



# The Author as Scribe. Materiality and Textuality in the Trecento

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# **The Author as Scribe. Materiality and Textuality in the *Trecento***

A dissertation presented  
by  
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to  
The Department of Romance Languages and Literatures

in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
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**The Author as Scribe. Materiality and Textuality in the *Trecento***

Abstract

In this dissertation, I explore the relationship between the material aspects of an editorial artifact and their literary implications for the texts it contains. I show how the interpretation of a text needs to be accompanied by an inquiry into the material conditions of its production, circulation and reception. This study is intended as both an investigation of the material foundations of institutions of literary study and a reflection on some often neglected sides of contemporary theorizations concerning textuality, writing, and media. My purpose is to show a paradigmatic example of the basic coincidence of textual datum and material unit, content and medium, verbal-visual message and physical support.

The dissertation is articulated in a theoretical chapter followed by three case studies. In the theoretical introduction, I provide critical reflection on and expressive response to the complex, non-deterministic interplay between cultural constructs and the media within which they are formalized and by which they are formed in the context of medieval Italian literature. First, I briefly outline the theoretical coordinates within which to consider the materiality of textual supports (*ostraka*, papyri, codices) as a key element for the adequate interpretation of the texts that they preserve. Next, I offer examples of the interdependence between the strictly textual and material characteristics of a literary product. I sketch out the interpretive implications of these connections from the points of view of composition, circulation, and reception. I purposely draw the examples from different textual cultures, mainly classical (Greek and Latin) and medieval (Occitanic and Italian), in order to test the general plausibility of my methodology of inquiry.

The first case study is conceived as a thematological inquiry. It offers a catalogue raisonné of the metaphors of the book and book production in the Dantean corpus. It studies, therefore, the description of the materiality of the book at the level of the enunciation. Books are a recursive figure in Dante's macrotext. The reference to the "libro della mente" in the early canzone "E' m'incresce di me sì duramente" prefigures the "libro della memoria" in the incipit of the *Vita Nova*. Moreover, the book is the metaphor for the revelation of the cosmos held together by bond of love ("legato con amore in un volume") at the climax of Dante's mystical vision in *Paradiso* 33. Dante's entire literary production is inscribed within the metaphors of the book, which is disseminated in poetically and hermeneutically significant places. In this chapter, I begin by charting Dante's images of and references to books in his corpus. Basing my analysis on Ernst Robert Curtius' historical study of the book as symbol, and Hans Blumenberg's gnoseological articulation of the metaphor of the legibility of the world, I then outline the various semantic realms that the metaphors of the book entails. On one hand, the hints at the book structure serve as meta-textual elements that guide interpretation, since they convey information on the book format, the typology of expected readership, and the expository order of the text. In sum, these metaphors of books and book production are chiefly concerned with the text's dramatizing its own problematic creation. For instance, the material elements implied in the address to the reader in *Paradiso* 10, 22 ("Or ti riman, lettor, sovra 'l tuo banco") underscore a precise choice of book format (the "libro da banco universitario") and a specific readership (scholars). On the other hand, the metaphorology of the book (and of the *Commedia* qua book) entails a more radical cognitive experience, since it signifies the *reductio ad unum* of scattered entities due to its nature as all-compassing semiotic vehicle. The final step of my analysis is to compare the interpretive indications inferred from references to the materiality

of the book embedded in the text with actual renditions of some early witnesses of the *Vita Nova*.

In the second case study, I explore the editorial and intertextual relations between Giovanni Boccaccio's autograph of the *Teseida* and two exemplars of the poem (a manuscript and an incunabulum, both produced in Ferrara in the 1470s and kept at Houghton Library, Cambridge, MA). First, I delineate the complex system of authorial personae that Boccaccio impersonates in the manuscript. Then, I describe how visual and verbal elements in the autograph cooperate to engage the reader in a multi-sensorial aesthetic experience. Next, I investigate to what extent the material configuration of the Ferrara exemplars comply with the hermeneutic guidelines materially embedded by Boccaccio into his autograph as a means of managing the reception and controlling the interpretation of the poem. I outline how these two exemplars reveal the importance of Boccaccio's editorial project in successfully inscribing his literary production within the canon of authoritative texts. In fact, the rich paratextual apparatus with which Boccaccio furnishes his autograph is the foundation upon which the *Teseida* grew into a classic and sprouted the proliferation of comments and accretions that surrounded the text of the poem.

The third case study focuses on Francesco Petrarca's *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*. Petrarca's songbook has been a privileged object of analysis for material philology since the publication of the fac-simile of the manuscript that preserves the autograph of the collection (ms. Vat. lat. 3195). The study of the autograph shows Petrarca's editorial project of associating the poet's activity with the scribe's in an ideal coincidence of literary expression and script, text and book, composition and folio. Basing my inquiry on the fac-simile, I argue that the autograph should be considered as an organized form of visual poetry. In fact, this exemplar can be thought of as an entity that systematically conjugates a linguistic/verbal

message with an iconic formation. The two are not simply juxtaposed, but rather they coexist in a sort of hypostasis, in which the iconic element affects the linguistic substance. On one hand, the verbal text brings about meanings that are of a linguistic type. On the other hand, it is structured as a medium that conveys meanings that are generally portrayed by the other order of representation (the visual). Therefore, the autograph delineates a project of integration between graphical and linguistic elements, in compliance with the classical and medieval tradition of visual poetry (from Simias' *taechnopagnia* and Optatianus' *carmina figurata* to the calligraphic production of the Schola Palatina). In the case of Petrarca's songbook, the iconic element does not imply an apparatus of images, given the extreme essentialism of his editorial endeavors. Instead, it is chiefly limited to the graphic execution of the linguistic sign: its system of majuscules and minuscules, its layout, the regulation of written lines and blank spaces, and the relation between verse and line. I will therefore indicate how the iconic character of the autograph can be interpreted as a series of logical relations between the poetic language and its graphic rendition through writing. My purpose is to show that this series of relations conveys a specific set of visual guidelines that lead the reader through the decoding and interpretation of the text.

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*a Francesco e Matteo*

Say it, no ideas but in things.  
W.C. WILLIAMS, *Paterson: Book I*

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## How to Do Words with Things

Per noi non si dà teoria senza esperienza storica.

