The Making of a Lyric Sequence: 
Time and Narrative in Petrarch's 
*Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*

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Now if things are regarded as part of a continuum, they can be taken either as many or as one; for taken separately, one by one, they are many; and as such they do not form a single object for an act of sensation or thinking, nor are they sensed or thought of simultaneously. But they can be regarded in another way, namely as composing the whole continuum; and as such they are apprehended all at once and by one act, whether of sensation or intelligence.

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* la.58.2

This essay seeks to show that, in making his lyric sequence, and in forging the model that would be so variously imitated, Petrarch was above all concerned with what always concerned him most—the experience of the passing of time, the fact that he was dying with every word he wrote: "Having reached this point in the letter, I was wondering what more to say or not to say, and meanwhile, as is my custom, I was tapping the blank paper with my pen. This action provided me with a subject, for I considered how, during the briefest of intervals, time rushes onward, and I along with it, slipping away, failing, and, to speak honestly, dying. We all are constantly dying, I while writing these words, you while reading them, others while hearing or not hearing them; I too shall be dying while you read this, you are dying while I write this, we both
are dying, we all are dying, we are always dying.”¹ It is my thesis that Petrarch responded to what he perceived as the mutually reinforcing tyrannies of time and narrative by devising the lyric sequence: a genre in which he could manipulate the properties of narrative in such a way as to confront and defuse the passage of time.

Let us begin at the beginning, with the title. Petrarch himself gave his collection only the Latin title, *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta.* The traditional title *Canzoniere* (derived from a common noun referring literally to a collection of canzoni) testifies to the unity that earlier generations saw in and/or imposed upon the collection; by forcing us to speak of the text in the singular, it conveys a sense of unity, and hence of willed narrative progression. The vernacular title currently in vogue, *Rime* or *Rime sparse,* borrowed from the first verse of the collection’s first poem, “Voi ch’ascoltate in rime sparse il suono,” more accurately reflects the original; not only does it provide an equivalence for *fragmenta* with the Italian *sparse,* but it preserves the plurality of the Latin title, obliging us to speak of “them” rather than “it.”² While the history of the *Fragmenta*’s reception most often demonstrates an implicit rejection of the title’s assessment, our own times have witnessed an upsurge in critical willingness to take Petrarch’s title at face value.³


² This grammatical fragmentation was deemed sufficiently important by the author that, in the course of the transition from the Chigi form of the collection to the final version as preserved in Vatican manuscript 3195, the title was changed from one bearing the words *fragmentorum liber* to the current *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta,* thus moving from a singular to a plural noun; see Ernest Hatch Wilkins, *The Making of the Canzoniere and Other Petrarchan Studies* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1951) 167. Although the Chigi ms. is not an autograph, Francisco Rico treats *fragmentorum liber* as likely to have been Petrarch’s designation; in “‘Rime sparse;’ ‘Rerum vulgarium fragmenta’: para el título y el primer soneto del Canzoniere,” *Medioevo romanzo* 3 (1976): 101-138, he suggests a lengthy “vacilación” between titles (121). Quotations are from Gianfranco Contini, ed., *Canzoniere* (Torino: Einaudi, 1964); italics in the text are mine throughout. Contini inserts a second title page, inscribed *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta,* after the prefatory material. A sampling of recent editions yields the following titles: *Canzoniere,* ed. Piero Cudini (Milano: Garzanti, 1974) (Cudini follows Contini in inserting the proper title prior to the text); *Rime,* ed. Guido Bezzola (Milano: Rizzoli, 1976); *Rime sparse,* ed. Giovanni Ponte (Milano: Mursia, 1979). Robert Durling uses *Rime sparse* in his edition and translation, *Petrarch’s Lyric Poems* (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1976).

³ Natalino Sapegno comments that “l’ordinamento fu, in ogni caso, un fatto posteriore e soprattutto non inteso a trasformare la sostanza lirica delle singole composizioni, ciascuna delle quali vuol essere considerata esteticamente per sé” (Il Trecento,
however, the critical pendulum has swung, and recent studies return to the attempt to formulate the nature of the *Fragmenta* qua collection: in reaction to Bosco’s "Petrarca senza storia," Santagata urges us to "reimpostare il problema del *Canzoniere* nella sua dia-
cronia."*4 In fact, in the dialectic between collection and fragment, neither pole should be privileged; the genius of the genre lies pre-
cisely in its balancing of both. Petrarch himself does not uniformly avoid all forms of narrativity in the fashioning of his fragments; rather, he not infrequently exploits the properties of narrative, most notably in his deliberate contrivance of a beginning, middle, and end, and in the deployment of sufficient plot to provoke the crude biographical readings we enjoy lampooning today.*5 Thus, a

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3rd ed. rev. [Milano: Vallardi, 1938] 241); see also Giuseppe De Robertis’ application to the *Fragmenta* of Mallarmé’s theory of “recommencements” (*Studi* [Firenze: Le Monnier, 1944] 42). Most influential has been Umberto Bosco’s dictum: “Il vero è che non possiamo in alcun modo rassimolare una linea di sviluppo, uno svol-
gimento, non solo nel canzoniere, ma in tutto il Petrarca. Egli è senza storia, se lo si considera, come si deve, nel concreto di tutta l’opera sua” (Francesco Petrarca [1946]; 2nd ed. rev. Bari: Laterza, 1968) 7). Bosco’s formulation of the *Fragmenta*’s poetics as “statica, senza sviluppi, senza un prima e un poi” (7) is, in my opinion, still valid as an essential half of the Petrarchan dialectic.

*4* Marco Santagata, *Dal sonetto al Canzoniere* (Padova: Liviana, 1979) 146. Santa-
gata responds to his own challenge in “Connessioni intertestuali nel *Canzoniere* del Petrarca” (ch. 1 of *Dal sonetto al Canzoniere*), in which he demonstrates the links that exist between individual poems. Adolfo Jenni, “Un sistema del Petrarca nell’ordi-
namento del *Canzoniere*,” in *Studi in onore di Alberto Chiari* (Brescia: Paideia, 1973) 2: 721-732, counters Wilkins’ emphasis on variety as a governing principle by pointing out all the instances of “raccostamento” (722) in the *Fragmenta*, thus emphasizing synchrony rather than diachrony; Ruth Shepard Phelps too had posited not only a principle of variety in form and content, endorsed by Wilkins, but also a “principle of association, which creates little groups and clusters of poems upon similar sub-
jects” (*The Earlier and Later Forms of Petrarch’s Canzoniere* [Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1925] 172). *Variatio* as the structuring principle of the lyric sequence has recently been republised by Germaine Warkentin, “‘Love’s sweetest part, variety’: Petrarch and the Curious Frame of the Renaissance Sonnet Sequence,” *Renaissance and Reformation* 11 (1975): 14-23. For Bortolo Martinelli, “L’ordinamento morale del *Canzoniere* del Petrarca,” in *Petrarca e il Ventoso* (Bergamo: Minerva Italica, 1977) 217-300, order is provided by a moral itinerary; his zealous replacement of the romantic “psychological” reading with an Augustinian autobiography runs the same risks of imposing a story-line onto the text incurred by his precursors. Kenelm Foster, *Petrarch: Poet and Humanist* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh U. Press, 1984) 63-89, also sees a moral narrative, with the difference that he acknowledges a repudi-
ation of Laura in certain penitential poems, notably the closing canzone, while Martinelli insists implausibly on her consistently Beatrician function.

*5* The search for biography in the text is an offshoot of the desire for narrative; as C. S. Lewis points out with respect to biographical readings of Sidney’s *Astrophel and Stella*, readers move from the search for the “story” (narrative) to the search for the “real story” (biography), while “the sonnet sequence does not exist to tell a real, or
poet whose paradoxical project is the collecting of fragments engages in strategies that further heighten the disjunction between the mode of binding and the mode of loosing: he undermines the fragmentariness of his fragments.

We could more simply say that Petrarch adopts the genre of the lyric sequence, since the paradoxes posed above are inherent in the genre itself. Such a choice was not automatic for Petrarch, not time-honored nor sanctioned by tradition, as it will be for later Renaissance poets; indeed, Petrarch invented the modern lyric sequence. He could have written lyrics in the manner of the poets before him, poets like the ones he celebrates in canzone 70, where he rehearses the lyric tradition from its Provençal origins to his own time by citing incipits of Arnaut Daniel, Guido Cavalcanti, Dante, Cino da Pistoia, and himself; that is, he could have written lyrics that would not have tantalized readers with a faint but unmistakable story-line, that would not have demonstrated the tentative but provocative unity that led to the title Canzoniere. Instead of following in the wake of Dante’s lyrics, which are in fact rime sparse, connected by no internal principles of construction, Petrarch followed in the wake of Dante’s Vita nuova, the first modern collection of lyrics to be deliberately arranged according to a predetermined

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7 Santagata goes further, claiming that Petrarch’s is “il primo organico canzoniere della letteratura occidentale” (145). The question of the ancient poetry book is much discussed; see Matthew S. Santirocco, Unity and Design in Horace’s Odes (Chapel Hill: U. of North Carolina Press, 1986). Chapter 3 of Dal sonetto al Canzoniere treats Petrarch’s medieval antecedents.

8 Although the verse in question is probably Guillem de Saint-Gregori’s, according to Contini Petrarch certainly attributed it to Arnaut.
sequential order, an order that is invested with a narrative burden. But whereas Dante connects the lyrics of the *Vita nuova* by means of prose passages that are intended to elucidate the poetry, and thus to control and limit its narrative reach, Petrarch removes the connecting prose passages, and leaves his poems unglossed except by each other, open to interpretations that are limited by nothing but the order in which the poems are arranged. In other words, Petrarch takes from Dante the idea of transcribing previously written lyrics into a new order where the order generates significance, but he does not take Dante’s means of controlling significance, namely the prose. The results are twofold. First, we have a form that is programmatically open, that seems devised for the multiplication (in Petrarchan diction, metamorphosing) of meaning, thus generating the paradox of mobile fixity, of themes and topoi that are unchanged but also unrestrained, free to accrete greater and greater significance, in the same way that the “monotous” language develops an intense power of suggestion. Second, we have a genre where order, although frequently used to destabilize, is also the basis for what stable significance we can grasp, where indeed order is everything, as is indicated by the telling phrase “transcripsi in ordine,” used by the poet to note that he had transcribed a poem from a reference collection into the *Fragmenta.*

9 Simplifying somewhat, Lewis comments that “The difference between the *Vita Nuova* and Petrarch’s *Rime* is that Petrarch abandoned the prose links; and it was they that carried the narrative” (327). The *Vita nuova*’s narrative is not carried solely by the prose; Dante too had the idea of arranging previously unarranged lyrics to make them signify something they had not previously signified. At the same time, it is important that, of Dante’s two means for generating narrativity, Petrarch discards the more heavy-handed use of prose, and retains only the more supple use of order. For a Bloomian approach, see Germaine Warkentin, “The Form of Dante’s ‘Libello’ and its Challenge to Petrarch,” *Quaderni d’italianistica* 2 (1981): 160-170.

10 The reference is to the “unilinguismo” posited by Contini’s classic study, “Preliminari sulla lingua del Petrarca,” printed as the introduction to his edition; see also Adelia Noferi, L’esperienza poetica del Petrarca (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1962), who refers to Petrarchan “monotonia.” For the openness of the *Fragmenta,* see Aldo Scaglione, “La struttura del Canzoniere e il metodo di composizione del Petrarca,” *Lettere Italiane* 27 (1975): 129-139.

