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Facultatea de Istorie • Centrul de Studii Clasice și Creștine

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## **CRONICA – CRONACA / 341**

## **PUBLICAȚII – PUBBLICAZIONI / 347**

## SIGLE ȘI ABREVIERI / SIGLE E ABBREVIAZIONI\*

ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i> , II, <i>Prinzipat</i> , Berlin-New York
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> , Turnhout.
CCSL	<i>Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina</i> , Turnhout.
<i>Cod. Iust.</i>	<i>Codex Iustinianus</i> .
<i>Cod. Theod.</i>	<i>Codex Theodosianus</i> .
DELL	<i>Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine. Histoire des mots</i> , par Alfred Ernout et Alfred Meillet, tirage de la 4 <sup>e</sup> édition, Paris, 1959.
EDR	<i>Epigraphic Database Roma</i> ( <a href="http://www.edr-edr.it/default/index.php">http://www.edr-edr.it/default/index.php</a> ).
GCS	<i>Griechische Christliche Schriftsteller</i> , Berlin.
MGH	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i> .
OLD	<i>Oxford Latin Dictionary</i> , Oxford, 1968.
PG	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Graeca</i> , Paris.
PL	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina</i> , Paris.
PLRE I	<i>The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire</i> , I, A. D. 260-395, by A. H. M. Jones, J. R. Martindale, J. Morris, Cambridge, 2006
PSB	<i>Părinți și scriitori bisericești</i> , București
SC	<i>Sources Chrétiennes</i> , Lyon.
SCIV (SCIVA)	<i>Studii și cercetări de istorie veche (și arheologie)</i> , București.
ThLL	<i>Thesaurus linguae Latinae</i> .

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\* Cu excepția celor din *L'Année Philologique* și *L'Année Épigraphique* / Escluse quelle segnalate da *L'Année Philologique* e *L'Année Épigraphique*.





## CHALLENGES IN THE LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF THE SELF. CASE STUDY: *ACCIDIA* (*SECRETUM*, PETRARCH)

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**Key-words:** *accidia, aegritudo, pestis, metaphor, conscience.*

**Abstract:** *The treatise Secretum proposes a type of literary representation of the conflicted, sick self, whose reactions are antagonized, distorting, through exaggeration or minimization, the evanescent data of reality. In the process of healing those parts of the soul through which the connection with God is restored, the assumption of destiny is a necessary stage. Positioning the self at the center of one's own drama, recognizing one's wounds, discovering one's own resources that prevent its destructuring and dissolution are, from a Christian perspective, signs of concern for salvation, of love for the destiny of the soul after death.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *accidia, aegritudo, pestis, metaforă, conștiință.*

**Rezumat:** *Tratatul Secretum propune un tip de reprezentare literară a sinelui conflictual, bolnav, ale cărui reacții sunt antagonizate, distorsionând, prin exagerare sau minimizare, datele evanescente ale realității. În procesul de vindecare a acelor părți ale sufletului prin care se restabilește legătura cu Dumnezeu, asumarea destinului constituie o etapă necesară. Poziționarea sinelui în centrul propriei drame, recunoașterea rănilor lui, descoperirea resurselor proprii care previn destructurarea și disoluția lui constituie, dintr-o perspectivă creștină, semne ale grijii pentru mântuire, ale iubirii față de destinul sufletului de după moarte.*

“By the end of the Middle Ages, the literary approach to the self occupies as important a place as the venerable concern with the self as an aspect of soul or mind. Petrarch plays a major role in the last phase of this development, which takes place between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries”<sup>1</sup>. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, in *Secretum*, Pe-

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Stock, *Reading, Writing, and the Self: Petrarch and His Forerunners*, *New Literary History*, 226/4, *Philosophical Resonances*, 1995, 717.

trarch showed an increased interest in revealing his contrasting, lucidly disarming inner experiences. Perhaps the fear of being perceived as a spirit demanding for compassion was one of the reasons why he did not want to make the manuscript public, but keep it for himself, considering that he would find solace in simply returning and re-reading it anytime life would have put him in trouble. After the first stages of composing the verses of the *Canzoniere* had offered the image of a dreamy author, who deals with the theme of unfulfilled love with fleeting sorrow, without the rancor of a temperamental character, Petrarch found himself in the situation of talking about himself for himself, offering himself a helping hand, to which his sick spirit could return in case of necessity, through his lifetime. From this perspective, the act of writing and re-reading become the liberators of a troubled conscience, which can only be healed by words.

