



Return to Philology and Hypertext in and around Petrarch's *Rvf*

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Abstract: This article examines the theoretical premises and consequences of the renewed attention to the intersection between philology, hermeneutics, and criticism in humanist studies in general and in Petrarch studies in particular. The most recent philological achievements—from the new facsimile of *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta: Codex Vat. Lat. 3195 (Rvf)*, edited by Belloni, Brugnolo, Storey, and Zamponi, to the new critical edition of Petrarch's masterpiece by Giuseppe Savoca—are presented and discussed as introduction to reflections on the role that a hypertext project, such as the *Oregon Petrarch Open Book* initiated at the University of Oregon, may play in the return to philology as necessary tool of textual criticism and hermeneutics.

The importance of philology for literary studies is at the core of the symposium *Francesco Petrarca from Manuscript to Digital Culture* (Petrarch Project) along with the question of the reception of Petrarch's *Rvf* in translations, imitations, rewritings, and intersemiotic transpositions. In the proceedings of a conference on *Petrarch and the Textual Origins of Interpretation* that took place in 2004, Teodolinda Barolini in collaboration with Wayne Storey asserted that the study of Petrarch requires knowledge of the codicological and philological issues raised by his work. My essay addresses first of all the broader context of what Edward Said has called the “return to philology” in literary studies; secondly it tackles this issue with particular attention to the philological questions and practices involved in the construction of the hypertext based on Petrarch's *Rvf* that we are developing at the University of Oregon.

What are the theoretical implications and consequences of the renewed emphasis on philology that we experience nowadays in our work as intellectual, literary critics, translators, and teachers? What are the new horizons opened by digital technology in the study of Petrarch's masterpiece and more generally in literary studies? How can we take advantage of the hypertext technology in reading, studying, and teaching Petrarch's exemplar collection of poetry? In short, what are the premises, repercussions, and relevance of what we are doing with digital texts and philology in our daily intellectual activity?

Philology, Criticism, and Hermeneutics

Giambattista Vico, the eighteenth-century Italian philosopher, suggested in his *New Science* that philology and criticism, philology, and philosophy are and should always be deeply intertwined. “Philosophy,” he writes, “contemplates reason whence comes knowledge of the true; philology observes that of which human choice is author, whence

comes consciousness of the certain” (138). Vico goes on to point out the reciprocal failures of a philosophy not grounded in philological arguments and of philology unable to draw all the philosophical implications of its practice. Vico studies the “truth” concerning human history philologically. He considers the words as bearers of reality, a reality that is hidden and difficult to understand and open to human interpretation. Edward Said, in one of his latest works devoted to the interplay between humanism and philology, pointed to Vico as one of the forerunners of an authentic “interpretative revolution” that conjugates philology and philosophy, one based on the idea that the acts of reading and interpretation are paramount to humanistic knowledge. A true philological reading, Said goes on, is always active and involves “getting inside the process of language” to disclose what may be hidden or incomplete in the texts we are studying (59).

Ezio Raimondi, the prominent Italian scholar and critic, in his recent volume on *Il senso della letteratura* (The meaning of literature) emphasizes that great modern criticism is born as philology rather than aesthetics and that nowadays literary criticism allied with philology has an unprecedented opportunity to valorize the inexhaustible plurality of interpretations of literary texts (60). Raimondi, like Said (and like Eric Auerbach before them), connects the importance of philology to an idea of humanism, to a vision of human being in our time, a vision that in both cases is hermeneutical, perspectival, and finite.

Philological criticism has made a fundamental contribution to this idea of humanism when it has appreciated the hermeneutical value of texts through editing, drawing on phenomenological, comparative, and hermeneutic procedures, and moving beyond a deterministic idea of text as a pure fact. This divinatory and creative idea of criticism is intrinsically hermeneutic and based on a relational rather than ontological notion of meaning. This idea is already present in Vico and finds a champion in Hermann Usener, the nineteenth-century German scholar of philology (1834-1905) who adopted comparative, phenomenological, and hermeneutic procedures in studying religious issues in the ancient world. German philosopher and theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher in the first half of the same century developed the hermeneutic idea, combining the empirical element of philology and the reflective and speculative attitude of philosophy. For Schleiermacher, hermeneutics, the understanding and interpretation of texts and cultures, should be a kind of divination and hypothesis-making, the result of multiple comparisons and collations among other texts of the same period as the one being interpreted. These texts may be from the same author or from other writers. In this perspective, the challenge for the interpreter becomes the ability to move from the particular to the general without losing the specificity of the individual voices involved in the process. The hermeneutical mode of interpretation since its modern inception with Schleiermacher—but we should also mention here Friedrich Schlegel (81)—opens the philology of the text to the dialogue with other texts and the reflection on the constitutive process of signification and meaning. The uniqueness of the particular work is not denied but finds on the contrary its distinctive features in relation to other texts and specific historical contexts, renouncing the idea of an ultimate, definite, and exhaustive configuration and meaning.

