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# Spaces of Memory

## *A Metaphorical Field in Petrarch's Latin Works*

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### Abstracts

The essay aims to explore the theme of memory in Petrarch's Latin Works and in his intellectual experience, analysing especially one of the two metaphoric fields of memory, namely that which defines memory as a space that can be created, organised, filled with contents, and revisited with the specific aim of learning and discovering while remembering past events. Petrarch's constant interest in the structure and processes of memory and in the heuristic quality of the act of remembering seems to be effectively condensed into some metaphors (like thesaurus, arca, arx, cella, etc.) involved with the idea of repository that can be depicted in different ways depending on whether the aim is that of emphasising the value of the memories contained in it, or its possible religious applications, or its creative function.

### Keywords

Petrarch – metaphor – memory – Augustine

### 1 Metaphorical Approach and Literary Interpretation

Symbolic images of memory are often linked with two main metaphoric fields, that of the thesaurus and that of the book, which represent the two main mental structures of memory, namely memorization and remembering.<sup>1</sup> Because of the very nature of the designated objects, the distinction between the two metaphoric fields is blurred and there are often overlappings and substitutions

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<sup>1</sup> See Weinrich, 1964; Assmann, 1991; Weinrich, 1997; Assmann, 1999.

between the figurative elements. For that reason, those who wish to carry out a concrete and general study of these metaphors must necessarily list metaphoric fields, describe them, and analyse their mutual relationship. Following such a metaphorical approach, this study explores the theme of memory in Petrarch's Latin output and in his intellectual experience, analysing especially one of the two metaphoric fields of memory, namely that which defines memory as a space that can be created, organised, filled with contents (the *res memorandae*), and revisited with the specific aim of learning and discovering while remembering past events.

## 2 The Treasure of Memory

In his *De otio religioso*, Petrarch calls his readers' attention to a passage from the Gospel of Matthew (6,19–21), which he quotes from Augustine's *De vera religione* (III, 4):

Tales et vos igitur spectatoris vestri oculis exhibete, futuri periculi providentes, preteritorum et negotiorum obliti et immemores meritorum. Et siqua etiam nuns a tergo vellicans mundi cura, siqua vel tenuiter sibilans aura seculi blandientis insequitur, induimini remedia Scripturarum, in quibus conquirendis non laboro, quoniam prior nobis in illorum conquisitione laboravit Augustinus. "Dicitur enim" inquit "avaris: Nolite vobis condere thesaurus, ubi tinea et rubigo exterminant et ubi fures effodiunt et furantur, sed thesaurizate thesauros vobis in celo ubi neque tinea neque rubigo exterminant et ubi fures non effodiunt; ubi enim thesaurus tuus ibi est cor tuum".<sup>2</sup>

In the codex Par. Lat. 2201, the copy of Augustine's work which was owned and read by Petrarch signals his interest in the above-mentioned passage in that it contains his careful philological reconstruction of the text of the Gospel

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2 Petrarch, 2008: 78: "You should behave in the same way before your witness, forgetful of past activities and of many merits. If the exciting lure of the world softly calls from behind you or the breath of the alluring century that gently blows entices you, equip yourself with the tools of Scripture, upon which I do not need to dwell at length in that they have already been identified by Augustine, who has carefully researched them before. He writes: 'The miserly are told: Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth, where moth and rust disfigure them, and where thieves dig them up and steal, but treasure up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor rust disfigure nor thieves dig up. For where your treasure is, there also is your heart'".

and his thematic gloss “*Medicina data avaris*”.<sup>3</sup> Petrarch invites his readers to entrust themselves to Scripture as if it were a wholesome medicine and thus to behave with prudence by means of leading an intelligent and edifying life, as each human being should do with the help of a wise memory of the past and a far-sighted tendency to keep an eye on the future. Petrarch indicates the Biblical quotations which, from that point on, occur frequently in the text by employing the image of medicine (“*remedia Scripturarum*”) which combines the idea that the precept is effective with the fact that it is easy to “ingest” in that it is concise, as is suggested also by the dialogues in *De remediis utriusque fortune*.<sup>4</sup> These programmatic statements reveal that *De remediis* was conceived as a *summa* of moral philosophy and a compendium of the lessons learned from literature but also as a virtual visualization of that vast natural library which represents our memory, in which it is even easier to collect and preserve all knowledge than in a physical library (“*in promptu et ad manum*”).

The encyclopedic aim and especially the mnemonic availability that characterise that text and its structure also emerge, albeit to a lesser extent, in the aforementioned passage of the *De Otio Religioso*, where the image of the thesaurus, which is extremely important in the Biblical quotation, also contributes to emphasise the memorial dimension of the remedium. It is no coincidence that Petrarch’s statements are followed by the biblical warning to the miser: just as the miser should not hoard riches on earth but rather entrust the intimate treasure of their heart to heaven, so the readers of his work (which is dedicated to his brother Gherardo, a Carthusian monk, and to the whole monastic “*felix Cristi familia*”) should not give in to the allurements of this world but resist them with the help of the Biblical texts, which can be stored as effective “*remedia*” that are always available in one’s soul. Thesaurus or remedium are both words which imply the need to collect and store – namely, to treasure – knowledge in one’s own inner self, in one’s mind or heart, that is to say in memory. In

3 See Rico, 1974: 317–320. On the Petrarch’s glosses on memory see also Torre, 2007: 75–208. On the importance of the constant dialogue between the reader Petrarch and the book see: Bec, 1976; Feo, 1998; Vecchi Galli, 2003; Chines, 2003; Marcozzi (ed.), 2016; Bolzoni, 2019; Signorini, 2020.

