THE SYMBOLISM OF PETRARCH'S CANZONE TO THE VIRGIN: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

It has, so far as the writer knows, never been pointed out that Petrarch's magnificent invocation to the Virgin, in the high and solemn beauty of which the mystic and essentially mediaeval side of the poet's complex nature finds eloquent expression, contains the same symbolism as that on which the early Christian hymnists based their morning hymns; which forms the nucleus of the tenth century bilingual alba discovered by Johann Schmidt in the Vatican Library in 1881; and which was utilized by Folquet de Marselha (if the attribution be reliable) and his successors in this field, as a nucleus for the production of the psychologically interesting, and, to certain temperaments, aesthetically pleasing religious albas of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Provence. This important fact, if it can be demonstrated, is a striking instance of what, for the dawn genre in general, may be stated as a species of universal law, by the operation of which the development of this form seems to have been largely conditioned. I refer to the attractive power which this theme, in all its aspects, has exerted, at different times and in different places, over minds of great and even transcendent poetic talent, in virtue of which there has formed around the motif a body of poetry which, both qualitatively and quantitatively, is altogether remarkable.

2. For a tabulation of the apposite pieces, see p. 3.
5. Cf. Pratsch, Biographie des Tr. Folquet von Marseille, Berlin, 1878, pp. 39-49, where the attribution to Folquet de Marselha is denied; R. Zenker, Zu Folquet von Romans und Folquet von Marseille, in Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie, vol. XXI, p. 335 ff. Only three MSS. contain the alba: C attributes it to Folquet de Marselha; R to Folquet de Romans; F to Folquet, without further specification. Crescini, in his Manualeto Provenzale (2d improved edition), Verona-Padova, 1905, does not admit the necessity of rejecting the attribution to Folquet de Marselha.
Symbolism of Petrarch's Canzone to the Virgin

It is at least a curious coincidence that beside the unique association of great names citable for the genre in general, may stand, each representative of a special phase, the names of three such creative geniuses as Petrarch, Shakespeare, and Richard Wagner. That Shakespeare used the motif, and in a form which Gaston Paris believed to be more primitive than that of the extant popular French manifestations, is now well known; and the dawn-scene of Wagner's Tristan und Isolde, as a revival of the courtly mediaeval theme, is of course celebrated. That Petrarch, however, may claim the distinction of having crystallised, in a poetic production of consummate creative artistry, the religious symbolism which forms the basis both of the Latin hymnology of the early Christian centuries and of the religious albas of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, has, apparently, never been observed.

Petrarch's canzone to the Virgin, to be specific, seems to me to represent, from the aspect at least of genius, the culminating point in the long and complex development of the religious symbol.

I cannot enter here into the question of origins. Of this whole subject of religious symbolism, as contained in the Latin hymnists of the early centuries, in the tenth century bilingual piece, in the five extant albas of specific religious intention; in a short piece, perhaps fragmentary, in French, which has been supposed to represent the first strophe of a lost Crusade song; in the Reis

*a Cf. Journal des Savants, 1892, p. 163.

Wagner, influenced, as Roethe, not very convincingly, surmises (in the Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum, vol. XXXIV, N. F. 22 = Anzeiger für deutsches Altertum, vol. XVI, 1890, pp. 75-97. See especially p. 80), by the later tagelied production of Oswald von Wolkenstein, and certainly by the tagelied tradition represented by the Middle High German poets of renown (with whom Gottfried von Strassburg may, as a possibility, be included) has, if I am not mistaken, seen, above all, in his adaptation of the theme to his Tristan und Isolde, the dawn-symbolism which, undoubtedly, attracted many of his predecessors. The evocational effectiveness of that dramatic scene, with its consistent leit-motif, needs no description here; but I am far from certain that the connection of the symbolism referred to, with the mediaeval German tradition, has always been, by scholars, correctly gauged.

*b Cf. in general, Ebert, Allgemeine Geschichte der Litteratur des Mittelalters; erster Band: Leipzig, 1874, p. 165 ff., 171 ff.

*cf. note 3.

*Bartsch, Grundriss, p. 131, no. 26; p. 171, no. 342, 1; p. 141, no. 206, 1; p. 114, no. 71, 2; p. 153, no. 248, 70.

*Bartsch, Chrest. fr., columns 243-246.
glorios of Guiraut de Borneil,\textsuperscript{12} in the clearly fusional piece of the later Raimon de las Salas, the \textit{Deus aidatz}, which may, at least in part, be an imitation of Guiraut,\textsuperscript{13} in sporadic instances in Germany between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, and in rich development thereafter.\textsuperscript{14}—I have made a special investigation which has led me far, presenting, as it does, many complex problems of influences and inter-relations peculiarly delicate in nature and recalcitrant to all attempt at off-hand and obvious solution. I may state here, however, my strong belief that the view which holds to the dependence of the profane upon the religious \textit{alba}, expounded somewhat vaguely by Wilhelm Scherer\textsuperscript{15} and more definitely by Gustav Roethe,\textsuperscript{16} is quite erroneous. The courtly manifestation of the \textit{alba} must, it seems to me clear, be at least in essence dissociated from the religious form, which harks back to a tradition of great antiquity. One of the latest investigators of the theme, Mr. Georg Schlaeger,\textsuperscript{17} who also holds this view, goes, in my opinion, altogether too far in his peremptory denial of all inter-relation: it would, it seems to me, be impossible for two such manifestations of the theme to co-exist under similar circumstances, and retain at the same time entire independence; tho each had its own tradition and its own laws, and was, at least originally, independent of the other, secondary influence of greater or less degree was inevitable, as seen, e. g., in the \textit{alba} of Guiraut de Borneil, in that of Raimon de las Salas, and in the clear religious 'parodies' (in the Greek sense) of the fifteenth and sixteenth, perhaps, also, of the preceding centuries in Germany.

