

Gur Zak (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem): *Petrarchan Bonds: Virtue, Vulnerability, and Community in Petrarch's Letter Collections*

One of the celebrated features of Petrarch's textual practices is his use of letter-writing as a means of fashioning deep connections across the barriers of both space and time. Through letters, Petrarch established a bond with ancient authors long dead, with devoted friends living across Europe, as well as with us, readers of posterity. Yet while fashioning a trans-cultural and trans-historical community through letter-writing, Petrarch's letter collections are dominated by an ongoing tension over the precise nature of this epistolary community: is it a communion of like-minded men, sharing in similar universal ideals of reason and virtue, or is it rather a coming together based on the recognition of – and sharing in – common human vulnerabilities? While Petrarch's epistolography is primarily identified nowadays with the former option, Gur Zak's paper will highlight the way in which these two competing notions continually collide and interact within Petrarch's letter collections – an oscillation which becomes in itself a defining feature of his humanist outlook.