11 The table between pp. 98 and 99 in Wilkins shows the poems that were marked for transcription and the various abbreviations Petrarch used (one set of markings that Wilkins takes as “tr’ p me” is in fact “trs p me”; see Domenico De Robertis, “Contiguità e selezione nella costruzione del canzoniere petrarchesco,” in *Studi di filologia italiana*, Bollettino annuale dell’Accademia della Crusca [Firenze: presso l’Accademia della Crusca, 1985] 43: 46, n. 3). The fact that Petrarch used an analogous expression, “transcriptiones in ordine,” for his transcriptions of letters (see Carlo Calcaterra, *Nella selva del Petrarca* [Bologna: Cappelli, 1942] 393) implies anal-
“Transcrpsi in ordine” is emblematic of the narrativity that inheres to Petrarch’s fragments, and whose value is far from merely formal: since narrativity is essentially time in its textual dress, and time is the major concern of the Fragmenta, we are asking how the poet’s obsession with the passing of time takes textual shape in the form of narrativity, in textual time as articulated in unavoidable temporal constraints like beginnings, middles, and ends. Although unavoidable, these are constraints that a poet, especially a lyric poet, can minimize. Such, however, is not Petrarch’s tack. Instead, he alternates between evading narrativity and confronting it, exploiting the dialectical tension between the lyric sequence’s lyric and narrative drives to tread a tightrope between the safety of stasis and the exigency of motion. Thus, the basic feature of this problematic is the paradox of narrativity’s simultaneous absence and presence, a paradox that informs the lyric sequence as a genre and underlies the Fragmenta as a whole: Petrarch seems to accept

ogous principles of construction for the Rerum familiarium libri and the Rerum vulgarium fragmenta, an implication rendered more suggestive by the further similarity of their titles. On the kinship of the prologues of Familiares, Metricae, and Canzoniere, all proclaiming the fragmentary nature of the texts they introduce, see Rico, 108-114.

12 Recent scholarship has begun to accord time its rightful place as the central and abiding concern of Petrarch’s oeuvre. As Gianfranco Folena observes in “L’orologio del Petrarca”: “Il tempo è non solo un riferimento continuo, ma anche la struttura portante della cultura e della poesia del Petrarca, e stupisce che questa struttura non sia stata ancora analizzata partitamente, per quanto non manchino alcuni tentativi recenti” (Libri e Documenti 5.3 [1979]: 1-12; quotation p. 5). See also the two contributions of Edoardo Taddeo, “Petrarca e il tempo: Il tempo come tema nelle opere latine,” Studi e problemi di critica testuale 25 (1982): 53-76, and, on the Fragmenta, “Petrarca e il tempo,” Studi e problemi di critica testuale 27 (1983): 69-108. After a brief section on “Il tempo e la poesia”, the latter article deals with “Il tempo come categoria formale nei sonetti,” showing how Petrarch employs tense to obtain “quello che è il carattere specifico della poesia petrarchesca, la profondità della prospettiva temporale” (75). More generally, see Bosco and Noferi, as well as Arnaud Tripet, Pétrarque ou la connaissance de soi (Genèvre: Droz, 1967) 75-87, and Giovanni Getto, “Triumphus Temporis: Il sentimento del tempo nell’opera di Francesco Petrarca,” in Letterature comparate: problemi e metodo. Studi in onore di Ettore Paratore (Bologna: Patron, 1981) 3: 1243-1272.

13 The link between narrative and time is affirmed in a text of supreme importance to Petrarch, the Confessions, where Augustine answers the question “What, then, is time?” by way of a narrative act, the recitation of a hymn (11.14; trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin [London: Penguin, 1961]). Although Augustine is seeking to define time rather than narrative, his discussion illustrates narrative’s intractably temporal nature, and is one to which modern theorists are still indebted; Paul Ricoeur not coincidentally begins his study Temps et récit (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1983) with a chapter on Book 11 of the Confessions. Noferi and Folena stress Confessions 11 as the basis for Petrarch’s ideas of time.
the narrative burden of time when he arranges his lyrics in a sequence; he seems to deny it by calling them—and to a lesser extent by making them—fragments. From a narratological perspective, the lyric sequence is a peculiarly paradoxical genre, since it insists simultaneously on fragmentation—each lyric is an individual entity endowed with a beginning and ending, with its own entelecheia—and on fragmentation’s opposite, namely a sequentiality, a linearity brought about by the existence of the larger unit that subsumes the individual parts into a common structure, with a common beginning and ending. But the truly noteworthy feature of the lyric sequence, and the one that renders it as a genre so suited to its inventor, is that these terms could be reversed and the paradoxes cited just now “squared”: thus, the individual lyric could be viewed as the paradigm of unity, of anti-fragmentation, and the common structure as the agent of fragmentation, as that which continuously disrupts the unity achieved by the individual poems. In the same way, then, that with respect to content, the poet precisely calibrates information and disinformation in such a way as to hook the reader without ever gratifying him, at the level of form he holds the agents of unity and of disunity in a severe and paradoxical balance. Whichever way we look at it, Petrarch has created a genre in which the peace he is always seeking is as elusive formally as it is thematically.

A typically opaque but crucial index of our poet’s concern with narratological issues is his division of the collection into the two parts traditionally, but erroneously, labelled “in vita di madonna Laura” and “in morte di madonna Laura.” The most overt exploitation of formal structure in the text, Petrarch’s division is a creative act without precedent in the lyric collections of his forebears. Our mishandling of the division is thus worth looking at in some

14 An example of such disruption operating thematically is provided by the placement of sonnets 60-63: the unity of 60, in which the poet curses the laurel, is compromised by 61, in which he blesses everything connected with Laura, while 61 is in its turn compromised by 62, a penitential poem, which is then undermined by 63, a love poem. On a syntactic level, Antonino Musumeci discusses Petrarch’s use of parenthesis as a means of mirroring psychological fragmentation; see “Tecniche frammentarie nei Fragmenta del Petrarca,” in Interrogativi sull’Umanesimo, ed. Giovannangiola Tarugi (Firenze: Olschki, 1976) 3: 27-34. The poet’s sensitivity to the dialectic between the one and the many is expressed in this meditation on the value of time: “Thirty years ago—how time does fly! and yet if I cast a glance backward to consider them all together, those thirty years seem as so many days, so many hours, but when I consider them singly, disentangling the mass of my labors, they seem so many centuries” (Fam. 24.1; p. 308).
detail. The manuscripts testify that the division was placed by authorial fiat at canzone 264, “I' vo pensando”: in the Vatican manuscript 264 is marked, like the collection's opening sonnet, with a large ornamental initial, and there are seven blank pages between it and 263;¹⁵ the fact that “I' vo pensando” is similarly marked in the Chigi collection indicates that the idea of using it to begin part 2 was one of long standing.¹⁶ Nonetheless, 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, thus accommodating the in vita/in morte rubrics invented by the text's editors.¹⁷ Nor does our century’s acceptance of the manuscript evidence resolve all the problems posed by the division, since reluctance to accept 264 as the starting-point of part 2 is fueled not only by the apparent suitability of 267 for the post, but also by the two

¹⁵ See Wilkins, 190-193, for a description of the codices and discussion of the bipartite division; regarding the portions of V. L. 3195 transcribed by Petrarch and those by his secretary, Giovanni Malpaghini, see p. 107. Wilkins took the blank pages as an indication that Petrarch intended to keep adding to part 1, therefore concluding that 366 does not represent the final number of poems (186-187). Most critics today would agree with Foster that “263 is manifestly a splendid conclusion to Part I” and that the symbolic significance of the number 366 is intentional (96; but see Scaglione). Recent arguments for the calendrical structure of the Fragmenta depend on an intentional numerology; see Thomas Roche, “The Calendrical Structure of Petrarch’s Canzoniere,” Studies in Philology 71 (1974): 152-172, and, much less plausibly, Frederic J. Jones, “Laura's Date of Birth and the Calendrical System Implicit in the Canzoniere,” Italianistica 12 (1983): 13-33.

¹⁶ See Phelps for an analysis of the Chigi form, the first extant collection of the Fragmenta. In the Chigi collection, which contains 215 poems (174 in part 1 and 41 in part 2), “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, which is “Passa la nave mia” (Phelps, 189). Since the 41 poems that make up part 2 of the Chigi collection are arranged in the same order as the first 41 poems of part 2 of the final collection, Phelps’ discussion of the division is still useful. According to Wilkins, the Chigi belongs to 1359-1362, while work on V. L. 3195 beings ca. 1366 and continues until the poet's death.

¹⁷ A brief editorial history may be found in Martinelli, 256-258, who points out that whereas the in vita/in morte headings derive from a fourteenth century rubric added to the Vat. ms., and thus were present in the fifteenth century, the transposition from 264 to 267 occurs only in 1514. The tenacity of the tradition is such that, even after Mestica, Carducci and Ferrari begin part 2 of their edition with 267: “Non osammo seguirlo [Mestica], tenuti dal rispetto alla quasi religiosa consuetudine” (Giosuè Carducci and Severino Ferrari, eds. Le Rime [1899; rpt. Firenze: Sansoni, 1957] xxiii). A further editorial transgression, undertaken for the first time in 1525, is the separation of all nonLaura poems into a third independent group; see Nicolae Iliescu, Il Canzoniere petrarchesco e Santi'Agostino (Roma: Società Accademica Romena, 1962) 19-20. The division continues to elicit editorial lapses, as witnessed by the fact that Cudini, Bezzola, and Durling fail to indicate its existence. Contini scrupulously leaves a blank page and uses the running headers “Prima parte” and “Seconda parte.”
sonnets that follow the canzone: 265 and 266 refer to Laura alive.\textsuperscript{18} Moreover, one of these two sonnets, 266, is an anniversary poem, ostentatiously declaring itself composed 18 years after the poet’s \textit{innamoramento}, and thus three years before Laura’s death, a fact that has weighed heavily in an ever more chronologically-oriented debate: Wilkins argues that the decision to use 264 to begin part 2 must have been made before Laura’s death, a view that has been challenged by Rico, who suggests 1349-1350 instead.\textsuperscript{19}

The debate about the division is marked by an inability to focus on the express intent—indeed on the very actions—of the author. To say, with Mestica, that the division is intended to reflect not external events but an internal struggle sharpened by external events, is to say correctly, but not enough.\textsuperscript{20} Unless we choose to ignore the author’s intentions, like Carducci and Ferrari, or seek to show that Petrarch intended to move 265 and 266 to the end of

\textsuperscript{18} As Phelps notes, “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 \textit{Aspro core} and \textit{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” (193). Cesareo argues that Petrarch intended to transfer 265 and 266 to the end of part 1 (Phelps, 194).

\textsuperscript{19} Wilkins suggests 1347 as the date for “I’ vo pensando” (193); in \textit{Life of Petrarch} (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1961), he moves the canzone even further back, to ca. 1344. Rico’s arguments for the later date may be found in the article cited previously, and are paraphrased by Foster, 103-105. In his attack on Wilkins and support for Rico (98-102), Foster, although not unprovoked—Wilkins’ argument is indeed specious when he infers from the position of 264 that it had to be placed where it is before Laura’s death in 1348—makes the mistake of continuing to pursue the red herring of chronology (and, in effect, allowing Wilkins to set the agenda). Thus, Foster’s efforts go into supporting Rico’s case for dating the bipartite division after Laura’s death and not into determining what the division is intended to signify; once more external biographical issues take precedence over internal textual matters. Moreover, the desire to discredit Wilkins’ chronology leads Foster to contradict himself; while on p. 101 he notes that “the bipartite division of the \textit{Canzoniere}, though related to, is not wholly determined by, the death of Laura” and “that Petrarch was free to arrange his poems exactly as he pleased,” on p. 102 he forgets these sound precepts when he attempts to devalue 264 and the two sonnets that follow it. Although it is not clear how the date of “I’ vo pensando” would affect our reading of its position at the outset of part 2, it is symptomatic of the debate that so much attention has been paid to this issue.