4 Petrarch, 1991: 1:6–7 [*De remediis utriusque fortune*, 1, praef., 11]: “*ad id maxime respexi, ne armarium evolvere ad omnem hostis suspicionem ac strepitum sit necesse, quin mali omnis et nocentis boni atque utriusque fortune remedium breve sed amica confectum manu, quasi duplicis morbi velut non inefficax antidotum, in exigua pixide omnibus locis atque temporibus ad manum, ut aiunt, et in promptu habeas*” [“Consider first of all that you will no longer have to consult a whole library whenever you suspect the presence and imminent thrust of the enemy, since now you have *ad manum* – within easy reach – as they say, and before your eyes in all places and at all times, a quick remedy for every trouble or hurtful good and for either Fortune compounded by a helpful hand: a potent antidote against a double disease, as it were, packed in a little box”].

the *Secretum*, for instance, medical treatment is represented as an education to read, in a mnemonically oriented way, books, the world, and one's self, that is to say those 'technologies of the self' which, according to Foucault, "permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality".<sup>5</sup> What is encouraged is thus active reading, which is a precondition for silent meditation on what has been read or listened to. Active reading is explicitly modelled on the monastic practice of *lectio divina*, but its scope is broadened to include not only the hermeneutic reading of biblical texts but also the exegesis of the classics and the practice introspective analysis.<sup>6</sup>

The word *thesaurus* is indeed often metaphorically interpreted as 'repository of memory',<sup>7</sup> and its popularity as a metaphor of memory is likely due not only to the fact that it can so easily take on a figurative meaning but also to its twofold referent: on the one hand, the word 'treasure' is often employed to refer to any treasure, not necessary a material one (it can be quality, a positive feeling, a piece of knowledge); on the other hand, it is the perfect signifier of memory in that it can denote both the container in which goods are stored and the goods that are stored in it, whose value is implicit; in other words, it simultaneously refers to the content and the container.<sup>8</sup> For that reason, the term *thesaurus* can be regarded not only as a metaphor of memory but as also one of its main metaphoric fields. Scholars often consider it to be the emblematic

5 Foucault, 1997: 225.

6 See Leclercq, 1974: 88–91; Kahn, 1985; Carruthers, 1997 and Stock, 2001.

7 Cf. Cicero, *De oratore* 1, 5, 19; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* XI, 2, 1; *Rhetorica ad C. Herennium* III, 16, 28; Augustin, *Confessiones* x, 8; Tertullian, *De anima*, 24, 3; Cassiodorus, *Variae* v, 22, 4. See Carruthers, 1990: 34: "Zeno the Stoic (4<sup>th</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.) defines memory as 'thesaurismos phantasion' or 'storehouse of mental images'. *Thesaurus* is used metaphorically both in Romans (2:5) and the Gospel of Matthew (6:19–20) in the sense of storing up intangible things for salvation, the Greek being translated by Jerome as a verb, *thesaurizare*, thus: 'Nolite thesaurizare vobis thesauros in terra ... Thesaurizate autem vobis thesauros in caelo'. In the codex of the *Epistles* which belonged to Petrarch and which is now preserved, without signature, in the Biblioteca del Collegio S. Luigi in Naples (on that manuscript see Martinelli, 1990 and Baglio, 2008), the passage from the letter to the Romans ("secundum duritiam autem tuam et impaenitens cor thesaurizas tibi iram in die irae et revelationis iusti iudicii Dei") is accompanied by the gloss "Thesaurizas. Accumulas tibi vindictam dei peccando". The same extract also appears in Petrarch, 2005, 1: 150 [*Familiares*, III, 13, 9 (to Giovanni Colonna)]: "si paupertas excluditur, vereor ne non tam aurum, quam, quod ait Apostolus, thesaurizes iram in die ire" ["Poverty being excluded I fear not so much that you store gold than, as the apostle says, that you store wrath on the day of wrath"].

8 Cf. Leyerle, 1974: 118: "[...] the memory was commonly thought to be a thesaurus where treasures of the past would be safe"; and Carruthers, 1990: 35: "Thesaurus refers both to what is in

image, the very model, of all the metaphors which represent memory – that is the faculty of memory – as a container in which the *res memorandae* should be placed, or of those which depict single memories as precious objects to be jealously guarded (gems, jewels, coins ...). The genitive in the expression “thesaurus memoriae” can thus be interpreted as subjective or as objective: in the first case, the phrase indicates that memory is a treasure, in the second case it comes to mean ‘the treasure in which memory is stored’.

In the extract from *De otio religioso* that has been analysed above, the metaphor of the thesaurus as a symbol of memory is ambiguous: on the one hand, the thesaurus, which is related to *remedium*, is the precious memory of Scripture which can be effectively used against “the breath of the alluring century that softly blows”; on the other hand, the explicit association between “thesaurus” and “cor” in the quotation clearly evokes the idea that memory has a physical location and points to the heart as one of its most successful scientific and metaphoric formalisations.<sup>9</sup> The same Biblical passage, quoted this time from Jerome, *Epistles*, XXII, 30, also appears in a key section of Petrarch’s *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia*, in which the author defends himself against the accusation of valuing Cicero over Christian religion but does not deny that Cicero’s works have had, and continue to have, a special place in his heart (that is to say in his memory, in which Cicero’s teachings have been stored as a treasure):

Quarum, ut intelligo, nulla potentior, quam quod, licet peccator, certe cristianus sum. Etsi enim forsitan audire possim quod obiectum sibi Ieronimus refert: “Mentiris, ciceronianus es, non cristianus. Ubi enim thesaurus tuus, ibi et cor tuum”. Respondebo et thesaurum meum incorruptibilem et supremam cordis mei partem apud Cristum esse.<sup>10</sup>

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the strongbox, the ‘treasures’ [...], and the strongbox itself. When the wise men kneel before Jesus in Matthew’s account (2:11), they bring out their offerings of gold, frankincense, and myrrh from opened thesauri: ‘et apertis thesauris suis obtulerunt ei munera, aurum, thus, et myrrham’. The thesauri of the wise men are portable strongboxes such as a merchant might carry”.

- 9 On the relation between “cor” and “thesaurus” see also the English Medieval examples analysed in Bridges, 2003.
- 10 Petrarca, 1990 [*De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia*, v, 168]: 282: “As far as I know, the most powerful of all these arguments is this: of course I am a Christian, even though a sinner. I might be told the same thing that Jerome said was objected to him: ‘You lie: you are a Ciceronian, not a Christian. For where your treasure is, there also is your heart’. I will answer that my indestructible treasure and the noblest part of my heart are with Christ” (my translation).