Starting in the ancient dualism of light and darkness, as typifying moral antitheses;\textsuperscript{18} perpetuated in this symbolic application

\textsuperscript{12} Bartsch, \textit{Grundriss}, p. 150, no. 64.
\textsuperscript{13} Bartsch, \textit{Grundriss}, p. 188, no. 469, 2.
\textsuperscript{14} Cf. in general, for the German religious development, Bartsch, in \textit{Album des literarischen Vereins in Nürnberg= Gesammelte Vorträge und Aufsätze}, Freiburg, 1883, pp. 250–317; W. de Gruter, \textit{Das deutsche Tagelied}, Leipzig, 1887.
\textsuperscript{16} L. c., p. 86 ff.
\textsuperscript{18} Cf. de Gruter, l. c., p. 128 ff.
to Christ and the Virgin in the New Testament;\textsuperscript{10} reflected in the morning hymns of the early Christians, who met, \textit{ante lucem}, to usher in the dawn with pious hymn and prayer;\textsuperscript{20} made the basis of the Latin hymnology of the first centuries (here St. Ambrose and Prudentius, from whom I shall shortly have occasion to quote, deserve especial mention);\textsuperscript{21} interrupted for six centuries, as the result possibly,—if one accept de Gruyter's plausible hypothesis\textsuperscript{22}—of a transition from lyrical song to epic souvenir (a transition based on the development of a mystical significance which paralleled the hours to the stages of Christ's sufferings, and in the course of which the symbolic conflict of light and darkness would tend to be supplanted),—the old symbolism, which certain evidences indicate was throughout the intervening centuries never in the tradition completely lost,\textsuperscript{23} reappears intact in the tenth century Latin piece (with Provençal refrain),\textsuperscript{24} and developed contemporaneously with our courtly \textit{alba} in the form of a fixed \textit{genre}, one of the most interesting and aesthetically pleasing manifestations of the theme which we possess.

The symbolism on which this religious form, perpetuating its old tradition, is based, falls, much condensed and briefly stated, as follows:

\textsuperscript{20} The most thorough study of biblical analogies which I have found is that of Schlaeger, \textit{l. c.}, p. 46 ff.; cf. also de Gruyter, \textit{l. c.}, p. 127 ff.

\textsuperscript{21} Cf. \textit{e. g.}, Gaston Paris, \textit{l. c.}, p. 164; Ebert, \textit{l. c.}, is not explicit here.

\textsuperscript{22} See notes 28, 29, 36, 43, etc.

\textsuperscript{23} de Gruyter, \textit{l. c.}, p. 129.

\textsuperscript{24} Cf. Schlaeger, \textit{l. c.}, p. 45, note 1; p. 50, note 1; p. 51; p. 52; \textit{ibid.}, note 1; p. 53; p. 57, note 1.

\textsuperscript{25} Cf. note 3; also p. 40. This enigmatic Provençal refrain, of which only the words \textit{L'alba par... tenebres}, falling respectively at beginning and end, can be admitted as beyond dispute, I have studied exhaustively in my dissertation, \textit{Alba, Aube and Tagelied in the Light of the History of Culture}, shortly to appear in print; the conclusions there reached are briefly as follows: (1) The refrain originally rhymed by series of three syllables. (2) It consists of two distinct divisions, lines 1-4 representing the first, lines 4-7 the second. (3) The first division is, in all probability, the poetic reproduction of a castle-watchman's auroral cry. (4) The second division is a special religious application drawn from division 1, and adapted to the body of the Latin text. (5) The meaning, with some reconstruction of the text, I believe to be the following: "\textit{The dawn appears; it lights the sea; beyond these hills it passes. Awake! Do vigil! See clearly what Night's darkness means!}" From conclusions three and four it will be seen that I do not admit the refrain to be evidential for the theory of a presumptive tenth century dawn \itshape genre, of either courtly or popular basis.
2. Mary: light in general; specifically, Dawn:
   sometimes, (a) Lucifer; (b) Stella Maris.
3. Christ: the Day:
   by confusion, (a) Lucifer; (b) Dawn; (c) the Sun itself.
4. Satan: Sin; Night; Sleep.

It is this symbolism which forms the nucleus of our religious hymns and albas.25

Of the twenty-six morning hymns published by Jacob Grimm in 1830,26 a rather considerable proportion seem to me citable as examples of at least three of the symbolic elements listed above, viz., nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 15, 16, 18, 20, 25:

1. Mediae noctis tempore.
2. Deus qui coeli lumen es.
3. Splendor paternae gloriae.
4. Aeternae lucis conditor.
5. Fulgentis auctor aetheris.
8. Diei luce reddita.
15. Deus qui certis legibus.
16. Christi qui lux es et die.
18. Sic ter quaternis traditur.
20. Hic est dies verus Dei.
25. Aeterne rerum conditor.

