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Francesco Petrarch

Word Count: 997

After crowned as a Poet Laureate in 1341 in the Capitol of Rome, Francesco Petrarch, or also known as Francesco Petrarca, placed his wreath before the Tomb of Apostle in the Saint Peter's Basilica signifying his desire to reconcile Classical and Christian philosophy.¹ Petrarch is a highly celebrated Italian poet, classical scholar, and early humanist during the fourteenth century. He is also regarded as the "Father of Humanism". Today, Petrarch is mostly known for his lyric poems and sonnets which might have inspired many including Boccaccio's great works, Shakespeare's sonnets and Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa.² He left a distinctive legacy in the European culture for centuries after. Therefore Petrarch's passion for writings and classical antiquity arguably contributed the most to the introduction of early humanism in the Middle Age and consequently inspired the realization of human's true potential and the subsequent cultural movement of the Renaissance.

Petrarch's writings in both Italian and Latin re-established a literary culture and awareness across Europe which significantly attributed the Renaissance. His Canzoniere or the Song Book of 366 lyric poems, mostly dedicated for his ideal relationship with Laura the love of his life became an important model for love lyrical poetry in terms of language and style. Later, his writing style, often referred as Petrarchism³, continued to influence other writers and playwrights such as Spenser,

¹ University of Pennsylvania. "Petrarch at 700." *Penn Libraries*. 11 September 2012.
<http://www.library.upenn.edu/exhibits/rbm/petrarch/petrarch_index.html>

² Davis, L. "Through the Pages of Tuscany." *BBC Travel*. 11 September 2012.
<<http://www.bbc.com/travel/feature/20110902-through-the-pages-of-tuscany>>

³ Bondanella, J. C., & Musa, M. *The Italian Renaissance Reader*. 1987. p. 1-3.

Shakespeare, Milton and et cetera. He also gained popularity for epistles, letters though to private recipients intended for the general public. Some even claimed that Petrarch started his own plague of literary awareness.⁴ This highly contributed to the rebirth of knowledge and the development of the studia humanitas, the study of liberal arts, among Europeans. He also garnered much support for humanism from the nobles and the wealthy. Petrarch's qualities of introspection, nature appreciation and morality were portrayed in the "the Ascent of Mount Ventoux", a recount of his climb of the 6273-foot-high mountain near Avignon.⁵ These qualities largely were the foundation of the transition from the medieval beliefs to the modern ideas. Furthermore, in all his writings including poems, letters and essays, the importance of reflection can also be considered a revolutionary idea that links to early humanism which puts a great emphasis on intellectual freedom and expression.

Also, Petrarch's pursuit to revive the classical antiquity of the Romans and the Greeks was considered a significant leap which ended the Dark Ages and sparked a renewed interest in the classics' teachings and wisdom. Since young, Petrarch developed his fascination towards classical literature. During 1327 - 1336, he travelled all over Europe to search and collect ancient manuscripts and even further vindicate their authenticity. He discovered a famous collection of Cicero's works namely Letters to Atticus and the speech Pro Archia, as well as a partial manuscript of Quintilian's Oratorical Institute. Petrarch even published his own Familiar Letters following the footsteps of Cicero's letters. His reputation as a classical scholar was acknowledged by Pope Benedict XII who later made him a Poet Laureate at the Capitoline Hill on April 8, 1341. Petrarch's acceptance speech asks for a resurrection

⁴ Sadlon, P. "Information on Petrarch." *Francesco Petrarch - Father of Humanism*. 11 Sept 2012. <<http://petrarch.petersadlon.com/petrarch.html>>

⁵ Bondanella & Musa, 1987

of classical virtues and poetry and associated the laurel to the poetic and literary immortality⁶. Along with his friend, Boccaccio, Petrarch's interest in the classical literature was echoed throughout Europe causing a shift of beliefs from the school of supernaturalism to the school of humanism. This was how the European Renaissance began to manifest itself. Petrarch's writings put forth a new value of how human should think critically and eloquently.

In addition, Petrarch's attempt to incorporate Christian beliefs and classical culture defines the direction of the European Renaissance to a large extent. His idea was also supported by Salutati and Conversini. Being a devout Christian, he believed that God granted human intellect in order for one to employ it to the fullest. Petrarch opposed Scholasticism, the common teaching in schools and universities, which he found lacking of classical style, arid and incomprehensive. His disapproval was later reflected in 1368 treatise *On His Own Ignorance and That of Many Others*⁷, a polemic against scholastics of Padua.

As Petrarch is often regarded as one of the Italy's Three Crowns of the Renaissance literature and poetry, along with Dante and Boccaccio, today Petrarchism continues to influence the cultural and artistic pattern of modernity. To celebrate 700 years of Petrarch's birth in 2004, many exhibitions and conferences about him and his subject of literature were held worldwide. It is observed that his humanist culture influences many modern perceptions. For instance, the comprehension of the place of an individual in society can be gained from Petrarch's Letter to Posterity in which he insightfully discussed about fame in society. Another example can be how music was

⁶ Sadlon, 2007

⁷ Mann, N. *Petrarch at the crossroads*. In Honour of Donald Charlton, University of Warwick. 1992. p. 2. 11 Sept 2012. < <http://petrarch.petersadlon.com/submissions/Mann.pdf>>

transformed from monody to polyphony after Petrarch's sound and variation in his poems.⁸ These discussions further reiterate the presence of Petrarch and his contribution in our world today. The relevance of his works vindicates the importance of the study of human virtues and deeds from a secular perspective during his time then and now.

In conclusion, Petrarch's personalities and love for the classics certainly contribute to the early humanism in the fourteenth century and its subsequent development years after. Though he does not have many humanist followers because of his solitude and deep focus at individual level, Petrarch is undeniably the person who completely transformed the conventional way of thinking and exploring human abilities as discussed. Without him, the world may not have reached where it is today.

⁸ Bondanella & Musa, 1987