\textsuperscript{20} Mestica writes that in his edition the two parts are divided “non per l’avvenimento esteriore e accidentale della morte di madonna Laura, ma per un fatto intimo al Poeta stesso: la sua conversione morale, che nel 1343 diele a lui occasione di comporre in latino il \textit{Secretum}, e quindi in poesia volgare la Canzone I’ vo pensando, con cui appunto, nel Codice originale, la Parte seconda ha principio” (Wilkins, 191). Martinelli develops this view to argue that the division signifies a conversion from \textit{vita vetus} to \textit{vita nova} (259-253). These authors, like Ilieescu and most recently Foster, posit an achieved conversion within the \textit{Fragmenta}, an idea I do not share.
part 1, like Cesareo, we are faced with the following facts. Part 2 begins with 264, which is followed by two sonnets that treat of Laura alive; this fact becomes significant when we reach 267, where she is dead, and it becomes more significant when we finish reading the collection and realize that the rest of the Laura poems in part 2 endorse Laura’s death in 267, with the result that 265 and 266 are unique. So we have a moral canzone, a meditation on the transitory nature of all earthly attachments, followed by two sonnets that strike the reader as a return to the status quo, in that they do not pursue the moral program of detachment suggested by the canzone. If, with respect to the canzone that precedes them, these sonnets are discontinuous, with respect to the poems that follow them they are completely anomalous, since they represent a living Laura. Their anomaly is heightened, as though to make sure we notice it, by their dates: poem 266 expressly instructs us to view it as composed in 1345, before the death of Laura in 1348. And while the 1350 date of poem 265 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.21

What, then, is the function of these two sonnets? Besides providing, as Phelps suggests, an ironic rejoinder to the canzone,22 their presence in part 2 indicates that the significance of the second part cannot be located wholly in Laura’s death. It therefore constitutes a deliberate nonprivileging of 267, and, thus, an affirmation, a deliberate privileging, of 264. In prototypical fashion, Petrarch has used order and form to signal that we must not be distracted by the superficial suitability of 267 as a new beginning, but persevere in looking to 264 for his message, which regards not the transit of one of life’s creatures but transition itself—our ability to make transitions in the face of the transitory nature of all life. By giving 264 an ornamental initial and creating a space between it and 263, the poet marks a textual new beginning, a textual transition; by making the first poem of part 2 one that addresses precisely his ability to effect a spiritual new beginning, to put a space between himself and his past, Petrarch has created a remark-

21 Petrarch’s notes provide the 1350 date for “Aspro core”; see Phelps, 157.
22 “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’ ” (Phelps, 199-200).
able consonance between form and content. The question posed by the content of the canzone—is the poet capable of conversion, is he capable of transition?—is thus also posed formally; the space that delimits part 1 from part 2 signifies the idea of change as surely as anything the poet can say. A method of composition that, definitely from the time of the Chigi collection and very likely even before, hinges on the bipartite structure—poems 1 and 264 were fixed as the beginnings of parts 1 and 2, and the collection grew by a process of accretion to each part—tells us that the division is a key index to the text. As I hope to show, the two parts of the Frag menta reflect diametrically opposed attitudes toward narrativity, and, in fact, embody contradictory but ultimately compatible strategies for defeating time.

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Part I is dominated by nonnarrativity, by the refusal or inability to move forward. Emblematic verses articulating variations on this motif include: “Io mi rivolgo indietro a ciascun passo” (15.1), which presents the basic paradigm volgere or tornare plus indietro; “et tornai indietro quasi a mezzo ’l giorno” (54.10), where the anti-Dantesque variant is established, since the middle of the path provides Petrarch an opportunity not for turning (con-vertere) but for returning;23 “ne’ primi empii martiri / pur son contra mia voglia risospinto” (96.7-8), where the poet views his backward turning as involuntary, and anticipates a later poem where the attempts of his mente to cross the ford to virtue are turned back by a superior force, “quasi maggior forza indi la svolva” (178.12); “l’aura mi

23 I should note that madrigal 54 is a penitential poem that expresses the poet’s desire to leave Love, and that the verse in question announces his defection. It is certainly legitimate to speak of conversion as a return to God; for examples from Augustine, see Iliescu, 52-53, 83. Nonetheless, Petrarch is here imitating the Commedia, where conversion is generally viewed as forward motion: besides the obvious recall of Dante’s first verse, Santagata points out that he is adapting the episode at the gates of Dis, and putting into effect the return that Dante-pilgrim merely fears (“Presenze di Dante ‘comico’ nel Canzoniere del Petrarca,” Giornale storico della letteratura italiana 146 [1969]: 163-211; esp. p. 206). And in his pivotal conversion scene, Augustine too speaks of forward motion: earthly attachments are “voices” that “were stealthily plucking at my back, trying to make me turn my head when I wanted to go forward”; on the other side of the barrier, Continence urges him “to cross over and to hesitate no more” (Confessions 8.11; p. 176). My point is that resistance to forward motion is so ingrained in Petrarch that even conversion is figured as a turning back; moreover, what is only a trope in the last verse of 54 is concretized in the opening verses of 55, where he turns back indeed, to Laura: “Quel foco ch’ì pensai che fosse spento / dal freddo tempo et da l’età men fresca, / fiamma et martir ne l’anima rinfresca.”
volve, et son pur quel ch’i’ m’era” (112.4), where his personal version of the winds that buffet Francesca, the agent of his private “bufera infernal, che mai non resta” (Inf. 5. 31), is identified as l’aura/Laura; “io son pur quel ch’i’ mi soglio, / né per mille rivolte anchor son mosso” (118.13-14), where his capacity for turning without ever converting is even more explicitly reiterated; “poi tornai indietro” (120.9), where the classic paradigm refers to a return from the threshold of death, thus beginning to reveal the advantages of not moving forward, and to clarify such refusal as a strategy for denying the passage of time;24 “Vero è il proverbio, ch’altri cangia il pelo, / anzi che ’l vezzo” (122.5-6), where we learn that, though we may grow old, we will not alter our habits, i.e. we will not change, a sentiment echoed in “già per etate il mio desir non varia” (168.13); “sarò qual fui, vivrò com’io son visso” (145.13), where the poet emphatically confirms the truth of the above proverb with respect to himself; “ma spesso a lui [= Quel sempre acerbo et honorato giorno] co la memoria torno” (157.4), a verse that illuminates the key role of memory as part 1’s nonforward-moving mechanism par excellence; “a vespro tal, qual era oggi per tempo” (175.11), where the stages of the day are invoked to tell us that the “sun”—Laura—shines on him in the evening of his day as she did in the morning, so that the course of his life brings no change; “torna volando al suo dolce soggiorno” (180.14), where his soul flies back to Laura though his body sails away from her down the Po; and the verse that perfectly captures the paradoxical nature of his stationary movement, “ch’i’ pur vo sempre, et non son anchor mosso” (209.6).

The attitude sketched by these verses is quite unshakable. Thus, a poem that seems at first glance to express a contrary opinion is 86, where we find the idea that time cannot turn back, i.e. that change is inevitable, expressed in the same language used elsewhere to express the self’s continual turning back and refusal to change. However, on closer examination of the sonnet, we find that the poet feels compelled to instruct his soul regarding the passage of time—“Misera, che devrebbe esser accorta / per lunga

24 Petrarch’s awareness of this ploy is indicated by the rigidity with which he counters it elsewhere, most tellingly in Familiari 16.5, where he congratulates his correspondent upon recovering his health while at the same time exhorting him to remember “that one is always going toward death even while seemingly returning from it” (trans. Aldo S. Bernardo, Letters on Familiar Matters: Rerum familiarium libri IX-XVI [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins U. Press, 1982] 302).
experiēntia omai che 'l tempo / non è chi 'ndietro volga, o chi l'affreni" (9-11)—precisely because his soul is unwilling to accept the verdict. Similarly, we note that even positive forward movement, genuine change, is designated as backward motion by Petrarch, as a return from the state in which he was; thus, in 119, he credits Glory, here personified as a woman, with having turned him from less noble youthful endeavors toward the pursuit of poetic immortality: “Solo per lei tornai da quel ch’i’ era” (9). Although phrases like tornare indietro are the clearest indicators of the poet’s attitude, there are others; we think, for instance, of the important verbs rinfrescare and disacerbare, used to denote the lover’s increasing or decreasing pain, as in “ragionando si rinfresca / quel’ardente desio” (37.49-50) and “perché cantando il duol si disacerbba” (23.4). In one case discourse causes desire, hence suffering, to wax, and in the other discourse causes suffering to wane, and yet these two contradictory emotions are conveyed through verbs that describe identical—backward—motion: rinfrescare, to re-fresh, tells us that desire grows by returning to a point of origin; disacerbare, to debitter, tells us that suffering is lessened by a removal of what is acerbo, again by a return to an earlier state. Thus, Petrarch finds ways always to go back, never forward, a fact that highlights the importance of the first verse of the first canzone, poem 23, “Nel dolce tempo de la prima etade”; for Petrarch, there are no new beginnings (because there are constant new beginnings), and so the first time—the “prima etade”—is the only time. Whether by turning back or by not moving forward, he never gets beyond square one; like the Red Queen in Through the Looking-Glass, he moves in order not to move. This principle is stated in its most

25 The poet provides an accurate diagnosis of this condition in Familiari 21.12: “Those who pursue their lusts do not attain this goal [well-being in the present], for just as a useless or broken container is never full, so those who always begin afresh never reach an end, there being no end to something infinite; what is more, cupidty is ever vigorous and incipient, always attractive and infinite. Those, then, who follow her are undertaking an infinite journey, never resting nor able to find repose because their motivation, lust, knows no rest” (193, italics mine). The clarity of the moral lesson expressed in this passage is problematized in the Fragmenta by the poet’s exploitation of the “positive” side of continual incipience: the illusion of infinity.

26 Elizabeth Wilson Poe addresses Bernart de Ventadorn’s ways of denying time in the chanso, commenting: “Though we may think that we are going forward, we always seem to end up where we were before; it is as if we were moving in circles, or, perhaps more accurately still, marking time” (From Poetry to Prose in Old Provençal [Birmingham, Alabama: Summa Publications, 1984] 7). What Bernart aims to do within the chanso, Petrarch aims to do within the sequence as a whole.
extreme form in another paradigmatic part 1 verse: "mille volte il di moro et mille nasco" (164.13).

Further textual support for the nonnarrativity of part 1 may be found in its high proportion of sestinas, a form whose very structure, based on the compulsive return of six identical rhyme words repeated in different order in each of its six stanzas, constitutes a denial of time and narrativity.27 Although it has been argued that the circularity of the six stanzas is tempered by the congedo,28 if we consider the form from which the sestina evolved—the canzone—it seems fair to say that here we have canzone that has been rigidified (by the use of rhyme words rather than sounds) and stylized (by the use of retrogradatio cruciata as an organizing device) to the point where it becomes the textual equivalent of the illusion that time has stopped: if meter (and hence rhyme) is the poetic means of measuring time, then the sestina has discovered a meter that subverts itself, that—by producing circular stasis instead of linear movement—in effect refuses to do what meter must do.29 Nor should we forget that, in practical terms, the sestina is the poetic alternative to the standard canzone, and that the standard canzone as a form is almost "narrative" by comparison. Thus, it seems not insignificant that of the Fragmenta's nine sestinas, eight are in part 1. The first sestina is poem 22, "A qualunque animale alberga in terra," whose importance is enhanced by its position within the collection; it is the first nonsonnet, nonballata to appear in the text, and serves as a kind of dialectical preparation for the canzone.