### 3 Arx/Arca: A Safe Place against the Blows of Time

Two significant examples of the metaphor of memory as a repository are also offered by the terms “arx” and “arca”, which are also etymologically linked. Arca is simultaneously a real and concrete model (a trunk, a chest, a construction) and a mythical and imaginary one (the spiritual ark which every person can build, just like Noah did, through inner meditation) and, as such, it is a fitting parallel to memory with its double nature as “ars” (that is the visual representation of the techniques of oratorical mnemonics) and as experience (that is the act of defining of one’s own inner self through meditation). That affinity between arca and memory will be illustrated in this section by showing the most significant examples of the metaphor of “arca memorie” in Petrarch’s corpus. The image of the arx, instead, originated from the ancient studies of natural philosophy on the location of the psychic faculties and was then defined by Christian ethics as the inner rule of reason, as the place within the soul in which the crucial battle of Vice and Virtue takes place. It is especially this Christian version of the image of the arx as “arx rationis” that frequently appears in Petrarch’s works, while he employs the metaphor of “arx memoriae” only once, namely in the final greetings of *Familiare* XXIII, 16, when bidding an affectionate goodbye to his friend: “Vale feliciter, et, si quod est amoris nudi meritum, rescribe aliquid, quo me nondum e memorie tue arce deiectum leter”.<sup>11</sup> Arx memoriae is thus the fortified seat of affections,<sup>12</sup> a safe place in which to defend himself from the numerous blows of time. This kind of metaphor of memory often takes different but equally evocative forms in Petrarch’s works: one on them is the representation of memory as a library, a bastion of knowledge which sets the image of the mortal fate of men against the eternal survival of the message handed down by classical culture:

id meditans lectulum meum odi et ad illum nisi urgente necessitate non redeo, sed ab illo mox ut me nature vinclis explicutum sentio, incuntanter avellor inque bibliothecam illi proximam velut in arcem fugio.<sup>13</sup>

11 Petrarch, 2005: 3:295 [*Familiare*, XXIII, 16, 7 (to Johannes of Neumarkt)]: “Live happily, and if pure love has any merit, send me some response so that I may rejoice at not having yet been removed from the stronghold of your memory”.

12 See Petrarch, 1976: 36 [*Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* 2, 5–6 e 12–3]: “Era la mia virtute al cor ristretta | per far ivi et negli occhi sue difese [...] ovvero al poggio faticoso et alto | ritrarmi accortamente ...” [“My vital power was concentrated in my heart, to make there, and in my eyes his defense [...] or to lead me up the weary high mountain away from the slaughter ...”].

13 Petrarch, 2005: 3:109 [*Familiare*, XIX, 16, 20 (to Guido Sette)]: “and so with this thought, I scorn my little bed, returning to it only when in urgent need. As soon as I feel myself free

The explicit expressions of the metaphor of “*arx memoriae*” should also be linked with occurrences of the image of *arx rationis* when it is employed in contexts in which the idea of memory is prominent. The most interesting case can be found in the prologue to the first book of *De remediis*, where Petrarch himself suggests that the following dialogues should be read as one-act plays in the great theatre of memory, in which the characters are the personifications of Reason and of the four main passions of the soul (Pleasure, Hope, Pain and Fear), and whose stage is a vast space towered over by the arx:

Sic autem ad legendum venies, quasi quattuor ille famosiores et consanguineae passiones animi, spes seu cupiditas et gaudium, metus et dolor, quas due sorores equis partibus prosperitas et adversitas peperere, hinc illinc humano animo insultent: quae vero arci presidet ratio, his omnibus una respondet clipeoque et galea, suisque artibus et propria vi, sed celesti magis auxilio circumfrentia hostium tela discutiat. Ea michi de tuo ingenio spes est, ut unde victoria stet facile iudices.<sup>14</sup>

Later on, in dialogue 82 of Book II, that image is described in greater detail and its aims are made clear by way of a comparison between the real building and the spiritual stronghold of virtue:

R. Fac tibi cariorem aliam [*arcam*] quam non perdas; circumvalla animum piis intentionibus, honestis vitam actibus; prudentiam ac fortitudinem ante fores loca, iustitiam atque modestiam in propugnaculis, humanitatem ac mansuetudinem undique in muris, spem, fidem, caritatem arcis in medio, providentiam supreme turris in vertice, bonam famam in circuitu. [...] Hanc tibi arcem nemo usquam invadet, hanc tibi nemo poterit aut volet eripere; hac malos in stuporem, bonos in amorem imitandique studium excitabis.<sup>15</sup>

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of nature's bonds, I immediately tear myself away to take refuge as to a stronghold in my adjoining library”.

14 Petrarch, 1991: 110 [*De remediis utriusque fortune*, I, praef., 17]: “You should read this book as if those four most famous, twin-born passions of the mind, Hope or Desire and Joy, Fear and Sorrow, brought forth at the same time by the two sisters Prosperity and Adversity, fiercely assaulted from all sides the mind of man, and Reason, who governs this citadel, took on all of them at once. In her buckler and helmet, by stratagem and proper force, and, more so, with God’s help, she fends off the weapons of the roaring enemies around her”.

15 Petrarch, 1991: 3189 [*De remediis utriusque fortune*, II, 82, 10]: “Fortify your mind with good intentions, your life with honest deed; station prudence and courage before the gates, justice and moderation on the battlements, humanity and mercy everywhere along

The metaphor of “*arca memoriae*” is the one which appears more frequently and more elaborately in Petrarch’s corpus. In *Familiare* XVII, 8, for instance, Petrarch’s employs it to point out the radical difference between hoarding material goods and the formative experience of studying, that is to say between a practice which leads to avarice and should thus be avoided in order to behave virtuously, and a habit which instead requires constant dedication:

necque etenim ut mercator dives quamvis navigandi finem fecerit, cumulatam tamen consignatamque pecuniam domi habet, sic etiam studiosus legendi meditandique finem faciens, consignare memoriam velut archulam suam potest. Est enim futilis ac rimosa et cui, nisi aliquid iugi studio semper inferciat, multa quotidie dilabantur. Ita qui non discit, obliviscitur, et quisquis memoriam suam quasi plenam redundantemque neglexerit, post tempus ad illam rediens, inanem vacuumque mirabitur. Studendum assidue et usque ad extremas vite reliquias sine intermissione discendum, exemplis innumeris at illustribus admonemur, e quibus pauca subnectam.<sup>16</sup>

In this comparison between the rich merchant and the scholar, the image of *archula memoriae* refers simultaneously to the two objects with which it is most frequently associated, namely money and books.

