

CHAPTER ONE

PETRARCH AT THE CROSSROADS OF HERMENEUTICS
AND PHILOLOGY:

EDITORIAL LAPSES, NARRATIVE IMPOSITIONS, AND
WILKINS' DOCTRINE OF THE NINE FORMS OF THE
RERUM VULGARIVM FRAGMENTA

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The goal of this paper is to isolate a core constituent of Petrarch's intellectual and poetic identity, one that suggests that when handling Petrarchan texts even the non-philologist will benefit from acquiring the rudiments of Petrarchan philology. I will endeavor to explain why I think that the point where hermeneutics and philology intersect is a crossroads to which the serious student of Petrarch must almost inevitably arrive, even if then to depart again—as most of us will—for a place more fully philological or more fully interpretive. What is it about this crossroads, this particular intellectual juncture, which is peculiarly Petrarchan? That question furnishes the framework of this paper.

Given my topic, it is perhaps best to declare at the outset that I am not a philologist. However, over the course of an intellectual life spent thinking about thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italian texts I have been drawn, apparently ineluctably, ever further into matters philological, undoubtedly because in this field philology continues to collide with interpretation and the two cannot be neatly segregated. Nowhere is this collision more evident than in Petrarch studies, though it occurs in other intellectual domains as well. Recently I critiqued the edition of Dante's lyrics published in 2002 by the present dean of Italian philologists, Domenico De Robertis, precisely because the edition in question thought to privilege philology over hermeneutics without acknowledging the necessary quotient of interpretation that is part of the practice of philology—without acknowledging, in other words, that philology *is* a form of interpretation.¹ I will come back to

¹ See Barolini 2004.

this story, for the problems of the De Robertis edition are exemplary with respect to the juncture I hope to illuminate; they pivot at the nexus of hermeneutics and philology. For now, my point is autobiographical: in my adult life, the original solicitation to engage with philological issues came from Petrarch.

When I went to graduate school in the 1970s, theory was newly in vogue and philology seemed quite *déclassé* and outmoded; the work of editing was rarely mentioned in graduate school. It was not then possible to foretell the fortunate turn of the wheel whereby philology would become fashionable again via interest in material culture on the one hand and hermeneutics on the other. A classicist as an undergraduate, I was familiar with the philological discussions that can be found in the notes of Latin and Greek editions, and this background gave me an appreciation for the importance and hermeneutic complexity of the editorial enterprise. I engaged with philology through Petrarch, while writing an essay entitled “The Making of a Lyric Sequence: Time and Narrative in Petrarch’s *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*”² (other names for Petrarch’s vernacular masterpiece are *Canzoniere*, *Rime*, and *Rime sparse*, but the only authorized name, given by Petrarch in his final copy, is *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*). In other words, I found that I had to read and digest Ernest Hatch Wilkins’ seminal philological and codicological study, published in 1951, *The Making of the “Canzoniere” and Other Petrarchan Studies*.³

My goal was to conceptualize the intertwined problems of narrative and time in Petrarch’s lyric sequence; to do this it turned out that I needed to understand the basic philological problems inherent in the construction of Petrarch’s text. Let me add, the better to underscore the specificity of the Petrarchan problematic, that at the same time I was also working on conceptualizing the problems of narrative and time in Dante’s *Paradiso*, and that philosophy—not philology—was required to solve those problems.⁴

The experience of reading Wilkins was a watershed for me, although not for entirely positive reasons. I was interested in the constructedness of Petrarch’s vernacular masterpiece, which Wilkins had illuminated; indeed, the title of my essay, “The Making of a Lyric Sequence”, is

² See Barolini 1989. Citations of this essay are from the 2006 reprint.

³ See Wilkins 1951a.

⁴ See Barolini 1992, especially chapter 8.

intended to refer to his title, *The Making of the “Canzoniere”*. Wilkins’ reconstruction of the text’s construction involved much description of the manuscripts and—although his description is dated by today’s standards, in ways discussed by Dario Del Puppo and H. Wayne Storey and in the context of standards set by the new facsimile edition of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* by Gino Belloni, Furio Brugnolo, H. Wayne Storey, and Stefano Zamponi—it was essential reading at the time.⁵ I was working on an idea that could not be verified without understanding to some degree the story told by the manuscripts: the idea that Petrarch used narrative devices as a means of bringing time into a text which simultaneously resisted temporality, and that he saw the lyric sequence (and eventually also the letter collection) as a genre which was uniquely qualified to achieve these ends. I needed to understand how the construction of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* was achieved in material terms because it seemed clear that the material and the ideological would reflect each other. The experience of thinking about the material construction of Petrarch’s text in turn stimulated an ongoing meditation on the dialectical interplay of interpretation and philology in other early Italian contexts, leading me eventually to the controversies that swirl around Dante’s lyrics.

In retrospect, I see that the experience of reading Wilkins also incubated the thesis that Petrarch, more than most authors, more for instance than Dante or Boccaccio, created an opus that in fact *requires* would-be interpreters to understand the relevant philological and codicological issues. (The work of Dante’s for which we would have to make an exception is not the *Commedia* but the *Vita Nuova*, whose proper interpretation also requires from us an understanding of the rudiments of its material construction and editorial history.) This condition occurs because of the high degree of constructedness of Petrarch’s texts, or better because of the nature of their constructedness, which is to be located precisely in the codices he used and how he handled and manipulated them.

How is this behavior different from that of any other author? After all, all textual construction is ultimately located in the material form in which it was first made, whether that be in clay tablets or computer files or parchment codices. In the case of Petrarch’s collection

⁵ Del Puppo and Storey 2003, and Belloni, Brugnolo, Storey, and Zamponi 2004.

of vernacular lyrics, the key individualizing factors are: first, that it is indeed a collection, a grouping of poems placed in a pre-determined order (and this is why the *Vita Nuova*, which also arranges previously written lyrics in a new order, generates some of the same critical problems as the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*); and, second, that Petrarch built his collection by literally moving poems from one codex to another in ways that we can still trace (as compared to the *Vita Nuova*, where all material traces of Dante's manipulation have vanished).