27 In her study of Petrarchan poetics as a poetics of repetition, Noferi remarks that the sestina is "non per nulla la forma petrarchesca per eccellenza" (see "Il Canzoniere del Petrarca: scrittura del desiderio e desiderio della scrittura," in many respects an updating of her book via Blanchot, Lacan, et. al., in Il gioco delle tracce [Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1979] 59). Petrarch suggestively links repetition and the passing of time: "Scarcely did he [Vergil] seem able to express to his own satisfaction the flight of time and its irretrievable loss, except by constant repetition" (Fam. 24.1: p. 309).
28 The poems are not, however, pure sixes. Tornadas create a seventh entity, a half-strophe that transforms the sestina into a 'seven.' Thus in its completed form, the poem has an eschatological orientation and a unilateral direction of time" (Marianne Shapiro, Hieroglyph of Time: The Petrarchan Sestina [Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1980] 12).
29 Dante notes the relation of rhyme to time in the Convivio: "Per che sapere si conviene che 'rima' si può doppiamente considerare, cioè largamente e strettamente: stretta[mente], s'intende pur per quella concordanza che ne l'ultima e penultima sillaba far si suole; quando largamente, s'intende per tutto quel parlare che 'n numeri e tempo regulato in rime consonanze cade" (4.2.12, italics mine; G. Busnelli and G. Vândelli, eds., 2nd ed. rev. A. E. Quaglio [Firenze: Le Monnier, 1964]).
that follows. As its preponderantly temporal rhyme words indicate (overtly temporal are sole, giorno, stelle, and alba), poem 22 could be seen as a manifesto for the sestina form: while any sestina, no matter what its content, is temporally charged, here the content fully supports the form. (For contrast, we need only look at the next sestina, poem 30, “Giovene donna sotto un verde lauro,” where only one rhyme word—anni—is overtly temporal; instead of the eroticizing of time that we find in “A qualunque animale,” in “Giovene donna” we find the temporalizing of eros.\(^\text{30}\)) Although, in 22, the illusion that time has stopped can hardly be achieved in isolation from the incantatory effect of the poem as a whole, it is most clearly expressed in the series of impossibilità that articulate the core of the poet’s desire; he craves only one night, but that night must know no dawn: “Con lei foss’io da che si parte il sole, / et non ci vedess’altri che le stelle, / sol una nocte, et mai non fosse l’alba” (31-33). This “time-stopping sequence” may be taken as emblematic of the role accorded the sestina form within the Fragmenta.

I am aware of the paradoxes that obtain with regard to the Petrarchan sestina, in which the circularity of the form is frequently vitiated by a narrative program. It could be argued that a characteristic of the Petrarchan sestina is to let time in; this is most apparent in the penitential sestinas, 80, 142, and 214, where the conversion thematic fights against the circularity of the form and somewhat “straightens” it.\(^\text{31}\) Indeed, in his penitential sestinas, Petrarch undertakes a characteristicly paradoxical project, namely the wedding of a linear program to a circular form—and in so doing he once more registers his ambivalence about conversion. We could restate this by noting that while Dante’s stony sestina, locked in its erotic petrification, is as spiritually distant from the Commedia as anything he wrote, Petrarch goes counter to all precedent by adopting the sestina to write some of his most Commedia-like poems. If the form affects the content, throwing doubt on the expressed desire to change, the content also affects the form, resulting in a stretching, a depetrifying, of the genre. While Dante aims to make his sestina as petrified verbally as the petra it describes, Petrarch aims for greater fluidity, seeking ways to reduce the form’s resistance; for instance, while Dante strives to keep the rhyme words in their primary significance, Petrarch “cheats” by

\(^{30}\) Temporalized eros is more characteristic of the Fragmenta than its counterpart, as witnessed by that paradigmatic sonnet “Erano i capei d’oro a l’aura sparsi.”

\(^{31}\) On Petrarch’s “narrative” sestinas, see Foster, 111.
adopting equivocal and impure rhymes. This line of argument could be pursued by looking at the sestinas as a group, in terms of the narrative purpose they may serve as a set. If, as I hope to show in future elaborations of this essay, Petrarch distributes even this most anti-narrative form throughout his collection with a narrative purpose, then his sestinas are compromised by definition, and it is not surprising to find them letting time in. Like all aspects of Petrarch’s poetics, his sestina is paradoxical; he contaminates the rigidity of its form because his way is based on ambivalence and paradox, to the point that it would be unlike him to exploit even the sestina’s form absolutely. Nonetheless, I believe that the previous paragraph is not incorrect as a first step in the analysis: Petrarch is attracted to the sestina for its time-stopping properties, which he exploits but also—typically—distorts. If rhyme is semantic time or change, and the sestina is a game in which you drastically reduce the possibilities for such change, Petrarch is the master of playing these two ends against the middle: while Dante uses the form to achieve stasis, Petrarch uses it to achieve the paradox of mobile stasis/static movement.

In the same way that the sestinas serve to dissolve time, there is another group of poems that exists to mark it. The anniversary poems commemorate the date of the poet’s enamorment on 6 April 1327, and carry their own time bombs in the form of numerical expressions indicating the precise number of years that have elapsed since that fatal day, “l primo giorno” (107.8). The very existence of a set of fifteen anniversary poems scattered through the Fragmenta confirms Petrarch’s manipulation of latent narrative structures in his text, and also illuminates his keen awareness of the relation between narrative and time. The anniversary poems

32 Mario Fubini comments “Col Petrarca abbiamo l’impressione che la sestina si disciolga” (Metrica e poesia [Milano: Feltrinelli, 1962] 305). In “Forma e significato della parola-rima nella sestina” (Teoria e prassi della versificazione [Bologna: Il Mulino, 1976] 155-167), Costanzo Di Girolamo documents the ways in which Petrarch alters the form, noting that “pare anzi che il gioco principale consista nel ‘deformare’ semanticamente proprio le parole-rima più concrete” (162). On Petrarch’s mediation, in his choice of rhyme words, between Arnaut’s phonic values and Dante’s semantic values, see Maria Picchio Simonelli, “La sestina dantesca fra Arnaut Daniel e il Petrarca,” in Figure foniche dal Petrarca ai petrarchisti (Firenze: Licosa, 1978) 1-15.

33 Similarly, Petrarch uses alliteration to obviate the effects of enjambment (see Simonelli, “Strutture foniche nei Rerum vulgarium fragmenta,” in Figure foniche, 52). What makes this move so characteristic is its duplicity: on the one hand the poet wants enjambment, on the other he attenuates its impact.

34 The set has been studied by Dennis Dutschke, “The Anniversary Poems in Petrarch’s Canzoniere.” Italica 58 (1981): 83-101, who reads them thematically in
are a sequence of poems whose physical order is invested with not only a generally narrative but also a specifically temporal burden: i.e. they are arranged chronologically, with the result that sequentiality, the flow of the text, and chronicity, the flow of time, are—more concretely than usual—one. Although, as groups, the sestinas and the anniversary poems seem intended to counter and defuse each other, I believe that in fact the two sets move toward the same goal—the liquidation of time—from opposite perspectives. The anniversary poems are emblematic of Petrarch’s paradoxical relation to time: although a sequentially linked narrative set whose common and avowed purpose is the marking of time, they contain some of the poet’s most pronounced refusals to accommodate time. (In this respect too the anniversary poems are the mirror image of the sestinas: the poems that work to stop time are recast so that they show time’s ravages, while the poems that exist to salute time are infused with a fierce resistance.) Thus, “fine non pongo al mio obstinato affanno” (50.52) announces limitless suffering, but it also rejects finitude, limits, for the sufferer—“fine non pongo”; the middle and the end of the fourteenth year are said to correspond to its beginning, thus denying both time and narrative (“S’al principio risponde il fine e ’l mezzo / del quartodecimo anno ch’io sospiro” [79.1-2]); in his fifteenth year, Laura’s “amorosi rai . . . m’abbagliam più che ’l primo giorno assai” (107.7-8); when the sixteenth year of his love remains behind him, the lover moves forward toward his death, only to find that he has returned to the beginning: “parmi che pur dianzi / fosse ’l principio di cotanto affanno” (118.3-4). Of the examples of nonnarrativity cited earlier, three—“io son pur quel chi’ mi soglio, / né per mille rivolte anchor son mosso,” “ch’altri cangia il pelo / anzi che ’l vezzo,” and “sarò qual fui, vivrò com’io son visso”—are from anniversary poems. Indeed, this last verse recalls Dante’s Capaneo, who sums up Hell as a condition of eternal stasis and repetition when he exclaims “Qual io fui vivo, tal son morto” (Inf. 14.51).35

The verse “sarò qual fui, vivrò com’io son visso” comes from poem 145, “Ponmi ove ’l sole occide i fiori et l’erba,” one of two anniversary poems that are out of chronological order; in this case, terms of an achieved conversion: “They emphasize love as conflict in Part I, by depicting Petrarch’s continuously oscillating thoughts and moods. In Part II, however, there is a change as the anniversary poems progressively point the way to a resolution of conflict” (88).

35 Raffaele Amaturo cites Propertius (“Huius ero vivus, mortuus huius ero”) as Petrarch’s source; see Petrarca (Bari: Laterza, 1971) 306.
a poem referring to the fifteenth year of the poet's love follows anniversary poems commemorating the sixteenth and seventeenth years. Readers of Wilkins will remember how much he makes of the break with chronology effected by 145; reasoning on the basis of Phelps' three principles of construction for the Chigi collection—general chronological order, variety of form, and variety of content—and noting that there is noticeably less variety of form and content in part 1 after 145 (i.e. there are longer stretches of sonnets not interspersed with canzoni, ballate, sestinas, or madrigals, and longer stretches of love poems not interspersed with political poems, moral poems, friendship poems, and the like), Wilkins extrapolates a so-called Pre-Chigi form that ended before 145, indeed with sestina 142, and that was composed with greater care than the sections of part 1 added later. I say "extrapolate" and "so-called" because the Pre-Chigi form (also called Correggio) is not extant; unlike the Chigi form, it does not actually exist. Since Wilkins' enormous contributions have led to the damaging repetitions of his conjectures as facts, I will take this opportunity to point out that the Pre-Chigi form is a hypothesis whose shape is based in great part on the out of order poem 145. Thus, Wilkins concludes that the penitential sestina 142, "A la dolce ombra de le belle frondi," is the last poem of part 1 of the Pre-Chigi form; he reaches this conclusion by looking for a poem with a "specific character of finality" among the poems immediately preceding 145, and he lands on 142, which "would have made a dignified and appropriate ending to Part I." On this basis it is now commonly taken for granted that 142 is the end of part 1 of the Pre-Chigi form, whose existence is also taken for granted. All this because

36 118 refers to "il sestodecimo anno" and 122 to "Dicesette anni." While the reference to "il mio sospir tilustre" in 145 is somewhat vaguer, I agree with Wilkins that it provides "an impression of fifteen-ness" (95).

37 Wilkins' positivism has induced many to repeat him uncritically; in response Foster is correct to stress that "Not one of the earlier 'forms' distinguished by Wilkins exists" (94). Although Wilkins tells us that the Chigi collection is the first extant form, the importance of this information is obscured by his confident assertions regarding earlier forms, especially the Pre-Chigi.

38 Wilkins, 97. In the same way, he posits 292, "Gli occhi di ch'io parlai si caldamente," as the last poem of the Pre-Chigi form because it "has a specific character of finality, and would in itself be excellently adapted to close a carefully ordered collection" (104).

39 Guglielmo Gorni unquestioningly treats 142 as the last poem of part 1 of a Pre-Chigi/Correggio form in "Metamorfosi e redenzione in Petrarca: Il senso della forma Correggio del Canzoniere," Lettere Italiane 30 (1978): 3-13; for a similar treatment of 292, see Amaturo, p. 328, who compounds the problem by mistakenly
of the "notable disregard" for the poet's presumed original principles of construction that the out of order 145 supposedly ushers into the collection. Far from showing disregard for such principles, I contend that the out of order anniversary poems are key to understanding what Petrarch's principles of construction really are: fragmentation is brought about by establishing and then destroying its opposite. The out of order anniversary poems perfectly reflect the paradoxes of the set to which they belong; they function as subverters of narrative order—of progression, linearity, time—of all that the anniversary poems as a set seem to represent.