In different ways the close intersection of philology, criticism, and hermeneutics is at the core of the new philological achievements that appeared in recent years in Petrarch studies: first of all, the publication in 2003 of the new facsimile of *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta: Codex Vat. Lat. 3195*, edited by Belloni, Brugnolo, Storey, and Zamponi; secondly, the publication of a new critical edition of Petrarch's masterpiece by Savoca. I limit my reflections on these philological achievements to three brief sketches that are oriented toward my reflections on the role that a hypertext project, such as the one initiated at the University of Oregon, may play in this return to philology as necessary tool of textual criticism and hermeneutics.

The first point I would like to make is quite obvious. These philological accomplishments in Petrarch Studies are the result of different methodological approaches: on the one hand the new material philology focused on Petrarch's autograph manuscript; on the other hand a textual criticism oriented towards the "critical edition" based on Petrarch's autograph manuscript and the variants found in the most important witnesses, *Codice degli abbozzi* (Vat. lat. 3196), *Chigiano* (L V 176), *Laurenziano* (XLI 17), and *Queriniiano* (D II 21).

My second point is that both philological achievements are important and offer new insights on Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. In both philological projects we find the awareness of possible limits that the scholars see in their research. Savoca in his introduction to the critical edition of the *Rvf* admits that "the philology of a text is a continuously open technical and cognitive process" and that as a consequence the hermeneutic task of the interpreter is inexhaustible and should always be philologically oriented (vii). I also mention here what Storey writes about the use of a sophisticated tool such as high magnification and ultraviolet light to investigate Petrarch's autograph manuscript. This highly sophisticated methodology of inquiry solves some problems in textual criticism but at the same time it poses new problems because it not only allows us to trace Petrarch's microscopic steps, such as the multiple erasures, but it also reveals the disturbing evidence of the presence of subsequent hands which, after Petrarch, "intervened," as Storey writes, "more often than we might care to imagine" on his autograph manuscript (81). For these reasons Storey argues in favor of a "philological method based on the paleographic and codicological observation of the witnesses" (85).

My third point is the most important and least obvious. It is an invitation to question the assumption that critical editing is opposed to and incommensurable with facsimile or diplomatic editing. This assumption, widespread in textual criticism, is paper-based and can be overcome, as the emergence of the digital revolution in the humanities has already shown. Let me mention here Jerome McGann's *Radiant Textuality* and his pioneering digital projects such as the Rossetti Archive that were created precisely to question the supposed incommensurability between critical edition, facsimile, and diplomatic editions, building editorial machines capable of generating on demand "multiple textual formations—eclectic, facsimile, reading, genetic—that can all be subjected to multiple kinds of transformational analyses" (McGann, "From Text to Work" 27). Other scholarly Web projects are following this idea of a comprehensive digital edition of literary texts. Examples here include The William Blake Archive and Walt Whitman Archive. Along these lines the Petrarch Project

we are developing at the University of Oregon envisions a digital environment that would allow scholars and students using it to make choices about their platforms of critical attention, as well as about the specific kinds of analyses to undertake—moving, for example, from the critical edition to the diplomatic edition and vice-versa. To this goal we are studying a collation tool that would allow the viewer not only to choose which platform and which edition to read but also to compare multiple editions and appreciate their differences.