The autobiographical treatise *Secretum* represents one of the most sincere and painful Humanist testimonies about man's inability to rise from the abyss of a destructured self, whose parts no longer form a whole, but survive on their own, in an exhausting latency. Through a dialogue with Augustine, Petrarch (the author's *alter ego*) tries to find out both the cause of his mental suffering and the possibilities of remedying the situation in order to once again enjoy the advantages of an intact self, which consist primarily in the unity of feelings and thoughts untouched by the relativity of the uncontrollable course of existence. After Augustine places the cause of Petrarch's suffering in connection with Petrarch's wandering away from God, the reasons why he got there are examined and it is concluded that the winding course of such an unfortunate adventure was the attachment to things (fortunes) or the fleeting ideals (glory, love) of life. Augustine warns that the state of impotence that characterizes Petrarch is a sign of an illness, which the ancients called *aegritudo* and the moderns *accidia*: *A. Habet te funesta quedam pestis animi, quam accidiam moderni, veteres egritudinem dixerunt (Secretum, II, 49)*. This statement opens the door to a visual digression, in which the images of falling and rising from the ground become emblematic of the state of illness and of the impulse to return to the state of health: *F. 'Cadere' igitur et 'iacere' unum atque idem esse diffinis? (Secretum, I, 11)*. The prevalence of the visual sense at the expense of the other senses, in images like this, as well as Petrarch's declaration of not being able to remain steadfast in his elevation, of not being able

to reach and remain in balance, despite his burning desire, is a mark of Neoplatonic influence, especially a reminiscence of the thesis related to the chaining of the spirit in the body. Happiness resides, in fact, in a state of functional balance that can be reached, in Augustine's opinion, by intertwining decision, that is, the speech centered on a single objective, with action, that is the natural consequence of the speech; it represents the Christian habitual state of being, the state of the one who, putting his trust in the future life, assumes the hardships of this world.

The description of the disease and its related symptomatology constitute in *Secretum* the expressive background on which the debate regarding the problems of a destructured self takes shape. Starting from the definition offered to the self, which, according to Irving Howe<sup>2</sup>, represents "a construct of mind, an hypothesis of being, socially formed even as it can be quickly turned against the very social formations that have brought it into birth", we deduce that this manifestation is the distinctive element, the mark, the imprint of our being in this world, but that it is neither immutable (it is a "hypostasis",) nor easily decipherable by others. Being a posture of our being, therefore of its passage through this world, in distinct spatio-temporal contexts, it is subject to an attitude of reaction to the social stimuli that describe our dynamics in this world. From this angle, we can say that a sick self is, first of all, non-reactive, that is unable to respond to the demands of an environment that constantly challenges it. The voluntary seclusion of the subject, which stands under the sign of a programmatic solitude in *De vita solitaria*<sup>3</sup>, and which is invoked by Petrarch as a potential remedy to soul sickness in *Secretum*, is however not an idea shared by Augustine. For the latter, healing does not depend on circumstances external to the being, but primarily on a certain mental climate, on an inner atmosphere that involves the restoration of order in an existential chaos and that can only be acquired

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<sup>2</sup> Irving Howe, *The Self in Literature, Salmagundi*, 90/91, 1991, 56.