Let us consider the placement of the two out of order sonnets. With regard to 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. The second out of order anniversary poem is 266, "Signor mio caro," which commemorates 18 years of love for Laura and follows anniversary poems referring to 20 years of passion. "Signor mio caro," the most gravely out of sequence of the anniversary poems, 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 "I' vo pensando" only by one intervening sonnet. (These two facts seem not unrelated: the presence of an

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referring to 292 as the last poem of the Chigi (rather than Pre-Chigi) collection. In fact, the last poem of the Chigi collection is our current 304, "Mentre che 'l cor dagli amorosi vermi," and the last poem of part 1 of the Chigi is our current 189, "Passa la nave mia." It is regrettable that critical energy has been devoted to poems 142 and 292 as appropriate endings to their nonexistent collection and that no one, to my knowledge, has examined from this perspective the two poems that actually serve as endings in the existent Chigi collection.

40 The unbroken stretches of the second section of part 1 have routinely posed problems for commentators: Amaturo refers to the "lunga e diseguale serie 130-247" (299), while Foster speaks of the "rather random arrangement" of 135-263 (71), and oscillates between ending the first section of part 1 with 135 or 142.

41 Compare its straightforward "diciotto anni" to "sospir trilustre" in 145. The 20 year anniversary poems are 212 ("venti anni") and 221 ("vigesimo anno").
earthly attachment other than Laura is another way of showing us that part 2 deals with the implications of the passing of all mortal loves, which is to say that this text is more philosophic than romantic; as confirmation, 269 laments the deaths of both Laura and the Cardinal.) If beginning the second part of anything necessarily implies a transition, a movement forward, what could more effectively suggest a conversion manqué than a backward moving anniversary poem, a poem that should have moved forward, beyond a point we indicate as “20,” and instead has regressed to “18”? Finally, perhaps the most satisfying sign that the anniversary poems are not what they seem, that they resist time as well as affirm it, comes from an instance of collusion between two sets: the first anniversary poem, “Giovene Donna sotto un verde lauro,” is a sestina, resulting in a poetic hybrid that is the formal equivalent of a contradiction in terms. From this perspective, “Giovene Donna” constitutes an impasse between form and content; the first—prime—example of the species we call anniversary poems, the poem charged with initiating the series’ narrativity, starting the set on its temporal path, is crippled, rendered incapable of accomplishing its textual mission, by being cast as a sestina.42

The collection opens with a sequence of poems that, like the anniversary poems, possesses a narrative thrust; as readers have long noted, poems 2 to 5 provide plot information regarding first the lover’s enamorment (2 and 3) and then the beloved (4 and 5). This narrative sequence introduces the problematic of time into the text; it offers Petrarch an opportunity to establish the ideological underpinnings for part 1’s animosity toward narrativity. Poems 1-4 are about first things, first times, first (birth-)places: the poet’s “primo giovenile errore” (1.3), Love’s “primiero assalto” (2.9), the day when “i miei guai / nel commune dolor s’incominciare” (3.7-8), the place where “si bella donna al mondo nacque” (4.14). The last poem in the sequence, poem 5, the first poem to contain “il fine” (and, perhaps not coincidentally, the first poem to begin with “Quando”), introduces the consequence of all beginnings, namely endings. This famous play on the beloved’s name, parsed as LAU-RE-TA, far from being a frivolous gesture toward rhetorical virtuosity, instructs us that narrativity resides in her, in her name, represented here as syllabified by time:43

42 By the same token, it will be apparent why this sestina could hardly have contained the time-stopping sequence found in “A qualunque animal.”

43 In Confessions 13.15, angels are able to look upon God’s face and read in it “sine
Particularly noteworthy are the narrative markers that the poet has linked to the syllables of her name: LAU with “s’incomincia,” RE with “poi,” and TA with “il fin.” The first syllable corresponds to beginnings, the middle syllable to middles, and the last syllable to endings; thus, to the extent that the text engages a being defined as existing in time, such as Laureta, it engages the temporal/narrative problems of beginnings, middles, and ends. Most prophetic for the rest of the *Fragmenta* is the negative sense of endings introduced here. The ominous “T’Acì, gridà il fin” foreshadows the poem’s final tercet, where the unexpected turn toward death is expressed in the possibility that Apollo will disdain the poet’s “lingua mortal,” and it establishes, in the link between the last syllable of her name and finality, the narratological consequences of loving—or for that matter being—a living creature, a creature subject to time, to death, to endings.

Sequentiality created by the linking of canzoni is encountered in poems 70 to 73, a series of four successive canzoni. Here narrativity is confronted in the form of metrical uniformity: not only do we find four canzoni in a row, in itself an occurrence of note, but poems 71, 72, and 73, the so-called *canzoni degli occhi*, are more specifically emblazoned. In the midst of the *Fragmenta*’s flagrant cultivation of metrical variety, they are the only canzoni to be marked by identical meter and rhyme scheme, differing from each other only in number of stanzas, and thus in overall length. Far from being haphazard, this sequence of three canzoni possessing identical stanzaic form offers us another example of the collaboration of form and content; the poet has found a metrical means of mirroring his thematic concerns. These poems, in which the poet requests Amor to harmonize his *rime* with desire (“et col desio le

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syllabis temporum” (“without the syllables of time”). The syllabification of Laura’s name, by contrast, recalls Augustine’s syllabification of the hymn “Deus Creator omnium” as an analogue for time in *Confessions* 11.27. Robert Durling takes poem 5 more seriously than most commentators; see the introduction to his edition of the *Rime sparse*, 12-14.
mie rime contempre” [73.6]), air the relation between writing and eros: writing begets desire, they tell us; an activity undertaken as a means of ending desire succeeds only in renewing it. This theme in itself is not new (we think of the verse from poem 37 quoted earlier: “ragionando si rinfresca / quel’ardente desio”); what is new is the poet’s use of the formal metrical properties of the canzone to highlight the problem. Thus, the congedo—the ending—of 71 states: “Canzone, tu non m’acqueti, anzi m’infiammi / a dir di quel ch’è me stesso m’invola: / però sia certa de non esser sola.” Since poetizing has inflamed desire rather than satisfying it, the poem cannot end; another must follow. Likewise, the congedo of 72 insists: “Canzon, l’una sorella è poco inanzi, / et l’altra sento in quel medesmo albergo / apparechiarsi; ond’io più carta vergo.” Again, the poem’s resolution is dedicated to affirming its inability to resolve itself, to terminate. This denial of closure is given added force by the canzoni’s metrical uniformity, which promotes the illusion that the three poems are one, that we have not ended one poem and begun another, but instead have refused to end and returned in a circle to the first poem’s beginning.

These canzoni thus subvert narrativity, using the congedi to deny the closure that it is their poetic function to effect, and thus denying the quiescence—the peace—that is brought about by the full stop and blank space at the end of all poems. For, despite the fact that Petrarch frequently destabilizes the conclusions of his poems by introducing conditionals, and despite the fact that poems not undercut in their own conclusions are routinely contradicted in the poems that immediately follow—despite all this, not even Petrarch can avoid the momentary peace of the physical ending. This physical resolution is undercut in the canzoni degli occhi, whose refusal to satisfy or to accommodate closure suggests a lesson to be applied to the Fragmenta as a whole. The poet now faces the problem engendered by his own strategy: if he were not to bring this sequence of canzoni to an end he would be moving toward narrative; he must therefore end even this sequence dedicated to disproving all endings. How then to end these poems that deny endings? Petrarch’s solution is to import for the last congedo a biological rather than textual necessity: “Canzone, i’ sento già stancar la penna / del lungo et dolce ragionar co · llei, / ma non di parlar meco i pensier’ mei.” His weariness forces him to end. But we note, first, that the end imposed on his writing is not imposed on his thoughts; second, even the end imposed on his writing is reversed in the next two sonnets. Sonnet 74 begins “Io son già
stanco di pensar si come / i miei pensier’ in voi stanchi non sono.”
Here the reprise of stanco from the conclusion of 73 echoes the
canzone in typically contradictory fashion: he is weary of thinking
about how tireless—nonweary—are his thoughts of her. Sonnet
75 then takes this process a step farther, so that not only are his
thoughts not weary, but in fact his ability to discourse is not weary
either: “questi son que’ begli occhi che mi stanno / sempre nel cor
colle faville accese, / per ch’io di lor parlando non mi stanco’”
(12-14). In this way the poet does his best to undo the ending he
was obliged to posit at the end of canzone 73.

Canzone 70 serves as a kind of prologue to 71-73, a role for
which it is formally fitted by its lack of congedo. This is the poem in
which each stanza but one ends with the first verse of a precursor’s
poem: stanza 1 ends with an incipit that Petrarch ascribed to Ar-
naut Daniel, “Drez et rayson es qu’ieu ciant e · m demori” (“It is
right and just that I sing and be joyful”); stanza 2 ends with an
incipit of Guido Cavalcanti’s, “Donna me priegha, per ch’io voglio
dire”; stanza 3 ends with the incipit of one of Dante’s petrose, “così
nel mio parlar voglio esser aspro.” The poet’s anxieties about po-
etic discourse, expressed in the first strophe’s rhetorical question
“che se non è chi con pietà m’ascolte, / perché sparger al ciel si
spessi preghi?” (3-4), are reinforced by these first three citations,
each of which emphasizes an outpouring of poetic expression, ei-
ther joyful (“Drez et rayson es qu’ieu ciant e · m demori”), emo-
tionally neutral (“Donna me priegha, per ch’io voglio dire”), or
harsh (“così nel mio parlar voglio esser aspro”). If the poet seems
up to this point expressively blocked, in part by his own fears, and
in part by the force of the tradition in which he works, finding
himself constrained to appropriate the voices of others, it seems
significant that, in the fourth stanza, where Petrarch shifts the
blame for his unhappiness from Laura to himself, he should cite a
poet whose voice is so much more like his, Cino da Pistoia, and that
the final stanza should end with a verse of his own. As though to
underscore the limited breakthrough he has achieved, Cino’s
verse, “la dolce vista e ’l bel guardo soave,” is not related to the
writing of poetry, like the first three incipits, and it is tonally sim-
ilar to the Petrarchan verse with which the poem ends, “nel dolce
tempo de la prima etade”—the main difference, in fact, is the
temporal anxiety that Petrarch infuses into Cino’s unalloyed
sweetness. The suggestion, at the conclusion of canzone 70, that
the poet’s expressivity is no longer obstructed, that he has found
his voice, serves to usher in the three canzoni that follow: the
blocked voice of 70 makes way for the released voice of 71-73, as
the inability to begin succumbs to the inability to end.