In composing the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, Petrarch took previously written lyrics and literally moved them in the process of arranging them in a new—and to him significant—order. Petrarch transcribed poems from drafts, some of which are preserved in the codex Vaticano Latino 3196, known as the *codice degli abbozzi*,⁶ into a standing order. The last of these orders is preserved as the partial autograph, codex Vaticano Latino 3195. Let me mention here that, while Vaticano Latino 3195 is technically only a partial autograph because Petrarch did not personally copy all the poems in it himself, the poems not transcribed by Petrarch were transcribed by his secretary Giovanni Malpaghini under his direct supervision. As a result, the entire codex is authorial and, in the etymological sense of the word, “authoritative”.⁷

The construction of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* can therefore be visualized in a very precise way as an interaction between material codices, followed by the material mechanics of what occurs within the final codex, within Vaticano Latino 3195 (one feature of the codex's material construction, its erasures, is discussed by Storey in this volume). A similar process underlies the construction of Petrarch's letter collections (as discussed by Roberta Antognini in this volume). My point here is that, while the existence of an autograph, which we possess for instance in the case of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, is always of enormous significance, since an autograph always provides invaluable insight into a text's genesis and creation, nonetheless an autograph is of lesser specifically *hermeneutic* value in the absence of a poetics that is so markedly material, so profoundly codicological. And, in fact, once the authen-

⁶ See Pacca and Paolino 1996 for their useful edition of Vaticano Latino 3196.

⁷ Giovanni Malpaghini transcribed 244 poems, 189 in part 1 and 55 in part 2; Petrarch transcribed 123 poems, including one retranscription, 75 in part 1 (the retranscription is number 121) and 48 in part 2. See Wilkins 1951a, 75–76.

ticity of Staatsbibliothek Hamilton 90 as Boccaccio's autograph was established, the Boccaccian interpretive enterprise has not continued to focus on it in the same way that the Petrarchan interpretive enterprise has remained focused on Vaticano Latino 3195.

The thesis that Petrarch's poetics constrain his interpreters to come to grips with the fundamentals of Petrarchan philology has a corollary, which will motivate many of my remarks in this paper: we as critics should take responsibility for labeling the verifiably philological and should be transparent regarding our positions along the critical axis from philology to hermeneutics. Again, my position was shaped by the encounter with Wilkins, for I did not emerge from reading *The Making of the "Canzoniere"* with a charitable view of the application of Petrarchan philology to literary criticism—quite the opposite. The experience was fruitful in terms of thinking of the boundary permeable and impermeable between philology and interpretation and the discourses that are situated along that boundary precisely because I was shocked by the acritical and hermeneutically naïve applications of Wilkins that dotted the landscape of Petrarchan literary criticism. Thus, the "The Making of a Lyric Sequence" contains a subtext intended to be corrective of Wilkins and even more of Wilkins' reception. This subtext of yore will be my main text in this essay, a text preached with all the more vigor because the intervening years did not produce as much correction as I (alas, naïve myself with respect to the reception of critics by their peers) would have hoped.

In "The Making of a Lyric Sequence" I considered the philosophical implications of the macro-structures of Petrarch's text. Chief among these macro-structures is his division of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* into two parts. For readers who are not familiar with Petrarch's method of composition, let me briefly explain that, in the final collection of 366 poems, poems 1 and 264 were fixed as the beginnings respectively of an unnamed part 1 and an unnamed part 2, and poem 366, *Vergine bella*, was fixed as the conclusion. The collection grew by a process of accretion to each of the two parts: poems were copied from drafts and transcribed into the poet's *ordo* (we have autograph draft sheets containing lined-through poems and marginal annotations indicating transcription "in ordine"). We know that Petrarch had divided his collection into two parts before doing so in Vaticano Latino 3195, because an earlier form of the collection (copied by Boccaccio in Chigiano L V 176 and

hence known as the Chigi form) is also divided into two parts.⁸ Moreover, the canzone *I' vo pensando*, a meditation on the transitory nature of all earthly attachments akin to a versified *Secretum*, begins part 2 in both the Chigiano codex and in Vaticano Latino 3195. (*I' vo pensando* is not number 264 in the Chigi form, because the Chigi collection consists of a total of 215 poems, 174 in part 1 and 41 in part 2.) Therefore, we know that the decision to divide the collection into two parts with *I' vo pensando* as the hinge was one of long standing.

The significance of the division, the most overt exploitation of formal structure in the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* and a creative act without precedent in the lyric tradition, is immense. The very act of composing a text—in this case the very act of collecting the lyrics—in and of itself generates a beginning and an ending, but the willed and constructed nature of a beginning or of an ending is less evident if a text contains no other formal structure (no chapter divisions or other segmentations). Petrarch's division is a formal structure that, by generating a textual "middle"—in the narratological sense of *in medias res* rather than in the mathematical sense (poem 264 is closer to two-thirds of the way through the *Fragmenta* than to the half-way point, suggesting as a model Augustine, who structures his *Confessions* so that the conversion experience occurs at roughly two-thirds of the way through the text)—also has the effect of throwing into relief the willed and constructed nature of the collection's beginning and ending.

As an interpreter, one engaged in hermeneutics, I read the significance of Petrarch's division of his collection into two parts as follows. I take this novelty in the lyric tradition to be an abstract—that is, an order-based rather than content-based—way of probing the very nature of transition. Transition is thematized by the division itself, since the division entails a transition from a "1" to a "2", and it is then highlighted by Petrarch's consistent choice for his textual new beginning of the canzone *I' vo pensando*: a poem about the poet's inability to make a new beginning in the manner of Augustine in the *Confessions*, his inability to effect a true and complete transition. The question posed by the content of the canzone—is the poet capable of conversion, capable of a new beginning, capable of transition?—is answered in the negative

⁸ Wilkins dates the Chigi form to 1359–62; work on Vaticano Latino 3195 begins ca. 1366. For a description of the Chigi form, see Phelps 1925; the codex itself is described by De Robertis 1974.

by the canzone's famous Ovidian last verse: "et veggio 'l meglio, et al peggior m'appiglio" (v. 136).⁹ This same question is also posed formally and abstractly: the formal transition from part 1 to part 2 signifies the idea of change as surely as anything the poet can say. The collection thus makes the transition that the poet himself says he cannot make, and Petrarch has found an abstract non-thematic way of articulating structurally his central theme of transition versus transition manqué.