The fact that memory is defined by the term “*arca*” in its meaning of container of jewels or money can be explained in the light of the spontaneous link between the value of the stored goods and the importance of memories, and, hence, that image implies a value judgement on the content of that peculiar thesaurus, that is to say on the things that are remembered. That is the reason why the word “*arca*” is generally employed to describe a strong and reliable memory. Petrarch follows that convention too, as is evident, for instance, in *Familiare* VI, 8, in which the author praises the unknown addressee of the letter for his lively intellect and, in doing so, he contrasts common material goods

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the walls, hope and faith in the midst of the castle; place providence on the top of the highest tower and good reputation into the outer ward. [...] This citadel no-one shall ever invade, nobody will want or be able to take it from you; it will provoke astonishment in the wicked and love in the good, who will want to imitate you”.

16 Petrarch, 2005, 3:27 [*Familiare*, XVII, 8, 3–4 (to Matteo of Como)]: “Unlike the wealthy merchant who, at journey’s end, has heaped and stored money in his home, the scholar who has put an end to his reading and thinking cannot consign it to memory as to a moneybox. For it is untrustworthy and contains many cracks and, if not constantly stuffed with some substance through study, daily loses something. Therefore he who does not learn forgets, and whoever neglects his memory, as if it were full and overflowing, will be astonished at its emptiness when he subsequently returns to it”.



with the gems of knowledge stored in his memory: “Quam pauper quam ve si dives, nescio. Loquor de arcula; aimus enim procul dubio dives est, Bianteo more sua secum bona circumferens”.<sup>17</sup> Even within the context of a commonplace introductory encomium it is worth focussing on Petrarch’s clarification of which kind of wealth he is referring to in that it suggests that using the term “arca” in a both literal and a figurative sense was a common and widespread practice. Petrarch combines those two meanings also in a passage in the invective *Contra quendam magni status hominem sed nullius scientie aut virtutis*, but, in that case, the association of wealth and knowledge takes on a negative connotation in that the target of the invective is warned that the accumulation of wealth is directly proportional to the impoverishment of his intellect and hence also of his memory: “Quod quam verum fuerit, scies illico, ut ad ingenii tui arculam te converteris, cuius claves inter nummorum acervulos perdidisti, utque illam effringas, crede michi, nil intus invenies”.<sup>18</sup> The moralising observation on the excessive accumulation of money is thus combined with the accusation of protracted intellectual negligence, which inevitably leads to a torpor of the senses and hence to the weakening of memory’s ability to retain and preserve information, as is also suggested by the comparison between merchant and scholar in the aforementioned extract from *De otio religioso*. Petrarch’s constant interest in the structure and processes of memory and in the heuristic quality of the act of remembering seems to be effectively condensed into the metaphor of the ark, an image which fittingly evokes the idea of a systematic effort to shape, mould, and verify, as is coherent with its religious background. Indeed, Petrarch himself recognises that memory often has to cope not only with men’s guilty neglect but also with the tricks of old age which, although it does not manage to utterly erase it, it certainly increases its need to be taken care of more zealously:

Ceterum premit senectus memoriam, non opprimit nec extinguit, et quamvis promptior adolescentis, angustior tamen; senis est memoria: plurium recordatur sed cuntantius. Plura enim vidit, plura audivit, plura legit, plura didicit, plura velut clavibus abdidit, et multorum dominum multa negligere est necesse. Multe illi sunt arcule diu intacte et, locupletis

17 Petrarch, 2005: 1:327 [*Familiars*, VI, 8, 1 (to a friend in need)]: “How poor or how wealthy you may be I do not know. I am speaking of your money box; for without doubt you are wealthy in mind, which in the fashion of Bias carries all its goods with it”.

18 Petrarch, 2003: 100 [*Invective against a Man of High Rank with No Knowledge or Virtue*]: “You will see at once how true this is, if you turn the small coffer of your intelligence. You have lost the keys to it in the little piles of your money; but if you break it open, believe me, you will find nothing inside it”.

in morem, non cuncta que possidet ad manum habet: querenda sunt et eruenda, ut que sint reposita non amissa.<sup>19</sup>

Those who are truly wise, regardless of their age, will thus make sure to guard the content of their “arca” and constantly check its capacity and measure its size; greedy merchants will instead focus on material riches, thus neglecting their mental faculties or even failing to be aware of their existence because of their utter lack of interest in them. The comparison between the wise man and the greedy merchant is introduced again a few lines later in that *Seniles* VIII, 2 but with a significant variation. Petrarch’s friend, who walked into the poet’s library and was surprised to find in it a casket which contained sheets of papers and poems rather than precious objects, can indeed be accused not so much of greediness as of naivety:

[...] cum deinde bibliothecam introgressus et sepe tacitus libellos numerare incipiens diu nichil ageret, magni illos extimans (in quo certe non errabat modo aliud quam pecuniarium pretium cogitasset), arculam denique speciosissimam peregrini operis et amici munus alterius intuens atque auri plenam putans (cum vel vacua vel papiri et carminum plena esset) [...].<sup>20</sup>

This extract features several interesting elements: first of all, the metaphoric association which previously linked memory and arca, memories and wealth, is also implied in this passage in which the casket, the true thesaurus of Petrarch’s writing, is clearly represented as an “arca sapientiae”; secondly, this use of the term “arca” can also be regarded as an example of the commonplace of the casket as a portable library, which was very popular in Western literature.

Since the Biblical example of the Ark of the Covenant which contained the stone tablets given to Moses (*Deut.*, 31,26), the term was traditionally associated with the idea of a transportable container of books and it was fittingly used

19 Petrarch, 2005a: 1:271–272 [*Seniles*, VIII, 2, 9 (to his friends)]: “Although a young man’s memory is quicker, an old man’s memory is tighter, he remembers more, but less promptly, for he has seen more, heard more, read more, learned more, and hidden more as if under lock and key. The owner of many things must overlook many. He has many trunks that long remain untouched, and like a wealthy man does not have at hand everything he owns; they must be looked for, dug up as things that have been put away, not lost”.