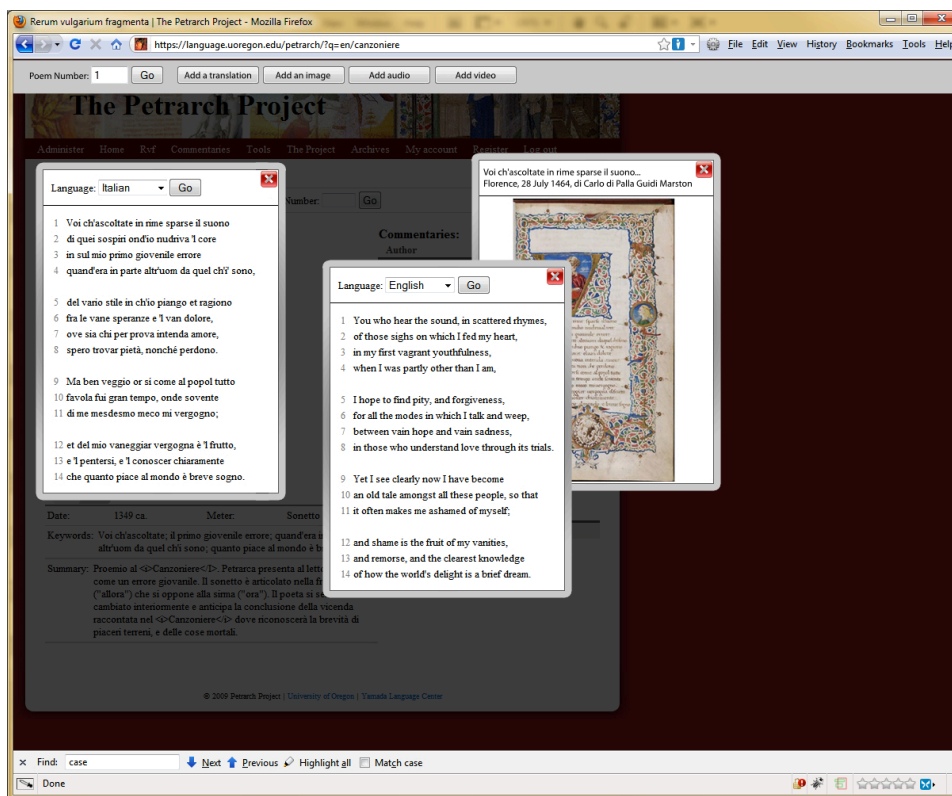


Figure 1. OPOB new interface prototype.

In figure 1 it is possible to see a prototype design of the new interface of the Oregon Petrarch Open Book (OPOB) prepared by our Web designer, Travis Shea. As one may realize considering the collating and critical opportunities opened by this tool, the metatexts in digital editions are not merely commentaries on the given set of texts, but platforms that enable dynamic procedures of display and analysis that are much needed not only in actual literary criticism but also in translation studies.

Petrarch's *Rvf* from Manuscript to Digital Environment

The editors of the recent facsimile on the one hand and Savoca on the other reach opposite conclusions on the closure of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. Whereas the former hold that the material condition of the autograph manuscript does not allow thinking of a concluded work, the latter believes that the *Canzoniere* is a finished project. These different interpretations of the closure of the *Canzoniere* are motivated by and need to be comprehended within the specific and different critical orientations partially determined by

facsimile editing and critical edition philology. On the one hand, Savoca's conclusion that the *Canzoniere* is a finished work is surely based on an interpretation of the autograph manuscript, but the decision to include the analyses of the most authoritative witnesses necessary to a critical edition has some bearing on his view. On the other hand, the editors of the recent facsimile insist on the need to appreciate the visual poetics of Petrarch's original manuscript and ponder its implications for the meaning of the micro- and macro-text. In the spirit of the most refined material philology, the essays included in the *Commentary* to this sophisticated facsimile version of the *Canzoniere*, made possible by the digitization of the partial autograph manuscript, remind us that literary works do not exist independently of their material embodiments and that the physical form of the text is an integral part of its meaning.

After a magisterial investigation of the relationships between the text and such features as form and layout, illumination, rubrics, and other paratextual elements, Stefano Zamponi concludes that the manuscript of the *Rvf* at the time of Petrarch's death had "un'organizzazione materiale incompiuta" (an uncompleted material organization) made of unbound fascicles that would confirm Petrarch's intention to set aside the project of an autograph edition of the manuscript, transforming it into an "autograph archive" of lyrics he decided to insert in his *Canzoniere* project (38). Wayne Storey, in his essay "Doubting Petrarca's Last Words: Erasure in MS Vaticano Latino 3195," poses the fundamental question of what constitutes the "final" or "last" copy of Petrarch's work. This question is articulated through another question concerning the very possibility that an author like Petrarch, so profoundly dedicated to continuing experimentation with his works, would consider last copies definitive versions (70). Storey suggests that Petrarch's multiple erasures and revisions, along with the condition of his work at the time of his death, do not allow us to conclude with certainty that the final copy of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* represents his final wishes or his plans for the final version of his work (71). Erasure was one of the principal tools Petrarch used to organize and reorder the *Fragmenta*. The moment at which Petrarch took over as the primary scribe of Vat. Lat. 3195, originally intended as a fair copy, represents a crucial turning point in the manuscript. This change implies not only variations in the register of the quires—Storey holds—but also greater latitude in the erasures and revisions. Petrarch resorted to multiple erasures, cancellations, and interlinear additions in different ink to elucidate his text, running the risk of compromising the writing surface.