To this list may be added, from the monumental collection of Wackernagel,27 analogous passages from nos. 6, 9, 27, 29, 31, 35, 85, 118, 235, 245.

26 In the latter, however, it is combined with the figure of the Watchman, or, at least, of the poet who assumes the functions of Watchman (and warner) in his exhortation to sinners to arise from sleep (=night =darkness =sin); all these elements may be traced back thro' the hymnology of the early Christian centuries to biblical analoga.


28 Das deutsche Kirchenlied von der ältesten Zeit bis zu Anfang des XVII. Jahrhunderts. Mit berücksichtigung der lateinischen (sc. Liederdichtung) von
I have but little space here for citation. God, as in Ambrosius, is "auctor" of the resplendent aether, ruler over sun and moon. His own splendor is the splendor of paternal glory, from its own light light-streaming. He is light of light and source of light day illuminating day: true sun shining with perpetual splendor creator of eternal radiance light Himself and day, knowing no night—candidor indescribable: His day is the true day of the coming day He is judge. Hence is, in Prudentius, the cockcrow heard just before dawn the symbol of our judgment.

So, on the same analogy, is Christ refulgence. He is light and He is day. He is Lucifer, the Morning Star, disperser of Night, and cloud, and darkness arouser of the drowsy day expeller from high heaven of Night's shadows radiant light, interraying human sense breaker of Night's bonds breaker of new light This light is the light of Faith in His salvation He is true light of the faithful light of light, He shall be believed in his prophecies of light to the elect the dawning of the day brings with it deep light.


Wackernagel, l. c. no. 3, strophe I (all). Wack., l. c. no. 4, strophe I (all). Ibid., strophe II, lines 1-2. Grimm, l. c. no. 4 = Aeterne lucis conditor; cf. also no. VI. Ibid., strophe I, lines 2-3. Grimm, l. c. no. 6, strophe I, line 2 = candor inenarrabilis. Grimm, l. c. no. 20 = Hic est dies verus Dei. Grimm, l. c. no. 6, strophe I, line 3. Wack., l. c. no. 27 = Hymnus ad galli cantum, strophe IV, Vox ista . . . nostri figura est iudicis. Grimm, l. c. no. 4, strophe I, line 2. Grimm, l. c. no. 2, strophe 4, line 3 = Typusque Christi Lucifer. Wack., l. c. no. 29, strophe I. Grimm, l. c. no. 2, strophe IV, line 4. Wack., l. c. no. 3, strophe II, line 1; ibid., no. 11, strophe III, lines 1-2; ibid., no. 29, strophe I, line 4; Grimm, l. c. no. 2, strophe IV, lines 1-2; ibid., no. 4, strophe II. Wack., l. c. no. 11, strophe VIII, line 1. Wack., l. c. Prudentius, no. 27, strophe XXV. Wack., l. c. no. 35, strophe III, lines 1-2; cf. strophes VII and VIII. In general throughout. Wack., l. c. no. 15, strophe II, line 4. Grimm, l. c. no. 8, strophe III, line 1. Grimm, l. c. no. 16, strophe I, lines 3-4.
faith: hope of the promised boon. Faith in Him shall be as Noo-
day; and the twilight of unfaith and sin shall be avoided. As
dawn-symbol of salvation the dawn of the real day shall induce
first prayer.

As God and Christ symbolise resplendent light, so are Night
and darkness symbolical of Satan and his evil powers, by whose
pollution the believer is during sleep most susceptible, when the
consciousness of his faith is weakened. Hence is the Divinity
prayed to lend its aid, above all, when sleep weighs down the weary
mind, to ray down the light of glory that the enemy, full of
wile, may have no play, may not, profiting by heavy slumbers,
catch the defenceless mortal unawares; that he, the serpens cal-
didus, may not attempt to force his entrance into the slumbering
soul, and by fraud, or violence, commit sacrilege upon the
glorified spirit.

He is the Enemy; he is the thief, who believes himself im-
mune before the light, but whose wiles are set at naught by the
light of Christ. That Light is strength against his evil acts when
it dawns, the whole chorus of dark errors flee incontinent
from their evil way. So Sleep, given over to these evil forces,
symbolises eternal death, and only with its dispersal and that

48 Wack., l. c., no. 3, strophe V, lines 3-4.
49 Wack., l. c., no. 4, strophe VII, lines 3-4.
50 Wack., l. c., no. 11, strophe VIII, lines 3-4.
51 Wack., l. c., no. 9, strophe II, line 4.
52 Grimm, l. c., no. 15, strophe II.
53 Grimm, l. c., no. 16, strophe III, lines 1-2.
54 Grimm, l. c., no. 18, strophe II, line 3.
55 Ibid., line 4.
56 Wack., l. c., no. 6, strophe III, Quo fraude quiquid daemonum in noctibus
deliquimus, Abstergat illud caelitus tuae potestas gloriae.
57 Grimm, l. c., no. 18, strophe IV, line 3.
58 Ibid., line 4.
59 Wack., l. c., no. 9, strophe II, line 3.
60 Wack., l. c., no. 29, strophe V, line 1.
61 Ibid., line 2.
62 Ibid., lines 3-4: Prudentius, Wackernagel, l. c., no. 27, strophe VIII,
strophes X and XXV.
63 Wack., l. c., no. 29, strophe V, line 3.
64 Wack., l. c., no. 11, strophe III, lines 3-4.
65 Wack., l. c., Prudentius, no. 27, strophe VII, lines 1-2.
66 Wack., l. c., no. 9, strophe II, lines 1-2.
of the "wandering demons" frightened by the symbolic cock-crow, is the soul again free to draw to itself that eternal life which the white dawn heralds.

