

Interviewer Grace Smith

ITAL 396

Professor Schneider

2019 Fall Final

An Interview with Petrarch

Interviewer: Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the post-game review of the Humanists' World Cup! I am your host. As you just watched, the Humanists' World Cup is a tournament dedicated to testing players and their commitment to the humanist way of life. Our guest today is the famous Francesco Petrarch, who was born in Arezzo Italy. Petrarch, the game today was filled with many excellent humanists, including yourself. Reflecting on your gameplay today, what do you think was your most influential move?

Petrarch: Thank you for having me! I think my best attribute on the field today was my ability to “[integrate] ancient pagan learning with Christian literature.”¹ Without my contribution, the other humanists I played with today would not have been able to stand on the shoulders of giants.

Interviewer: When you use this term ‘giants,’ who are you referring to? Are they other players on the field or are they not? Who are these giants?!

Petrarch: Well, you haven't done your research, have you? I am referring to ancient scholars such as Aristotle and Cicero. The men of the ancient world worked to form the ideal forms of oration and philosophy.²

Interviewer: What was the hardest part of working with the works of these giants? What barriers did you have to cross to train with them?

¹ Witt, Ronald. "Petrarch, Creator of the Christian Humanist." In *Petrarch and Boccaccio: The Unity of Knowledge in the Pre-modern World*, edited by Candido Igor, 65-77. Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2018.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvbj7kck.7>.

² Quillen, Carol E. "A Tradition Invented: Petrarch, Augustine, and the Language of Humanism." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53, no. 2 (1992): 179-207. doi:10.2307/2709870. And Seigel, Jerrold E. "Ideals of Eloquence and Silence in Petrarch." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 26, no. 2 (1965): 147-74. doi:10.2307/2708225.

Petrarch: I think one would assume the language barrier would have been the hardest. I trained with Cicero's Latin writings, but I actually found that the Latin language became my friend. I actually opted to translate other humanist works into Latin so that they could last.³ The language barrier was not the largest issue with these works. I found the most complicated aspect of these training sessions to be the difference between what I was learning and what I had learned in my faith...

Interviewer: I'm sorry to interrupt, but can you elaborate on that a bit for all our viewers at home?

Petrarch: As I studied the work of St. Augustine, I discovered that he had a great admiration for Cicero, as did I. Even though Augustine used pagan thought to help establish Christian doctrine, Augustine's love of both were hierarchical. From Augustine, I learned that faith was of the uppermost importance but from my own studies I learned that if the two fields were equal incredible things could occur. I actually wrote down my experiences with integrating the two in the "Ascent of Mont Ventoux."⁴

Interviewer: If I may paraphrase, what you're saying is that you found a way to equalize both religious and ancient texts for your own study and use? Wow, revolutionary. Aside from curiosity surrounding your experience on the field and training, I'm curious about what you thought of the other players. Who impressed you?

Petrarch: Well, I am enamored with Boccaccio's work always. He is one of my contemporaries that I insisted must be available in Latin.⁵ His work is provocative but not presumptuous.

Interviewer: You seem to have that word presumptuous on hold for other players. Are there any other players on the field that you reserve that terms for?

Petrarch: I am lucky that they were not on the field today because presumptuous players don't belong at the Humanists' World Cup; I cannot stand physicians. I know they were not on the field today, but they are always claiming that they should be included in the

³ Petrarch, Francesco. "Tale of Griselda a Tale of Wifely Obedience." *Presidents ad Fellows of Harvard College*. 2006. <http://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/special/authors/petrarch/pet-gris.html>

⁴ Francesco Petrarch. "The Ascent of Mont Ventoux." *Fordham University*. 2019.

⁵ Petrarch, Francesco. "Tale of Griselda a Tale of Wifely Obedience." *Presidents ad Fellows of Harvard College*. 2006. <http://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/special/authors/petrarch/pet-gris.html>

tournament. They are not philosophers or scholars; they are mechanics of the human body.⁶

Interviewer: To our viewers at home, are you hearing this!? You do not hold your tongue for these physicians.

Petrarch: The physicians I have had close contact with believe that they can sell philosophy! One cannot sell philosophy! You cannot put philosophy up for sale!⁷ Those physician types always insist that they too are philosophers, but they are not. How dare they!

Interviewer: I do not want to compare you to physicians, but were there any periods that during your training that you felt as if you were removed from humanism or not playing to your full potential?

Petrarch: I do not think there was ever a period during which I was not a humanist, but I can look back on my own work and identify some inconsistencies or impossibilities. In my *Secretum*, I openly acknowledge the importance of consistency and its relationship to wisdom, but inherently my works are full of inconsistencies. For example, in that same piece I define the highest wisdom or aspiration of man is composed of stoicism, but stoicism and aspiration are easily made hypocritical of each other. For a man to be entirely stoic there can be limited desire, but to have goals to aspire for is to have desire. But at least I am not trying to sell my inconsistencies, like others I know...

Interviewer: What was the most physically challenging portion of your training?

Petrarch: There were multiple times throughout my life where I tried to mimic St. Augustine's and other ecclesiastical heads celibacy to benefit my studies. When I was forty, or

⁶ Celenza, Christopher. "Petrarch and the History of Philosophy." In *Petrarch and Boccaccio: The Unity of Knowledge in the Pre-modern World*, edited by Candido Igor, 78-90. Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2018. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvbj7kck.8>. And Petrarca, Francesco. David Marsh Editor and Translator. "Francesco Petrarch Invectives." *Harvard University Press*. (2003).

⁷ Petrarca, Francesco. David Marsh Editor and Translator. "Francesco Petrarch Invectives." *Harvard University Press*. (2003: Pg 71).

thereabouts, I “cast off not only the obscene act but even the memory of it.”⁸ At that point in my life, I had already had children and begun my work as a philosopher, so I had no need to be promiscuous. But alas, I relapsed several times.

Interviewer: My, my Petrarch your life and training is fulling of intriguing moments, but our post game coverage is coming to an end. We have one last question for you: what advice would you give to the other humanists or new humanist who just watched the game?

Petrarch: That is a tough question. I would recommend that humanists not be afraid to take the path not walked. Do not be afraid of fields that oppose each other. Do not be afraid to climb the tallest mountains in your life.⁹ Do not be afraid to be eloquent and well-spoken. And whatever you do, DO NOT be a physician.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for your time, Petrarch.

Petrarch: Thank you for having me!

Interviewer: You have given all of us a lot to think about. You have been watching the post-game review of the Humanists’ World Cup, and I hope you enjoyed our time with Petrarch, the world-renowned humanist.

⁸ Witt, Ronald. "Petrarch, Creator of the Christian Humanist." In *Petrarch and Boccaccio: The Unity of Knowledge in the Pre-modern World*, edited by Candido Igor, 65-77. Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2018. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvbj7kck.7>.

⁹ Ascent of mT Ventoux

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