But, as we try to understand the significance of this division for Petrarch, we are distracted by another story: the story of centuries of editorial mishandling, of editorial and philological lapses. Early on the editorial enterprise narrativized Petrarch's opaque and rubric-free division by adding the rubric "in vita di madonna Laura" to part 1 and the rubric "in morte di madonna Laura" to part 2. And then, in a further assault on the integrity of the authorized text, because apparently the addition of unauthorized material in the form of the headings to the autograph was not sufficient to guarantee the narrative transparency, the interpretive legibility, that editors and commentators sought, another change was made: the beginning of part 2 was moved in order to accommodate the narrative story-line told by the invented rubrics. From Bembo's 1514 edition until Mestica's 1896 edition, part 2 begins with sonnet 267, *Oimè il bel viso*, the first poem to register Laura's death, rather than with canzone 264, *I vo pensando*.¹⁰

The tenacity of the editorial tradition—or, better, of the centuries-long editorial lapse—that begins part 2 with the sonnet *Oimè il bel viso* is remarkable. Even after Mestica made the correction and placed the beginning of part 2 at *I vo pensando* in 1896, Carducci and Ferrari return to the error in their edition of 1899; and they do so consciously, noting that "Non osammo seguirlo [Mestica], tenuti dal rispetto alla quasi religiosa consuetudine".¹¹ The division of the *Rerum vulgarium*

⁹ Citations of the *Rvf* are from Santagata's revised edition of 2004.

¹⁰ While Bembo's 1501 edition places the division correctly before canzone 264, his 1514 edition transposes the division, placing it before sonnet 267, as noted by Gino Belloni: "a parte qualche variante di minor conto, è da notare nell'aldina del '14 un fatto assai importante che riguarda il *Canzoniere*: lo spostamento di demarcazione fra la prima e la seconda parte. La prima volta, aldina del 1501, la bipartizione conferma, tra 263 e 264, il Vaticano latino 3195, l'autografo del Petrarca collazionato dal Bembo alla fine del suo lavoro, ed il 3197, autografo del Bembo, alla base—come s'è detto—dell'aldina del 1501; ora, aldina del 1514, la nuova divisione tra 266 e 267 smentisce silenziosamente questa opzione" (Belloni 1992, 297).

¹¹ Carducci and Ferrari 1899, xxiii. Mestica's full title page (1896) shows his dedication to the material texts: *Le rime di Francesca Petrarca, restituite nell'ordine e nella lezione*

fragmenta has continued to elicit editorial lapses, as witnessed by the fact that Cudini (1974), Bezzola (1976), and Durling (1976) fail to indicate its existence.¹² All this editorial deviation from the autograph occurred despite the fact that in the final form of the collection the demarcation is clearly placed at canzone 264: *I' vo pensando* is marked, like the collection's opening sonnet, with a large ornamental initial, and there are seven blank pages between it and sonnet 263, the last poem of part 1.¹³ In the Chigi collection as well, *I' vo pensando* is distinguished by an ornamental initial; one blank page and a portion of another separate it from the last poem of part 1.

And yet, despite the unambiguously clear philological facts of the case, the division that Petrarch placed before poem number 264 in the final form (or before poem number 175 in the Chigi form) was moved by the text's editors. When the material and philological witness—the autograph codex—collided with the hermeneutic imperative to explain and read the text in more explicitly narrative and biographical terms, the hermeneutic imperative won. And the results of this victory were ever more egregious deviations from the autograph, culminating in the 1525 edition of Vellutello, who, in what would prove to be the most successful of the sixteenth-century editions of the *Fragmenta*, imposed a tripartite division onto the *Fragmenta*, moving the political and moral poems into a separate third section that one scholar has compared to an “appendix”.¹⁴ Parts 1 and 2 are maintained by Vellutello but they are no longer Petrarch's parts 1 and 2: they have been reordered to bring about a clear chronology and purged of the original order's offending chronological inconsistencies. Vellutello's espoused goal, as explained in his opening editorial manifesto, “Trattato de l'ordine de' sonetti et canzoni del Petrarca mutato”, was to assert a chronological, biographical, and narrative history within the *Fragmenta*, which he lovingly reconstructs with the use of a map of Vaucluse as a visual aid.¹⁵

del testo originario, sugli autografi, col sussidio di altri codici e di stampe, e corredate di varianti e note. Edizione critica.

¹² Contini (1964) scrupulously leaves a blank page and uses the running headers “Prima parte” and “Seconda parte”, as do Bettarini (2005) and Santagata (1996); Santagata 1996 reverses to “Parte prima” and “Parte seconda” as his headers.

¹³ These blank pages caused Wilkins to believe that Petrarch intended to continue adding to part 1 and that the total number of poems is not therefore set at the numerologically significant 366.

¹⁴ See Belloni 1992: “La terza è intesa come un'appendice” (66).

¹⁵ Belloni 1992 includes a plate of the map and prints Vellutello's “Trattato de l'ordine de' sonetti et canzoni del Petrarca mutato” on pp. 89–93. See also Storey 2006a, an account of the vagaries of the material reception of the *Fragmenta*.

Vellutello's edition of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* is worth looking at because it provides a convenient synthesis for the resistant reception accorded Petrarch's vernacular masterpiece, brilliantly crystallizing the features of the *Fragmenta* that have proved most enduringly difficult for readers to accept. In Vellutello's hands these features "prove" that the previously transmitted order of the collection could not have been Petrarch's. In other words, the very features that we now identify as quintessentially "Petrarchan"—systematic variability, organically disposed mutability, a shifting and metamorphic kaleidoscope of labyrinthine textuality that exploits the principle of *ordo* as a means of defying order¹⁶—all this is what proves to Vellutello that the text purporting to be Petrarchan was not really Petrarch's.

In justifying his systematic reorganization of the text, Vellutello vehemently denies the Petrarchan paternity of the Aldine editions. He says that he will prove that in the order as it was transmitted there is no order—"proverò in esso ordine non essere ordine alcuno"¹⁷—thus inadvertently characterizing the carefully crafted disorder, the intentional disruption of too overt an order, that modern critics associate with the Petrarchan lyric sequence. But for Vellutello the collection's manifest disorder is the sign not of Petrarch's deliberately subversive deployment of the idea of *ordo* but of the literally non-Petrarchan pedigree of Aldo's edition. Thus he argues that Petrarch, having included in his collection poems that count the years since his first falling in love (poems called by modern scholarship "anniversary poems"), would never have placed some of them out of chronological order. And so Vellutello, after carefully listing all the *Fragmenta*'s anniversary poems, draws our attention to the two anniversary sonnets, numbers 145 and 266, which are out of chronological order:

Questi sonetti & canzone dovebbono adunque esser posti nel procedere dell'opera per ordine, ma noi veggiamo che avanti a quel sonetto *Ponmi ove 'l sole occide i fiori et l'herba* [145], che il xv anno del suo amore dinota, essere stato posto quello *Rimansi a dietro il sesto decim'anno* [118], et quell'altro *Dicesett'anni ha già rivolto il cielo* [122], che l'uno il xvi, l'altro il xvij anno dinota. Veggiamo similmente quell'altro, *Signor mio caro ogni pensier mi tira* [266], che 'l xvij anno significa, essere non solamente posto dopo i due che di sopra habbiamo detto, che il xx anno dinotano, ma anchora [...].¹⁸

¹⁶ See Barolini 2008.

