

Reading, Rewriting, and Encoding Petrarch's *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* as Hypertext

Francesco Petrarca's *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (henceforth *Rvf*), as any other masterpiece of world literature, "cannot be inherited" from the past: every new generation must obtain it "by great labour" (Eliot). The resources of the Oregon Petrarch Open Book (henceforth OPOB), a working database-driven hypertext in and around Francesco Petrarca's *magnum opus* allow the digital reader to approach the text in an unprecedented hypertextual configuration. Digital and hypertext technology create the condition necessary to appreciate the importance of each configuration of the *Rvf* in relation to the others conceived by Petrarch and/or the Petrarchan tradition. The philology and reception of Petrarch's *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* is almost seven centuries old; to keep the interest in philology alive in the digital era we must reject the ideology of the absolute, definite text, while remaining aware of the alterity of the past and appreciative of the conflict of interpretations. The OPOB invites the reader to question the assumption that critical editing is opposed to and incommensurable with diplomatic editing and to take advantage of the "Compare assets and poems" tool as an editorial machine capable of generating on demand multiple textual formations.

The idea that authors do not write books but texts, incarnated in different written objects including manuscripts, printed books, and electronic texts, is becoming more and more familiar in our digital time. The familiarity with manuscripts and incunabula long ago led scholars to point out the necessity of distinguishing between physical materials and their supporting structure, such as the book, that are unique and singular, as well as the "abstraction" that we refer to under the name "text," which is ideal and reproducible. As Joseph Dane writes in his *The Myth of Print Culture*, "In the earliest printed books we have [...] there is not a single question in bibliographical or literary history that could not be considered a variant" (Dane 9). For this reason, we should be concerned above all with texts but at the same time take into appropriate consideration their supporting structure as well. Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier in their Introduction to *A History of Reading in the West* emphasize that "reading is not already inscribed in the text" (1); "meanings of texts depend on the forms and circumstances through which they are received and appropriated by their readers" (2). In other words, the crucial role of the reader in giving texts a meaning depends on the forms of writing and supporting structures through which the text

is transmitted. Cavallo and Chartier go so far as to say that forms produce meaning, new ways of looking at a text, and every change in support produces new meaning. In the following pages I will introduce the new forms and circumstances of reading made possible by the hypertextual configuration of the OPOB.

1. Reading Petrarca's Rvf as Hypertext

The ideal reader of the OPOB may read and study the evolution of Petrarch's masterpiece from manuscript to digital culture. The *Rvf* were a lifelong endeavor and took different configurations throughout the years. Petrarch was still operating on the partially holograph MS Vat. Lat. 3195—that includes the supposedly last one of these configurations—until the last days of his life, when he was rearranging the numbering of poems 336-66. The digital copy of Ettore Modigliani's diplomatic edition of Petrarca's last manuscript published in 1904 can be a good point of departure for our reader. Next, he or she may read the text in the manuscript tradition represented by the Cod. Queriniano D II 21, one of the most precious witnesses of the history of the *Rvf* that represents the pre-definitive form. Thanks to a 2012 ACLS digital innovation grant, we digitized and transcribed this manuscript, and now in the OPOB it is possible to read the digital copy along with transcriptions of the poems.

The Queriniano D II 21 is a parchment manuscript, discovered and first described by Arnaldo Foresti (440-45). Other scholars studied and described it, including Renato Gaffuri, Valentina Grohovaz, Michele Feo, and Carlo Pulsoni. It dates back to the end of the fourteenth century. It is appreciated by scholars for being one of the closest to the last version of the *Rvf* transcribed by Petrarch in the Vat. Lat. 3195. It is one of the four witnesses used by Giuseppe Savoca to prepare his recent critical edition of the *Rvf*. Savoca holds that punctuation in this manuscript—even though not always present—can be illuminating while reading the Vat. Lat. 3195; and that the use of majuscules is another area that is particularly precise (103). For Ernest Hatch Wilkins the first part of this manuscript represents the "eighth form" of the *Rvf*. In a different perspective, for Feo the Queriniano D II 21 represents the "third edition" of the *Rvf* immediately preceding the last configuration prepared by Petrarch in the Vat. Lat. 3195. Other scholars, like Carlo Pulsoni, prefer not to speak of the Queriniano D II 21 in terms of a special "form" or "edition" of the *Rvf*.

After this exposure to the manuscript tradition, our readers may approach the earliest printed edition of the *Rvf*, published in Venice in

1470 by Vindelino de Spira (Inc. Queriniano G V 15), which we digitized and transcribed as well. It is a unique and marvelous edition of the *Rvf* including extensive illustrations that serve as elaborate visual glosses of fundamental natural and psychological motifs in the poems. The handwritten marginalia glosses are another unique feature of this edition. The glosses and the illustrations are integrated and provide a remarkable and exceptional interpretation of the *Rvf*. In the OPOB these readings may be complemented with and compared to Renaissance and modern commentaries such as Vellutello's; also, recent critical editions of Petrarch's *Rvf* such as Contini's and Savoca's, the Spanish and French translations by Enrique Garcés and Vasquin Philieul (16th century), a contemporary English translation (A. S. Kline), and partial translations in Russian, Chinese, Japanese, and German.