Although Storey's and Zamponi's critical views, informed by material philology, may seem of concern to only a small group of philologists, they should in fact concern any reader, student, or scholar of the *Canzoniere*. Indeed, they pose serious problems to Petrarch criticism challenging well-established horizons of expectations and a solidified universe of reading and interpreting based on the technology of the book and printed editions of the *Canzoniere* that lead us to conceive Petrarch's masterpiece not in terms of an on-going unfinished project but as a self-identical, self-enclosed, and concluded book. The tradition and the transformation of the text of the *Canzoniere* as represented by the witnesses, the incunabula, and later printed editions needs to be considered, and Savoca in the spirit of his

critical edition is right in pointing to the closure of the *Canzoniere*. However, it is at the same time equally important to consider the critical stance of the editors of the facsimile, especially because they reveal some crucial features of Petrarch's writing that are very important to understand his work. These recent discoveries of material philology also have significant implications for the idea of hypertext that we are developing at the University of Oregon in and around Petrarch's *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*. When we started our digital project in 2003 we promoted the idea of Petrarch's *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* as an open, unfinished, and living work that grows with its readers, a text that can be read and studied as a continuous work in progress. Our idea was informed by a hermeneutic view of literary texts that also found sources of inspiration both in George Landow's idea of hypertext and in Jerome McGann's conception of digital edition and tools necessary to represent the fundamentally dynamical and social character of the textual condition.

At the core of our theoretical premises there was an attentive scrutiny of what many critics, including Giuseppe Mazzotta, called Petrarch's ethics of writing, which is a philosophical approach to the problem of writing traceable in the *Canzoniere*. Writing for Petrarch is not simply the neutral technology devoted to registering his emotions and the idols of his desire. It also constitutes the fundamental tool to appreciate the borders of human and individual consciousness and the limits of representation of the self and the other that he does not conceive in ontological terms but as a performative gesture. As he says in poem 339, whatever he wrote about Laura, is just "breve stilla d'infiniti abissi" ("a little drop from infinite depths"). He goes on to say that the "stilo," the individual style expressed in writing, does not extend beyond the human mind; in other words, he recognizes how individual consciousness and human reason created through writing cannot transcend the practice that makes them possible--hence the continuous emphasis and meditation on the practice of writing that pervades the *Canzoniere* and, at the same time, the continuous and progressive process of revision of the micro- and macro-text of his collection of poetry. Petrarch's philosophical idea of writing—in which we can see at work an original combination of Platonic and Christian elements—draws him to conceive the *Rvf* as a life-long project and to postulate that human consciousness and the representation of the other are not reducible to an aesthetic or epistemological problem. For Petrarch they have ethical and metaphysical implications that emerge in the micro and macro structure of the *Rvf*.

Material philology brings evidence to this idea of philosophical writing by pointing to the fact that the *Rvf* were never a bound book during Petrarch's lifetime and pointing to continuous erasures and revisions and to the absence of the formal closures typical of medieval manuscripts. Roberta Antognini also recently detected this philosophical idea in Petrarch's autobiographical letters, the *Familiars*. As in the *Canzoniere*, Petrarch follows here only up to a certain point the Augustinian idea of memory and time because, differently from Augustine, he is unable to resolve the irremediable conflict between time and eternity. While Augustine's *Confessions* narrate a conversion, Petrarch's *Familiars* perform the absence of a real conclusion, centering the narration on a sequence of present times and introducing death as the only possible narrative close. The present time is for

Petrarch the time of writing and reading, the time of poetry, the language of *mutabilitas* (mutability) and human restlessness. This language, as he read at the beginning of Augustine's *Confessions*, can find repose only in death: *Inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in Te* (I, 1; IV, 12).

To conclude this section of my essay, Petrarch's philosophical idea valued in ethical terms the performative, living knowledge of writing and poesis; he does not associate writing with instrumental and scientific knowledge, pointing instead to what Shelley in his *Defense of Poetry* would later call "the poetry of life" (37). How is it possible to remain faithful to Petrarch's idea of writing while at the same time interpreting his works? In other words, how can we read and interpret the *Canzoniere* in the different forms that it took during Petrarch's lifetime and later in printed editions, recovering meanwhile the underlying spirit of an on-going living project? These questions are at the origin of the conception of the Oregon Petrarch Open Book we are developing at the University of Oregon. The last section of my paper presents the guiding ideas of this hypertext project and reflects once more on the contribution it may offer to the on-going philological and hermeneutical debate on Petrarch's *Canzoniere*.