20 Petrarch, 2005a: 1:272 [*Seniles*, VIII, 2, 11]: “Then, when he entered the library and silently began counting the books, for a long time he just stood there, marveling at their value. He certainly was not mistaken in this, if only he had figured something other than monetary value. Finally, he stared at a very handsome chest of foreign workmanship, a gift from another friend, and he assumed that it was full of gold, whereas it contained neither gold nor silver but was filled with paper and poems”.

as a metaphor for memory, conceived as a movable trunk which contains the knowledge gathered by reading many books: “Memory is like a sort of library of the mind, a safe and reliable case for perceptions”, writes for example John of Salisbury in his *Metalogicon* (I, 11: “Memoria vero quasi mentis arca, firmaque et fidelis custodia perceptorum”).<sup>21</sup> Petrarch often uses the term “arca” to indicate the trunks in which his books were stored and jealously guarded, ready to come out and be available to him at his will, just like memories become visible to the eyes of the mind: “Libros preterea diversis generis et simul per quos aut de quibus scripti sunt comites gratos et assiduos, et promptos vel in publicum prodire vel ad arculam redire cum iusseris” (*De vita solitaria*, II, 14).<sup>22</sup> Not only does the image of the trunk full of books effectively hint at memory’s ability to accumulate and methodically store, but, by containing an allusion to the act of taking books out of it, it also points to the heuristic nature of the process of remembering. The act of bringing books back to light after they were left to collect dust in trunks can thus be associated with that of bringing back to your mind images, words, and sensations that had temporarily become unavailable to our consciousness.

By drawing that analogy, Petrarch seems to represent the entire experience of remembering which generated the epistolary corpus of the *Familiars*. Indeed, in the introductory letter addressed to “his own Socrates”, Petrarch remembers his anguished desire to flee from the losses he suffered in 1348, and his painful inability to deal with the burden of his past:

ego iam sarcinulas compono, et quod migraturi solent, quid mecum deferam, quid inter amicos partiar, quid ignibus mandem, circumspicio. Nichil enim venale michi est. Sum sane ditior seu, verius, impeditior quam putabam: multa michi scriptorum diversi generis supellex domi est, sparsa quidem et neglecta. Perquisivi situ iam squalentes arculas, et scripturas carie semesas pulverulentus explicui.<sup>23</sup>

21 Quoted in Carruthers, 1990: 43. On that matter see also Schebat, 2002–2003.

22 Petrarca, 1992: 312: “I look for books of different genres which may become good and faithful companions either because of the author who wrote them or because of the subjects they treat, and which are always ready to appear in public or go back inside the trunk at one’s signal” (my translation).

23 Petrarch, 2005: 1:3 [*Familiars*, I, 1, 3 (to his Socrates)]: “For me, I am arranging my belongings in little bundles, as wanderers are wont to do. I am considering what to bring with me, what to share with friends, and what to burn. I have nothing to be put up for sale. Indeed I am richer, or perhaps I should say more hampered than I thought, because of the great number of writings of different kinds that lie scattered and neglected throughout my house. I search in squalid containers lying in hidden places and pulled out dusty

The commonplace contrast between material and spiritual wealth and the presence of words such as “arca”, “sarcina” and “supellex” contribute to suggest that there is a memorial dimension to this scene of rescue and selection of old texts, but it is Petrarch himself who, in the following passage, explicitly describes this concrete physical action as a metaphorical journey through his memories, as a more or less conscious act of remembering. Even if he is oppressed by the tragic events of the past, he resists the temptation to erase his old writings from his memory and, by describing to himself the condition of his soul through a metaphor,<sup>24</sup> he conceives his plan to collect and preserve his memories, a plan which he constantly refers to in his works with the phrase “sparsa fragmenta recolligere”:

Vicit hec sententia; sicut enim non magnificus, sic non inamenu labor visus est, quid quo tempore cogitassem recordari. Sed temere congesta nullo ordine versanti, mirum dictu quam discolor et quam turbida rerum facies occurreret; ut quedam, non tam specie illorum quam intellectus mei acie mutata, vix ipse cognoscerem; alia vero non sine voluptate quadam retroacti temporis memoriam excitarent.<sup>25</sup>

The image of Petrarch bending over his trunk could thus be read not only as a successful metaphorical representation of the memory processes of storage and retrieval, but also as a representative “imago agens” of all those intimate

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writings half destroyed by decay”. On Petrarch’s project of writing about himself the *Familiars* see Antognini, 2008.

24 Petrarch, 2005: 1:3 [*Familiars*, I, 1, 4 (to his Socrates)]: “Confusis itaque circumventus litterarum cumulis et informi papiro obsitus, primum quidem cepi impetum cuncta flammis exurere et laborem inglorium vitare; deinde, ut cogitationes e cogitationibus erumpunt, ‘Et quid’ inquam ‘prohibet, velut e specula fessum longo itinere viatorem, in terga respicere et gradatim adolescentie tue curas metientem recognoscere?’” [“Therefore, beset and encircled by confused heaps of letters and formless piles of paper, I began a first attack by determining to throw everything into the fire, thereby avoiding a thank-less kind of labor. Later, as thought followed upon thought, I found myself saying, ‘What stops you from looking behind like a tired traveler from a vantage point after a long journey and slowly recalling the memories and cares of your youth?’”].

25 Petrarch, 2005: 1:3 [*Familiars*, I, 1, 5 (to his Socrates)]: “This thought finally dominated, and while the work involved did not appeal as a grand undertaking, neither did trying to recall the thoughts and memories of times past seem too unpleasant. But when I began turning over the papers piled at random in no particular order, I was astonished to notice how varied and how disordered their general aspect appeared. I could hardly recognize certain ones, not so much because of their form but because of the changed nature of my own understanding. Other things, however, did come back to mind with considerable delight”.

confessions which are generally the product of Petrarch's attempts to examine his past. This text, which acts as an introduction to the entire volume, suggests that memory is conceived by Petrarch both as defence against the relentless flow of time and as the lens through which its intrinsic pleasure is revealed in the form of a surprising moulding of the self.<sup>26</sup> Petrarch is "encircled by confused heaps of letters and formless piles of paper", just as the book collector described by Walter Benjamin is, and he is torn between throwing everything in the fire or indulging in the pleasure of "looking behind like ['in terga respicere'] a tired traveler from advantage point after a long journey and slowly recalling the memories and cares of your youth".<sup>27</sup> In these letters (real or invented as they may be), Petrarch offers an idealised self-portrait, which is as true as every fictional narration, as true as every autobiography, in that an autobiography is a story in which the writer presents his own interpretation of the events, which he selects so as to produce specific effects.<sup>28</sup>