Furthermore, the reader may decide to experience the text along with intersemiotic transpositions, including artworks and musical renderings utilizing the archives of the OPOB. Finally, the users may read the entire *Rvf* in tweet format: in the Apparatus menu they may find 366 tweets, one for each poem. As will become apparent in the next section of this essay, readers and students in the context of seminars and specific reading projects created these apparatuses. In this perspective, the OPOB introduces new hopes for the possible positive effects of digital innovation in the humanities by documenting inventive academic reading strategies in which the typical hyper attention required by the digital environment is conveniently combined with cognitive approaches oriented toward deep reading. The ideal reader that the OPOB has in mind is for sure a hyper reader that has to come to terms with multiple layers of meaning in the text as prompted by the hypertext and the intertextual setting in which the reading takes place.

Despite all possible similarities with previous revolutions of textual forms, the third revolution we are experiencing is introducing unprecedented changes in the ways we read texts.¹ First of all, the new and most important role that computation plays in research is as an "enabler of access" to an audience potentially far larger than the one retrieving books from libraries. The availability of texts in digital format does not in itself make the difference, though. What is really important is the organization of the texts available in searchable databases, "with well-defined schema describing that organization and well-defined access protocols for searching the data" (Foster 18). This new organization and architecture of texts based on hypertextual orientation creates a new situation for the reader, one in which the books are not on the shelves and not conducive to topographical memory.

The *lector in rete*, as we may call the new reader protagonist of the third revolution, is first of all seated before a monitor screen; he or she scrolls through a computerized file in a way that apparently resembles the ancient readers of a *volumen* or roll. In reality, the likeness is deceptive, since the now vertical scroll contains all the logical arrangements of text introduced by the codex, including quite often the pagination and different kinds of indexing. At first sight reading on the screen introduces a relationship with the text that combines two forms of reading that were the result of the two different textual logics and writing supports, the manuscript and the printed text. Upon deeper scrutiny, one has to realize that the written text becomes an ephemeral entity on the screen: it lasts for the time of its representation. It loses its perennial relationship with its supporting materiality.

This is why, notwithstanding the qualities inherited from the previous revolutions in reading, it is not possible to speak of a “page-screen.” The electronic page is the result of a series of various visual configurations and platforms that may include the visualizations of documents in a mosaic of small windows that the reader can now choose. Anne Zali speaks in this regard of a “*texte nomade*” (46- 47). Terje Hillesund invites us not to confuse the electronic text in general as described above with the e-book in which the text is related to and integrated with a specific device based on electronic paper, such as the “Amazon Kindle”; she identifies different typologies of reading. She argues that deep and continuous immersive reading is possible with books and to a certain degree with e-books. On the contrary, the digital environment provided by web browsers and hypertext favors a multimodal and discontinuous kind of reading.

While I agree on the need to not confuse e-books with projects that are explicitly conceived as hypertexts, I argue that deep reading may be possible also within a hypertext approach to reading. Moreover, recent technological changes have radically modified the relationship between reading and writing to the point that the reader may now be considered a co-author. In fact, whereas from the appearance of the first incunabula the room for reader intervention was limited to the blank spaces on a page, in the new era opened by digital texts the reader may now intervene at any moment in the production of the text not only by annotating, copying, and indexing, but also by recomposing the texts in new ways different from the original (Cavallo and Chartier 26-28). As we will see in the next section, the OPOB encourages the use of the resources available in the hypertext to rewrite Petrarch's poem for example in a tweet format. Before describing such a utilization of the

OPOB, I will now introduce some possible paths of reading the text for study or research goals.

The OPOB's user may consult the individual asset separately or may choose a number of assets to combine through the link "Compare poems and assets." The OPOB supports and inspires active reading by allowing the reader to select different platforms of critical attention and to realize multiple tasks including the following:

- Compare manuscripts and transcriptions; compare manuscripts with printed versions of the text or with rewritings.
- Compare multiple versions of the original text in Italian: the Modigliani diplomatic edition, the Contini edition, and the recent critical edition prepared by Giuseppe Savoca.
- Compare different translations in relation to specific editions of the *Rvf*.
- Combine selected elements of the Apparatus with the base text to facilitate basic comprehension of the poems: paraphrases, summaries, tweets, and commentaries.
- Combine selected elements of the archives (visual, music, and essays) included in the Apparatus with the base text, to enrich the comprehension of the poems.
- Produce a new rewriting of one or more poems of the *Rvf* in tweet format.

Some of these features are of interest especially to translators and scholars of translation, others are particularly useful to students and scholars of Romance languages, comparative Literature, and general audience as well. From a methodological and pedagogical point of view, the philology developed in the OPOB does not neglect the text of *Rvf* in favor of a plurality of indistinct textualities; rather, its specific aim is to put the reader in the position of being able to appreciate both the importance of the material support and the evolution of the text, as well as their metamorphoses moving from manuscript culture to print and digital culture. Philology is the master key of the OPOB; we appreciate the new preservative and interpretative opportunities that humanist philology is developing in conjunction with the digital encoding of classical texts. Nevertheless, our hypertext construction puts substantial new emphasis on making sense of the poems through an intertwined reading of different textualities and different intersemiotic renderings of Petrarch's text; a reading that we tend to combine with different forms of writing.

To better illustrate this important point, I will now introduce two reading projects that I have elaborated in two seminars on re-reading

Petrarch's *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* that I taught at the University of Oregon in 2011 and 2014. In true Web 2.0 fashion, students in selected reading and writing projects became active discussants and contributors to the ongoing dialogue with Petrarch's masterpiece and among its readers.