G. FOLENA, *Volgarizzare e tradurre*

### 1. In limine

As he analyzes the process of composing the best possible speech, Plato depicts Socrates in the act of describing the activity of writing to Phaedrus (*Phaed.* 278 d 8 – e 1), young and passionate man of letters:

Οὐκοῦν αὖ τὸν μὴ ἔχοντα τιμιώτερα ὧν συνέθηκεν ἢ ἔγραψεν ἄνω κάτω στρέφων ἐν χρόνῳ, πρὸς ἄλληλα κολλῶν τε καὶ ἀφαιρῶν, ἐν δίκῃ που ποιητὴν ἢ λόγων συγγραφέα ἢ νομογράφον προσερεῖς;

On the other hand, if a man has nothing more valuable than what he has composed or written, and he spends long hours folding and unfolding it, pasting parts together and cutting them apart, wouldn't you be right to call him a poet or a speech-writer or an author of laws?

In a text where the heuristic and hermeneutic values of writing are critically anatomized and disputed, if not explicitly rejected, Plato offers a notable testimony of the physical, material, technique of writing a text. This description of the writer's procedures of composition, based on folding and unfolding the roll several times, cutting and pasting pieces in order to add or erase portions of text, is consistent with the ancient sources' report of Plato's maniacal anxiety for revision and rewriting.

The passage is particularly fruitful in conjunction with a letter that Marcus Tullius Cicero wrote to his friend and publisher Titus Pomponius Atticus (*Ad Att.* 16, 6, 4). Cicero asks Atticus to cut the prologue to the *De gloria* from his papyrus and glue a new one onto it. In fact, Cicero had already used the same prologue for the third book of the *Academica*:

Nunc negligentiam meam cognosce. de gloria librum ad te misi, et in eo prohoemium idem est quod in Academico tertio. id evenit ob eam rem quod habeo volumen prohoemiorum. ex eo eligere soleo cum aliquod σύγγραμμα institui. itaque iam in Tusculano, qui non meminissem me abusum isto prohoemio, conieci id in eum librum quem tibi misi. cum autem in navi legerem Academicos, agnovi erratum meum. Itaque statim novum prohoemium exaravi et tibi misi. tu illud desecabis, hoc adglutinabis.

Now check out my carelessness. I sent you the book *De Gloria* and in it the preface which is in book 3 of the *Academica*. This happened because I have a notebook of prefaces, from which I usually select when I have completed a work. Therefore, when I was already in Tusculum, since I did not remember that I had already used this preface, I threw it into that book that I sent you. But when I was reading the *Academica* while out at sea, I noticed my mistake. Thus, I immediately drafted a new one and sent it to you. Please, cut that one off and paste this one on.

The two short passages evoke a semantics of cut-and-paste, with which we are all but too eerily familiar. What is more, the two citations express the relevance of the material support of a written text for the understanding of its composition and consumption. In fact, both passages are relevant testimonies of how deeply the materiality of the text has affected the composition, transmission, and circulation of the textual patrimony that we now possess.

In this work, I explore the relationship between material aspects of an editorial artifact and their literary implications for the texts they transmit. I intend to provide critical reflection on and expressive response to the multifaceted, non-deterministic interaction between cultural constructs and the media within which they are formalized and by which they are formed.

In this introduction, I will sketch out the interpretive significance of the material features of a text (and of a literary text in particular). This introduction claims to investigate the material foundations of literary studies, and is a reflection on some often-neglected aspects of contemporary theorizations concerning textuality and media. My observations

briefly describe some methodological perspectives for a historically relevant approach to literary texts. The argumentative structure of this preface is articulated in three steps:

- i. First, I will briefly outline the theoretical coordinates within which to position the materiality of a text as a key element of a comprehensive interpretation of the text itself.
- ii. Next, I will offer examples of the interdependence between (strictly) textual and material characteristics of a literary product. I will then sketch out the interpretive implications of these connections in considering both the process of composition and the finished product. I will purposely draw examples from different textual cultures, mainly classical and medieval, in order to test the general plausibility of my methodology of inquiry.
- iii. Finally, I will delineate the three case studies that I chose as core objects of my analysis.

## **2. Paradigms for an Analysis of Materiality and Textuality**

The analysis of the material condition of a text is not new to literary criticism. Disciplines such as paleography, codicology, papyrology, and bibliography have served as major research tools in the study of ancient and pre-modern texts. Rooted in the positivistic tradition of the nineteenth century *Hilfswissenschaften*, their technical contribution to the study of books as historical artifacts has nonetheless very rarely been considered of significant hermeneutic value for the examination of the strictly literary aspects of the text contained therein and its dynamics of production, consumption, and circulation. A major ambition of this study is to bridge the gap between technical assessment and interpretive and aesthetic evaluation.

Classical philologist Giorgio Pasquali theorized, *si parva licet*, a similar approach in his justly celebrated article “Paleografia quale scienza dello spirito” (“Paleography as Science of the Spirit”).<sup>1</sup> Following his mentor Luigi Schiapparelli’s practice, Pasquali understood paleography not in terms of a mechanical and exterior description of script forms, but rather as an organic historical methodology of reconstructing the development of writing as a salient aspect of human civilization. Nevertheless, Pasquali’s approach promoted documentary analysis as a way of attaining a more informed reconstruction of classical antiquity. The purpose of my study, rather, is ultimately rooted in literary criticism, in that it attempts to more closely relate the analysis of technical material aspects to literary interpretation. Specifically, I propose a moratorium on the ongoing process of dematerialization of texts that characterizes most theoretical approaches to literature, in order to anchor texts to their sensible nature. In Stephen Knight’s words, manuscripts present “lots of odd things you don’t expect to find”,<sup>2</sup> which have momentous implications for the texts they preserve. Texts cannot be removed from their historical specificity and treated as representations that exist independently of their material circumstances. Readers manipulate objects. To put it in Roger Chartier’s words, “reading is not uniquely an abstract operation of the intellect: it brings the body into play, it is inscribed in a space and a relationship with oneself or with others”.<sup>3</sup>

The conceptual foundations for the study of textual materiality and its relevance within literary interpretation can be traced back to a constellation of texts from different critical fields. In this section, I intend to bring into the discussion some of the major works

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<sup>1</sup> See PASQUALI 1933.