The Oregon Petrarch Open Book

The Oregon Petrarch Open Book (henceforth, OPOB), started in 2003 to deepen the understanding of book technology in the context of digital scholarship, was conceived as a crucial opportunity to integrate different technologies and resources, from manuscript to book culture up to late print culture. I was particularly interested in taking advantage of digital technology to create new conditions to study and teach Petrarch's *Rvf* in their making, evolution, and afterlife in translations, rewritings, and intersemiotic transpositions. When the OPOB project was coming to life, digital humanities were a well-established discipline critical for enlarging humanistic inquiry. The strongest component of this discipline, devoted to transferring our cultural legacy in digital form, was represented by the collaboration between traditional humanities and computational technology based on formal-logic methodologies. Although we were intrigued by the unprecedented research possibilities opened by digital humanities, our approach was more inclined toward what Johanna Drucker calls "speculative computing." We did not invest our investigative resources in formal logic with the goal of reaching an objective representation of the text of the *Canzoniere*. On the contrary, our goal was to show how Petrarch's collection of poems is never stable or identical to itself but always situated within specific conditions of production and use.

The possibility of integrating different technologies and resources lead us to conceive a complex and articulated idea of database as backbone of a digital hypertext that would document the multiple, potentially infinite lives of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. Our fruitful collaboration with the University of Oregon Yamada Language Center and Knight Library made possible the acquisition and integration in digital format of important resources, such as Renaissance commentaries of the *Canzoniere* and the digitization of the Modigliani Diplomatic Edition. Making hard-to-access printed material available in digital format was

only our first step towards the broad transformation of scholarship and pedagogy in Petrarch studies. Our main goal was and remains to provide on our website not only resources but also tools to facilitate the collation, interpretative assessment, and re-conceptualization of the available data, to the point of suggesting a critical and pedagogical approach that does not presume its object as given in advance.

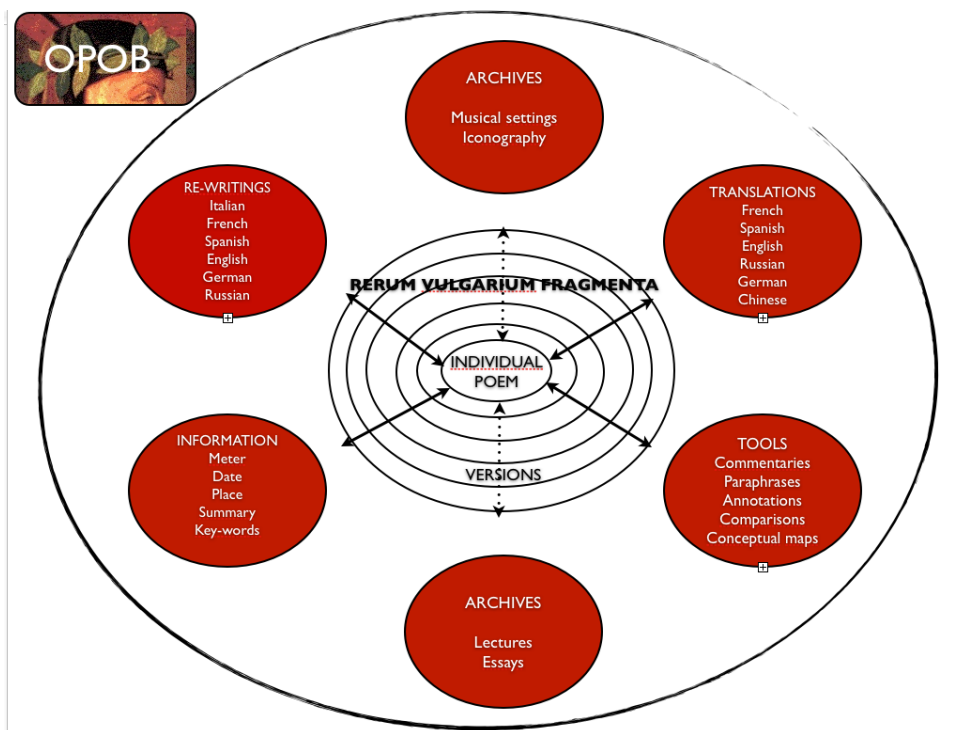


Figure 2. The Oregon Petrarch Open Book Database.