So, in the main, the symbolism of the early Latin hymns.

The essence of this symbolism appears again intact in the tenth century bilingual poem, which, because of its Provençal refrain, may, with some ground of reason, be classed as the first of our Provençal religious albas. Here, however, a new element is added to the symbolism which, in the hymn-passages, is lacking, that of the symbolic watchman. It is quite unnecessary, after the studies of de Gruyter and G. Schlaeger, to attempt to set forth here the many biblical analogies from which this allegorical figure is evidently, in the ultimate issue, drawn. What I should like to call especially to the reader's attention is the fact of its existence in the Latin hymns and in one of the specific pieces which contain the dawn and darkness symbols. I refer to Wackernagel, No. 31, especially strophes III and IV:

> Lux, ecce, surgit aurea,  
pallens facesat caecitas,  
Quae nosmet in praeceps diu  
errore traxit devio.

Speculator adstat desuper,  
qui nos diebus omnibus  
Actusque nostros prospicit  
a luce prima in vesperum.

A close search would, undoubtedly, reveal other examples of this use, which is derived directly from the Bible. The bilingual alba, at any rate, combines the watchman in this allegorical application with the symbolic dualism synthesised above; the dawn description, as in a number of our hymns (especially in Prudentius), quite outweighs however the Watchman element, which is limited to two lines (strophes I–II, line 3): the daemonic obsession

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* Wack., l. c., no. 27, strophe X, line 4.
* Ibid., line 3.
* Wack., l. c., no. 3, strophe V; no. 11, strophe VIII, etc.
* L. c.
of sleep, on the contrary, comes out strongly, especially in strophe II. The shortness of the text justifies its citation here entire:

1. Phæbi claro nondum orto iubare
   Fert Aurora lumen terris tenue.
   Speculator pigris clamat surgite.
2. En incertos ostium insidie,
   Torpentesque gliscunt intercipere,
   Quos suadet preco clamat (? ) surgere.
3. Ab arcturo disgregatur aquilo
   Poli suos conduct astra radios
   Orienti tenditur septemtrio.

Refrain (recurrant after each third line),—

$L'alba$ par umet mar atra sol
Poypas abigil miraclar tenebras.

The closeness of the body of the Latin text to the symbolic idea of the Latin Christian hymns of the 4th and 5th centuries is so clear and obvious that a direct connection must be admitted. Here, as there, the dawn-theme forms the inception (1–2); here, also, the exhortation to arise (combined, it is true, with the figure of the watchman, but that, as we have seen, was also in the hymnology): the ostium insidie: the pigris and torpentes, the idea of catching unaware in intercipere, all corresponds exactly to the basic idea of the "symbolistic" already analysed.

Passing over two centuries, we find, in the handful of Provençal religious albas, the same or similar elements, with, also in this progression, the introduction of a new symbolic element. This new element, on which much stress is laid, is that of the Virgin.

Yet just as, in the case of the Watchman, we found already in the hymnal of the early centuries an exact prototype, so also, for the rôle of the Virgin played in our religious albas, we are not left without analogy.

In Mediae noctis tempore (Grimm, I), occurs the allusion to the famous parable of the wise and the foolish virgins,

Occurrunt sanctae virgines
obviam tunc adventui
gestantes claras lampadas
magno laetantes gaudio . . .
here, if I am not mistaken, allegorical of the coming day, and hence comparable with Grimm, IV, strophe 2:

Jam cedet pallens proximo
diei nox adventui
obtundens lumen siderum
adest et clarus lucifer.

(Lucifer playing here the Virgins' part.)

This parable of the wise virgins and their symbolic lamps is highly important, because of its intimate association with the whole religious symbol;71 Petrarch, as we shall soon see, uses the motif in his canzone.72 Tho, of course, the confusion of the wise virgins with Mary, as highest and wisest of all, was the effect of an obvious association, it is not they who appear before us in the Provençal albas, but the Virgin, Mother of Christ, Herself.

For Her also, in the Latin hymns, analogies may be found.

In the Ave maris stella, attributed to the fifth century Venantius Fortunatus (Wackernagel, l. c., no. 85), the functions usually attributed to Christ, the Saviour, are here applied to Her; felix caeli porta mutans Evae nomen, She is thus implored,—

Solve vincla reis,
profer lumen caecis,
Mala nostra pelle,
bona cuncta posce.

In this short excerpt we find the Virgin, then, conceived as a source of resplendent light, figuring Christ's salvation and hence breaking the bonds by which the sinful are encompassed; above all as Media-trix, who, by Her intercession, may obtain for the sinner all good gifts, (by which, undoubtedly, freedom from sin, peaceful death, and the resurrection are signified). Moreover, as we see in the title, the identification of Mary with the star of the sea is here already consummated. The specific light-symbolism inherent in this epitheton comes out much more plainly in a seventh century hymn (Wackernagel, no. 118) which begins,

O stella maris fulgida
absolve plebis crimina

71 See Schlaeger, l. c., p. 30, note 2.
72 See pp. 48-50.
Here, as in the passage cited above, Mary, as vicarious light of salvation, stands between eternal damnation and eternal joy, and either issue will depend on Her.