<sup>3</sup> In *De vita solitaria*, solitude is a condition for: the literary creation (*otium literatum*): *Nam de otio quidem illud Ciceronis notum: «Quid dulcius otio literato?»* (I, 3); the philosophical meditation: (...) *non minus illud Seneca vulgatum: Otium sine literis mors est, et hominis vivi sepulture* (I, 3); the Christian monasticism: *Solus oravit, in solitudine ieiunavit, in solitudine tentantem vicit adversarium* (II, 10).

through a type of channeled energy towards the fulfillment of a single objective, spiritual and strictly related to God; this type of inner, creative energy, capable of changing the course of human life, is the will. Thus, Augustine transcends the message of Stoic philosophy, which theorizes the value of resignation to fate; however, he retains a small part of it when he speaks, for example, in his sermons, about the value of humility as one of the most precious theological values. In *Secretum*, solitude is connotated more negatively than positively: a) it should be avoided until the sick soul recovers: *Restat unum, quod pene iam oblitus eram: tam diu cavendam tibi solitudinem scito, donec sentias morbi tui nullas superesse reliquias* (*Secretum*, III, 52); b) it is connected to ambition and the desire for vain literary glory: *Multis namque viis ad unum terminum pervenitur, et tu, michi crede, licet calcatam vulgo deserueris viam, tamen ad eandem, quam sprevisse te dicis, ambitionem obliquo calle contendis; ad quam otium, solitudo* (*Secretum*, II, 36); it is a sign of unrequited love: *rerum omnium contemptus viteque odium et desiderium mortis, tristis et amor solitudinis atque hominum fuga* (*Secretum*, III, 30).

Augustine's speech brings to the attention of the readers of the treatise a type of interesting optics from three points of view: a) the treatment of the soul through a volitional act is universally valid, applicable and accessible to all categories of people, in the sense in which it does not take into account the singularity of the affected being, it does not depend on the social status of the subject, Augustine referring to Petrarch as a pagan and less as an intellectual (when he does, it is to hyperbolize the skills obviously born or acquired by him throughout his life) b) the treatment of the soul can begin at any stage of the disease, the personal decision-making factor being endowed with a huge creative power c) the treatment prescribed by Augustine is implicitly guaranteed; the text does not provide details that would lead the reader to believe there is even the slightest possibility that the healing could not take place. While describing the causes of the anarchy of a destructured self, Augustine mentions the "soul" as the center of the problem. Although the connection between the self and the soul is philosophically paradigmatic for the transformations that can irreversibly endanger the becoming of the being, in the philosophical practice it is customary to talk about diseases of the soul and not of the self, focusing attention on the fact that between the self and the soul there is not a relationship of perfect overlap, of identity: the

soul carries peculiarities that inexorably belong to our energetic imprint with which we were endowed from the moment of birth, while the self belongs to the way we relate to ourselves based on data recorded as a result of our dynamics with our peers (alterity plays an important role here) and with the environment. The therapeutic process that a sick soul must go through is described by Augustine with the meticulousness of a mentor who has gone through this experience himself. This technique of teaching, of transmitting information is part of an authorial strategy that increases the credibility of the discourse and attests the act of healing. The short questions, the acid answers (containing advice: *A. (...) quid autem nunc probati consilii michi sit, breviter accipe* – *Secretum*, III, 36, accepted by Petrarch: *F. Credo ita esse* – *Secretum*, II, 44; *Sprevisse nequeo, cuius, et sepe alias et his presertim proximis diebus, sana consilia sum expertus* – *Secretum*, III, 8; or contested: *F. Difficillima quidem persuasio* – *Secretum*, II, 54), the acid answers, the acuity of observation and the interest in detail make Augustine look like a doctor, while the digressions meant to give weight to the discourse, taking it into the area of humanistic knowledge (philosophy, theology, literature), bring him closer to the Medieval prototype of the scholar. Augustine uses the terms *ae-gritudo*, *accidia* or *pestis animi* in order to name Petrarch's spiritual problems: *Habet te funesta quedam pestis animi, quam accidiam moderni, veteres egritudinem dixerunt* (*Secretum*, II, 49). For Petrarch, the name is not as important as the object to which it refers, that is, an affection of the soul: *Hanc sive egritudinem, sive accidiam, sive quid aliud esse diffinis haud magnifacio; ipsa de re convenit* (*Secretum*, II, 52).