2. Rewriting Petrarch's *Rvf* in the OPOB

In recent years the curators of the Oregon Petrarch Open Book (OPOB) debated the pedagogical usefulness of introducing in the *Rvf* hypertext as an educational apparatus that would facilitate the reading of the original poems written by Petrarca in the Italian of the fourteenth century, encouraging at the same time an original interpretive attitude. Our plan included paraphrases, summaries, and key words for each poem. In our vision, the writing of such apparatuses had to follow a philological strategy that would have students and contributors to the site read the text in the original and eventually in translation, and then produce in sequence the paraphrase, the summary, and the key words. In this perspective it became natural to add to the list of our apparatuses a Twitter edition of Petrarch's *Rvf*.

The idea of translating Petrarch's *Rvf* into Twitterature was developed and implemented for the first time during a seminar, Re-reading Petrarch's Canzoniere in the Digital Era (Ital 407/507), taught at the University of Oregon in Winter 2011. This class created the first Twitter edition of Petrarch's *Rvf* in Italian and focused mostly on the Italian text; students of another seminar on the same topic, taught three years later, re-elaborated the original tweets written in Italian and provided an English translation of them. Both versions are now available in the OPOB. In this essay I limit my analysis to the first creative effort; the reader who wants to know more about the equally innovative translation of the Italian tweets may consult the article, "E-Philology and Twitterature," which I wrote with Rebecca Rosenberg, a student in the 2014 seminar.

The most important challenge that the 2011 seminar had to face was the production of pedagogical apparatuses that would facilitate the comprehension of the *Rvf* and the creation of the tweets that in our vision had to have primarily a hermeneutic function. The six undergraduate and the four graduate students that made up this seminar were motivated to perform this important task for three important reasons: first, as advanced students of Italian, they felt that by creating paraphrases, summaries, key words, and tweets for each poem they were improving immensely their knowledge of the language; second, they sought to

progressively develop a comprehensive grasp of the individual poems and of the collection as a whole; finally, by actively engaging with the *Rvf*, they intended to incarnate the figure of the *wreader* popularized by George Landow, becoming active readers and contributors to the creation of the hypertext around Petrarch's *Rvf* (Landow, *Hypertext* 4-5; *Hyper/Text/Theory* 14). The instructor provided the general introduction to the *Rvf* and presented in each class a narrative account of the sequence of poems assigned. He divided the class into three groups and coordinated their work performed both in and outside the class; his assistant, Cinzia Capon, helped the students to write the paraphrases and the instructor to provide an edited version of them for each poem.²

The students had to read all the poems but concentrated their weekly work as *wreaders* on the poems assigned to their group. After reading the original text and the paraphrases, the different groups had to provide the summaries, keywords, and tweets for the poems assigned. It was clear from the start that the sequence of philological and writing activities represented an exceptional tool for reading and comprehending the text. One could argue that this way of "reading" somehow regenerated a reading practice that originated in the early Middle Ages, when people started to read in order to write, and to write in order to be read, as it happened in the *compilatio*, the method of composition of scholasticism.

As for the early medieval readers described by Cavallo and Chartier, for us reading was not exclusively aimed at a simple comprehension of the literal meaning (*littera*) of writing (Cavallo and Chartier 18). This first stage consisted of a movement from the original text to the paraphrase. This initial comprehension was followed by the composition of the summary of the general meaning (*sensus*) of the poem. Finally, the individuation of the keywords and the writing of the tweet allowed the students to arrive at a proposition that more nearly captured the profundity of the poem (*sententia*).

Each group shared the work done in class so that all the students were learning from each other and participating in a collective endeavor that may be seen as a form of flipped teaching/learning. Differently from the traditional model of instruction, whereby the teacher is typically the central focus for disseminating information, flipped teaching intentionally changes instruction to a learner-centered model in which class time creates meaningful learning opportunities. Moreover, whereas the traditional pattern of teaching is mostly centered on giving students the task of reading from a textbook, flipped teaching taking advantage of educational technologies such as hypertexts aims at producing new

textualities as a result of a collaborative effort by which information assimilation takes place in the classroom not through lectures but by participating in consequential activities. In other words, flipped learning provides students with different ways to learn content and demonstrate mastery; the instructor in flipped teaching is involved in creating and/or curating relevant content for students and with students.³

We discussed at the beginning of the seminar the general tone of the tweets. After a few experiments of various kinds, we decided to use in our tweets the first person, to favor an emphatic engagement with the meaning that the author presumably had in mind and to avoid ironic and sarcastic rendering of his voice. In other words, we used the tweet as a creative interpretive tool, something different from the summary and the collection of keywords; ultimately, in our view the tweet had to extrapolate the quintessential element of each poem allowing an immediate and insightful grasp of it. At the end of the course during one memorable session in the Yamada Language Center at the University of Oregon, the students alternately read all the 366 tweets edited by the instructor.

It was impressive to witness the lively and active reading of the long sequence of tweets that translated one of the masterpieces of Western literature into a format and a language attuned to our contemporary ears. In the general discussion that followed the reading, most students appreciated the sense of continuity from one tweet to the other and the comprehensiveness of our interpretative reading that allowed a complete review of the entire *Rvf* in just three hours. The consecutive reading of all the 366 tweets gave them a sense of the entire *Rvf* better than the one possible through an anthology of poems selected by the instructor.