Coming now to the Provençal religious albas falling chronologically from the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century on (I cannot here concern myself with the symbolism of the German material), we find a complete and harmoniously effected fusion of these elements already existent (eliminating here deliberately biblical analogies from our consideration) in the Christian Latin hymnology from the fourth century on.

The symbolism is first clearly apparent in the opening prayer of Guiraut de Borneil's alba, it is in the solemn invocation,

Reis glorios, verais lum e clardat,
Deus poderos, senher, si a vos platz,
     siatz fazels aiuda,
     pois la noitz fon venguda
Et ades sera l'alba;

the repeated exhortation to arise, the fear of an attack (II, 4); the prayer to God, son of Saint Mary (III, 3); the exhortation to the sleeper to go to the window and behold the signs of the sky (IV, 1–2), under penalty of disaster (ib., line 4), all, in my opinion to be dissociated from the worldly situation, in view of the Star of the East mentioned in stanza II, lines 4–5.

qu'en orien vei l'estela creguda
qu'amena l'orn, qu'eu l'ai ben coneguda
(Et ades sera l'alba).

and, of course, of the clear and specific prayer at the beginning of the piece.

So, also, it appears in the fourteenth-century profane alba attrib-

It was, if I am not in error, a cumulative development: two thirteenth century pieces (Wackernagel, l. c., nos. 235 and 245: Ave Maris, gratia plena; Ave praeclara maris stella), show, in this direction, some progression.

See above, note 10.
uted to Raimon de las Salas, which, like Guiraut's piece, begins with a prayer:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Dieus, aidatz} \\
\text{S'a vos platz,} \\
\text{Senher cars,} \\
(\text{E) dous e verais} \\
\text{E vulhatz} \\
\text{Que ab patz} \\
\text{Lo jorn es clars} \\
\text{E bels c'ades mais} \\
\text{nos abratz . . .}
\end{align*}
\]

the clear symbolic purpose of which is supplemented by the seven-line refrain,—

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{L'alb'el jorns} \\
\text{Clars et adorns} \\
\text{Ven, dieus, aidatz!} \\
\text{L'alba par} \\
\text{E'l jorn vei clar} \\
\text{De lonc la mar} \\
\text{E l'alb'el jorns par.}
\end{align*}
\]

In neither Guiraut nor Raimon de las Salas, however, is the symbolic figure of the Virgin at hand; the symbolism here is restricted to supplication to God for help, evidently against the powers of evil; and the dawning day is taken as symbolic of His, and Christ's, salvation.

In the alba attributed to Folquet de Marselha, however (the first specifically religious alba which we possess in Provençal), the star of the day (=Star of the East) undoubtedly symbolises Mary. Mindful, perchance, of the dark blots upon his memory, Folquet prays God, as he, like Petrarch, feels the approach of that day which Mary, star of the East, has heralded, to take him in great pity; to let not the devil injure him or cast about him his deceptions,—

\[
\begin{align*}
\ldots \text{Que'l jorn es aprochatz} \\
\text{E la nueg ten sa via.} \\
\text{E prec senher que us prenda}
\end{align*}
\]

\footnote{See note 13.}

\footnote{Cf. for this, and the following references to the Provençal albas, note 10.}
this, combined with an exhortation to others to rise from the sleep of sin, and the symbolic refrain,

La nueg vai e l jorns ve
Ab clar temps e sere,
E l’alba no’s rete,
Ans ve belh e complia.

and a closing appeal, after expression of repentance, for resurrection and salvation,

Josta los sieus nos me
laysus on si capte,
E ns meta dins sa tenda.

Even more strongly comes out the symbolic figure of the Virgin in Peire Espanhol, who, in a fervent allocution, exhorts all those in whom the darkness of sin still lingers, to rise up and cast it out; and receive, in lieu thereof, the glorious light that is God, which the Queen, Mother of pity, Blessed Dawn, has heralded—("O rich is he, who joyfully may serve such lady!") The symbolism of this piece is especially explicit; in strophe II we are told that

Lo jorns es dieus, loiautz omnipotens
Qui venc en charn don al mon allumnat,
Et alba es, don cist jorns fo naissenz,
La reina maire de pietat:

it is near the day which has this dawn; no harm may come to those who believe on Her, when this dawn is near them; the darkness of sin must be cast off and the divine light must enter before Death takes away (eternally) all brightness, for Hell is filled with darkness, where li chalkiv mal fadat, Non auran mais lum ni clartat ni alba. Yet no one need despair, despite his sins, if he become transrayed by this divine light, tho before he was wandering in the darkness of sin; he will be, apparently (the text is here defective), better received quan ac son sen camjat.
I have already, I fear, taxed the reader’s patience with over-much citation, and must, for the rest of the development, be somewhat brief.