The term *accidia* appears accepted in the common consciousness only in the 4th century AD and has its origins in the tribulations of Egyptian monasticism<sup>4</sup>. Evagrius Ponticus and Cassian are the authors who used this term in their writings, referring to a state of mind involving several types of experiences, including physical weakness, indolence and apathy, which kept the monks away from the obligations of ascetic life. Because these states distracted them from meditation and prayer, they were often likened to demons or temptations. In

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<sup>4</sup> Stanley W. Jackson, *Acedia, the Sin and its Relationship to Sorrow and Melancholia in Medieval Times*, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 55/2, 1981, 172.

Evagrius Ponticus and Cassian, *accidia* is among the capital sins, but it is no longer mentioned, for example, in Gregory the Great<sup>5</sup>. Stanley W. Jackson shows that, in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the emphasis falls on the physical limitations that *accidia* causes, weakness, a certain state of drowsiness and inability to carry out physical work, and in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the emphasis falls on the inner state of the subjects. That is why we should not be surprised by the fact that in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the terms *accidia* and *tristitia* are used interchangeably<sup>6</sup>.

If the theological writings attest such an evolution of the meaning of *accidia*, its symptomatology makes us think of melancholy, a state of mind that Hippocrates considered a disease, and which he explained by the excess of black bile in the human body. However, a first complex approach to this condition is made by Rufus of Ephesus in his treatise on melancholia published in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Even if it has not been preserved, a number of elements were used and passed on by Galenus. The researcher Thomas Rüten names three original elements in Rufus's observations regarding melancholy: a) the link between this state and the prototype of the intellectual (a category which, among all other social categories, would be the most affected); b) the theory according to which this state can be caused both of the yellow bile as well as the black bile, thus dismantling the Hippocratic theory of the excess of black bile; c) the connection between hypochondria and melancholy<sup>7</sup>, which will last until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when Robert Burton composes *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621).

In *Secretum*, the meaning of the term *accidia* is a happy twinning of the two directions, the theological and the medical one. The theological one is supported by the fact that Augustine refers to *accidia* emphasizing Petrarch's distance from fulfilling the spiritual duties that every Christian has in relation to God. The medical one is supported by establishing the fact itself that the subject is affected by a "disease", but especially by indicating a treatment, which involves reading philosophical literature. In the prologue of the book, the female character Veritas mentions that Petrarch is affected by a dange-

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, 175.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Rüten, *Rufus' Legacy in the Psychopathological Literature of the (Early) Modern Period*, in *On Melancholy: Rufus of Ephesus*, Mohr Siebeck GmbH and Co. KG, 2008, 245. The link between hypochondria and melancholy had already been intuited since the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, by Diocles of Carystus, cf. *ibidem*, 247.

rous and long-lasting illness: *periculosa et longa egritudine tentus sit* (*Secretum*, Pr., 7). This disease is described by means of three metaphors: a) metaphor of the chains: *F. Quid igitur censes esse faciendum, ut integer animus, discussis terre compedibus, tollatur ad supera?* (*Secretum*, I, 17); *A. Duabus adhuc adamantinis dextra levaeque premeris cathenis, que nec de morte neque de vita sinunt cogitare* (*Secretum*, III, 2); metaphor of the battle with the self: *F. (...) Veluti siquis ab innumeris hostibus circumclusus, cui nullus pateat egressus, nulla sit misericordie spes nullumque solatium sed infesta omnia, erecte machine, defossi sub terram cuniculi: tremuntque iam turres* (*Secretum*, II, 51); metaphor of the fallen asleep soul: *A. Profecimus aliquantulum; en incipis expergisci* (*Secretum*, I, 16). These metaphors either present a latent state of the soul, or a state of restlessness, this ambivalence being suggestive for the image of a split self. Augustine points out that that several literary works treat about the disease, giving information on how it can be overcome: *habes Seneca de hac re non inutilem epistolam; habes et librum eiusdem De tranquillitate animi; habes et de tota hac mentis egritudine tollenda, librum M. Ciceronis egregium, quem ex tertie diei disputationibus in Tusculano suo habitis ad Brutum scripsit* (*Secretum*, II, 66)<sup>8</sup>.