The point of view of this database is the construction of a hypertext that would allow the user to follow the genesis and evolution of Petrarch's collection and compare different versions as conceived by the author or as presented and published in different incarnations (from manuscript to printed editions), including variants of individual poems conceived by Petrarch in his autograph manuscripts (Vat. Latin 3195 e Vat. Lat. 3196, the so-called *Codice degli abbozzi*). Another major goal of this project is to make it possible to read and compare multiple commentaries, translations, adaptations, and re-writings established in centuries of "Petrarchism." Finally, our growing database includes references to the iconography and musical settings of Petrarch's poems.

Before becoming concerned with the production of digital metatexts, mark-up language, and structured data, we focused on the intellectual design of our hypertext. As Johanna Drucker writes, "Structured data and metatexts are expressions of a higher-order model in any digital project. That model is the intellectual concept according to which all the elements of a project are shaped, whether consciously or not" (38). The central intellectual concept of the OPOB is the philosophical and performative idea of writing and reading discerned in Petrarch's work. This original idea was reinforced by the philological discoveries announced in the 2003-2004 commentary and facsimile edition of the *Rerum*

vulgarium fragmenta: Codice Vat. Lat. 3195, by Belloni, Brugnolo, Storey, and Zamponi and their colleagues. The fundamental inspiration behind the conception of the Petrarch Project hypertext leads us to identify the contingency of the individual poem as the point of departure of the historical synthesis attempted in the construction of our hypertext. This choice was also influenced by Auerbach's idea of *Ansatzpunkt* (point of departure) as developed in his essay "Philology and Weltliterature." I'll come back to this in my conclusion, but I first briefly introduce the actual articulation of our database, a work in progress depended on and open to the philological advances created by centuries of humanist scholarship.

If we exclude the single words, verses, and stanzas, the most discrete unit and point of departure of the hypertext is the individual poem written by Petrarch. Other relevant units and groupings are the poetic forms used by Petrarch. The vast majority are sonnets (317), though the sequence contains a number of canzoni (29), sestine (9), madrigals (4), and ballate (7). Other discrete units are the narrative sequences that connect some poems such as the *canzoni degli occhi* (71-72-73). More importantly the hypertext in the *Rvf* addresses the problem of the different versions of the collection that Petrarch envisioned during his lifetime. The first indication of Petrarch's intention to collect his poems can be found in the Vat. lat. 3196 (*Codice degli abbozzi*) and dates back to November 4, 1336. This earliest form of the *Rvf* is usually named by criticism as *Prima raccolta di riferimento* (First reference compilation) and can be conceived as the first step toward the definition of Petrarch's project. The *Rvf* were a lifelong endeavor and took different forms throughout the years, including three other *Raccolte di riferimento* (Reference compilations), in 1359, 1359-60 and 1366-68.

We are aware that there is an important philological debate regarding the different versions of the *Rvf* as conceived by Petrarch. Wilkins's "doctrine" of the nine forms of the *Rvf* is put into question by various scholars including Teodolinda Barolini who holds that there is no material proof of the existence of the nine forms of the *Rvf* speculated by Wilkins. Wilkins himself was able to distinguish the two forms that have material evidence (the Chigi and the Vaticano Latino 3195) from those that have only a metaphorical value as visualization of his personal conception of the progressive construction of the *Rvf* (31-34). We address only partially this important debate in our site at the moment. So far we decided to maintain the interpretative value of Wilkins's theory of the different forms of the *Rvf*, a theory that to some extent confirms the performative value that Petrarch attributed to writing and poetry itself.

We plan to add to the assets of our database some examples of manuscripts in digital format that would provide a material confirmation of the different forms of the *Canzoniere* envisioned by Petrarch. So far we document the numeric structure of the major collections and editions that followed the first actual attempt: prima silloge (1342); redazione Correggio (1356-58); forma Chigi (1359-63); forma di Giovanni (1366-67); forma Malatesta (1373); forma Queriniana (1373); redazione Vaticana (1374). By clicking on the link on the right side of the screen the reader can compare the different versions of the *Rvf* appreciating the evolution of the text in a way that is not possible through a purely linear reading.