<sup>2</sup> KNIGHT 1983, p. 46.

<sup>3</sup> CHARTIER 1994, p. 8.



that imply the necessity of reading a text together with its material condition. However, the purpose of this section is neither to provide a complete bibliographical essay (or a narrative of the development of a material-philological approach to literature), nor to systematically endorse the methods described *in toto*. Instead, this section singles out individual features from a *corpus* of theory (arbitrarily, one may say), from which a material approach to the literary text can be gauged. On this note, two cautionary forewarnings seem necessary.

Firstly, the theorists mentioned in this section are not necessarily literary critics. The attention they dedicate to literary texts is often marginal, in that they relate literature to other forms of written communications and other modes of expression (oral, televisual, audio, graphic, etc.). Their interest in literary texts is often limited to the notion of literature as a specific system for organizing, associating, and storing textual materials. They inquire into those institutions, such as archives or libraries, which interact with literary documents by functioning as repositories or channels of transmission. They investigate literature as a socially coded product and a materially defined artifact: “[...] the functions of writing always correspond to the type of materials used, and therefore those functions correspond to the typologies of products created”.<sup>4</sup> In this study, on one hand, the focus of attention will be definitely restricted to literary texts and to practices of literary history and criticism. On the other hand, greater attention will be paid to the interaction between literary texts and formats that preserve them, rather than to writing as a technology.

Secondly, most of the theorists mentioned in this section share the conviction, to different degrees, that history of communication is characterized by moments of fracture, revolutionary watersheds, and great divides: e.g., the invention of writing, the formalization

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<sup>4</sup> PETRUCCI 1993, p. 2.

of alphabetic scripts, the invention of printing, etc. These so-called *Great Divide* theories<sup>5</sup> can be fruitfully applied to the history and theory of instruments of literary production and composition, though some provisos are necessary. In particular, they are useful in describing a specific phenomenology, even when they fail to provide an explanation based on valid evidence, or when this explanation is merely a conjuncture. More precisely, the set of theoretical instruments that I intend to promote here, however incomplete, contributes to the understanding and interpretation of the specific ways in which texts are written and read, even if they do not produce a direct linkage between literacy and modes of thinking (which was, at least partially, the intent of the ‘Great Divide theorists’). In Mary Carruther’s somewhat skeptical words, “[...] neither the prevalence nor the form of written materials in a culture should [...] be taken as any sure indication of those people’s *ability* to think in rational categories, or of the structures those categories may take”.<sup>6</sup>

*Le geste et la parole (Gesture and Speech)*<sup>7</sup> by French anthropologist and archeologist André Leroi-Ghouran offers a fascinating (if controversial) perspective on the role played by technological instruments in human evolution. The point that is relevant to this discourse is the close and fundamentally deterministic relationship instituted between language and manual technique in the historical development of cognitive abilities:

When techniques within the city walls began to prepare the ground for the world of today, when space and time became organized within a geometrical network that captured both the earth and the heavens, then rationalizing thought began to overtake mythical thought. Symbols were linearized and gradually adapted to the flow of verbal language until graphic phonetization finally culminated in the alphabet.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See CHANDLER 1995, and FIORMONTE 2003, pp. 23-53.

<sup>6</sup> CARRUTHERS 1990, p. 32

<sup>7</sup> See LEROI-GHOURAN 1993.

<sup>8</sup> LEROI-GHOURAN 1993, p. 216.

Leroi-Ghouran weaves a causal nexus between graphical mechanisms, the act of writing, verbal expression, and rational thinking. The development of language is synchronic with the evolution of technique: between a system of knowledge, its graphical reification, and its material support, there is a relationship of reciprocal and dynamic influence. With considerable justification, this approach has often been charged with technological determinism. A similar accusation has been directed against social anthropologist Jack Goody and literary historian Ian Watt's influential article on the "consequences of literacy". Using classical Greece as a case study, the authors argued for the dependency of rational thought upon alphabetic literacy, underscoring

[...] the fact that writing establishes a different kind of relationship between the word and its referent, a relationship that is more general and more abstract, and less closely connected with the particularities of person, place and time, than obtains in oral communication.<sup>9</sup>

Literacy, then, would foster a form of rational, logical, and skeptical thinking, since it would allow for a separation of the text from its immediate context, and make comparative analysis possible.

A number of well-known scholars reached similar conclusions, namely an academically heterogeneous group from the University of Toronto generally referred to as the "Toronto School". Extensive public and private exchanges of ideas and bibliographical influences and contacts characterize the work of this group, which can be interpreted as a somewhat cohesive and coherent intertext about the role of writing and writing technologies in human culture. The main proponents of this cultural experience are historian of English literature Walter J. Ong, classical philologist Eric Havelock, political economist and social scientist Harold A. Innis, and cultural theorist Marshall McLuhan. Even if many of their

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<sup>9</sup> GOODY and WATT 1963, p. 321.

major assumptions have at times been disputed and charged with oversimplification, their argumentation is still suggestive and inspirational. In fact, their brilliant collection and discussion of the properties of literacy is still fascinating, even though the explanation of those properties is no longer entirely defensible, nor is it formulated in appropriate scientific rhetoric.

In his seminal essay on *Orality and Literacy*,<sup>10</sup> Ong initially describes the emergence of individual consciousness as a result of literacy. The act of writing, as he sees it, creates a distance between the originator of a message, the message proper, and its receiver:

By separating the knower from the known, writing makes possible increasingly articulate introspectivity, opening the psyche as never before not only to the external objective world quite distinct from itself but also to the interior self against whom the objective world is set.<sup>11</sup>

Ong applies this notion of the interiorization of thought to the description of the characteristics of written language (extensive vocabulary, articulated syntax, precision, closure). Finally, he infers the strict dependence of peculiar features of a number of literary genres upon writing and its fixation on material supports. In the case of modern narration, he identifies such features with a preference for clause subordination, linear plot lines, the sharp detachment between narrator and reader, and several others. Ong's conclusions provide a transformative (if not developmental and evolutionary) theoretical model for an all-encompassing history of literary forms that proceed from orality to literacy.