¹⁷ Belloni 1992, 89.

¹⁸ Belloni 1992, 91.

Vellutello goes on to note that sonnet 266 should also not have been placed among the poems *in morte*, an error that he says applies as well to the placement of canzone 264 and sonnet 265.¹⁹ Vellutello thus alerts us to the major *cruces* that have bedeviled Petrarch scholars, who have agonized in particular about the out-of-order anniversary poems and the beginning of part 2.

The editorial history of the *Fragmenta* clearly has its own significance: Petrarch's readers resisted his abstract, order-based, and non-biographical mode of signifying and insisted on narrativizing his text as much as possible. The act of narrativizing through the insertion of *in vita/in morte* rubrics and the shifting of the beginning of part 2 culminated in Vellutello's wholesale reorganization of the text. All these editorial moves testify to the need to simplify and to tame Petrarch's endlessly tantalizing—because systematically opaque—“spider's web”: “opra d'aragna” (*Rvf* 173.6). Vellutello's tripartite editorial transgression certainly has the effect of simplifying: the removal of political, moral and occasional poems into an independent third group results, for instance, in readers not facing the interpretive challenge of finding the political canzone *Italia mia* (number 128 in Petrarch's order and the canzone cited by Machiavelli at the end of the *Prince*) embedded in a sequence of love poems.

There is a story about the Italian imaginary, indeed ultimately about the European imaginary, encoded into the editorial history of these *rime non affatto sparse* which are nonetheless editorially *sparse*—textually redistributed—to suit readers' tastes. On another occasion we could probe further the cultural significance of the systematic violation visited upon the text of this most imitated of poets: a violation all the more interesting because it happens within a cultural context that simultaneously fetishizes the “opera organica”—like the *Vita Nuova* and the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*—and degrades the lyrics that have not had the good fortune to be included by the author in an “organic” whole, lyrics that are dubbed “estravaganti” or wandering outsiders.²⁰ But for now, let us come back to the interplay of hermeneutics and philology around the issue of the division of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* into

¹⁹ “Oltre a questo, quella canzone *I vo pensando & nel pensier m'assale* [264], et il seguente sonetto *Aspro core & selvaggia & cruda voglia* [265], posti fra l'opere fatte in morte, le quali per la loro sententia manifestamente si conoscono dover andare fra quelle fatte in vita” (Belloni 1992, 91).

²⁰ See Barolini 2004 [2006], 266.

two parts. The editorial lapses that occurred around a philologically quite straightforward matter, a division of the text that is present in the autograph, signal the presence of interpretive pressures that trumped the philological evidence, pressures that for instance arguably conditioned Vellutello's stunning reverse reclassification of a fully authorial and "organic" work into a "fragmented" and non-authorial one. Let me repeat a point that puts us squarely at the crossroads of philology and hermeneutics: in the case of the division of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, interpretive pressures for centuries trumped the philological evidence.

Petrarch is undoubtedly provocative in his resistance to an overdetermined interpretive template, for reluctance to accept canzone 264 as the starting-point for part 2 has been fueled by the fact that sonnets 265 and 266 treat Laura alive. We have seen that Vellutello found the placement of poems 264–266 *in morte* troubling; their position was still troubling critics in 1925, when Ruth Shepard Phelps summed up the critical problem created by their presence in part 2 thus: "The great objection to accepting the division into parts as indicated in Chigi L. V. 176, Laur. XLI, 17, and V. L. 3195 is the fact that it throws into Part II the two sonnets *Aspro core* and *Signor mio caro*, the one a complaint against Laura's cruelty, in the old key of so many of the songs in Part I, and the other a tribute of love and friendship to Cardinal Colonna and to Laura".²¹ To our text's chronology-obsessed critics, sonnet 266, *Signor mio caro*, ostentatiously displays its unsuitability for part 2 as part 2 was editorially defined by the inserted rubric "in morte di madonna Laura": it is an anniversary poem that expressly instructs us to view it as composed in 1345, 18 years after the poet's *innamoramento*, and thus three years before Laura's death in 1348.²² But Petrarch never declares that he is telling an accurate biography or autobiography, that his poems are in chronological order, or that the poems of part 2 all treat Laura dead. Rather, Petrarch declares, through the material witness of the autograph, only that *I' vo pensando* starts part 2. Petrarch's readers, a group that includes the subsequent cultivators of the sonnet sequence

²¹ Phelps 1925, 193. As Phelps (1925, 194) reminds us, Cesareo argues that Petrarch intended to transfer 265 and 266 to the end of part 1.

²² While the 1350 date of poem 265 (provided by Petrarch's notes; see Phelps 1925, 157) is not apparent to the reader, it too is of interest, because it tells us that Petrarch was capable, if he deemed the effort advisable, of writing as though Laura were alive after her death, and thus further underscores the painstaking construction that characterizes this portion of the text.

throughout Europe who moved the genre in the direction of greater biographical clarity and fidelity, created the relentless biographical and chronological prism through which we view the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*. When the text failed to conform to our prism, we altered the text. An interpretive framework completely (and hence simplistically) dependent on chronology and biography has been superimposed onto a text that simultaneously invokes and evades biography and is not so much dependent on chronology as selectively engaged in exploiting it.

Since the contributions of Ruth Shepard Phelps, the author of an important 1925 study of the Chigi form titled *The Earlier and Later Forms of Petrarch's "Canzoniere"*, have been obscured by Wilkins' subsequent work, it gives me pleasure to note that "Miss Phelps" (as Wilkins refers to her) provides a much more sophisticated reading of the presence of sonnets 265 and 266 than either her predecessors or her successors: "A conceivable explanation of their position here is that they are a kind of corollary to that last line of *I' vo pensando*, proving that although he sees 'the better' he still follows 'the worse'".²³ This is an example of a philologist accepting the philological evidence, and then, rather than trying to alter the philological record, turning to interpretation and showing real interpretive intelligence. For centuries, however, editors responded by simply overriding the philological evidence. In other words, rather than acknowledging the *interpretive*—not philological—challenge posed by sonnets 265 and 266 and asking what Petrarch intended to signify through his order, perhaps arriving at the conclusion that Petrarch inserted sonnets 265 and 266 into their positions in the sequence precisely to deter us from too much privileging of Laura and her individual death and to goad us in the direction of more universal issues of transition and conversion, the very editors who should be the custodians of the philological and material evidence have typically responded by overriding and suppressing it.