Elena Cull, a graduate student in the course and a writer herself embraced with passion her role of *wreader* and the interactive learning that the class prompted. She was particularly enthusiastic about her first tweet from poem 1 of the *Rvf*. When she first read the poem, “Voi ch’ascoltate in rime sparse il suono/di quei sospiri ond’io nudriva ’l core...” she was deeply touched; she felt that a door was opening and that she was about to meet a real human being with his dreams, hopes and sorrows. This first meeting with the poet induced Elena to conceive the tweet to give expression to his voice and to update his language so that contemporary ears could still hear his message:

Ehi! Voi ricordate com’era essere giovani e innamorati? Abbiate pietà di me! Ora mi vergogno e capisco che il mondo è transitorio.

In the final discussion of the class she emphasized the benefits of rewriting the text in different formats, the discipline of the mind necessary to learn a language while interacting with a great work of literature. Other members of the seminar, Antonio Schiavulli and Michael Lukomski, noted this point as well, underlining the importance of removing the separation between the pedagogical-linguistic elements and the literary dimension of the course. The language, in this way, they added, had not been an ancillary foundation of the literary work: from the start and for the entire duration of the course both the linguistic and literary dimensions interacted in an interdependent relationship, based on a mechanism of understanding and creating, reading and re-writing. Schiavulli was particularly fond of the creative dimension of the new text, the tweet, as different from the original text in form and content. His tweet from poem 1 was slightly different from Elena's:

La giovanile ingenuità con cui ho affrontato l'amore ha prodotto questi versi. Ora, da uomo maturo, comprendo il valore profondo delle cose.

Gail Gould, a graduate student in the class, further elaborated these ideas by stating that the sequence of philological activities required to read a poem allowed entering the linguistic process at the origin of the poem itself, revealing some of its deep and hidden strata. In the final discussion of the class she presented on the difficulties and rewards of writing a tweet out of a very long poem of 157 verses such as Canzone 360. In this song the poet summons the sweet and cruel Love in front of the court of Reason. Petrarch presents himself as an innocent victim, persecuted for a long time by the passion of Love, and describes his unhappy life under this merciless master. He accuses Love of having turned him away from God because of a woman and considers it responsible for his suffering. Love responds by reversing the charges. Petrarch is guilty of failing to take a great opportunity that had been given to him: to imitate the perfection of Laura and rise to heaven with his poetry. At the moment of the verdict the personified Reason takes time: the issue is too complicated and cannot be easily resolved. Certainly, such a paraphrastic summary of the poem does not do justice to the rhythm and many beautiful poetic nuances of Petrarch's marvelous poem. However, the tweet that Gail helped to write captures the poetic truth, the *sententia* that is at the core of the poem:

Nel processo contro Amore, io ero il testimone di tante sofferenze. Amore si è difeso e la Ragione non ha saputo giudicare.

Nicolò Potesio, an undergraduate student majoring in science, took the course on Petrarch's *Rvf* because he wanted to experience at least one literature course during his college years. In his comments on the class he wrote that composing a tweet was for him fundamental in approaching the world of poetry, which for him was an unknown territory up to that point. He perceived a greater understanding of the poems for which he wrote a summary and a tweet. He admitted consulting not only the original text and paraphrases but also translations before writing the summary and the actual tweet. His choice of which aspect of the poem to include in the tweet was related in many cases to the structure of the sonnet that is divided in a “*fronte*” in which the poet introduces the theme of the poem, and in a “*sirma*” where the poet draws his conclusion or final reflection on the proposed theme. Quite often the clue for the tweet for him was located precisely in the *sirma* as he wanted to achieve an emphatic interpretation, writing in the first person and giving voice directly to the poet.

He found particularly useful the tweet he wrote for poem 19 where the poet compares himself to a moth drawn to the fire that burns. For Petrarch it is impossible to escape the love for Laura in spite of its having a negative effect. Like the moths the poet cannot withdraw; he is bound to be drawn to his flame forever, even when it burns. Compared to the original poem much is absent in the summary and in the tweet. Nicolò decided to omit the discussion in the first quatrain of the different types of animals, focusing on the butterfly for the well-known tendency of these insects to be attracted to the light; he also omitted any part of the first tercet because it was redundant. He included in the tweet the problem (the fire is attractive, but it burns) and resolution announced in the final tercet of the *sirma* (it is his destiny to be burned). This tweet is therefore Nicolò's interpretation of the proposition and of the tone presented by the poet in this poem:

Sono una farfalla attratta dalla sua fiamma, incapace di allontanarmi anche quando mi brucia. È mio destino andare dietro a ciò che mi arde.

Robert Belmonte, an undergraduate student of Renaissance literature, wrote that in the classes he took in the past while studying the texts of the Italian Renaissance he felt disconnected from the poetic work. For him to go through the same creative process as the author has done to write his poems helped him to develop his literary skills as a whole. One of his favorite tweets is the one from the poem 358 where the poet associates the death of Laura to that of Christ. Petrarch is now

waiting for death and invokes its arrival because his life has already ended with the death of Laura.

Morte, la tua venuta è dolce, devo superare questa tristezza e l'unica cura sei tu.

The tweet helped Robert not only to understand the poem but also to contextualize it in relation to the others in the sequence and grasp the crucial importance of the death theme for the second part of the *Rvf*.