In the *alba* of Bernard de Venzac (or Venzenac), the whole Trinity is invoked, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, against the *mal fuit efernal*—“that we may come,

joyos e resplandens
El sieu regne, aissi cum resplen l'alba . . .”:

archangels, angels and all the saints are prayed for intercession with Christ, *lo filh reyna pia*, i. e., of Mary, who is obviously signified in the close (*Belh estela d'orien*), as in Folquet and elsewhere. Yet here the dawn, by one of the numerous confusions inherent in the very nature of the symbolism, is symbolically applied to Christ and not to Mary, who, as star of the East, merely heralds the dawning day of Christ's salvation.

For the Virgin, Guilhem d'Autpol, in his richly sonorous invocation to Christ's Mother, cannot, in the intensity of his mystic rapture, find enough laudation; she is fountain of pleasure; source of all true mercy; cloister of God and consolation and haven of safety; joy with no alloy of sadness, and “light and clarity and dawn of Paradise”: Her he prays for intercession with Her Son, “of face resplendent bright.”

In Guiraut Riquier, lastly, the curious, universally interested, talented Guiraut, notable reviver of old poetic themes, we have, in a piece which is one of the subsidiary forms of the theme (it combines a worldly theme, for which in my dissertation on the *Alba* genre, I have proposed the nomenclature “Nuech”), a direct appeal, from the personal standpoint, to the Virgin. After long vigil in the darkness whence, having great desire of true light, he fain would issue, the sinner calls on Mary, thro whose aid alone he may obtain this light: (*She who to sinners, deeply penitent, is as Dawn*). “For no man may do aught good in life without prayer to Her the Virgin, Mother of all wisdom. Let us, therefore, pray Her gratefully that she grant us true aid to escape the assaults of our enemies (=Sin): to Her who, to sinners, is as Dawn.”

We may now turn our attention to Petrarch.
It is indeed strange, to one who has studied the religious hymns and albas closely, not to find, either in the studies of those scholars who have concerned themselves with the symbolism involved, or in any of the commentators of Petrarch's canzone, from the older expounders to Carducci and Ferrari, a word about the close and intimate relation in which especially the first six, and the final stanzas of this poem stand, not only to the symbolic elements in St. Ambrose and in Prudentius (taking their hymns as representative), but to the half dozen or so religious albas, starting with the tenth century bilingual piece already considered, and continuing with the Provençal religious albas, from Folquet de Marselha on.

One might on the contrary have supposed that any expounder of the canzone, before citing scores of analogies from the Bible and the Church Fathers which it is extremely unlikely that Petrarch utilized in the aggregate for the composition of his canzone (even tho these analogies constituted for the whole tradition a common fund), would have cited, above all, poems chronologically close to Petrarch, of directly similar purpose to the canzone; poems found, moreover, in a literature which had become in Italy, as elsewhere, quasi-canonical, and with which we know Petrarch was well acquainted. Whatever conclusion we may draw, the fact at least stands out—hitherto, apparently, by some strange oversight overlooked—that the Provençal religious albas, which as we have seen stand in a relation of close dependence to the Latin hymns, combine, similarly to the Petrarchan canzone, the same expression of repentance of a sinful life with the light-symbolism of the Divinity; the same supplication before the thought of Death and its theologic consequences, with the specific hope of the rapidly approaching symbolic day; what is most significant, with direct invocation of the Virgin, who personifies, above all, the light of Christ's salvation.

The only explanation that I can find for the curious neglect to bring Petrarch and at least the Provençal albas into direct connection is, that the beautiful invocation of Petrarch represents a composite of two distinct poetic tendencies, one of which, in the commentators' mind, has obscured the other. It is, on the one hand, hymn and lauda; on the other, elegy and canzone. As the
Symbolism of Petrarch’s Canzone to the Virgin

former, it is objective, and sings the praise of the Virgin; as the latter, it is subjective, and exposes the soul-states of the poet himself. It is specifically hymn in the first six stanzas (vv. 1-78): verses 1-8 contain the invocation plus the exposition; then begin both prayer and praise, the latter in vv. 1-8 of each stanza, the former in the five following verses, beginning from the second apostrophe. Part two, as said, is elegy, yet even here the prayer reappears; and at the close of the poem the direct point and intention of the whole symbol stands clearly forth.

A brief general synopsis of the symbolism may be given here, before reproduction of the apposite portion of the whole canzone for subsequent detailed analysis.77

Mary is the Vergine bella,—di sol vestita, who so pleased the Summo sole that He hid his light within Her (here, of course, Christ and Christ’s salvation are signified): She is the regina del ciel; most significant, She is Vergine saggia, e del bel numero una,78 De le beate vergini prudenti; anzi la prima e con più chiara lampa: clearly here, as in the Latin hymn cited above, an allusion to the parable of the wise and the foolish virgins. She is both the daughter, and the Mother who, a lofty, lucent window of Heaven, lights this life (ch’allumi questa vita; fenestra del ciel lucente, altera); who came to save us in su gli estremi giorni; who brought forth the Sun of Justice, which lights anew the world, teeming with dark errors (che partoristi . . . di giustizia il Sol, che rasserenà Il secol pien d’errori scuri—i. e. the Night of Sin); She is Vergine chiara . . . di questo tempestoso mare stella; She is d’ogni fidel nocchier fidata guida in the terribile procella in which the poet finds himself senza governo; that this storm, which has brought darkness, is sin, the words Ma pur in te l’anima mia si fida . . . peccatrice sufficiently indicate; the closing lines show this conclusively, and the symbolism of Ambrosius and Prudentius, on the one hand, of the Provençal religious albas, on the other, is complete with the significant allusion. . . . Ma ti prego, Che’l tuo nemico del mio mal non vada.—The rest of the canzone is taken up with the poet’s entreaties to be freed from the torments of his love for Laura, and his promise to devote to Her,

77 The basis of this, and the following analyses is the text of the Carducci-Ferrari edition of Petrarch, see note 1; and pp. 48-50 for the text itself.
78 In the special sense of “highest.” Cf. the Greek μα γυμαιού (Gesualdo).
the Virgin, in exchange for this boon, all his life and service. The chiesa, however, again reverts to the symbolism:

Il dì s'appressa, e non pòte esser lunge,
Si corre il tempo e vola,
Vergine unica e sola.