The Petrarch Project

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Versions of Rerum vulgarium fragmenta [Compare Versions](#)

Petrarch's last version of the *Rvf* is in the Vatican Library (now Cod. Vat. lat. 3195). He kept working on this edition until the last days of his life. The first indication of Petrarch's intention to collect his poems can be found in the Vat. lat. 3196 (Codice degli abbozzi) and dates back to November 4, 1336. This earliest form of the the *Rvf* is usually named by criticism as *Prima raccolta di riferimento* (First reference compilation) and can be conceived as the first step toward the definition of Petrarch's project. The *Rvf* were a life long project and took different forms throughout the years, including three more Raccolte di riferimento (Reference compilations), in 1359, 1359-60 and 1366-68.

We document all the major collections and editions that followed the first actual attempt: prima silloge (1342); redazione Correggio (1356-58); forma Chigi (1359-63); forma di Giovanni (1366-67); forma Malatesta (1373); forma Queriniana (1373); redazione Vaticana (1374).

By clicking on link on the right side of the screen the reader can compare the different versions of the *Rvf* appreciating the evolution of the text in a way that is not possible through a purely linear reading. In this way the text of the *Rvf* grows with the reader preventing the form of crystallized understanding usually implicit in the reading of the "final" product, the printed edition of the last drafting from the Cod. Vat. lat. 3195.

- [Vaticana](#)
- [Queriniana \(1373\)](#)
- [Malatesta \(1373\)](#)
- [Giovanni \(1366-67\)](#)
- [Chigi \(1363\)](#)
- [Correggio \(1356-58\)](#)
- [Prima silloge \(1342\)](#)

[Vaticana >](#)

Figure 3. The list of the versions of the *Rvf* included in the OPOB at this time. This list will evolve as we follow the recent philological debates. The actual comparison tool is accessible by clicking on the link in the upper right corner.

In this way the hypertext of the *Rvf* grows with the reader preventing the form of crystallized understanding usually implicit in the reading of the “final” product, the printed edition of the supposed last drafting from the *Cod. Vat. Lat. 3195*.

These features of the OPOB suggest a representation of the hypertext in and around the *Rvf* in which discrete units, entity, and system are codependent and make sense only in relation to each other. Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela's theory of *autopoiesis* may help to understand this extremely dynamic process. It is interesting to note that the term autopoiesis was originally presented as a system description to define and explain the nature of living systems. Autopoietic systems are considered as a “network of processes of production and transformation of components” (79), which through their interactions and transformations continuously regenerate and realize the network of processes. The hypertext in and around Petrarch's *Rvf* documents and encourages such power of continuous regeneration in the co-dependence and interaction of all its parts. The multiple and intersected centers of the hypertext, along with the collating tools that we are preparing, create multiple potentially infinite possibilities of reading and interpreting. Finally, the hypertext around the *Rvf* includes intralingual and interlingual translations, re-writings, and also intersemiotic transpositions (Jakobson 261) that bear witness to an extremely productive interaction between Petrarch's poems, musical and artistic renderings, poetic re-writings, and translations. In the hypertext poetic re-writings and translations become an important realization of Petrarch's work and significant interpretation of its

poetry in dialogue with other artistic forms, literary or not. As a result, then, this apparatus of metatexts that constitute the corpus of the hypertext around Petrarch's *Rvf* allows us to trace in a new, more accurate and comprehensive fashion its reception over the centuries as a collection of poems that maintain their individuality and autonomy while at the same time entering in multilateral relationships both within Petrarch's forms of the *Canzoniere* and in the broader and multifaceted contexts represented by what we call Petrarchism.

The screenshot shows the 'The Petrarch Project' website. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links: Administer, Home, Rvf, Commentaries, Tools, The Project, Archives, My account, and Log out. Below the menu, there are three buttons: View, Outline, and Track. The main section is titled 'Compare Versions' and contains a table with the following columns: Final Version (1374), Queriniana (1373), Malatesta (1373), Giovanni (1366-67), Chigi (1363), Correggio (1356-58), and Prima silloge (1342). Each column has a sub-column for Part I and Part II, with plus and minus signs indicating visibility. Below the table, there is a text instruction: 'To compare different versions, click the plus sign above to show a version, and the minus sign to hide it.' At the bottom, there is a list of line numbers from 1 to 18, with a corresponding list of manuscript references (Prima, 34, 35, 36, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 49, 58, 60*, 64, 69).

Final Version (1374)	Queriniana (1373)	Malatesta (1373)	Giovanni (1366-67)	Chigi (1363)	Correggio (1356-58)	Prima silloge (1342)
Part I	Part I	Part I	Part I	Part I	Part I	Part I
Part II	Part II	Part II	Part II	Part II	Part II	Part II

To compare different versions, click the plus sign above to show a version, and the minus sign to hide it.