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- 26 See Bury, 1998: 108 ("Delicatissimi quondam libri, corrupti et abominabiles iam effecti, murium quidem fetibus cooperti et verminum morsibus terebrati, iacebant exanimis; et qui olim purpura vestiebantur domicilia tinearum. Inter hec nichilominus, captatis temporibus, magis voluptuose consedimus quam fecisset medicus delicatus inter aromatum apothecas, ubi amoris nostri obiectum reperimus et fomentum") ["The precious books which were once magnificent lay barren, left on the ground to rot neglected, or to putrefy covered by mice nests and mangled by worm bites. In those places I found forsaken volumes, which had once worn purple and linen but were then covered in dust, thrown on the ground and left to be eaten by woodworms. I could not resist them and, in my spare time, I lost myself in those poor books with even greater pleasure than an apothecary who wanders among the spices of his shop: I thus found the object of my love again" (Translation mine)]. On book as the fetishised object of Petrarch's desire see Camille, 1997.
- 27 Cf. Benjamin, 1968: 59: "I am unpacking my library. Yes, I am. The books are not yet on the shelves, not yet touched by the mild boredom of order. I cannot march up and down their ranks to pass them in review before a friendly audience. You need not fear any of that. Instead, I must ask you to join me in the disorder of crates that have been wrenched open, the air saturated with the dust of wood, the floor covered with torn paper, to join me among piles of volumes that are seeing daylight again after two years of darkness, so that you may be ready to share with me a bit of the mood – it is certainly not an elegiac mood but, rather, one of anticipation – which these books arouse in a genuine collector. For such a man is speaking to you, and on closer scrutiny he proves to be speaking only about himself".
- 28 See Coetzee-Kurz, 2016: 3: "A more radical way of posing the same question is: Are all autobiographies, all life-narratives, not fictions, at least in the sense that they are constructions (fiction from Latin *ingere*, to shape or mould or form)? The claim here is not that autobiography is free, in the sense that we can make up our life-story as we wish. Rather, the claim is that in making up our autobiography we exercise the same freedom that we have in dreams, where we impose a narrative form that is our own, even if influenced by forces that are obscure to us, on elements of a remembered reality".

#### 4 Memory as Hunting Action

Within the metaphoric field of the “thesaurus” there are some representations of the faculty of memory which are different from others in that they involve a greater level of detail: they represent memory’s capacity to store data, and also offer information as to the data which it processes; in other words, they illustrate the form and finality of the container while simultaneously describing some general characteristics of the content. Such a denotative richness is often also combined with the fact that these metaphors can be involved in a more complex network of references, which is established by the overlapping of different metaphoric fields. An interesting example of the metaphor of memory more in general, and especially of its use in Petrarch’s works, is offered by the image of the cage. While that image primarily represents memory as a container, the peculiar nature of its content, namely an animated being, implies both a specific interpretation of memories (the content), one which also influences the notion of memory (the container), and a revelation of the ways in which memory works.<sup>29</sup> Depicting memories as birds or bees, as was the case in most versions of this metaphor, can indeed evoke the idea of memories as spiritual, unstable and uncertain, and it can simultaneously allude to the dynamism of the mechanisms of memory (which, according to Aristotle’s theory of memory, are characterised by the constant coming and going of memories in and out of the mind) as well as to their combinative nature (which entails the collection and fusion – which is also a ‘transformation’ – of data from outside, a process which is similar to that of “mellificatio”).<sup>30</sup>

The origin of this metaphor can be traced back to Plato’s *Theaetetus* (197c–198d), where knowledge is defined on the basis of the relationship between the notions of ‘possessing knowledge’ and ‘having knowledge’, that is on the basis of memorial dynamics; it is indeed possible to ‘possess knowledge’ without necessarily using it at a particular moment (‘having knowledge’), just as having captured a ‘wild bird or something else’ and having locked them in

29 Cf. Draaisma, 2000: 230: “In a playful metaphor like that of Plato’s aviary, the memory does not have the same meaning as in the representation of the memory as the light-sensitive plate of a photographic camera, exposed to sensory stimuli. One metaphor turns our recollections into fluttering birds which we can only catch at the risk of grabbing the wrong one, the next one reduces memories to static and latent traces”.

30 This metaphor often appears in Petrarch’s letters and through it he insistently returns to the idea of an imitation attentive to the magisterium of the Ancients but never servile, of an imitation that does not condition the formation of a personal style but rather participates in this education, with his industrious but fully credible naturalness. On “mellificatio” see Pigman, 1980 and Greene, 1982: 81–103.

a cage (“peristereon”) means ‘possessing’ them but not ‘having them’, in that one truly ‘has them’ only when one takes them out of the cage (that is to say captures them once again). It is thus possible to ‘have knowledge’ only after having brought back to mind the data acquired long before and which are in our possession in that they lie in the repository of our memory:

Once more then, just as a while ago we imagined a sort of waxen block in our minds, so now let us suppose that every mind contains a kind of aviary stocked with birds of every sort, some in flocks apart from the rest, some in small groups, and some solitary, flying in any direction among them all.

PLATO 1961 [*Theaetetus*, 197d]: 904

Memory and reminiscence are thus both alluded to in this passage and are represented by the images of the seal and the cage, which evoke traits typical of memory and reminiscence respectively, namely the idea of the stability of the stored data and the heuristic dimension implied in the act of retrieving the store data.<sup>31</sup> The grouping of birds in different flocks and their instinctual flying in any direction are instead figurative images of the ephemeral and changeable quality of memories which can be controlled with difficulty by using the principle of order, which, as we know, governs each technique of memory storage. Plato’s theory of knowledge as an act of reconstruction also contains another idea which can be read as a corollary of the image of the aviary: both the act of acquiring knowledge and that of retrieving it from one’s memory are represented as hunting actions, thus emphasising the dynamic, voluntary, and productive quality of both of them.

Some of those elements (together with a possible echo of Plato’s text) can be found also in dialogue 64 of the first book of *De remediis*, dedicated to “aviaries”. From the first lines, the usual moralising interpretation of the theme offered by Ratio suggests that there is a strong connection between external and inner reality and indicates several parallel elements between them:

R. [...] Invenit gula venationem, invenit piscationem, invenit aucupium nec cepisse satis est quas liberas natura creaverat, nisi etiam asserventur.