Well aware of Milman Parry and Alfred Lord's theory of Homeric formulaic poetic diction,<sup>12</sup> Havelock reconstructs the paradigm shift in Greek culture under the advent of

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<sup>10</sup> See ONG 1982.

<sup>11</sup> ONG 1982, p. 105.

<sup>12</sup> See LORD 1960.

literacy and alphabetic writing in his studies on Homer and Plato.<sup>13</sup> His alphabetic hypothesis relates the emergence of the logical and analytical thinking of philosophy (and, partially, historiography) to the organized and structured syntax made available by writing. Havelock specifically connects these accomplishments to alphabetic literacy:

The civilization created by the Greeks and Romans was the first on the earth's surface which was founded upon the activity of the common reader; the first to be equipped with the means of adequate expression in the inscribed word; the first to be able to place the inscribed word in general circulation; the first, in short, to become literate in the full meaning of that term, and to transmit its literacy to us.<sup>14</sup>

The advent of literacy, and specifically of literacy through alphabetic writing, conditions the content of thought (critical vs. didactic, rational vs. mythical, logical vs. pre-logical) as well as its form (memorized rhythmic narrative vs. argumentative prose, paratactic vs. hypotactic).

Havelock described the commonality between his own research interests and Innis' as a "matter of happy coincidence".<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, Havelock's own studies on the influence of technological changes in communication media seem deeply indebted to the latter's notion of 'bias' as the influence that forms of communication exert over their content and the role of communication in the rise and decline of cultural traits: "[a] medium of communication has an important influence in the dissemination of knowledge over space and time and it becomes necessary to study its characteristics in order to appraise its influence in its cultural setting".<sup>16</sup> Innis took on communication studies and history of the

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<sup>13</sup> See HAVELOCK 1987.

<sup>14</sup> HAVELOCK 1982, p. 40.

<sup>15</sup> HAVELOCK 1982, p. 42.

<sup>16</sup> INNIS 1995, p. 33.

media tangentially but pervasively. Starting his analysis with the peculiarities of Canadian economy and the relationship between center and periphery in terms of accumulation of wealth and ease of transportation (and communication), Innis eventually aimed to “trace the implications of the media of communication for the character of knowledge and to suggest that a monopoly or oligopoly of knowledge is built up to the point that equilibrium is disturbed”.<sup>17</sup> Frequenting classical philologists at the University of Toronto led him to explain his theories through media-related historical case studies. By investigating the role of papyrus in Byzantine bureaucracy, of parchment in Christian practice, and of paper in the diffusion of Islam, he inferred the theoretical principle that media are not only the material support but also the form of communication. Different elites control different media of communication. Different media bring about different cultural scenarios and produce specific types of knowledge. Innis’s style, often hermetic and initiatory, and the complicated editorial status of his work made him hardly accessible to the vast audience. Nevertheless, McLuhan would explicitly recognize Innis’ influential role within the ‘Toronto School’ upon writing the introduction to a reprint of Innis’ *The Bias of Communication*: “I am pleased to think of my own book *The Gutenberg Galaxy* as a footnote to the observations of Innis on the subject of the psychic and social consequences, first of writing then of printing”.<sup>18</sup>

Even if the lack of a traditional scientific and rhetorical framework in his works often exposed him to sarcastic critiques within the scientific community, McLuhan, with his sometimes aphoristically presented analyses,<sup>19</sup> has had the strongest cultural impact (if not the strongest influence) of all the Toronto School theorists. Critical debate over his most

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<sup>17</sup> INNIS 1995, pp. 3-4.

<sup>18</sup> McLuhan 2005, v. 8, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> See McLuhan 1967.

controversial theses has persisted for the past fifty years and continues even now, as we experience McLuhan's long theorized "global village" in our daily activities. Even if some of the major denunciations of McLuhan's thought are undeniably plausible and have brought to light incontrovertible weaknesses and contradictions, one has the impression that the most virulent criticism has sometimes failed to recognize the most fascinating and fruitful implications of his work. Among his most informed critics, semiotician Umberto Eco offers a clear example of this misguided condemnation.<sup>20</sup> Eco parades the whole tool-kit of semiotics throughout his takedown of McLuhan, so as to underscore the absence of such equipment in the latter's argumentation. Eco laments, in sum, the lack of a cohesive theory of signs in texts that were not intended to provide any. For instance, Eco critiques McLuhan's notion of medium as too broad and imprecise, in that it does not distinguish between medium proper, channel, and code: "To say that the alphabet and the street are 'media' is lumping a code together with a channel".<sup>21</sup> However, the narrowness of this terminological assessment prevents him from appreciating the more relevant and intriguing aspect of McLuhan's notion of medium, i.e. the repercussion of the form of the medium onto sensorial experience and cognitive processes as a whole, as well as the interaction between human beings and their material environment in terms of communicative practices.

In *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, McLuhan offers a negative evaluation of print culture as a factor of loss for symbolic non-linear thought, and as an agent of impoverishment of irrational expression. In doing so, he outlines a mutual correspondence between communicative technologies and intellectual categories:

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<sup>20</sup> See ECO 1986.

<sup>21</sup> ECO 1986, p. 138.

That the abstracting or opening of closed societies is the work of the phonetic alphabet, and not of any other form of writing or technology, is one theme of *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. On the other hand, that closed societies are the product of speech, drum, and ear technologies, brings us at the opening of the electronic age to the sealing of the entire human family into a single global tribe.<sup>22</sup>

Changes in communication practices bring about structural transformations at an economic, social, and political level. Communication practices involve the interiorization of media, the alteration of the ratio between senses, and a change in intellectual dynamics of understanding:

My suggestion is that cultural ecology has a reasonably stable base in the human sensorium, and that any extension of the sensorium by technological dilation has a quite appreciable effect in setting up new ratios or proportions among all the senses. Languages being that form of technology constituted by dilation or uttering (outering) of all of our senses at once, are themselves immediately subject to the impact or intrusion of any mechanically extended sense. That is, writing affects speech directly, not only its accident and syntax but also its enunciation and social uses.<sup>23</sup>

McLuhan's major focus is on the sensorial and cognitive outcomes of the absorption of specific technologies. In his opinion, these repercussions are made less visible because of the persistent compulsion of media analysts to split form and content, message and physical support. On the contrary, media affect cultural conventions at all levels, and condition not only the way the message is delivered, but also the substance of the message proper. Quoting extensively from Henry J. Chaytor's underappreciated essay *From Script to Print*,<sup>24</sup> McLuhan offers the example of the cultural implications of manuscript culture: "The manuscript shaped medieval literary conventions at all levels".<sup>25</sup> The manuscript as format, that is, conveyed a specific set of connotations in terms of writing, reading, and circulation of a text:

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<sup>22</sup> MCLUHAN 1967, p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> MCLUHAN 1967, p. 35.