Emily Anger derived the shortest tweet from poem 138, an invective against the Pope of Avignon, a city deemed by the poet to be false and evil in opposition to virtuous Rome. The church for Petrarch has become a brazen harlot who rebels against Christ and the Apostles. The tweet gives a very succinct and clear idea of the invective:

Ah! Inferno babilonese!

The class discussion elaborated and enriched the tweet that now reads like this on the OPOB web site:

O inferno Babilonese! La sede papale è una meretrice sfacciata che genera il male. Perché Costantino non torna a revocare la sua donazione?

For Cameron Butler it was very important to read Petrarch's *Letters* and his philosophical work, *On his ignorance*, to understand the poems of the *Rvf*. Moreover, the philological activity performed in the class helped him to appreciate the great value of Petrarch's poetry and above all, what Cameron considered his unsurpassed ability to express emotions. To learn how to understand and select the data necessary to write a tweet was one of the most satisfactory parts of the course for Cameron; he learned to distinguish between the most important rhetorical elements of poetry and prose, and synthesize them into one unified idea. His favorite tweet was based on poem 313 where the poet laments the death of Laura and cries. He states that she took his heart and brought it with her to heaven. Finally, the poet adds that he would like to be dead, in order to be near her. Cameron's tweet captures in three brief sentences the core idea of the poem:

La morte di Laura mi fa piangere. Ha portato con sé il mio cuore e la mia anima. Vorrei essere morto.

Cameron was very proud of the work done in this course. In the final reflection on the class he wrote that the rewriting of Petrarch's poems in tweet format makes it possible for them to continue living, evolving, and remaining relevant to modern and classical poetry. He was convinced that the kind of work done in class and now available in the OPOB helps the reader not only to understand poetry in the *Rvf*, but also to acquire an insightful method to approach poetry in general, the poetry of the world.

Andrea DeKonig, in her comments, wrote that reading the 366 tweets helped her to understand that there is a dramatic force in the *Rvf* showing a journey of discovery and transformation through the love for Laura. Petrarch's daily feelings and desires are very relevant and the long sequence of tweets helps to provide a continuous and unique perception of Petrarch's masterpiece. Andrea's favorite tweet responds to poem 133, in which Petrarch feels dominated by the passion of love from which he cannot escape.

Love dazzles him and destroys his life, which flees away before Laura's angelic song and breath:

*Non ho alcuna difesa contro le armi di Laura che conquista la mia vita.
Io sono un bersaglio per amore e ho bisogno di misericordia.*

Andrea's tweet has been slightly modified in the actual version in the OPOB, which includes direct quotes from the original in the attempt at capturing Petrarch's poetic style:

Amore mi ha trasformato in un bersaglio, come neve al sole, come cera al fuoco. La mia vita fugge senza scampo alla tua dolce aura.

Finally, Brandy Freeman's favorite tweet took inspiration from poem 15. This was the first poem by Petrarch that really struck her. The poet is traveling away from his beloved and reflects on the impossibility of the physical body to live separated from the spirit represented by Laura, who has remained in her hometown. Love reminds the poet that lovers are exempt from physical rules that usually govern human beings and so the body and spirit can exist in separate states. The resultant suffering is described very vividly and dramatically by Petrarch, who feels he is leaving behind a piece of his soul. Here is Brandy's rendering of the poet's drama:

Mi domando come sia possibile sopravvivere senza lo spirito che mi anima, ma è un dolore che ogni uomo innamorato deve provare.

In the final discussion and in their written comments all the students in the class were convinced that the reading of a tweet cannot substitute for a reading of the actual poem; they would recommend the reader of the OPOB to read the tweet after having read the poem itself. Conversely, the reading of the tweet should trigger an engagement with the original text. Also, they suggest that occasional readers of poetry use the tweets as a reference tool to acquire a basic knowledge of the *Rvf*. Nevertheless, the instructor's basic criterion for editing the tweets created in this course suggests a greater role for a tweet, beyond its use as a hermeneutic and reference tool. This criterion is illustrated by the above-mentioned tweet from poem 133: including direct or indirect quotes from the original in the attempt at capturing Petrarch's poetic style. In this perspective the tweet incorporates a poetic flavor in what otherwise would remain a pure prose rendering of Petrarch's *Rvf*.

The work done by the class is propedeutic for and interconnected with a complex and articulated reading of Petrarch's masterpiece in hypertext format, which is now possible to perform through the Compare poems and assets tool included in the OPOB. The readers and students of Petrarch's *Rvf* may now retrieve the philological experience of the class, opening in different coordinated small windows on the same web page the original text, the paraphrase, the summary and the tweet of each poem. Taking advantage of these apparatuses and other resources and tools our readers may become *wreaders* themselves and produce new tweets out of Petrarch's poems as a synthesis of an interpretation different from ours. Then, they may submit the new tweets to the hypertext of the OPOB, adding a new contribution to the hypertext.

If we consider this important interactive dimension of reading in a digital environment we may conclude that digital humanities are providing new and more comprehensive ways to realize traditional humanities goals. One may argue that the OPOB hypertext reproduces the kind of extensive reading made possible by the reading wheel that was already known to the medieval and renaissance humanist (Cavallo and Chartier 29; Lollini, "Circles"). We are convinced that in this wheel the tweet becomes just a component that acquires sense and value in relation to the others. The experience of the students in the seminar proved that the tweet may not be just a tool to avoid the burden of reading Petrarch's poems but on the contrary a way to deepen their comprehension and better interpret them.