31 Cf. Draaisma, 2000: 27: “The physical image of the memory as a dovecote or aviary represents retention of information as the preservation of an experience in an enclosed space. A person wishing to remember something re-enters that space and tries to recover what has been kept”.

[...] quantum si captandis in virtutibus poneretur, illas pridem, nam minime sunt fugaces, optimo studio quaesitas intra animi habitum clausisset, unde nec effugere possit nec auferri.<sup>32</sup>

The “*animi habitum*” which should acquire and preserve virtues may be regarded as the metaphoric introjection of the physical container, a bird cage (“*aviarium*”), upon which the entire dialogue focuses. Similarly, the virtues, despite being less likely to “fly away”, have the same unpredictable and disorderly behaviour as the birds (especially when they are not effectively controlled and restrained). Lastly, the voluntaristic quality of both the literal and metaphorical scenario is represented by the action of hunting. Although Plato’s dialogue is not explicitly alluded to, that same model of memory (as memory and reminiscence) seems to emerge here in all its components. By being compared to an “*aviarium*”, the undetermined “*animi habitum*” appears more clearly as a thesaurus and as an image of the repository of memory in which the *res memorandae* (which include more or less virtuous contents) fly about freely, ready to be captured at any moment by a voluntary research, by a hunt of lost time.

Not only is the parallel between internal and external reality drawn at the beginning of the dialogue an effective re-elaboration of a successful image of memory, but it also sets the metaphorical tone for the entire dialogue. As has been mentioned above, in its very first answer, Ratio depicts the virtues which men should possess as birds locked up in a cage. The rest of the dialogue is then entirely (and conventionally) built on the quick and antagonistic exchanges between Gaudium, who speaks of the possession of specific birds (or rather of their capture and imprisonment, as is indicated by the verbs “concludere”, “implere”, “congregavi”), and Ratio, who tells anecdotes (which generally have a moral) about the birds: Ratio’s words are certainly a polemic invitation to simplicity as opposed to the display of wealth, but they also add another meaning (and an exemplary one) to an image that can be read as a metaphor. We have to bear in mind, though, that that metaphor refers to memory. The metaphoric associations introduced at the beginning of the text suggest that the dialogue develops in a way that is not dissimilar from the process of memorisation

32 Petrarch, 1991: 1186 [*De remediis utriusque fortune*, 1, 64, 2]: “R. [...] your gluttonous belly worship invented hunting, invented fishing, invented bird catching; nor are you satisfied just to catch what nature created to be free – you also have to imprison the birds behind bars [...] instead of wasting on all this such effort that, were it sincerely dedicated to attaining some of the virtues (which do not fly away) – by now you would have caged these virtues in your mind, whence they cannot escape or be removed”.



typical of classical mnemotechnics: as a *res memoranda*, the “*exemplum*”, together with its moralising and didactic message, is associated with an *imago agens* (the bird/the single memory) which is then placed in the vast thesaurus of memory (“*aviarium*”). From another perspective, each answer given by *Ratio* may also be read as an autonomous item of memorisable content which the image introduced by *Gaudium* makes recognisable (and retrievable) within the general structure of the dialogue (which corresponds to the cage of memory). The bird (that is to say the single memory and the content of the answer given by Reason) is thus not very different from what Petrarch elsewhere programmatically called *remedium*, and the image of the cage seems to have the same function of organising and preserving as the remedy “compounded by a helpful hand” mentioned in the preface to *De remediis*. In both cases, the metaphorical representation of memory covertly suggests that both each text of *De remediis* and the book as a whole seem to play a twofold function connected with memory: they are both *res memoranda* (namely a *remedium* that has to be stored) and *locus memoriae* (namely places where data are stored).

## 5 Landscapes of Memory

The many characteristics of memory as a faculty, a technique, and an experience clearly influence the possibility of representing it as a metaphor. It has been illustrated above that the notion of “repository of memory” can be depicted in different ways depending on whether the aim is that of emphasising the value of the memories contained in it (“*thesaurus*”), or its possible religious applications (“*arca*”), or its creative function (“*cella*”). All these images belong to the metaphoric field of the term ‘container’ in that they draw attention to the storing function of memory, to the act that we generally call memorisation. The workings of memory, though, also include the act of retrieving the data stored in one’s mind, and that act of remembering is characterised by the greater heuristic effort involved in the action carried out by the remembering subject. Retrieving the memories stored in the cells or caskets of our mind entails penetrating and carefully examining it. The metaphorical representation of such a quest, though, entails an idea of memory which combines the main image of the container with the vast and more complex one of the *locus*.

In order to represent memory in such terms, spatial metaphors drawn from the field of architecture can be successfully employed. The architectural dimension of the *locus memoriae* and, more in general, the idea that memory is spatial and material can be easily expressed by drawing on examples of organised structures which can normally be found in natural and artificial

spaces.<sup>33</sup> Drawing on topography and especially on architecture is thus especially useful to identify a mental space within the inner reality of human beings, a space characterised by consistent symmetry and uniformity and in which it is easy to orientate oneself in that there are precise landmarks. By doing so, the image of thesaurus will finally be detached from the idea of simple preservation, of a static, albeit incessant, accumulation of knowledge and perceptions. Moreover, the heuristic dimension whereby each act performed by memory can be conceived as a journey undertaken by the mind following significant clues within a more or less circumscribed space will become even more evident.<sup>34</sup> The more precise the landmarks which organise space are, the less laborious the search will be. The frequent use of architectural images to represent memory is indeed motivated by that need of order and precision.

A remarkable example of these considerations is offered by St. Augustine's reflections on memory in Book x (chapter 8) of his *Confessions*, which are indeed philosophical reflections but also moral teachings in that, as Petrarch points out, the immoderate desire of wealth and glory, and the unrestrained thirst for knowledge are nothing compared to what is inside the wide depths of the soul. Augustine knows that while transcending the senses and rising towards God, the soul may progressively enter within the carved spaces of the mind, which he describes as the vast rooms of memory where one can find treasures consisting in countless images coming from each thing that was perceived, as the vast recesses of memory in which each perception enters through its own specific entrance and is stored together with the others, and, lastly, as the enormous room of one's memory, as a vessel of unlimited capacity.<sup>35</sup>

33 Cfr. Cf. Draaisma, 2000: 30: "Augustine took his metaphors from what he saw around him: in this way the imaginary space of memory became a reflection of the outside world, *his* outside world, an impression of external reality on what was internal. Other writers, living in different places, in different ages, left the mark of *their* worlds on the metaphor of memory".