<sup>24</sup> See CHAYTOR 1950, pp. 1-10.

<sup>25</sup> See MCLUHAN 1967, pp. 86-90: 86.



among these, a more than flexible orthographical and grammatical standard, a strict and “unoriginal” adherence to a set of stylistic and rhetorical components, a mixed oral and written circulation, forms of textual reproduction that often resemble modern notions of plagiarism and piracy, etc.

In this study, I derive two significant hermeneutic components from McLuhan’s argumentation. Firstly, as already mentioned, the strong conviction and pronouncement of a tight connection (in fact, a substantial correspondence) between content and medium, message and physical support, text and material; secondly, certain organizational aspects of McLuhan’s discursive strategy. In fact, McLuhan’s rhetorical schemes exercise a strong influence on both the argumentative outline and the expositive order of this introduction. Specifically, the choice of examples from sometimes radically different cultural environments in the next sections is indebted to McLuhan’s perception of his own writing as “developing a mosaic or field approach to its problems”.<sup>26</sup> However, my analysis eventually aims to comply with standard academic scholarship, in that it does not reject definitions of terms or critical evaluation of evidence, and it does favor degrees of certainty and skepticism.

The theories of literacy formulated within the Toronto School have often been accused of a poor scientific method, since they fail to sustain brilliant intuitions with reliable data. Upon dealing with McLuhan’s notion of the repercussions of literacy on modes of thought, David R. Olson underscored its failure to provide precise causal explanations: “To appeal to the visual sense modality as providing linearity of thought is good metaphor but poor science”.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> McLuhan 1967, [p. vi].

<sup>27</sup> Olson 1994, p. 37.

Rather than relying on a 'strong' version of the Toronto theories and similar models of literacy, I intend to make use of a 'weaker' interpretation of them. A weaker version of these models allows us to use their hermeneutical capacity without having to acknowledge their philosophically dangerous and ideologically slippery disadvantages. It allows us to eschew their often-mentioned technological determinism, which assumes technology is the only driving force of progress in human civilization, disregarding other major political and social factors of impact. It allows rejecting a certain tendency towards logocentrism, which is often the result of an ill-concealed Hegelian approach that exalts Western civilization as the utmost anthropological peak in mankind's advancement. It counteracts the tendency to overlook what is lost in any alleged progress for the unilateral praise of what is newly accomplished: writing might indeed foster philosophical and critical reasoning, but Homeric poems are the vestiges of an oral culture; alphabetic writing is an easy system of representation for Indo-European languages, but pictographic writing occasions a different way of thinking about language; efficient bureaucracy and widespread schooling allow citizens to actively participate in the political, economical, and cultural life of the state, but they are also a possible means to control the individual and suppress dissent. Finally, a weak model unveils a series of unresolved dualisms and oppositions (aural/visual, inaccurate/quantifying, subjective/objective), the critique of the mystifying nature of which has been one of the still highly praised endeavors of the however declining 'Age of Theory'.<sup>28</sup>

In sum, the theoretical models that I have sketched out can be applied to literary texts either in a rigorous manner, or in a more 'lax', less fundamentalist one. The former stresses the role of literacy as an autonomous active force in restructuring thought, with extensive psychological and cultural implications: "New ways of reading gave rise to new

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<sup>28</sup> Objections to a strong model of literacy are in: STREET 1984, pp. 44-65; FINNEGAN 1988, pp. 1-14; THOMAS 1992, pp. 15-28; OLSON 1994, pp. 1-20; and JOHNSON 2010, pp. 3-16.

ways of writing texts and both gave rise to new ways of thinking about the world and about the mind”.<sup>29</sup> The latter, on the other hand, suspends any judgment on wider claims, focusing instead on the description of specific and culturally circumstantiated cases of interaction between literacy and society. This schematic partition is analogous to Brian Street’s persuasive distinction of two theoretical models of literacy: the autonomous and the ideological. The autonomous model defines an absolute schema of literacy that is thought to promote empathy, abstract reasoning, rationality, critical thinking, *sképsis*. In the ideological model, practices of literacy are “already embedded in an ideology and cannot be isolated or treated as ‘neutral’ or merely ‘technical’”.<sup>30</sup> The ideological approach, that is, eschews the claims of cognitive consequences of literacy and emphasizes its cultural significance for specific social groups within specific chronological and geographic parameters. Technical aspects and ideological components are considered intrinsically involved in social and cultural structures.

In this inquiry, I intend to take advantage of the less totalizing application and weaker version of the aforementioned theoretical models. Based on this version, it is not the modes of thought that change, but it is rather the way in which thinking is perceived and reflected upon. Literacy does not directly affect cognitive abilities, but it does have repercussions within cultural environments and communities. Significant to this claim are the studies of Elizabeth Eisenstein and Brian Stock. In *The Printing Press As an Agent of Change*, Eisenstein describes how the invention of printing shapes a new “commonwealth of learning”.<sup>31</sup> By focusing on the consequences of such technical aspects as typographical

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<sup>29</sup> OLSON 1994, p. 143.