The most unusual feature of canzone 70 is that its strophes’ final
verses are the first verses of previous canzoni. In other words,
former incipits have become explicits, beginnings have become
endings. Most striking is Petrarch’s use of the first verse of his own
collection’s first canzone, “Nel dolce tempo de la prima etade,” as
the last verse of canzone 70; thus, not only have beginnings been
converted into endings, but endings into beginnings, since the
canzone’s end finds him at the beginning of his own story, at the
“prima etade.” It also finds him at the beginning of the canzoni
degli occhi, addressed in turn to each of his story’s chief protago-
nists: Laura’s eyes, Laura herself, and Love. Thus, the circularity
of discourse—beginnings that are endings and endings that are
beginnings—is inscribed into canzone 70, before being enacted by
canzoni 71-73, where each ending sets the stage for a new begin-
ning. The interchangeability of beginnings and endings is further
figured through the presence of stanco in sonnets 74 and 75: the
congedo of canzone 73 (“stancar la penna”) becomes the incipit of
sonnet 74 (“Io son già stanco”), which in turn becomes the explicit
of sonnet 75 (“per ch’io di lor parlando non mi stanco”). In general
metrical terms, such a pattern of recurrence is expressed by the
type of rhyme scheme used in the sestina, which is a particular
form of coblas capcaudadas, “head-tailed” rhyme, where the last
rhyme of one strophe recurs as the first rhyme of the next.\(^44\) I
would suggest that the circular or head-tailed quality of these can-
zoni makes them a kind of analogue to the sestina within the col-
lection; like the sestina, they refuse time, embodying stasis. But, as
we have seen, Petrarch’s poetic categories mimic the fine line he
roads between motion and stasis. In this case, the very refusal to
end that produces the circularity of the canzoni degli occhi also
creates a sense of ongoingness, and thus a kind of mini-narrative
within the Fragmenta.\(^45\) If, as subverters of narrative that are still
subject to narrative, the canzoni degli occhi are analogous to the ses-
tinas, their mirror image—related to the canzoni degli occhi as the
anniversary poems are related to the sestinas—is the collection’s
next series of canzoni, 125 to 129.

\(^44\) On head-tailed rhyme and ideas of cyclicity, see Shapiro, 5.

\(^45\) De Sanctis refers to 71-73 as “quella specie di poemetto lirico sugli occhi di
Laura che [Petrarca] ha diviso in tre canzoni,” while Ginguené remarks that the
three poems “formano tutt’insieme come un piccolo poema in tre canti regolari”
(Carducci-Ferrari ed., 102).
The great sweep of five canzoni that runs from 125 to 129 is the longest such series in the collection, a series whose visibility is guaranteed not only by its length but also by its concentration of poetic brilliance. Following the principle that narrativity must be established in order to be more visibly fragmented, and considering that the canzone is the closest approximation to narrative in a lyric universe (it is most conducive to logical exposition and to narrative development, hence its use by Guinizzelli in “Al cor gentil,” by Cavalcanti in “Donna me prega,” by Dante in “Le dolci rime”), it seems not insignificant that the Fragmenta’s two largest blocks of canzoni should be found in part 1.46 To this second sequence the poet has entrusted the demonstration of his ultimate desire vis-à-vis narrative: to escape from it. Thus, it is a linear sequence, marked not by the circular recurrence of the canzoni degli occhi but by narrative progression and change. While 126, “Chiare, fresche et dolci acque,” breaks through the impasse experienced in 125 (epitomized in the conditional incipit, “Se ’l pensier che mi struggere”), and accomplishes the poet’s goal of turning back time, of achieving “oblio” (56), the poem that follows it, “In quella parte dove Amor mi sprona,” shows the return to the conditions of time and narrative, to oblio’s opposite, “istoria” (7), a word that appears for the first time in this canzone’s opening strophe.47 And the history to which the poet is reconsign in 127 is rehearsed again—macrocosmically—in 128, “Italia mia,” and finally in the sequence’s concluding canzone, “Di pensier in pensier, di monte in monte,” whose acknowledgment of the prison of forward motion is apparent in its first verse. This series takes the poet from the brink of escape, in 125, to actual ec-stasis in 126, where momentarily the turning-back mechanism of memory places him outside the temporal continuum, only to return him to the adamantine chains of time and narrative in 127, 128, and 129. Thus, the narrativity of these poems serves not to deny the constraints of narrative, as with the canzoni degli occhi, but to further underscore their thematic burden: there is no escape from narrative sequence, from moving “di pensier in pensier,” from time.

Instead of signifying identity and recurrence, as in the canzoni degli occhi, here meter is called upon to reflect linear change and

46 The series of four canzoni constituted by poems 70-73 is second in length only to 125-129. The obvious unity of poems 71-73, the canzoni degli occhi, has distracted critical attention from the block as a whole.

47 Istoria appears only twice in the Fragmenta, in canzone 127 and in sonnet 343, discussed later.
progression. The poet supplies just enough circularity to make this series a precise inversion of the previous series, where, by contrast, a touch of linear motion was injected into the prevailing stasis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Canzone</th>
<th>Number of strophen</th>
<th>Fronte/ Congedo</th>
<th>Sirma</th>
<th>Verses in strophen/settenari in strophe.</th>
<th>Verses in congedo/settenari in congedo.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>125</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>abCabC</td>
<td>cdeeFF</td>
<td>13/10</td>
<td>3/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Abb</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>126</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>abCabC</td>
<td>cdeeFF</td>
<td>13/9</td>
<td>3/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>AbB</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>127</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>ABCBAC</td>
<td>CDEeDeFF</td>
<td>14/2</td>
<td>8/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ABCcBcDD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>128</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>AbCBaC</td>
<td>cDEeDdfGfG</td>
<td>16/7</td>
<td>10/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>aBCcBbdEdE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>129</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>ABCABC</td>
<td>cDEeDFF</td>
<td>13/2</td>
<td>7/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>aBCcBDD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the diagram shows, the metrical patterns of 125 and 126 are identical but for the fact that the last verse of the strophen (and the congedo) is a settenario in 125 and a hendecasyllable in 126. The relaxation of the settenario of 125 into the longer verse of 126 yields a sense of closure, achievement, peace—the metrical equivalent of the ecstatic oblio achieved in "Chiare, fresche et dolci acque." The meter of 127 creates a sharp break between 125-126 and the rest of the set; here begins the process of enlargement that will culminate with 128. The leggerezza of 125 and 126 (they are the only canzoni in the collection where settenari outnumber hendecasyllables) gives way to the gravità of the entirely hendecasyllabic

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48 Durling comments that the difference in verse lengths is "stunningly effective in suggesting the overcoming of the halting inhibition of 125" (23).

49 For the effect of the settenari in 125-126, see W. Theodor Elwert, "Rima e figure retoriche nelle ‘canzoni sorelle’ del Petrarcha: ‘Chiare, fresche et dolci acque’ (126) e ‘Se l pensier che mi strugg’ (125),” Lettere Italiane 34 (1982): 309-327. Elwert points out that only six canzoni—71, 72, 73, 125, 126, 135—begin with settenari (319). He also notes that, besides 125-126, only 270 and 323 possess congedi of three verses (320). Elwert’s further essay on the metrical patterns of Petrarch’s canzoni, “La varietà metrica e tematica delle canzoni del Petrarcha in funzione della loro distribuzione nel Canzoniere” (in Dal Medioevo al Petrarcha: Miscellanea di studi in
fronte of 127, where the reversal of the second pes from abc to bac indicates the backward turn to istoria. A connection to the previous canzoni is maintained in 127’s sirma, which—although mainly hendecasyllabic—conserves the rhyme scheme of 125-126 but for an additional e rhyme. Altogether, however, the strophes of 127 are longer, the number of its strophes is greater, its proportion of hendecasyllables much higher, and its congedo has developed from three verses to eight: the net result is a much heavier poem. The growth pattern continues in 128, whose size reflects its “large” materia: both strophic length and congedo length peak at 16 verses and ten verses respectively. The addition of rhymes not present elsewhere in the series—the g rhyme in the sirma and the e rhyme in the congedo—further underscores the canzone’s uniqueness as the only political poem in the group. Nonetheless, 128 is less dark a poem than 127, a fact reflected in its higher proportion of settenari; although the fronte of 128 declares its connection to its predecessor by conserving the bac twist, it is no longer entirely hendecasyllabic. Finally, with 129 the poet introduces a falling off from the pattern of enlargement: from seven strophes we return to five (the number in 126), from a 16 verse strophe to a 13 verse strophe (as in 125-126), from a ten verse congedo to a seven verse congedo. Although 129 retains the hendecasyllabic fronte of 127 and a long congedo, its strophic rhyme scheme is identical to that of 125-126. In this way, Petrarch incorporates circularity into the sequence, allowing the last canzone to return metrically to the first two, while still retaining the signs of the narrative path travelled after 126. The strophic patterns are thus carefully modulated to reflect the thematic progression of these canzoni, which in fact ends in 129 on an ambiguous note: the series’ last canzone does indeed return to 126 in its appreciation of oblio, but with a less optimistic attitude determined by the intervening experiences of 127 and 128.50

50 The meter of 129 not only demonstrates a return to 125-126, but also, as noted
Narrative sequence is exploited to express our subjugation to time again in part 1 of the *Fragmenta*, in a series of sonnets dealing with presentiments of Laura’s death that begins (perhaps not coincidentally) 100 poems after the out of order anniversary poem discussed previously, 145, and embraces poems 246, 248, 249, 250, 251, 252, and 254. These poems share a lexicon that links mortality, death, and the passing of time to narrativity, the order in which we do things. In 246, the poet arranges his protagonists in a narrative sequence, praying that God send his death, his *fine*, before Laura’s death: “O vivo Giove, / manda, prego, il mio in prima che ’l suo fine” (7-8). Since life is governed by temporal rules, the critical questions, as with narrative, are those of priority and sequence: whose end comes first, whose end comes second, whose end comes last. Thus, in 248 we are apprised that whoever wants to see the best that nature has to offer had better come soon, since death takes the best first; if he comes in time he will see the sum of all virtue and beauty, but if he delays he will have cause for eternal weeping. This little narrative is inscribed into the poem with a purpose; it hinges on expressions that denote temporal anxiety in narrative terms (“et venga tosto,” “prima i migliori,” “Vedrà, s’arriva a tempo,” “allor dirà,” “ma se più tarda, avrà da pianger sempre”), adding urgency to the temporal message at the poem’s core: “cosa bella mortal passa, et non dura” (8). Similar strategies abound in these poems. Sonnet 250 recounts a dream in which Laura speaks proleptically to the poet of “quella ultima sera / . . . ch’i’ lasciai li occhi tuoi molli / et sforzata dal tempo me n’andai” (9-11), warning him in the sonnet’s last verse, “non sperar di vedermi in terra mai.” Sonnet 248 ends with *sempre*, and 250 with *mai*, marking the contours of a semantic field in which the *Fragmenta*’s strikingly temporal language is even more densely above, a solidarity with 127, the darkest of the five canzoni: the *sirma* of 129 mediates between that of 125-126 (with which it shares the same rhyme scheme) and that of 127 (with which it shares a similar disposition of long and short verses, but for the substitution of the first hendecasyllable by a *settentario*). A more detailed reading of the five canzoni bears out the double allegiance of 129, to 125-126 on the one hand and to 127-128 on the other. Briefly, 127 and 129 both function as glosses of 126; while the former disdains the *oblio* of 126, preferring an eternity of desire, the latter desires *oblio*, even rehearses it, but is devoted to showing why it is ultimately impossible to maintain. In the future I hope to elaborate this reading of 125-129 as a series. I know of no other attempt to read the poems thus; despite the intriguing title, Fernando Figurelli’s “Le cinque canzoni centrali della prima parte del *Canzoniere* del Petrarca” (*Annali dell’Istituto Superiore di Scienze e Lettere ‘S. Chiara’* [Napoli: R. Monastero S. Chiara, 1957] 7: 215-251) treats the canzoni individually.
packed than usual. Sonnet 254, the final poem in this group, rehearses the poet’s own ending: “i miei corti riposi e i lunghi affanni / son giunti al fine.” (10-11; here the abrupt and unusual full stop in the middle of the verse is a formal enactment of the fine invoked by the poet); the poem concludes with Petrarch’s own conclusion, “La mia favola breve è già compita, / et fornito il mio tempo a mezzo gli anni.” The poet calls his life a favola knowing well what a favola and his existence have in common; they are similarly sforzati dal tempo, to use Laura’s words. Thoughts of her death, her end, have imposed a narrativity on his own life that he usually avoids, as expressed in the extreme anomaly of poem 252’s “vivo ch’i’ non son più quel che già fui” (13). His fears regarding her death have forced him to let time in, and therefore to say what he has never before said: “vivo ch’i’ non son più quel che già fui” acknowledges the change once so categorically denied by “sarò qual fui, vivrò com’io son visso.”