Let me now come to Wilkins' doctrine of the nine forms of the *Fragmenta*, another case where there has been a massive contamination of philology by interpretation. I use the word "doctrine" advisedly, for despite the absence of material proof of their existence, the nine forms have taken on the status of received truth. In the decades since the 1951 publication of *The Making of the "Canzoniere"*, Wilkins' scholarly readers,

²³ Phelps 1925, 199–200.

precisely those who should know better than to read acritically, have taken on the role of acolytes in disseminating the master's doctrine.

There are two issues here. The first is that Wilkins himself frequently engaged in speculation, a fact that in itself should cause no alarm, since philologists are permitted to engage in interpretation, and indeed are required to engage in interpretation (we will come to the case of De Robertis' refusal to engage in interpretation, as troubling as its converse)—but must be vigilant and transparent about labeling it as such. The second is that Wilkins' speculative hypotheses are frequently treated as factual by literary critics (and even by philologists) who have used his work as the empirical and philological foundations for their interpretive castles, a fact that should cause great alarm but that instead has gone relatively unnoticed. Again, the problem is less that Wilkins engaged in interpretation than that others have represented him as though he did not. If one approaches *The Making of the "Canzoniere"* from the perspective of subsequent Petrarch criticism, one is startled by the disjunction between his hypotheses and the disseminated "facts" around the question of the nine forms, which are treated in the critical literature as though they exist.

Wilkins does not misrepresent what he is doing, although it is fair to say that he asserts his hypotheses with great confidence, writing in a dry and factual manner that lulls the reader into forgetting that he is hypothesizing. With respect to the nine forms, Wilkins clearly states that the Chigi form (the one copied by Boccaccio in Chigiano L V 176), which he calls the fourth form of the *Canzoniere*, is the "first extant".²⁴ He also states, in presenting the fifth or Johannine form (that is, the form copied by Petrarch and by Giovanni Malpaghini, whose first name in Latin produces the adjective "Johannine"): "All that follows might indeed have been presented under the heading of 'The Fifth and Final Form,' with appropriate subdivisions".²⁵ In other words, Wilkins acknowledges that there are only two material, or as he puts it "extant", forms. Forms five through nine are successive elaborations of the (one) form preserved as Vaticano Latino 3195. And forms one through three are hypotheses regarding the successive elaborations that led to the (one) Chigi form. As one sees when one reads *The Making of the "Canzoniere"*, some of these hypotheses are more convincing than others, and, rather

²⁴ Wilkins 1951a, 93, 160.

²⁵ Wilkins 1951a, 165.

than being accepted in bulk, each one needs to be evaluated individually. In any case, midst the hypotheses and the extrapolations, Wilkins unambiguously states the facts. Two forms exist: an earlier form, the Chigi, and a later form, Vaticano Latino 3195, which (unlike the Chigi) bears the traces of much revision and emendation.

Therefore, the nine forms are best conceived as metaphors that permit Wilkins to set forth his personal vision of the progressive construction of the making of the *Canzoniere*. In fact, they are a narrative conceit, rather like the nine heavens that permit Dante the pilgrim to experience paradise diachronically while Dante the poet insists on its synchronicity. If we on the receiving end could be clear about the status of the nine forms, there would be no harm done, but that is not what has occurred. Rather, these forms have taken on a rhetorical life of their own, apparently more important than their lack of a real historical or material life, so that not only is their existence taken for granted in the critical literature but also their very contours.

The rhetorically institutionalized life of the nine forms was a concern to me already in my essay of 1989. Interestingly, this concern came to the surface in the discussion of the out-of-order anniversary poem, sonnet 145, *Ponmi ove 'l sole occide i fiori et l'erba*, which we touched on in the discussion of Vellutello's complaints about the Aldine edition and to whose status we now need to turn in greater detail.

The *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta's* fifteen anniversary poems, poems that commemorate the date on which Petrarch fell in love with Laura, are scattered throughout the collection, explicitly dating themselves by marking the number of years that have elapsed since that fatal day of April 6, 1327. They are on the whole ordered chronologically, but, as we have already noted, there are two members of the set that are out of chronological order. If there is a message in the deliberate flouting of chronology demonstrated by these two poems, it has gone unheeded; rather the critical enterprise has collectively wrung its hands over such a breach of what it had decided was the text's decorum.

The first out-of-order anniversary poem is poem 145; as Vellutello pointed out in 1525, it refers to the fifteenth year of the poet's love ("il mio sospir trilustre" [*Rvf* 145.14]) but nonetheless is placed subsequent to anniversary poems that commemorate the sixteenth and seventeenth years.²⁶ The second out-of-order anniversary poem is sonnet 266, *Signor*

²⁶ *Rvf* 118 refers to "il sestodecimo anno" in its incipit and *Rvf* 122 begins "Dice-sette anni".

mio caro, which commemorates 18 years of love for Laura and follows anniversary poems referring to 20 years of passion. Much is revealed about the nature of Petrarch criticism and its relationship to chronology by its treatment of these two poems: poems 145 and 266, the two members of the exclusive set of “out-of-order anniversary poems”, have played disproportionately large roles in reception history. *Signor mio caro*, the most gravely out of sequence of the anniversary poems,²⁷ is a poem that we have already seen to be central to the controversy over the text’s division.²⁸ The disproportionate impact of *Ponmi ove ’l sole* on recent scholarship is related to the excessive importance ascribed to it by Wilkins in elaborating his doctrine of the nine forms—an importance that in turn is derived from its being out of chronological sequence.

In order to understand the importance given by Wilkins to poem 145, we must recall that, prior to the Chigi form, Wilkins’ fourth form, he posits a Pre-Chigi or Correggio form. (“Pre-Chigi” as the name for Wilkins’ “third” form is self-explanatory; it is also called “Correggio” because it is identified with a collection sent to Azzo da Correggio.) Wilkins based much of his hypothetical description of the hypothetical Pre-Chigi form on sonnet 145; as I wrote in 1989, “the Pre-Chigi form is a hypothesis whose shape is based in great part on the out-of-order poem 145”.²⁹ Reflecting the over-investment in dating and chronology that is the occupational hazard of Petrarch studies, the break with chronology of sonnet 145 served Wilkins, to whom it never occurred that chronology could be deliberately subverted, as the platform on which to erect the scaffolding of the Pre-Chigi form. It is worth reconstructing Wilkins’ arguments, since they are emblematic of his procedure and illuminate the distortion caused by a reception that has not attended to the unfolding of his arguments but only to his final conclusions.