<sup>30</sup> STREET 1984, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> See EISENSTEIN 1979, pp. 137-142.

reproducibility and fixity, she stresses the role of printing as a technological precursor to the Reformation (due to the opportunity that it offered for an unmediated reading of the *Scriptures*) and modern science (since it allowed for an accumulative research tradition). In *The Implications of Literacy*, Stock connects the more widespread diffusion of literacy around the twelfth century CE to the birth of heretical movements, through alternative theological versions of the sacred texts provided by reading communities, i.e.

groups of people whose social activities are centred around texts, or, more precisely, around a literate interpreter of them. The text in question need not be written down nor the majority of auditors actually literate. The *interpreter* may relate it verbally, as did the medieval preacher. It may be lengthy [...], but more normally it is short enough that its essentials can be easily understood and remembered [...]. Moreover, the group's members must associate voluntarily; their interaction must take place around an agreed meaning for the text. Above all, they must make the hermeneutic leap from what the text says to what they think it means; the common understanding provides the foundation for changing thought and behavior.<sup>32</sup>

For Stock, as for Eisenstein, literacy affects cultural perception rather than cognitive abilities: “As written language gradually reoriented man’s faculties of interpretation, the models produced could not help but feed back into the network of real social relations”.<sup>33</sup> Eisenstein and Stock do not imply a deterministic relationship between literacy and culture, but rather a complex series of mutual consequences of the dissemination of a technology, of a particular use of that technology, and of its unpredictable cultural implications. To the same extent, production and reception of literacy, and of that particular form of literacy that is literature, are affected by the material conditions in which literacy occurs. In this study, therefore, I allocate particular relevance to the ways texts, material supports, authors, and communities of readers interact.

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<sup>32</sup> STOCK 1983, p. 522.

<sup>33</sup> STOCK 1983, p. 456.

A materially inspired philological approach to literature is descriptive rather than evaluative. It offers an account of how different media affect different practices of writing and reading. It indicates how transformations in media are associated with distinctive shifts in both form and content of literary texts.

### **3. (Im-)Materiality and Composition**

Of the notions that we can derive from the theoretical principles mentioned in the previous section, the main tenet that can be inferred is that material formats do indeed affect the content and form of literary artifacts. More extensively, they can be said to generate meaning in themselves: they contribute to the semantic component of the literary work. Material processes and textual production cannot be thought of as independent entities. In fact, material forms determine expressive functions that control the very modes in which literary texts are produced. In short, the material support of literary communication structures and conditions its forms of expression and even the form and substance of its content.

The most evident confirmation to the notion of this interdependence is, perhaps paradoxically, the case in which the source of material support in the traditional acceptance is not provided, or, at least, is not provided for us to see. This is the case of oral literature. The notion of the formulaic nature of Homeric poetic diction as a testimony of oral poetry has paved the way to the connection between orality and specific literary strategies. Ong has convincingly associated literacy and linear plots with a narrative climax, while, on the contrary, oral narrative epics cannot be informed by the same textual organization.<sup>34</sup> In fact,

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<sup>34</sup> See ONG 1982, pp. 137-152.

in the case of Homeric epic narrative, the *fabula* immediately catapults the audience *in medias res*, into the very center of the action: an action that can be repeated infinitely.

The textual organization of narrative is also the critical object of Romance philologist Martín de Riquer. Riquer formulated an attractive hypothesis of the way in which material supports affected the evolution from medieval *romance* to modern novel. In Riquer's synthesis, the increasing sophistication in the technique of *entrelacement* from Chrétien de Troyes to later prose romances can be connected with the progressive diffusion and socialization of paper. In the second half of the twelfth century, Chrétien still writes his 'biographic romances' on small wax boards, a kind of non-flexible support, which in the end heavily constrains the ramification of the plot and limits the narrative to a single protagonist. Already one hundred years later, the diffusion of paper brings about a proliferation of interconnected adventures of distinct individuals: the *entrelacement* assumes a rhizomatic configuration, which can only be progressively controlled and organized through the more fluid structures of prose and a more manageable writing support like paper.<sup>35</sup> A merely material innovation initiates a change in literary structures and, from a broader perspective, can be said to imply a pluralistic and more diversified narratological structure.

In medieval scribal contexts, however, we must underscore that writing and orality are never completely divorced from each other, nor are composition and song. As Gustav Gröber conjectures in his seminal article on Occitan poetry,<sup>36</sup> troubadours would first create their compositions in written form, as their elevated technical and formal accuracy indicates. They would then proceed to reciting them either by heart or using *blätter* (or *rotuli*), i.e. sheets

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<sup>35</sup> See RIQUER 1985, pp. 189-198. See also BLUM 1937, and ORNATO 2000, pp. 19-32.

<sup>36</sup> See GRÖBER 1877. See also ZINELLI 2002.

with drafted versions or notes (in Gröber's terminology).<sup>37</sup> These crude exemplars would circulate in hypothetical leaves, of which we have no testimony. These leaves would have constituted the basis for the Occitan anthologies compiled in northern Italy in the fourteenth centuries. Since these texts were intended to be recited, the demand for written copies was scarce. Their translation into textual exemplars only occurred when Occitan poetry was already decaying, creating a necessity to preserve existing models.<sup>38</sup> The very rudimentary nature of those leaves would demand that the performer implement the text. It would also invite the scribe to 'improve' the text through oral recall or personal inspiration. The textual variance of the written compositions in different anthologies, their *mouvance*,<sup>39</sup> represents both the final outcome of a mixed oral and written textual circulation and the only trace of the theatricality and sociality of troubadouric poetry.

This type of mixed oral and written circulation and reception is witnessed by innumerable sources, even at a very late stage of medieval literature. For instance, Tuscan *novellista* Franco Sacchetti offers a vivid representation of an irritated Dante Alighieri caught in the act of blaming two artisans who were inaccurately performing parts of his poem.<sup>40</sup> As John Ahern underlines, what offends Dante is not the orality of the execution itself, but rather the poor level of the execution. A double circulation, oral and written, was taken for granted: "medieval literacy was by and large 'recitation literacy'".<sup>41</sup> As a matter of fact, Dante's own critical lexicon of composition in the *De vulgari eloquentia* is almost entirely orally

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<sup>37</sup> See GRÖBER 1877, pp. 337-344.

<sup>38</sup> See DI GIROLAMO 1989, pp. 4-9.

<sup>39</sup> See ZUMTHOR 1972.

<sup>40</sup> See AHERN 1997, pp. 214-215. Ahern cites Sacchetti's *novelle* cxiv and cxv, for which see MARUCCI 1996, pp. 345-350.