The particular interest of these poems for us resides in the fact that they constitute a verifiable sequence—let us call it the death sequence—that runs virtually from 246 to 254. In other words, the poet underscores the thematic content of these sonnets—intimations of Laura’s mortality—by arranging them in a sequence of manifest narrativity, where the sequential shape lends significance to the expressed fear that time is passing, that beautiful things do not last, that she will die. In order to signify her death, he permits a narrative sequence to enter the text, a fact that illuminates by contrast the dominant strategy of the Fragmenta up to now: it is a strategy that calls for fragmentation of the text into rime sparse precisely as a defensive bulwark against the forces of narrativity, time, death. The death sequence not only illuminates part 1, by clarifying what the majority of poems in part 1 does not do, but it also anticipates part 2, where narrativity—for the most part an absence previously—is to a much greater degree a presence. Poem 248’s dictum, “cosa bella mortal passa, et non dura,” will be echoed throughout part 2, most notably in the prototypical exclamation from canzone 323: “Ahi, nulla, altro che pianto, al mondo dura!” (72). While in part 1 encounters with narrativity occur in isolated

51 Although I have omitted 247 and 253 because they do not overtly refer to Laura’s death, it would be easy to show that they are closely related to the others, with the result being an unbroken sequence from 246 to 254. Referring to poems 249-254 as “i sonetti del presentimento,” Amaturo comments that “costituiscono quasi una sorta di poemetto unitario e continuato” and that they create a situation “quasi più narrativa che lirica, di presagio di morte” (319).
instances, in part 2 such encounters are an intimate component of
the textual fabric, a fact that has a very practical correlative: if one
does not trust one’s own experience as a reader of the *Fragmenta*,
one need only meditate on the experience of one’s students to re-
alyze that the poems of part 2 are in general easier to read than
those of part 1. This is due to the narrativity that has been infused
into the text; the static self-referential discourse that dominates
part 1 has given way to a discourse that has been simplified by the
intrusion of narrative elements, by the linear flow of the miniature
vignettes or stories that one frequently encounters. Emblematic
of this shift in tonality are those two structural columns of the *Frag-
menta*, canzoni 23 and 323: the storybook linearity that charac-
terizes the presentation of the symbolic dramas in 323, “Standomi
un giorno solo a la fenestra,” not for nothing called the *canzone
delle visioni*, contrasts strikingly with the compact impenetrability
that (despite its narrative program) characterizes the *canzone delle
metamorfosi*, “Nel dolce tempo de la prima etade.” Metamorphosis,
as a way of changing without changing, moving forward without
moving, is a hallmark of part 1, and canzone 23 perfectly reflects
these principles in its linguistic texture: dense, convoluted, an icon
to reified—or, as Petrarch would put it, petrified—immobility.52
The story-like flow of 323, on the other hand, is a stylistic correla-
tive of the governing principles of part 2: time flows, nothing lasts,
death comes. As the poet declares in the same canzone, “ogni cosa
al fin vola” (323.55).

Petrarch’s methods for infusing narrativity into part 2 may be
classified as follows.

1. The use of direct discourse, more prevalent in part 2 than in
part 1. By my calculation, direct discourse occurs in 45 poems in
part 1 and in 25 poems in part 2; due to the disparity in the size of
the two parts (263 poems in part 1, 103 in part 2), these figures
indicate a higher proportion of poems containing direct discourse
in part 2 than in part 1 (24.27% as compared to 17.11%).53 More-

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52 The impenetrability of canzone 23 is metrical as well: endowed with a 20 verse
strophe of 19 hendecasyllables and only one *settenario*, the stanzacic pattern of “Nel
dolce tempo” is the heaviest in the collection. Canzone 323, on the other hand,
presents us with an easily handled 12 verse strophe containing two *settenari* in the
*sirma*.

53 As part of his review of tense in the *Fragmenta* (“Petrarca e il tempo,” 1983),
Taddeo analyzes what he calls the “sottosistema del discorso diretto” (102-105). He
counts 47 sonnets that contain direct discourse. I count 70 poems that contain di-
rect discourse, of which 18 are not sonnets (17 canzoni, 1 madrigal), leaving a total
over, in part 2 direct discourse appears in major canzoni, of which a significant proportion are in dialogue form (either completely, like 359 and 360, or attenuatedly, like 264, 268, and 325). Thus, part 2 begins with 264, "I' vo pensando," a canzone that is based on a prose dialogue, the Secretum, from which it takes as its subject the inner conflict of its protagonist; as in the source, this conflict is rendered through a dialogue (attenuated, in that only the first pensier uses direct discourse) between two adversarial points of view. Canzone 268 contains a dialogue between the self and Love, who speaks in direct discourse, while in 325 we find a similar exchange between the poet and Fortuna, in which direct discourse is used by the lady. Of great importance are canzoni 359 and 360: 359 recounts a dialogue between the poet and his lady, who is at his bedside; in 360 the poet and Love argue their cases before the tribunal of Reason (who also uses direct discourse, so that we move from the dialogue to a mini-drama), in the same way that Augustinus and Franciscus argue before Truth in the Secretum. Dialogues are a textual way of making time palpable, as is indicated by their conspicuous use of such temporal/narrative props as "et poi demando" (359.13), "respond'io allora" (359.45), "e 'ncomincio" (360.9), "Il mio adversario ... comincia" (360.76-77). The use of direct discourse is a way of creating the illusion of reality in a text; thus, in Purgatorio 10, Dante constructs the dialogue between Trajan and the widow, rendered in direct discourse, to lend the illusion of a fourth dimension to the sculpted reliefs on the terrace of pride.

2. The use of a narrative ploy regarding a "second love" whom he rejects in order to remain true to Laura, called, with narratological emphasis, "l mio primo amor" (270.45; see also 271, 280). Indeed, the idea of a second love seems to belong to a category of

of 52 sonnets compared to Taddeo's 47 (because he does not give a list, I cannot compare our findings, except to say that I include the 21 sonnets from which he cites examples). Taddeo does not use the two parts of the collection as a criterion for analyzing his data.

54 In part 1 dialogue is found in four sonnets (84, 150, 222, 262) and one canzone (119).


56 Late in his life Petrarch erased the ballad "Donna mi vene spesso ne la mente" from the position it occupied as number 121 in the Fragmenta and replaced it with the current madrigal "Or vedi, Amor." Wilkins suggests that "Petrarch's dissatisfaction with Donna arose from the fact that it appears to speak of an interfering love" (180). The care shown in removing references to another love from part 1 does not apply in part 2, where such references are found in poems 270 and 271.
“doubles” that Petrarch creates for part 2 and that could be seen as a means of drawing our attention to the deep meaning of part 2, to the flow of time implied by the very existence of a part 2 that follows a part 1. These “doubles” include: the unique celebration of two loves in 266, the double anniversary poem for Laura and Cardinal Colonna; the commemoration, in 269, of the double death of this same duo, who both died of the plague in 1348; and, on a formal level, the presence, as the only sestina of part 2, of the two-part or double sestina, poem 332, a sestina that has been extended by a factor of two to double its normal length.

3. Clinging to past narrative. Under this rubric I would place:
a. poems on Laura’s resistance, the severe onestà that he now realizes was beneficial to him, as in 289.5-6: “Or comincio a svegliarmi, et veggio ch’ella / per lo migliore al mio desir contese” (see also 290, 297, 315, 351). Her chastity is a matter of historical record and should be of no particular importance now, a principle whose validity we can test by imagining that Beatrice and Dante discuss her erstwhile sexual virtue when they meet in the Earthly Paradise.
b. poems on Vaucluse as a place consecrated to her, a place where the “fior’, frondi, herbe, ombre, antri, onde, aure soavi, / valli chiuse, alti colli et piaggie apriche” (303.5-6) bespeak her (see also the poems in 4a).
c. poems that rehearse the narrative of her life and death, such as poems that mention the day he first saw her (284, 298); poems on her last day, “l’ultimo giorno et l’ore extreme” (295.5); poems on the date of her death, e.g. 298, which belongs to this category as well as to the first, since the “sempre dolce giorno et crudo” (13), April 6, is both the day of her death and the day of his enamorment. Here we should note also 336, where he specifies that her soul left her body “n mille trecento quarantotto, / il dí sesto d’aprile, in l’ora prima” (12-14).
d. poems devoted to their last meeting, such as 314 (“Questo è l’ultimo dí de’ miei dolci anni” [8]), 328 (“L’ultimo, lasso, de’ miei giorni allegri” [1]), 329 (“O giorno, o hora, o ultimo momento” [1]), and 330, in which he imagines what she said to him with her gaze during their last encounter.
e. poems on her arrival in heaven. Most notable is 346, where the angels and other heavenly citizens gather round Laura on her “primo giorno,” asking what “nova beltate” has arrived; she, although perfectly happy with her new “albergo,” turns back now
and then to see if the poet follows (“et parte ad or ad or si volge a tergo, / mirando s’io la seguo, et par ch’aspecti” [11-12]), and is concerned that he hasten to join her. Indeed, the poem ends with the temporally charged verb **affrettare**: “perch’i’ l’odo pregar pur ch’i’ m’affrettì.” Poem 326, although not as remarkable an example of the temporalizing of paradise as 346, again refers to her status as a newly arrived denizen of heaven, an “angel novo.”

4. The fashioning of a narrative regarding their present together. This category includes:

a. poems describing him in Vaucluse looking for signs of her: “Cosí vo ricercando ogni contrada / ov’io la vidi” (306.9-10; see also 280, 288, 301, 304, 305, 320). Although this search often results only in traces of Laura (“Lei non trov’io: ma suoi santi vestigi” [306.12]), it can also lead to more substantive results: thus in 281 his calling yields visions of Laura, “Or in forma di nimpha o d’altra diva” (9), which have materialized to the point where he can say that he sees her “calcare i fior’ com’una donna viva” (13). Indeed, she is sufficiently “donna viva” that he can specify her piteous attitude toward him: “mostrando in vista che di me le ’ncresca” (14).

b. poems in which she returns to console him. These poems constitute the logical next step after the successful search described in 281; her concern leads her to return with the express purpose of consoling her lover, as we learn in 282: “Alma felice che sovente torni / a consolar le mie notti dolenti” (1-2). In this poem, the process of materialization begun in 281, where she appears “com’una donna viva,” is crystallized in his recognition of her unique presence, manifested “a l’andar, a la voce, al volto, a’ panni” (14). She returns thus in 283 (“Ben torna a consolar tanto dolore / madonna, ove Pietà la riconduce” [9-10]) and in 343, where her consolation takes the form of listening to and commenting on his history—his life’s narrative—which causes her to weep (“et come inten
tamente ascolta et nota / la lunga historia de le pene mie!” [10-11]); in 285, on the other hand, she is the story-teller (“contando i casi de la vita nostra” [12]). This category (see also 284 and 286) is summed up by a verse in 285, “spesso a me torna co l’usato affecto” (7), which exemplifies the process whereby the affection she shows in death is projected backwards onto her life. Whereas, in the above poems, Laura is described as speaking but her speech is not expressed, in 279 and 341 she speaks in direct discourse, and in 342 and 359 she not only comes to him and speaks to him, but also sits on his bed and dries his tears.57
c. poems in which his thoughts rise to her in heaven, where they communicate with her, such as 302, where what she has to say to him extends for more than six verses of direct discourse, and 362, where both Laura and God speak to him, the latter responding to the poet's urgent request to stay in heaven with an entirely temporal injunction: “Responde:—'Egli è ben fermo il tuo destino; / et per tardar anchor vent'anni o trenta, / parrà a te troppo, et non fia però molto' (12-14). Thus, God (Whose direct discourse is the last instance of such speech in the *Fragmenta*) is like everyone else in the Petrarchan universe: concerned with time, which He counts out in ciphers, a not unimportant consideration in a text that we cannot read, discuss, or think about without encountering and manipulating numbers. Numbers signify time, as Dante tells us in the *Convivio* (in the same chapter in which he relates rhyme to time, as noted earlier): “Lo tempo, secondo che dice Aristotile nel quarto de la Fisica, è ‘numero di movimento, secondo prima e poi’” (4.2.6).