34 See Carruthers, 1998: 80: "Spatial and directional metaphors are essential to the conception of the way of monastic meditation, as is well known. And the rhetorical concept of *ductus* emphasizes way-finding by organizing the structure of any composition as a journey through a linked series of stages, each of which has its own characteristic flow (its mode or color), but which also moves the whole composition along. And the colors or modes are like the individual segments of an aqueduct, carrying the water, yes, but changing its direction, slowing it down, speeding it up, bifurcating, as the water moves along its route or way. For a person following the *ductus*, the colors act as stages of the way or ways through to the *skopos* or destination. Every composition, visual or aural, needs to be experienced as a journey, in and through whose paths one must constantly move".

35 On memory and on its metaphorical value in Augustine's works see: Casado, 1964; Schmidt-Dengler, 1968; Matthews, 1972; Hübner, 1981; Doucet, 1987; Ferretti, 1991; O'Daly, 1993; Solignac, 2002.

The mental assimilation of the images of such exterior spaces shapes the notion of memory according to parameters which make it easier to grasp and project it into a more functional and evocative three-dimensionality. It is exactly this tendency of the remembering subject to become the protagonist within a three-dimensional image of memory, to become himself a part of the process of remembering (as he becomes the representation of the voluntary act of retrieving the memorised object) that explains the popularity of architectural metaphors of memory. As Quintilian (*Institutio oratoria* XI, 2, 20) had previously explained, that type of metaphor involves a faithful representation of the principle of order as well as an explicit allusion to heuristic dynamics:

Haec ita digerunt: primum sensum vestibulo quasi adsignant, secundum, puta, atrio, tum inpluvia circumeunt, nec cubiculis modo aut exedris, sed statuis etiam similibusque per ordinem committunt. Hoc facto, cum est repetenda memoria, incipiunt ab initio loca haec recensere, et quod cuique crediderunt repscunt, ut eorum imagine admonentur.<sup>36</sup>

A similar treatment of memories can frequently be found also in Petrarch's corpus and their representations are so diverse that they contribute to the development of a repertoire of architectural metaphors of memory which are often evidently indebted to Augustine's thought. In some cases, the direct association between memory and an architectural place is made explicit by Petrarch himself; on other occasions, an imaginary process of building concerns intimate spaces such as the mind or the heart, which are traditionally synonyms of memory and often contribute to emphasise its meditative function. An example of this kind of mediated architectural metaphors of memory is the blatant echo of St. Augustine's notion of "aula ingenti memoriae" which appears in Petrarch's letter on his climb of Mount Ventoux (*Fam.*, IV, 1), a few lines before the famous explicit quotation of *Confessiones* X, 8, 15 on the foolish vanity of men:

Nondum michi tertius annus effluxit, ex quo voluntas illa perversa et nequam, que me totum habebat et in aula cordis mei sola sine

36 Quintilian, 1920–1922: IV:240: "These symbols are then arranged as follows. The first thought is placed, as it were, in the forecourt; the second, let us say, in the living-room; the remainder are placed in due order all round the impluvium and entrusted not merely to bedrooms and parlours, but even to the care of statues and the like. This done, as soon as the memory of the facts requires to be revived, all these places are visited in turn and the various deposits are demanded from their custodians, as the sight of each recalls the respective details".

contradictore regnabat, cepit aliam habere rebellem et reluctantem sibi, inter quas iandodum in campis cogitationum mearum de utriusque hominis imperio laboriosissima et anceps etiam nunc pugna conseritur.<sup>37</sup>

Augustine's image of the "room of memory" is re-elaborated by Petrarch, who uses the expression "room of my heart". The topos of courtly lyric in which the "domina" sits on the throne of her lover's heart is perfectly appropriate within the context of this passage, which deals with the remembrance of his intense love for Laura, but the undeniable memorial value of those words, which is so deeply connected with the poet's troubled past experience, cannot but be indebted to that living and still influential formulation of the architectural metaphor which appears in the *Confessions*. Whoever analyses that expression must thus clearly start with the assumption that the heart is here an image of memory: if "aula" is the main metaphor, one which offers an architectural depiction of memory, the image of the heart (which was identified as the seat of memory by a long medical and philosophical tradition dating back to antiquity) thus emphasises the fact that memory is an eminently interior, spiritual, faculty and it corrects the representation of memories and of the act of remembering as external and reified elements which was implied in the architectural metaphor. The expression "in aula ingenti memoriae meae" can thus be regarded as a realistic portrayal of the value and function of memory, and the phrase "in aula cordis mei" as an implicit comment on the complex physical and psychological nature of each mnemotechnic system. However, we must not forget that the idea of the heart as the seat of memory is not just prominent in medical and philosophical traditions, but it is also of biblical provenance (Lc 2,51).

In the specific case of Petrarch's extract, the variant form of the metaphor may also be specifically linked with the context in that it seems to indicate both the emotional investment involved in the act of remembering and the idea of the conflict between an external and earthly element (his love for Laura) and his spiritual aspiration to through self-analysis. Indeed, the image of "aula memoriae" employed by Augustine also seemed to emphasise the antithesis between body and soul, interiority and landscape which, appearing

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37 Petrarch, 2005, 1:177 [*Familiars*, IV, 1, 22 (to Dionigi of Borgo San Sepolcro)]: "The third year has not yet passed since that perverse and wirthless inclination which held sway over me and ruled over my heart without opponent, began to be replaced by another inclination which was rebellious and reluctant. Between these inclinations a very insistent and uncertain battle for control of my two selves has been going on for a long time in my mind".

in different forms throughout the *Confessions*, characterises the entire text and finds a substantial balance in the tenth book, right where the metaphors of memory appear more frequently: the various similes between the inner life of men and exterior landscapes (both natural and man-made) that can be found in that book mark a transition from a distinctly autobiographical section (books I–IX) to a noticeable more speculative one (books X–XIII) and enable the conflict between bodily needs and spiritual desires which characterises Augustine's thought to emerge; a conflict which translates into a tireless research conducted at first into the realms of history and then into those of meditation; a conflict which Petrarch willingly inherits and uses to guide his personal and poetic research.

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