<sup>41</sup> AHERN 1997, p. 217.

based. In the third chapter of this work, we will come across Francesco Petrarca's devotion to (and fixation on) the aesthetic features of the written word. Nevertheless, Petrarca would regularly check the sound of difficult verses by reciting them out loud in order to verify the appropriateness of prosody and metrics, as he explicitly noted in the marginalia to some of his poems.<sup>42</sup>

The relationship between material and immaterial media, between orality and writing, does not condition the nature of the text only in ancient, medieval, or pre-modern eras. Russian poet Anna Akhmatova (1889–1966) would not print and publish her poems, so that she could avoid being faced with censorship and consequent incarceration under Stalin's regime. Therefore, she would organize the texture of her poems so that they could be more easily learnt by heart by herself and a small circle of friends. The linguistic and stylistic dimension of her poems is the result of this effort to committing them to memory.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, no modern edition can render the artistic and human experience behind that stylistic dimension. Nor can the linguistic, rhetorical and metric features of her work be fully understood without considering its tragically imposed 'secondary' orality.

The discourse on materiality elicits, above all, an attentive consideration of the physical conditions in which literary texts were developed and made available for an audience. We are used to approaching medieval *tenzoni* through the format that they assumed first in medieval songbooks or *canzonieri*, and then in modern critical editions, meaning that we treat them as discrete, unrelated, autonomous poetic texts. This tradition goes back to medieval editorial practices. Editors of medieval anthologies would often extract a poem

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<sup>42</sup> It is the case, for instance, of the note on the left margin of f. 3v in ms. Vat. lat. 3196, the so-called *Codice degli abbozzati*: “s(ed) dimisi [*scil.* versus] p(ro)p(ter) sonu(m)”. See PAOLINO 2000, p. 203.

<sup>43</sup> See WELLS 1996, pp. 66-67. See also HAIGHT 1976, p. 98.



from its discursive context, in order to comply with notions of authoriality. Often ignoring the rubric of the poem, they would organize a set of texts based on their authors, and not on the association to correlated texts. A *tenzone* could therefore be forcibly disjointed, its texts extracted from their macrotext, disseminated within a manuscript, and finally dispersed in various manuscripts. The indifference towards the relationship between missive and responsive texts is best indicated by the progressive disregard for their rubrics, which would have originally indicated the connection between two or more texts. This indifference conceals, often irremediably, the cooperative nature of the *tenzone* as genre, its dialogic structure, the often temporally and locally delimited coordinates of composition, and the evidences that these texts were often impromptu compositions. When we neglect the material features of the texts, though they often appear in intratextual references to the physical aspects of composition, we are condemned to overlook the very dynamic of composition and exchange that defines these texts. Claudio Giunta has scrutinized the ‘mechanics’ of correspondence within *tenzoni*:

il proponente scrive il proprio testo e lo fa giungere al destinatario, visitandolo di persona o servendosi di un messo. [...] Ricevuto il sonetto, il destinatario replica, sempre per via privata (e talvolta servendosi del messo inviato dal corrispondente [...]).<sup>44</sup>

The sender writes his own text and has it delivered to the addressee, either visiting him or using a messenger. [...] After he receives the sonnet, the addressee replies privately (sometimes through the same messenger the sender had used [...]).

For Giunta, we might consider *tenzoni* as a subgenre of epistolography. The coherence, cohesiveness, and immediacy of this poetic correspondence were granted by the material physiognomy of the originals. The *charta* with the missive poem would probably include a blank space for the responsive sonnet, as implied by Anselmo Calderoni’s response to a

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<sup>44</sup> GIUNTA 2002, pp. 19-20.

poem by Domenico di Giovanni, better known as Burchiello: “di mie risposte *dovresti* esser satio, / se più ne vuoi ho lasciato lo spatio” (clvi 16-17: “You should have had enough of my replies: / if you want more, I left some space for them”).<sup>45</sup> Not only would the space left in the *charta* secure the respondent with an immediate verification of the metric pattern with which to comply, but it would also provide the writing material and a physical limitation for the length of the composition.

The sort of material constraint that I have indicated is not specifically linked to medieval practices, or to parchment and paper. According to a much-debated testimony from Pliny the Elder (*Naturalis historia* 13, 77), Greek papyrus rolls would generally consist of around twenty sheets of papyrus glued together.<sup>46</sup> Provided that the effective length of a roll of twenty sheets would still vary in relation to the extension of the text, the graphic typology, and the editorial technique, a roll would generally be between 6 and 10 meters long.<sup>47</sup> This average size would evidently preserve a variable but discrete text or a section of a longer text, as in the case of multi-volume compositions. Accordingly, the terms βίβλος or βύβλος would indicate the fiber of a papyrus plant, the papyrus roll (a book), and the subdivisions of a literary text articulated in several sections (its division into ‘books’).<sup>48</sup> A similar interdependence between the length of a textual unit and the dimension of the material support occurs in literatures written in cuneiform. Throughout the successive cultures of ancient Mesopotamia, cuneiform was a language-independent script used to write on clay tablets, that is “smooth, carefully-shaped pillow-like rectangles of clay impressed, when still

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<sup>45</sup> ZACCARELLO 2000, p. 154 (editor’s emphasis).

<sup>46</sup> See SKEAT 1982, pp. 169-172, and JOHNSON 2004, p. 87.

<sup>47</sup> See CAPASSO 2005, p. 90.

<sup>48</sup> See CAPASSO 2005, pp. 67-68.

slightly damp, with marks made by a reed stylus, then left to dry in the sun (and occasionally baked in a kiln afterwards)".<sup>49</sup> Clay tablets share many features of book culture. Used at first to record administrative acts in Sumerian, by ca. 2500 BCE the Sumerians used cuneiform to write down poetic texts. Fully inscribed tablets could contain several hundred lines on each side. Tablets were grouped together in series to write down long literary texts, with strong resemblances to the case of series of several papyrus rolls preserving extensive compositions. For instance, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* would generally entail some twelve tablets of up to ca. 350 lines each. *Versus reclamantes* and catch-lines were recorded in the 'colophons' and used to indicate the correct reading sequence of the tablets. The breaks between tablets would generally coincide with a poetically relevant interruption, like the end of a narrative section: "some literary works are composed with typical tablet lengths in mind as an element of their structure".<sup>50</sup> As to this interdependence between textual extension and physical dimension of the material support, we might also compare the afore-mentioned examples of materiality with our contemporary forms of digital writing. A probative example is offered by so-called twitterature, that is the reduction (in fact, a rewriting into *formae breves*) of extensive literary masterpieces into as many as twenty tweets (fourteen hundred characters each, which correspond to a specific and discrete number of bytes).<sup>51</sup>

In conclusion: on one hand, the heterogeneity of the examples recommends a case-by-case approach, and prompts the application of Michele Barbi's enduringly valid methodological directive, according to which every text presents unique problems that

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<sup>49</sup> BLACK 2004, p. 43.