A key strategy in the fashioning of a present narrative is the literalization of the turning-back topos: from a trope of memory, in part 1, it becomes a literal description of her various returns to him. Thus, *rimembrar* gives way to *richiamare, rivedere, ricercare, ritrovare*, and the expression “tornami avanti”—where the verb *tornare* applies to her rather than to him—becomes a textual emblem for part 2 (see, for instance, 268.46, 272.9, and 336, where the opening “Tornami a mente” allows the poet to build up to the vivifying exclamation: “Ell’è ben dessa; anchor è in vita” [7]).

5. The fashioning of a narrative regarding their future together. Here I would place:

a. poems referring to an unattainable future, the chaste old age they could have shared had she lived: “Presso era ’l tempo dove Amor si contra / con Castitate, et agli amanti è dato / sedersi insieme, et dir che lor incontra” (315.9-11). Their virtuous colloquies are detailed further in 316 (“Con che honesti sospiri l’avrei detto / le mie lunghe fatiche” [12-13]) and 317, where in response to the burden he would deposit in her “caste orecchie,” she would reply with “qualche santa parola sospirando” (13).

b. poems in which he prays that she may meet him at his passing:

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57 Direct discourse is ascribed to Laura or her attributes more frequently in part 2 than in part 1: six times or 2.28% in part 1 (23, 87, 123, 240, 250, 262) versus nine times or 8.73% in part 2 (279, 302, 328, 330, 331, 341, 342, 359, 362).
“Piacciale al mio passar esser accorta, / ch’è presso omai; siami a l’incontro” (333.12-13); “et spero ch’al por giù di questa spoglia / venga per me con quella gente nostra” (334.12-13).

c. poems that display the other side of her alleged concern that he hasten to paradise; here he begs her to pray that he may soon join her (“prega ch’i’ venga tosto a star con voi” [347.14]), and is impatient as to precisely when this shall be: “Sarei contento di sapere il quando, / ma pur devrebbe il tempo esser da presso” (349.7-8).

6. Emphasis on the narrativity inherent in life in general, and in his own life, whose story he so enjoys recounting, in particular. Part 2 contains the bulk of the Fragmenta’s proverbial expressions relating to the fleetingness of life: “Veramente siam noi polvere et ombra” (294.12), “nulla qua giù diletta et dura” (311.14), “O caduche speranze, o penser’ folli!” (320.5), “ogni cosa al fin vola” (323.55), “Ah, nulla, altro che pianto, al mondo dura!” (323.72), “quante speranze se ne porta il vento!” (329.8). Regarding Petrarch’s own life and poetry, we find “Or sia qui fine al mio amoroso canto” (292.12) and “ch’i’ chiamo il fine” (312.13).

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According to the persistent reading of the Fragmenta that posits conflict in part 1 and its resolution in part 2, we could view the narrativity of part 2 as a textual analogue to the spiritual resignation these critics have perceived: a stylistic acceptance of the dictates of narrative that translates into a spiritual acceptance of the dictates of time. However, for those of us who are dissatisfied with the view of the Fragmenta that reads the ending as achieved resolution and conversion, I would note that Petrarch’s adoption of linear/narrative strategies in part 2 could be viewed as more anarchic than resigned. As he himself is well aware, he introduces these elements precisely where, from a traditional perspective, they should not be. He knows—indeed he tells us, in some sonnets located toward the beginning of part 2, where the course he will travel for the rest of the text is still being debated—that he is supposed to use Laura’s death, as Dante used Beatrice’s.58 He states

58 The terminology is, of course, Augustinian. For Petrarch’s relation to Augustine, besides those critics already mentioned, see John Freccero, “The Fig Tree and the Laurel: Petrarch’s Poetics,” Diacritics 5 (1975): 34-40, and, more recently, Sara Sturm-Maddox, Petrarchan Metamorphoses: Text and Subtext in the Rime sparse (Columbia: U. of Missouri Press, 1985) ch. 5. Sturm-Maddox’s reconstruction of an Augustinian subtext in the Fragmenta differs from Iliescu, Martinelli, and Foster in
this with great clarity in sonnet 273, where he begins by pointing to his incurable tendency to look backward when he should look forward—"Che fai? che pensi? che pur dietro guardi / nel tempo, che tornar non pote omai?" (1-2)—and then links this Orphic pose to the desire to re-find her here, on earth, rather than acknowledge her definitive departure:

Le soavi parole e i dolci sguardi
ch'ad un ad un descritti et depinti òi,
son levati de terra; et è, ben sai,
qui ricercarli intempestivo et tardi.

(273.5-8)

The tercets conclude by stating the Dantesque alternative: she is not to be re-sought on earth, but to be followed as a guide to heaven and sought there; only then will the fact that she is dead begin to yield its fruits, by protecting him from other temptations, less alluring than she was while alive. Only when reclassified as dead, i.e. immortal, will she cease to impede his voyage toward certainty, stability, and peace, and instead promote it:

Deh non rinovellar quel che n'ancide,
non seguir piú pensar vago, fallace,
ma saldo et certo, ch'a buon fin ne guide.
Cerchiamo 'l ciel, se qui nulla ne piace:
ché mal per noi quella beltà si vide,
se viva et morta ne deueva tór pace.

(273.9-14)

The last verse, "se viva et morta ne deueva tór pace," epitomizes the problem: although dead, she functions not as a promoter of peace but as its destroyer; the beneficial effects of her death are blocked by a poet who prefers to treat her death like her life. To continue with the Augustinian terminology, instead of using Laura's death in the manner outlined in 273, he enjoys it, in the sense that he inscribes it in narrative, he pickles it in the saline waters of time. Even heaven exists in time as a result of the conversations that take place there during his visiting hours.59 In other words, Petrarch's

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59 All represented heavens must exist in time. My point is that Petrarch once again does not exercise his option to limit the temporal constraints of language.

its understanding that choosing Augustine as a model does not necessarily imply that Petrarch believes he succeeds in emulating his model; all we know is that he says that he wishes he could.
acceptance of the dictates of narrative is governed by his nonacceptance: in part 1 narrative is avoided because the goal is to stop time, resist death; in part 2 narrative is invoked because in order to preserve her as she was he must preserve her in time. He thus adopts opposite and apparently contradictory strategies to achieve the same results. When she is alive, he needs to cancel time. When she is dead, he needs to appropriate it.

So, Petrarch both evades narrativity and confronts it because both postures figure in his dialectical struggle to overcome the forces of time. This fact is never more evident than at the text's beginning, middle, and end. The original beginning, according to Wilkins, is the present sonnet 34, “Apollo, s’anchor vive il bel desio,” an archetypal part 1 poem in which temporal sequence is invoked in the process whereby Apollo loved first what the poet loves now—“difendi or l’onorata et sacra fronde, / ove tu prima, et poi fu’ invescato io” (7-8)—only in order to be nullified: in that she is “la donna nostra,” both Apollo’s Daphne and Petrarch’s Laura, whom both together will watch (“si vedrem poi per meraviglia insieme / seder la donna nostra sopra l’erba” [12-13]), all identities are conflated and time ceases to exist. By contrast, our present number 1 is atypical. Its purpose is to establish temporal sequence: a verse like “quand’era in parte alt’uom da quel ch’i’ sono” (4) suggests narrative movement from the past into the present and seems to promise more such movement leading from the present into the future. In this sense, the poem imposes a beginning in quasi-narrative terms. But, by the same token, it also

Thus, Folena notes that in the Trionfo dell’eternità, which he calls Petrarch’s Paradiso, “L’espressione dell’eternità è affidata nei punti culminanti alla negazione degli elementi grammaticali della deisì temporale” (9); he refers to such verses as “non avrà loco ’fu’ sarà’ né ’era,’ / ma ’è’ solo in presente, ed ’ora’ ed ’oggi’ ” (67-68). Far from approximating eternity in this passage, Petrarch draws attention to the very temporality he says he wishes to escape. By contrast, Dante’s Paradiso does succeed in finding ways to approximate eternity; see my “Dante’s Heaven of the Sun as a Meditation on Narrative,” Lettere Italiane 40 (1988): 3-36.

Petrarch’s use of prima and poi suggestively echoes the Convivio’s definition of time as “numero di movimento, secondo prima e poi.” On 34 as the original number 1, see Wilkins, 147.

Regarding Petrarch’s handling of Ovidian myth, P. R. J. Hainsworth notes that his “disregard of the temporal sequence necessarily involves a destruction of narrativity: in its stead there is the re-combination of the words denoting the constituent elements of the myth in such a way as to point to the presence of the timeless” (“The Myth of Daphne in the Rerum vulgarium fragmenta,” Italian Studies 34 [1979]: 28-44; quotation p. 38). Likewise, Sturm-Maddox comments that Petrarch’s “representation of his innamoramento as a reenactment of mythological story is also a defense against temporality: the transformation of Daphne into the evergreen laurel symbolizes [the] evasion from the imperatives of linear time” (129).
subverts it, precisely by virtue of its position at the text’s beginning; a recantation at the outset makes no more sense than Guido da Montefeltro’s attempt to repent before sinning. “Forse / tu non pensavi chi’io lôico fossi,” says the devil to Guido as he drags him off to Hell: it is not logical—in narrative or in life—to renounce the “breve sogno” before engaging in it, succumbing to it, representing it.62 Moving on to the Fragmenta’s version of a middle, we arrive at 264, a poem whose resolution regards its failure to resolve: “et veggio ’l meglio, et al peggior m’appiglio.” Again, Petrarch could have avoided invoking the category of a middle altogether; instead, he gives 264 an illuminated capital and leaves a space signifying transition between parts 1 and 2, a transition his transitional poem then denies. Finally, we arrive at the end, or better to that place where an expressed desire for ending is followed by physical closure. As we know from sonnets 363 and 364, the poet is tired: “et al Signor chi’i’ adoro et chi’i’ ringratio, / che pur col ciglio il ciel governa et folce, / torno stanco di viver, nonché satio” concludes 363, and 364 echoes “Omai son stanco” (5). Biological weariness was used as a means of ending once before, in the closing congedo of the canzoni degli occhi. If that series of poems serves to dramatize the arbitrariness of all endings, then the fact that their mode of ending is echoed in the text’s ultimate ending might make us wonder: what makes the final ending less arbitrary than the forced resolution of canzone 73? The answer lies not in the poet’s will, which in the final poem is still commanding itself to be full,63 but in the conditions to which his will, like ours, is subject. None of Petrarch’s textual tactics can finally prevail over the truth of his assessment, applicable to texts as well as to ladies: “cosa bella mortal passa, et non dura.”

62 This comment to poem 1 in the Carducci-Ferrari edition: “Proemio; e dovrebbe’essere epilogo” (3).
63 With regard to the alleged conversion of the Fragmenta’s ending, I will give Augustine the last word. The saint is here commenting on the delays in his conversion, shortly to be achieved: “The reason, then, why the command is not obeyed is that it is not given with a full will. For if the will were full, it would not command itself to be full, since it would be so already. It is therefore no strange phenomenon partly to will to do something and partly to will not to do it” (Confessions 8.9; p. 172, italics mine).