Reasoning on the basis of the three principles of construction for the Chigi form proposed by Phelps—general chronological order, variety of form, and variety of content—and noting that there is less variety of form and content in part 1 after sonnet 145 (i.e., there are longer

²⁷ Compare its straightforward “diciotto anni” to “sospir trilustre” in poem 145. The 20-year anniversary poems are numbers 212 (“venti anni”) and 221 (“vigesimo anno”).

²⁸ *Signor mio caro* draws attention to itself in other ways besides: it is the only anniversary poem to allude to a double devotion, celebrating not only 18 years of love for Laura but also 15 years of friendship with Cardinal Giovanni Colonna; it is the first anniversary poem in part 2, and is separated from the canzone that initiates part 2, *P vo pensando*, only by one intervening sonnet.

²⁹ Barolini 1989 [2006], 204.

stretches of sonnets not interspersed with canzoni, ballate, sestine, or madrigals, and longer stretches of love poems not interspersed with political and moral poems), Wilkins extrapolates a Pre-Chigi form that ended before sonnet 145. He argues that the break with chronology demonstrated by poem 145, combined with the long stretches of love sonnets unrelieved either metrically or thematically that follow it, indicate that the section of part 1 following poem 145, a section Wilkins dubs the “Chigi addendum”, was added by Petrarch later and at a time when he was working less carefully: “It is then clear that the last poems in Part I show a notable disregard of the three principles which governed the arrangement of poems in the preceding portion of Part I”.³⁰ This part of Wilkins’ argument, while based on premises that one might not accept, warrants at least being taken into consideration: the unbroken stretches of love sonnets in the latter section of part 1 *do* pose a critical problem, although it is certainly possible that the use of repetition is deliberate and not just a sign of poetic indifference. I argue that the rupture of chronology in poem 145 is deliberate, as is the subsequent repetition: “With regard to poem 145, one could deduce from the lack of variety in form and content following it that it serves to announce a set of poems devoted to repetition, indeed to a formal dramatization of its key verse, ‘sarò qual fui, vivrò com’io son visso’. In other words, the chronology-breaking 145 heralds chronological rupture writ large, in the form of a more marked lack of chronicity or temporal flow than has previously been encountered”.³¹

Wilkins then turns to choosing the poem that served as conclusion to the section of part 1 that was allegedly composed with greater care than the “Chigi addendum”, the poem that served (following his logic) as conclusion to the “Pre-Chigi form of the *Canzoniere*”:

Just where did Part I of the Pre-Chigi form of the *Canzoniere* end? The question could hardly be answered with certainty unless some fortunate chance should reveal either a MS preserving that earlier form, or a MS of the Chigi form revealing paleographically such a clear story of the process of addition as that revealed by 3195. The question may be answered, nevertheless, with a considerable degree of assurance.

It will be remembered that No. 145 is the first datable poem which breaks the chronological order; that a series of twenty-five sonnets begins with No. 150; and that a series of thirty love poems begins with No. 145. It seems probable, for the chronological reason indicated, that No. 145

³⁰ Wilkins 1951a, 96.

³¹ Barolini 1989 (2006), 205.

belongs to the Chigi addendum rather than to Part I of the Pre-Chigi form. The two preceding poems (Nos. 143 and 144) are both undatable, are both sonnets, and both deal with love, although neither is a love poem pure and simple. Neither has any specific character of finality: neither could well have been chosen to close a carefully ordered first part. But the next preceding poem (No. 142) is the *sestina* beginning *A la dolce ombra de le belle frondi*, which is an elaborate reminiscent poem of love and religion. It would have made a dignified and appropriate ending to Part I and it would have served admirably to close a Part I which was in the intent of the author to have been followed by a Part II beginning with *P vo pensando*.

I conclude, therefore, that it is probable that Part I of the Pre-Chigi form of the *Canzoniere* ended with No. 142.³²

In setting out to answer the question “where did Part I of the Pre-Chigi form of the *Canzoniere* end?”, Wilkins begins with a paragraph of disclaimers; as he indicates, the question cannot “be answered with certainty”. We could add that we lack the material evidence necessary to answer it, for no one has ever seen a Pre-Chigi form. But, as in all good stories, that which is lovingly imagined can be made to seem real if it is named, and already in posing his question, Wilkins gives his imagined form a name. It is the “Pre-Chigi form” even before we reach the disclaimers, which tell us that we would be able to ascertain the ending of the Pre-Chigi’s part I with certainty only if one of the following two hypotheticals were to become realities: 1) if a manuscript containing the Pre-Chigi form were to be found, or 2) if a different manuscript of the (extant) Chigi form were to be found, one that, like Vaticano Latino 3195, reveals the traces of its predecessors. Since the philological Fairy Queen has granted neither of these two wishes, neither Wilkins nor anyone else can answer the question he has posed at all, let alone “with certainty”. And yet, the paragraph concludes: “The question may be answered, nevertheless, with a considerable degree of assurance”.

At this point, Wilkins turns to the *pars costruens* of his argument. The foundation of his argument is the out-of-order anniversary poem 145. As we saw, Wilkins argues that *Rvf* 145, by breaking chronological order, ushers in the “notable disregard” that he believes is shown by the latter poems of part I of the Chigi form for the text’s presumed original principles of construction (general chronological order, variety of form,

³² The citation is from chapter 6 of *The Making of the “Canzoniere”*, titled “The Pre-Chigi Form of the *Canzoniere*” (1951a, 97).

and variety of content). The break with chronology effected by sonnet 145 and the lack of metrical and thematic variety in the section of the Chigi form that follow it (part 1 of the Chigi form contains 174 poems) together conspire to indicate, to Wilkins at least, that poem 145 initiates a part of the text that was less carefully constructed than the part that precedes it. Therefore, because Wilkins believes that the earlier forms were more carefully arranged than the Chigi form, it “seems probable” that “No. 145 belongs to the Chigi addendum rather than to Part I of the Pre-Chigi form”.