3. *Encoding Petrarca's Rvf*

In the 2014 seminar, Re-reading Petrarch's Canzoniere in the Digital Era, I designed with my collaborators an encoding activity that would allow students to develop a new thematic approach to Petrarch's poems. In the first section of the course the class discussed some crucial theoretical and methodological premises of digital humanism. While our specific goal was to elaborate a digital close reading of Petrarch's *Rvf* based on the encoding of a thematic network of selected poems, we did at the same time contemplate the elaboration of a quantitative approach to the *Rvf* as a whole. The main activity of the class was focused on reading, encoding, and interpreting poems based on critical inferences rather than on numbers and quantitative data about a text or a series of texts. In this respect, we shared Stanley Fish's concerns about reducing the reading activity to numbers ("Mind Your P's and B's: The Digital Humanities and Interpretation").

However, in the end we did find it useful to parallel the critical and qualitative approach to the text with a quantitative one. On the one hand, the possibility of reading the text of the *Rvf* in more than one version, in different media and formats belonging to different historical contexts proved to be extremely useful in triggering an informed and at the same time creative interpretation of the text. On the other hand, once we had elaborated the results of the digital close reading and encoding of selected poems we found it worthwhile to approach a digital distant reading of the *Rvf* based on the thematic keywords collected through the close reading. The experience of our class proved that data mining, looking for word frequencies or patterns in texts, and comparing and analyzing different texts, can be a meaningful research tool if associated with what remains the basis of humanism: close reading.

The point of departure of our reading was the contingency of the individual poem. In the ten-week seminar, students divided into groups read the entire *Rvf* and followed Petrarch's narration from the beginning to the end; however, they performed their interpretative activity by encoding a selection of specific poems every week. The thematic network of the *Rvf* was not a series of abstract and general themes imposed from the outside; it was elaborated as a work in progress through the encoding process and conceived as an organic inner part of the poems. On the one hand, the teacher was interested in particular in exploring the presence and importance of nature in Petrarch's poems; on the other hand, after students started encoding and interpreting the poems, a new, more complex, and articulated thematic network emerged. This network of themes extracted from within the poems themselves

included the poet, Laura, metaphysics, nature, metamorphosis, and urban life. Each group of students paid attention to all these themes in their encoding. Nonetheless, they chose from the weekly assigned sequences of the *Rvf* the poems to encode and interpret based on their special interest in and sensitivity to one of the themes.

We considered the themes as interrelated and interdependent. The poet is the site at which all the topics emerge and converge in their specific connotations. Nevertheless, his sphere is related to, dependent on, and intersected by other four spheres—Laura, metaphysics, nature, urban life. The encoding was meant to study the different manifestations, levels, and meanings of the intersecting relationships. Some students decided to learn the basic TEI encoding and worked towards this goal with Karen Estlund, quondam Director of the University of Oregon Digital Scholarship, who introduced them to the idea of digital close reading and encoding and followed their weekly encoding of Petrarch's poems. Yet, most of the students preferred to use a color-code system that was intuitive and, in the end, proved to be a very effective interpretative tool to complement the reading of the poems. I described thoroughly every stage of this experience in an article, "Re-Reading Petrarca in the Digital Era," I wrote with Pierpaolo Spagnolo, a student who participated to the seminar. In the pages that follow I will offer some reflections on the value of encoding as a way of close-reading a literary text, taking advantage of the hypertextual context.

In looking for a deep digital reading that would utilize the copiousness and the structure of the textualities available in the OPOB, our class rejected both the monographic and encyclopedic ideas of collecting data and developed a reading strategy based on the five circumscribed themes, organic inner parts of the *Rvf* and central enough to be a point of departure for an oriented encoding and close reading of selected individual poems. The close reading and encoding activities were then conceived as a premise for a distant, synthetizing reading of the *Rvf* as a whole. If it is true that in order to achieve a major work of synthesis, "it is imperative to locate a point of departure (*Ansatzpunkt*), a handle, as it were, by which the subject can be sized" (Auerbach 14); it is also true that a philological and historical synthesis cannot end in "the complacent exultation of the particular" and must remain "stirred by the movement of the whole."

Yet, as Auerbach concludes in his essay on "Philology and Weltliteratur," 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). In other words, the relational nature of the part

is reinforced through the distance/difference existing among different particulars. In this perspective the relativization of the parts transforms each of them as separate units in a mirror in which all the others reflect themselves. The reciprocal relation among all the units creates the comprehensive whole in which all of them partake in different ways. Ultimately, these units work as Leibniz' monads: each of them is unique and has at the same time the power of representation, by which it reflects all other monads in such a way that a seeing eye could, by looking into one monad, observe the whole mirrored therein (*Monadology* 56).

