the transformation of the myth mirrors the implicit consequences of the dogma which the theological theory itself keeps secret. *Volui nec potui*: this was the famous formula by which Augustine characterized the weakness of reason under the condition of original sin. Yet, the increasing rationalization of Christian belief in scholastic philosophy triggers an even more radical marginalization of reason. It not only uses its power over the senses, it is now involved in the senses themselves.