Wilkins’ argument continues: if sonnet 145 does not belong to part 1 of the allegedly well-ordered Pre-Chigi form but to a later, less carefully composed “Chigi addendum”, then the ending of the Pre-Chigi’s part 1 will be found in the section that precedes sonnet 145. So Wilkins scrolls backward from *Rvf* 145 looking for a poem that possesses the right characteristics “to close a carefully ordered first part” of an alleged more carefully ordered Pre-Chigi form. He discards sonnets 144 and 143 because neither “has any specific character of finality”. He finds what he is looking for in *Rvf* 142, *A la dolce ombra de le belle frondi*, a sestina which declares the need to convert from Laura to God. This is the very poem with which Vellutello had ended *his* part 1 of the *Fragmenta*! I mention this fascinating coincidence not to suggest that Wilkins appropriated from Vellutello, but to indicate the commonality caused by their shared obsession with chronology and narrativity: sestina 142 conforms to the narrative of achieved conversion that has been imposed onto the *Fragmenta* by its readers. Of *A la dolce ombra*, Wilkins writes that it “would have made a dignified and appropriate ending to Part I” of a Pre-Chigi form: “I conclude, therefore, that it is probable that Part I of the Pre-Chigi form of the *Canzoniere* ended with No. 142”.

So there we have it: poem 142, *A la dolce ombra*, possesses a “character of finality” which “would have made a dignified and appropriate ending to Part I”. On the basis of this argument, a purely subjective and interpretive argument regarding a poem’s “character”—an argument that is not erected on a material or philological foundation and for which Wilkins makes no philological claim—on this basis, then, it is commonly taken for granted that the sestina that is now *Rvf* 142 was the last poem of part 1 of the Pre-Chigi form. By the same token, the existence of the Pre-Chigi form is also taken for granted.

In 1978 the philologist Guglielmo Gorni published an essay, “Metamorfosi e redenzione in Petrarca: il senso della forma Correggio del *Canzoniere*”, in which he analyzes the poem which he takes as the undisputed end of part 1 of the conjectured collection, namely *Rvf* 142, in

order to arrive at “the sense of the Correggio form” (Correggio, we recall, is an alternate name for Pre-Chigi). Similar attention has been paid to *Ref* 292, *Gli occhi di ch’io parlai sì caldamente*, which Wilkins had dubbed the probable last poem of the Pre-Chigi/Correggio form by the same procedure: it too “has a specific character of finality, and would in itself be excellently adapted to close a carefully ordered collection”.³³ While critical energy has been expended on poems 142 and 292 as appropriate endings to the two parts of a collection whose existence can only be conjectured on the grounds of critical interpretation rather than philological evidence, no one, to my knowledge, has examined from this perspective the two poems that actually serve as endings to the two parts of the existent Chigi collection: *Passa la nave mia*, now *Ref* 189, and *Mentre che ’l cor*, now *Ref* 304.

The misrepresentation of Wilkins’ findings by scholars who fail to signal their readers that they are treating as facts what are correctly labeled hypotheses has created a vast confusion over the last fifty years, which we are just beginning to address. In a recent essay, Del Puppo and Storey have begun to update and correct Wilkins’ findings with contemporary technologies that allow them to more precisely evaluate actual materials such as, for instance, the inks that Petrarch used.³⁴ In comparison to the revision of Wilkins practiced by real philologists like Del Puppo and Storey, my concern is less technical and more metacritical, even, let us say, “existential”: we need to keep separate what exists from what does not. As a literary critic, and not a philologist, I cannot evaluate the materials and the documents in the way of a philologist, but I can transmit the philological findings with the maximum transparency, I can make the effort to keep separate and properly labeled that which is philologically verifiable and that which is not, and I can indicate where my interpretation rests on philologically verifiable data and where it does not. With respect to the nine forms that Wilkins advocates for the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, and for which he invents official credibility-enhancing names, it is absolutely essential to state often and clearly that only two forms exist: the form copied by Boccaccio in the codex preserved as Chigiano L V 176, and the form copied by Petrarch and Malpagini in the codex preserved as Vaticano Latino 3195.

³³ Wilkins 1951a, 104.

³⁴ See Del Puppo and Storey 2003.

At the crossroads where philology and interpretation meet, we have seen interpretation trump philology, and in the case of the nine forms of the *Canzoniere* we have seen interpretation disseminated as philological doctrine. In conclusion, and with the thought that we may be tracking a metacritical constant that goes beyond Petrarch studies, let us consider some other cases in the history of interpreting medieval Italian texts where the roles of philology and interpretation have been dangerously confused. The study of Dante boasts many examples of apparently philological debates that are not in fact philological at all, but rather debates in which hermeneutics is masked as philology.

Luigi Pietrobono's thesis of the *rifacimento* or rewriting of the end of the *Vita Nuova* is a prime example of an issue discussed as though philological while actually possessing no philological foundation. Pietrobono invented a non-existent, prior version of the *Vita Nuova*, whose ending with a triumphant *donna gentile* was, according to this thesis, later rewritten by Dante as the ending we now possess. The result was that scholars spent time and energy defending the "current" ending of the *Vita Nuova*, even though we possess no other ending and to our knowledge no other ending has ever existed. The corrective role of the material philologist in the sense of an "existential philologist"—one who gives more respect to what actually exists and is materially extant than to what a critic invents out of whole cloth—was in this instance played first by Michele Barbi and later (and to my mind definitively) by Mario Marti, in "Vita e morte della presunta doppia redazione della *Vita Nuova*".³⁵ However, the interpretive seductions of this kind of critical invention once launched are hard to resist, and Pietrobono's *rifacimento* hypothesis was revived by Maria Corti. Corti's own status as a philologist gave Pietrobono's invention new currency and, alas, apparent legitimacy.