The following scaled visualization of the thematic network based on the occurrences of theme-related words elaborated by our class allows such a simultaneous and comprehensive synthesis. The different themes are represented as intersecting spheres:

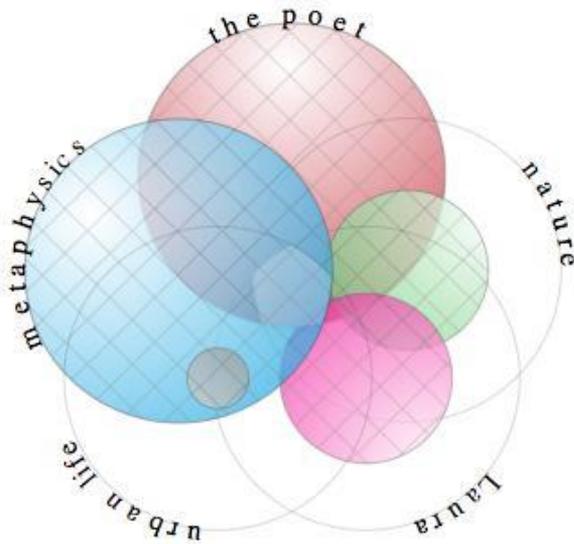


Fig. 1 Thematic network of Petrarch *Rvf*

Our point of departure was found by considering the independence and autonomy of the individual poems. Digital close reading and encoding led us to identify their provisional discrete grouping in five major themes; these themes became the point of departure of an articulated reading strategy that privileged the active forces in the poems, the protagonists, the natural and historical settings, along with the metaphysical culture of Petrarch. As suggested by Kate Singer, in her article “Digital Close Reading: TEI for Teaching Poetic

Vocabularies,” digital encoding was used in the classroom both as a method of teaching close reading and as a technology that helped to reconsider and challenge the terminology used in literary reading. By color-coding our readings, we learned to develop interpretative language beyond the discursive and rhetorical terminology that somehow has become unable to register the synthesizing, visualizing, and outlining needs of reading in our digital time.

Encoding keywords and terms of selected poems revealed the qualitative and quantitative relation among the different protagonists of the *Rvf*, that is at the base of the visualization introduced in Fig. 1. The following is the numerical representation of the initial encoding of selected poems that was elaborated using Excel:

	Nature	Mphys	Poet	Laura	Urban
Frequencies	127	243	242	135	47
Percentages	15.9%	30.6%	30.4%	17%	5.9%

Fig. 2 Thematic word frequencies of selected poems

From this point of departure, we were able to conceive a distant reading that provided us with a comprehensive view of the *Rvf* based on the quantitative data of the thematic keywords extrapolated from all the poems in the collection, adding this time “metamorphosis” as a special theme to the list.⁴ Here are the numerical results of the distant reading:

	Nature	Mphys	Poet	Mphos	Laura	Urban
Total word count	848	1502	2433	1361	2253	42

Fig. 3 Thematic word frequencies for the entire *Rvf*

On the one hand, the outcome of our digital close reading had Metaphysics as a prominent theme and the Poet and Laura as second and third, followed by Nature and Urban life; on the other hand, the result of the distant reading had the Poet as the principal theme immediately followed by Laura, and then, at a farther remove, metaphysics, metamorphosis, nature, and finally urban life. Thus, the thematic picture suggested by the distant reading is coincident with traditional readings of the *Rvf* as a love story that has two main protagonists and a prevalent metaphysical orientation. In this reading, nature does not deserve the role of protagonist and metamorphosis is just one theme among others.

On the other hand, the digital close reading based on an attentive semantic encoding of Petrarch's poems tells a different story. In this case, poet and metaphysics have a prominent role but the distance between them and Laura and nature is not so large as to rule out the interpretation that they play a role of co-protagonists in the *Rvf*. In other words, the close reading via encoding triggered an interpretation of the *Rvf* conceived not as a static and finished reality around the subjectivities of the poet and Laura but rather as a relational structure in which all the parts are mirroring each other in multiple perspectives.

Our experience suggests that new methodologies and strategies made possible by the digital humanities, such as digital encoding and structurally prepared intertextual readings, may well help change our understanding of classic texts and offer new ways of reaching traditional goals in the humanities. The parallel reading of historical documents and editions of the poems along with the miniatures of the Incunabulum Queriniano enriched the students' reading and encoding of the texts in question. Finally, considering the historical and quantitative synthesis created through the encoding, the class elaborated an esthetic interpretation of the *Rvf*, a drawing that visualized the importance of the different themes while at the same time attesting to their interdependence in a projected symbolic whole. The *Ansatzpunkt* of this synthesis was the result of personal intuition triggered by exposure to different textualities and nurtured by close and distant reading along with digital encoding, a mixture of art and science.⁵

The digital reading produced by our class was the result of intense work, dialogues and discussions in which each individual and each group was a protagonist. The teacher had his own story to tell based on his ongoing research on the role of nature in Petrarch's poems. He was open to listening to all the other stories the students were inspired to tell through their interaction with the material to tell. How many stories and readings of the *Rvf* were there in the class? At least five, one for each of the themes we considered; this approach triggered students' interests in finding new relations among the different topics. On the one hand, some students were interested in studying the authorial voice of Petrarch and the role of Laura in the *Rvf*. On the other hand, some students were interested in studying how Petrarch's metaphysical culture inspired his poems. Other students developed an interest in studying Petrarch's relation to cities, urban and historical culture more generally.

The class took in all these stories as they unfolded in our weekly meetings, in which each group had to present its close reading and encoding. In this way we rejected the idea that meaning is embedded solely in the text and avoided what is called textualism in favor of

openness to reader response and to different textualities and intersemiotic renderings available in the hypertext OPOB. Reading in our class was conceived as an activity that combined individual and group work. The semantic encoding of the poems allowed us to ponder that the meaning of the poems rather than being simply imbedded in formal features is the result of the reader's interpretive strategy. To work in groups allowed the class to maximize the value of interpretive communities in looking for some agreement on the different meanings of texts. Thus, the most innovative results are related precisely to the group and collective dimension of our experiment, the close reading and encoding of selected poems.