In *Ad Lucilium* (6, 56), an epistle that probes in a Stoic manner the theme of soul balance and the ways in which it can be lost or gained, *aegritudo* records only one occurrence and is used with the meaning of “care”, “concern”, with reference to the one who cannot fall asleep despite the silence surrounding him: *Aspice illum cui somnus laxae domus silentio queuriti, cuius aures ne quis agitet sonus, omnis servorum turba conticuit et suspensum accedentium propius vestigium ponitur: huc nempe versatur atque illuc, somnum inter aegritudines levem captans; quae non audit audisse se queritur (...) Animus illi obstrepit*. In *De tranquillitate animi*, Seneca talks about the state of a soul lacking full health, which is neither fully freed nor fully subject to vices, *nec aegroto, nec valeo* (I, 2), but also about how important it is to change habits as remedies in the treatment of diseases, *qualis ille homericus Achilles est, modo pronus, modo supinus*,

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<sup>8</sup> Seneca and Cicero are among Petrarch's ancient favourite writers, cf. B. L. Ullman, *Petrarch's Favorite Books, Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 54, 1923, 26-27.



*in uarios habitus se ipse componens, quod proprium aegri est, nihil diu pati et mutationibus ut remediis uti* (II, 12). The disease can also appear as a result of interacting with people suffering from soul sickness: *ita in amicorum legendis ingeniis dabimus operam ut quam minime inquinatos assumamus: initium morbi est aegris sana miscere* (VII, 4). It is very possible that the theme of change, in the abandonment of old habits and the adoption of a new lifestyle, was taken from here by Petrarch and introduced in *Secretum: turpius ad iuuenilia ista rediretur* (II, 43); *nec in tergum verti, nec assueta respicere* (III, 46).

In the aforementioned Ciceronian work, *Tusculanae disputationes*, III, Cicero uses the term *aegritudo* with the generic meaning of “sadness”, not associating it with a disease, but rather with a “state”. He offers a panoramic approach to the most common types of human passions, but does not mention the way in which such a state can be overcome, although the imaginary journey through Greek philosophy (Epicureism, Stoicism, the Cyrenaic school) is endowed with this finality. Cicero states, however, that a relatively easy way to overcome the state of sadness consists in reorienting attention away from adverse situations, as the Epicureans use to do (*Tusculanae disputationes*, III, 31, 76). For this, it is necessary to apply three Epicurean principles, two of which are attributed directly to Epicurus, and the third to his disciple, Metrodorus of Lampsacus: the first refers to the fact that the sadness associated with death is not justifiable, because those who have passed away don’t feel pain; the second refers to shifting attention from the unfortunate circumstances of life to remembering the beautiful moments of the past, realizing that the past can no longer be changed; and the third to the fact that there is no pure sadness, but in every sadness there is a certain type of pleasure<sup>9</sup>.

The disease of the soul can be cured by reading, but on the condition that the patient looks for the moral meaning in literary works, not for the beautiful and deceptive form of expression: *Lectio autem ista quid profuit? Ex multis enim que legisti, quantum est quod inheerit animo, quod radices egerit, quod fructum proferat tempestivum?* (*Secretum*, II, 5); *Comunis legentium mos est, ex quo monstrum illud execrabile, litteratorum passim flagitiosissimos errare greges et*

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<sup>9</sup> C. E. Manning, *The Consolatory Tradition and Seneca’s Attitude to the Emotions*, G&R, 21/1, 1974, 79.

*de arte vivendi, multa licet in scholis disputentur, in actum pauca converti. Tu vero, si suis locis notas certas impresseris, fructum ex lectione percipies* (*Secretum*, III, 67); *Nunquam, ex quo pueritiam excessi, scientiarum flosculis delectatus sum* (*Secretum*, III, 75). Petrarch insists on the parenetic dimension of literature, depriving it of its aesthetic character and thus shattering the classic binomial of the harmonious and functional unity between form and content. If man, in order to heal his soul, must give up old morals, vicious habits, then literature must also renew its main objective, that of educating generations of readers, since it comes into contact with that “undisguised” part of their being, which is the self. By combining the theme of the illness of the soul with the pedagogical dimension of literature, Petrarch shows that vulnerability (intrinsic human trait) and education (cultural accessory acquired by one’s own will) represent the pillars of the Humanist definition of man.

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