Along the same lines, Michele Barbi's creation of chapter divisions for the *Vita Nuova* that are not attested in the manuscripts has generated a debate that has veered between philology and hermeneutics with little attempt at clarity. Barbi's chapter divisions have now been altered by Guglielmo Gorni in his edition, but with less transparency regarding the manuscripts and more appeal to numerology than one

³⁵ The thesis was given life by Luigi Pietrobono (1915), picked up by Bruno Nardi (1942), laid to rest by Mario Marti (1965), and then resuscitated by Maria Corti (1983).

would like. The use of a numerological argument has no place in a debate that is supposedly held on philological ground, especially when the editor repeatedly puts on the mantle of authority as philologist. Not that an interpretive argument is *per se* unacceptable; philologists are allowed and indeed required to engage in interpretation, as I said earlier vis-à-vis Wilkins. The problem arises when the philologist does not make clear which part of his argument is based on material evidence and which part is based on interpretation. This problem is magnified when a philologist (Gorni) quarrels with a preceding philologist (Barbi) on philological grounds, but with insufficient transparency regarding the material evidence.³⁶

Entirely interpretive but pretending to be philological was the speculation as to which of Dante's lyrics were intended by Dante for the never written—truly non-existent—books of the *Convivio*, a guessing game played by scholars with little or no transparency as to the fact that they were engaging in nothing more than conjecture. The result was the use of reified labels attached to certain canzoni indicating their destination for such and such book of the *Convivio*. Thus, *Doglia mi reca* was routinely referred to as “la canzone della liberalità”, indicating its presumed destination for the presumed book of the *Convivio* that would have dealt with the virtue of liberality: “finalmente la canzone della liberalità si converte nella canzone dell’avarizia”.³⁷ As Kenelm Foster and Patrick Boyde write in their commentary to *Daglia mi reca*: “From *Con.* l.viii.18 we know that Dante intended in the fifteenth and last section of that work (which in fact he never wrote) to discuss the virtue of liberality, and it is commonly and plausibly assumed that the discussion would have taken the form of a commentary on the present canzone, *Doglia mi reca*. Only indirectly, however, is this poem about liberality; directly it is mainly an onslaught on the vice opposed to it, avarice”.³⁸ The label “canzone della liberalità”, then, is a kind of shorthand for Dante scholars which has less to do with glossing the poem in question than with building imaginary symmetries between Dante's existing lyrics and non-existent sections of the *Convivio*. It is dismaying to find these baseless formulae thoughtlessly relayed to new generations of readers: Piero Cudini's paperback edition of 1979 simply repeats Contini's

³⁶ For a philologist's critique of Gorni's edition, see Trovato 2000.

³⁷ Contini 1965 [1946], 182.

³⁸ Foster and Boyde 1967, 2: 295.

formulation, informing us that *Doglia mi reca* “Si svolge, da canzone della liberalità, a canzone dell’avarizia”.³⁹ These labels are altogether speculative but foisted on the innocent reader as though factual.

Of course, for pure ideology parading as philology, there is little in our field more egregious than the discussion regarding those of Dante’s lyrics that he left out of the *Vita Nuova*, called by philologists the *estravaganti*, “the wandering outsiders”, as though that were a philologically neutral term. The issues around Dante’s lyrics are too complex to be rehearsed here, and I will invoke them just sufficiently to situate De Robertis’ edition of Dante’s *rime* (2002) along the axes of philology and hermeneutics. Perhaps in response to a philological history that has been capable of extravagantly (if I may be permitted the play on words) unphilological gestures, De Robertis actually goes too far in the other direction: rather than over-dignifying his own interpretations and then hiding his interpretive moves under the protective veil of philology, as in the cases cited above, De Robertis over-dignifies philology, which he rigidly construes—and hence misconstrues—as an enterprise that precludes all interpretation.

Ironically, the reason for the failure of the De Robertis edition of Dante’s lyrics is that the editor, a great philologist, declines a task that is fundamental to an editor’s work: he declines to engage in interpretation. In the specific case of an edition of Dante’s lyrics, De Robertis’ unwillingness to interpret takes the form of his refusing to put the poems in any order other than that suggested by the already reconstructed order of medieval repertories. De Robertis’ refusal is explicitly grounded in the for him inviolable boundary between interpretation and philology, a boundary which he believes a philologist cannot cross: “E per contro, ogni razionalizzazione storica analoga a quella proposta dal Barbi, oltre alle possibili (e ormai ampiamente registrate, e attuate) controdeduzioni, include sempre una componente d’interpretazione che nulla ha a che fare con quella di cui la critica testuale non può mai fare a meno”.⁴⁰ But philologists and editors must and do cross this boundary all the time; the key is for them to be self-aware and transparent to others as they do so. Indeed, ultimately there is no boundary, for philology itself is a

³⁹ Cudini 1979, 246.

⁴⁰ See Barolini 2004 [2006] for a reconstruction of De Robertis’ argument with ample citation; this citation is from De Robertis 2002, 2: 1155.

branch of hermeneutics: conducted in a manner intended to maximize verifiability, but nonetheless rooted in interpretation.

Since Dante did not order his poems, Dante's editor must. I mean this quite literally: in order to be printed in a book, the poems must be placed in an order that is by definition not Dante's, since Dante left us no order for his lyrics other than that which he creates for selected poems in the *Vita Nuova* and *Convivio*. But if Dante did not leave us an order, he nonetheless wrote in an order, in the larger sense that he wrote his poems within time, over the course of a certain period of his life. As I have argued elsewhere, it is incumbent upon the editor of Dante's *rime* to use his or her expertise and *iudicium* on behalf of the reader to construct an edition that will attempt to indicate *grosso modo* the historical order in which the poems were written—and thus to construct an arc of Dante's thought. This is an act of interpretation that we have a right to expect from an editor. Certainly we should expect more than reliance upon the artificial constructions of medieval anthologies. In his edition De Robertis simply defers to earlier editors of the *rime*, beginning with Boccaccio, as though the fact that their interpretive decisions were made long ago somehow makes them less interpretive and more “philological”. Boccaccio's ordering of Dante's *rime* has historical value, and it has hermeneutic value (illuminating Boccaccio's views, however, not Dante's), but it does not have more specifically philological value than an ordering proposed by a modern editor who has studied, as De Robertis has, the extensive *recensio* of the *rime*'s manuscript tradition and thus stands in a good position to propose what Contini calls a “cronologia ideale”.⁴¹ As a result of his abdication of interpretation, De Robertis gives us an edition of Dante's *rime* that tells us more about the Trecento reception of Dante than it does about Dante.

The work of interpretation, which for me personally is the goal of the whole enterprise, is work that in any case not even an editor can forswear. Important as it is not to allow interpretation to trump philology, it is equally important to engage in philologically informed interpretation. A lush interpretive growth is one of the tributes that culture pays to textual greatness. The desire to rid texts of the wrong interpretive framework, to cut back the cultural undergrowth when it obscures the truth, cannot be allowed to mutate into the suggestion that

⁴¹ Contini 1965, 67.

the text is better off with no interpretive framework at all. All great texts bear, and solicit, interpretation. In the case of Petrarch's *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* he tells us as much, when he writes "transcripsi in ordine" next to a canceled poem in his draft notebook, for the *ordo* into which the poem has been transcribed is nothing less than an interpretive framework, one that we all in our different ways—philologists and interpreters alike—seek to discover.