CorI	Prima
1	34
2	35
3	36
4	41
5	42
6	43
7	44
8	45
9	46
10	49
11	58
12	60*
13	64
14	69
15	
16	
17	
18	

Figure 4. This interface is going to change in the near future since the OPOB will include actual Petrarchan manuscripts and a new comparing tool (see fig. 1).

Conclusion: Digital Philology and World Literature

I would like to return to Auerbach's "Philology of Weltliterature," already mentioned in passing above, that Auerbach wrote in 1952, toward the end of his life, when he was living in the United States and teaching at Yale. It remains relevant above all in the light of the cultural and technological changes that we are experiencing today. In this essay Auerbach addresses the fundamental question of how to preserve the historical perspectivism that for centuries was at the core of humanism and was put into question by "a scientifically ordered and conducted research of reality" that, as Auerbach writes, "fills and rules our life" (4). How is it possible to elaborate a cultural synthesis faithful to historicist humanism in a time where literary products are dominated by standardization and world cultures tend to coalesce? This is the question that opens Auerbach's essay, a question that is motivated by the realization of the "superabundance of materials, of methods and of points of view" that, as Auerbach writes, has become virtually impossible to master (8). How can one speak of a scholarly and synthesizing philology of world literature in this overwhelming situation?

In his essay Auerbach suggests the idea of an historical synthesis as result of a “personal intuition,” a mixture of art and science that may lead to the discovery of the point of departure of the synthesizing project he calls the *Ansatzpunkt*. This type of synthesis cannot be the result of encyclopedic collecting or be based on the traditional divisions of the literary material, chronological, geographical, or typological. The copiousness and the structure of the material available prevent making this possibility realistic. Even the monographic approach focused on life and works of an individual great author is not suited to be the point of departure for the synthesis that Auerbach has in mind, because, in the end, the works represent an “ungraspable unity.” Thus, he advises starting with a “firmly circumscribed phenomenon, comprehensible and central enough to be a point of departure” (13). In order to achieve a major work of synthesis, Auerbach goes on, “it is imperative to locate a point of departure (*Ansatzpunkt*), a handle, as it were, by which the subject can be sized” (14).

While designing the Petrarch Project we took Auerbach’s advice into serious consideration. As I suggested earlier in my essay the point of departure has been the individual poem as it relates to different hypertext connections. This *Ansatzpunkt* has all the features of a good point of departure as conceived by Auerbach: concreteness, precision and a potential for “centrifugal radiation” (15). Auerbach provides an example of a good point of departure taken from Dante; from a methodological point of view this example is very close to what the Petrarch Project is doing with the *Rvf*. Auerbach advises tracing the interpretation of “individual portions of the *Comedia* from its earliest commentators to the sixteenth century, and then again since Romanticism” (15). The point of departure, Auerbach insists, cannot be an abstract and general theme imposed from the outside; it has to be an organic inner part of the theme.

The way in which we conceived the relationships between the part and the whole was also inspired by some of the considerations that Auerbach develops in this essay. A philological and historical synthesis cannot end in “the complacent exultation of the particular and remains stirred by the movement of the whole.” Yet, Auerbach concludes, the movement from the particular to the whole can be “discovered in its purity only when all the particulars that make it up are grasped as essences” (16). To relate these words to our project we may reiterate that only by maintaining the independence and the autonomy of the individual poems and their discrete grouping can we appreciate their dependence on the movement of the whole. For this reason, *it is crucial to conceive of the whole not as a static and finished reality but rather to fully realize its reciprocal dependence on the part.*

In our project the whole is continuously moving and growing as we plan to include in the hypertext not only manuscripts, printed diplomatic and critical editions of Petrarch’s *Rvf*, but also multiple translations in many languages (including a new English translation conceived for and through the OPOB). At the moment the database comprises--besides the original Italian--Spanish, French, English, German, Russian, Chinese, and Japanese. Our project is clearly moving in the direction of world literature as we come to realize that the more the earth grows together the more there is need of historicist synthesis. Here, again, Auerbach helps us to understand that our philological home is becoming the earth, not the

nation, and that only when philologists are able to transcend the heritage deposited in their own nation's culture and language will this heritage become truly effective (17). In this essay I have tried to show how digital philology, digital humanities, and speculative computing may play a crucial role in this process by providing the ideas, the design, and the infrastructure necessary to promote the philological syntheses that we need in our time.

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