Our digital reading and interpretation does not pretend or want to be "exemplary," since we believe that each act of reading is in some way always singular, original, and *sui generis*. In this perspective our encoding is not meant to introduce a fixed and stable layer to the text. As Buzzetti and McGann write, "to approach textuality in this way [that is, as susceptible to a definitive reading] is to approach it in illusion." They go on to say that "markup should be conceived, instead, as the expression of a highly reflexive act, a mapping of text back onto itself"; and that "as soon as a (marked) text is (re) marked, the meta-markings open themselves to indeterminacy" (Buzzetti and McGann, par. 49). It is clear that in this perspective, quantitative reading can only be a tool of a digital reading of literary texts.

Our reading and encoding may be considered as a groundwork for other layers of encoding that will be introduced in the near future in the OPOB. All acts of interpretation occur in some context or other; our context is the late print time or digital era in Western capitalist society in which there is an unprecedented abundance of textualities and images that we need to learn to master in order to preserve the cultural memory of the past while pursuing at the same time the humanist project in original ways. To this goal, digital close reading, encoding, and visualization may become fundamental tools available to an ethical reader aware that reading is not simply a cognitive and epistemological matter and that the new nature of reading in the digital era is characterized not only by hyper and pervasive attention but also by a deep involvement with the text.

Critics like J. Hillis Miller have promoted the notion of an ethics of reading books and the importance of prosopoeias. Some of his ideas were reflected in our experience. He writes, "You can never be sure what is going to happen when someone in a particular situation reads a particular book," and that "reading is always the disconfirmation or

modification of presupposed literary theory rather than its confirmation.” (21) Reading in a digital context can be even more intricate, especially when you read with someone else and have to listen not only to the story supposedly told in the book but also to the stories told by other readers and editors of the text, even including the story told by the machine via a distant reading. To conclude, from a theoretical point of view, our approach to reading, re-writing, and encoding the poems of the *Rvf* resisted both the quantitative and doxographic reduction of theory based on statistics and taxonomy of methodologies and schools of thinking in favor of a theoretical inquiry based on wonder in which there are still opportunities for the individual to tell his/her own story in relation to others.

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APPENDIX 1

Example of TEI encoding: poem 21, completed by Adrian Leon.

```

</lg></div2>
<div2 type="poem">
<head>21</head>

<lg type="sonnet"><lg type="quatrain">
<l>Mille fiate, o <rs type="Laura">dolce mia guerrera</rs></l>
<l>per aver co' <rs type="Laura">begli occhi </rs> vostri <seg
  ana="metaphysics">pace</seg> </l>
<l>V' aggio proferto il <rs type="Laura">cor</rs>. M'a voi non
  piace</l>
<l>Mirar sí basso colla mente <rs type="Laura">altera</rs>.</l>

</lg><lg type="quatrain"><l>Et se <rs type="poet">di lui</rs> fors'
  altra donna spera,</l>
<l>Vive in <seg ana="metaphysics">speranza</seg> debile et
  fallace.</l>
<l><rs type="poet">Mio perché sdegno</rs> ciò ch' a voi dispiace</l>
<l>Esser non può già mai <rs type="poet">cosí com' era</rs>.</l>

</lg><lg type="tercet"><l><rs type="poet">Or s' io lo scaccio</rs>, et
  e' non trova in voi</l>
<l>Ne l' exilio infelice alcun soccorso,</l>
<l><rs type="poet">Né sa star sol, né gire ov' altri il chiama</rs>,</l>

</lg><lg type="tercet"><l>Poria smarrire il suo <seg
  an="metaphysics">natural corso</seg>.</l>
<l>Che grave colpa fia <rs type="Laura">d' ambeduo noi</rs>,</l>
<l><rs type="Laura">Et tanto piú de voi</rs>, <rs type="poet">quanto
  piú v' ama</rs>.</l> </lg>

```

ENDNOTES

¹ For a definition of the first and second revolution that brought the reader first from *volumen* to codex and then to the networks of printing see Cavallo and Chartier 24-25.

² As a biographical introduction to Petrarch, students read a selection of the *Rerum familiarium libri* (Letters on Familiar Matters); and as a philosophical introduction to the *Rvf*, Petrarch's *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia* (On his own ignorance). For the general pedagogical concerns of the course see my article, "Petrarch and the Ethics of Writing and Reading." The instructor could afford having a teaching assistant thanks to a 2010 NEH Digital Humanities Award.

³ For a review of the basic concepts and practices of flipped learning see Aaron Sams, et al., *Flipped Learning Network (FLN). The Four Pillars of F-L-I-P™*.

⁴ Art Farley, a colleague from the University of Oregon Computer Science Department, developed a computer program in the programming language Python that first removed insignificant stop words, i.e., conjunctions, pronouns, articles, and prepositions, from the entire *Rvf*, leaving only meaningful words in the poems. Then, the remaining words were matched against the words in each thematic set of words, with a count being maintained regarding each thematic set for each poem. Thus, each poem had a profile in terms of the number of words it contained for each theme.

⁵ I recounted the entire process of the creation of the drawing in the above mentioned article I wrote with Pierpaolo Spagnolo. This article includes a digital copy of the drawing (80, 97).

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