Though Death is here evidently meant, the Day of Salvation is uppermost in the poet's mind, for he ends with the entreaty:

Raccomandami al tuo Figliuol, verace
Homo e verace Dio,
Ch'accolga'l mio spirto ultimo in pace.

With this brief running analysis of the symbolic purpose to guide the reader, I cite, for collation and verification, the corresponding portion of the Canzone itself, with the significant passages italicised:

**Canzone (abridged)**

Lines 1. *Vergine bella, che di sol vestita,*
*Coronata di stelle, al sommo Sole*
Piacesti sì ch'èn te sua luce ascose;
7. . . Invoco lei¹⁹ che ben sempre rispose
Chi la chiamò con fede.
11. . . al mio prego t'inchina;
*Socorri alla mia guerra,*
13. Bench' i' sia terra, e tu del ciel regina.
*Vergine saggia, e del bel numero una*
*De le beate vergini prudenti,*
*Anci la prima e con più chiara lampa;*
*O saldo scudo de l'afflitte genti*
*Contr' a' colti di Morte e di Fortuna,*
*Sotto 'l qual si triunfa, non pur scampa;*
*O refrigerio al cieco ardor ch'avampa*
Qui fra i mortali sciocchi;
22. *Vergine, que' bellì occhi . . .*
*Volgi al mio dubio stato,*
26. Che sconsigliato a te vèn per consiglio.
*Vergine pura, d'ogni parte intera,*

¹⁹I take *lei* as referring to Vergine of line 1 and not as applying to "aita" of line 5.
Del tuo parto gentil figliuola e madre,  
Ch' alluni questa vita e l'altra adorni;  
Per te il tuo figlio e quel del sommo Padre,  
O festra del ciel lucente, altera,  

32. Venne a salvarne in su li estremi giorni;  
E tra tutt' i terreni altri soggiorni  
Sola tu fosti eletta,  
Vergine benedetta,  
Che 'l pianto d'Eva in allegrezza torni.  
Fammi, ché puoi, de la sua grazia degno,  
Senza fine o beata,  

39. Già coronata nel supremo regno.  
Vergine santa, d'ogni grazia piena,  
Che per vera et altissima umiltate  
Salisti al ciel, onde miei preghi ascolti;  
Tu partoristi il fonte di pietate,  
E di giustizia il sol, che rasseren  

45. Il secol pien d'errori oscuri e folti:  
Tre dolci e cari nomi ha' in te raccolti,  
Madre, figliuola e sposa;  
Vergine gloriosa,  
Donna del Re che nostri lacci ha sciolti  
E fatto 'l mondo libero e felice:  
Ne le cui sante piaghe  

52. Prego ch' appaghe il cor, vera beatrice.  
Vergine sola al mondo, senza esempio,  
Che 'l ciel di tue bellezze innamorasti,  
Cui né prima fu, simil, né seconda;  
Santi penseri, atti pietosi e casti  
Al vero Dio sacrato e vivo tempio  

58. fecero in tua verginità seconda.  
Per te po la mia vita esser joconda,  
S' a' tuoi preghi, a Maria,  
Vergine dolce e pia,  

62. Ove 'l fallo abondò la grazia abonda.  
Con le ginocchia de la mente inchine  
Prego che sia mia scorta,  
E la mia torta via drizzi a buon fine.  
Vergine chiara e stabile in eterno,  
Di questo tempestoso mare stella,  

*I take in eterno as referring to both chiara and stabile.*
D'ogni fedel nocchier fidata guida;
Pos' mente in che terribile procella
I' mi ritrovo, sol, senza governo,
71. Et ho già da vicin l'ultime strida.
Ma pur in te l'anima mia si fida;
Peccatrice, i' no 'l nego,
Vergine; ma ti prego
Che 'l tuo nemico del mio mal non rida.
Ricorditi che fece il peccar nostro
Prender Dio, per scamparne,
78. Umana carne al tuo virginal chiostro.
87. . . Vergine sacra et alma,
Non tardar, ch' i' son forse a l'ultimo anno.
91. . . . . e sol Morte n'aspetta.
105. Vergine, in cui ho tutta mia speranza
Che possi e vogli al gran bisogno aiutarme,
Non mi lasciare in su l'estremo passo:
Non guardar me, ma chi degnò crearmi;
No 'l mio valor, ma l'altra sua sembianza
110. Ch' è in me ti mova a curar d'uom si basso.
124. . . Se, . . .
125. Per le tue man resurgo. . . .
129. Scorgimi al miglior guado,
E prendi in grado i cangiati desiri.
Il di s'appressa, e non pote esser lunge,
Si corre il tempo e vola,
Vergine unica e sola;
E 'l cor or consienza or morte punge.81
Raccomandami al tuo Figliuol, verace
Omo e verace Dio,
137. Ch' accolga 'l mio spirito ultimo in pace.

Judged in the light of the Latin morning hymns, of which the
tenth century piece is evidently a late manifestation, and of the
Provençal religious albas, the logical sequence of Petrarch's sym-
thetic purpose seems, with some synthesis, to fall as follows:
1. Light = in general, the Divinity.

(a) God = the Sun.
(b) Mary = the Sun;

81 A period omitted in the C-F. edition is supplied.
the stars (in general);
the star of the sea, hence
the Morning star, hence
the symbolic Dawn;
the wisest Virgin (with the brightest
lamp);
the window thro which Heaven transrays
its light.

(c) Christ = the Sun;
the symbolic Day (of salvation).

   (a) the world, as darkened by multiple moral errors;
   (b) the sea (of life), dark with "storm of sin";
   (c) the Virgin's enemy, Satan, leader of the hosts of
darkness.

3. The Virgin = mediatrix (between the sin-shadowed sup-
pliant and the light of Christ's salvation).

   On the basis of the above analysis, the elements of what is in
effect a religious alba, could be here associated: these elements
would in detail fall as follows:

   Mary is resplendent light: vested Herself with sunlight,
crowned with stars, She bore within Her, also, the radiance of
Christ's salvation, with which radiance God, the Sun supreme, trans-
rayed Her (lines 1–3), and which She, a sun of justice, gave forth
again (line 44). She is first (16) and highest (una 14) of the
Wise Virgins (15), bearing a lamp more resplendent-bright than
they (16): over human life She casts this radiance (29). She is
window of high and lucent heaven (31); eternally refulgent, Her
light eternally constant (69).

   As light Herself, reflecting the glory of God the Father, and
engendrant of the light of Christ, the Saviour, She is invoked (11–
12) to succor him (12) in the conflict (12) of a world full of
multiple dark errors (45) and personal sin (73) which She (29),
and Christ, the Sun of Justice (44) illuminate anew (rassera, ib.).
As radiant star over the storm-dark sea, i. e., of Sin (70),—She is
implored (69) to take heed of the frightful tempest (69) to which
the suppliant is exposed. Eliminating the fusion with the worldly
and elegiac motif, who is the author of this conflict waged upon him? the source of the dark errors by which he is encompassed? the hurler down upon Life's sea of the sombre storm? The conclusion is imperative that it is Mary's enemy (75), Satan, who has encompassed the world in bonds of sin thro the sin of Eve (36), and whose exultation over his evil work the poet prays the Virgin (74) to forestall.

Thro Her can come Resurrection (124–5): under Her shield one may not only escape Death, but may even triumph in this Resurrection (19); She can turn Eve's weeping (the world's heritage of sin) into gladness, i.e., salvation (36): remembering only that he is fashioned in God's image (109), She is interceder (60) for the sinner, tho he is of the earth, She queen of heaven (13). She has engendered Christ, the Fount of Mercy (43) and the Sun of Justice (44); Her prayers can obtain grace proportionate to the transgression (60–62). Always has She responded (7) to him who called on Her with faith (8). Her, then, he invokes (7), praying Her to bend down from Heaven to hear his prayer (11), beseeching Her to turn Her beauteous eyes to his dubious state (22–3), to console him (26) and make him worthy of Her grace (37), to appease his heart in the holy wounds of Christ, Her Son (52); bending on the 'knees of his mind,' he begs Her to be his escort to salvation (63–64), and bring his sin-diverted way to a good end (65); he prays that thro Her intercession for his sinful soul (73) Satan, the Arch-enemy, may not triumph (74–75).

But the Night of Sin draws to its end; the last days are come; (88) Death only waits (89), and he exhorts Her not to delay Her intercession (ib.). In Her he has all his hope (105), hope that She can and will aid him in his great need (106). "Leave me not in su l'estremo passo (107), for I have repented of all my sins (130): let me find resuscitation thro Thy hand (124–5).

The symbolic day approaches. The day, so swift is life, approaches and cannot be far; conscience torments my soul; death penetrates my heart (131–134).

The Commenatus: Recommend me to Thy Son, true Man, true God; and pray Him bring me after Death into the Peace of His Salvation (135–137).
In the absence of certain knowledge, it is at least not circum-
spect to attempt conclusions; if, in the present case, such an attempt
be at all permissible, the conclusion would resolve itself as follows:
Petrarch, having thoroughly assimilated, from his wide knowledge
of its different sources and manifestations, the whole symbolism
studied in the present article, deliberately fused what is in essence a
religious alba with an elegiac expression of his purely worldly grief
arising from his love for Laura. In the formation of this syntheti-
cally remarkable canzone, Bible, Apocalypse, the homilies and com-
ments of the Fathers of the Latin Church; the early Latin hymnal;
the Provençal religious albas, have all, in ratios not certainly deter-
minable, had their share.

The first three of these five sources have by the commentators of
Petrarch’s text, been abundantly expounded: the last two, however,
have never, either by the canzone’s commentators, from the oldest
to the most modern, or by special investigators of the religious
symbolism per se, received the recognition which is their due.

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