<sup>50</sup> BLACK 2004, p. 45.

<sup>51</sup> See ACIMAN 2009.

accordingly require unique solutions.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, this very heterogeneity once again confirms the plausibility of a general theoretical inquiry into the connection between content and container.

#### 4. Reading Materials

Some further examples will help determine the extent to which readers' response is also strongly influenced by the material through which a text is received. The first is once again taken from Petrarca, an author who paradigmatically dedicated his whole life and literary career to the editorial project of his own work, in an ideal coincidence between poet and scribe, artist and craftsman. In the partial autograph of his songbook (ms. Vat. lat. 3195), folio 5v lays out sonnet 25 of the last version we now possess of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* in this *mise en page*:

Amor piangeua (et) io co(n) lui tal uolta	Dal qual miei passi no(n) fur mai lontani .
Mirando per gli effecti acerbi (et) strani	Lanima uostra dei suoi nodi sciolta .
Or chal dritto camin ladio riuolta	Col cor leuando al cielo a(m)be le mani /
Ringratio lui che giusti preghi humani	Benigname(n)te sua mercede ascolta .
Et se tornando a lamorosa uita	Per farui al bel desio volger le spalle /
Trovaste p(er) la uia fossati o poggi /	Fu per mostrar qua(n)to e spinoso calle .
Et qua(n)to alpestra et dura la salita	Onde al uero ualor co(n)uen chuom poggi . <sup>53</sup>

Love wept, and I, with him at times	from whom I never kept too far a distance,
seeing by the harsh and strange effects	your soul released from his knots.
Now God has turned it to the right path,	with heart raising both hands to heaven:
I thank Him who so kindly understands	men's just prayers in His mercy
And if, upon returning to life of love,	to make you turn your back on sweet desire
you found hills or ditches on your way,	it would just show how thorny the path,
how mountainous and hard the climb	by which one must rise to reach true worth.

As it is most common (if not normative) in medieval songbooks, this sonnet is written on seven lines, with two hendecasyllables juxtaposed on each line. The reading

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<sup>52</sup> See BARBI 1938, pp. x-xi.

<sup>53</sup> BELLONI *et alii* 2003, f. 5v. The transcription from the fac-simile is mine. I have also attempted to reproduce the irregularity of the intercolumnar spaces.

proceeds first horizontally and then vertically, with odd lines on the left and even lines on the right. On the contrary, modern versions and editions reproduce Petrarca's texts in the thoroughly vertical layout firmly established in Renaissance *canzonieri* (already from the second half of the fifteenth century). In this case, a thoroughly vertical layout prevents the reader from appreciating the acrostic structure of the poem: a structure that forms the word *Amore* (not by chance, clearly, as it is also the first word of the sonnet) with the opening letters of the odd lines of the *fronte* of the sonnet. A reading of this poem that disregards its material aspects (layout, graphic presentation, script, paragraphematic features etc.) fails to acknowledge this peculiarly Gothic element, possibly a *hápax legómenon* in Petrarca's songbook, an unrepeated feature, that undoubtedly had its aesthetic counterpart.<sup>54</sup> A material awareness of the text is unquestionably necessary not only for an adequate comprehension of the editorial strategies of that text, but also for a complete evaluation of its critical and hermeneutic elements. The knowledge of the material conditions of a text alters its philological perception, and therefore its overall significance.

Given the medieval context of the last example, it might be appropriate to reflect on the loss of connotations and intertextual refractions that a version of Samuel T. Coleridge's *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner* would suffer if the rubrics and marginalia (allusive to the medieval practice of glossing) were inserted as endnotes or footnotes. And the implications of a similar disregard for the material condition of the text should rightly make us shudder when we consider the case of the calligraphic tradition of visual poetry that has traversed Western literature for the past twenty-three centuries. We will see in the third chapter of this dissertation how similar concerns may affect the overall reading of Petrarca's *canzoniere*.

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<sup>54</sup> See BRUGNOLO 2004, pp. 105-106.

The disturbing scenario in which historically specific writing formats are systematically trivialized has become more and more frequently the critical target of a literary criticism inspired by principles of material philology. In his seminal study on the visual poetics of medieval and early modern Italian poetry, H. Wayne Storey inquires into the differences between medieval scribal practices and modern editorial solutions. When a transcriptional format is presented in a standardized modern shape to comply with current visual patterns, the cultural and historical dimension of the manuscript is paradoxically minimized through a misguided devotion to philological accuracy, which may well be honestly concerned with the reconstruction of historically legitimate lexicon, syntax, and metrics. Yet, it often disregards the actual physical appearance of the poem on the page, the specificity of its *mise en écrit*. This is the case of Francesco Filippo Minetti's authoritative critical edition of Florentine poet Monte Andrea's complete works.<sup>55</sup> Among these works one finds the set of sonnets with which Monte engaged several Guelph and Ghibelline poets in a political *tenzone*, transmitted uniquely in one of the early collections of medieval Italian poetry (ms. Vat. lat. 3793).<sup>56</sup> The initial poem in the final installment of the *tenzone* is the *sonetto rinterzato* "Coralment'ò me stesso 'n ira". The horizontal presentation of the poem in the manuscript creates a peculiar "network of anticipated rhyme linkage, producing a sense of delay in the revelation of the subsequent rhymes".<sup>57</sup> Minetti, however, chooses to present the poem in the conventional modern vertical schema (one hendecasyllable on each line). In an extremely scrupulous descriptive and interpretive presentation of the poem, he separates words and punctuates the verses, in order to make an extremely convoluted and *claus* syntax

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<sup>55</sup> See MINETTI 1979.

<sup>56</sup> See LEONARDI 2007, and ANTONELLI 1983.

<sup>57</sup> STOREY 1993, p. 78.

intelligible for modern readers. Nonetheless, this approach fails to reproduce and in fact invalidates the peculiar visual ambiguity that is by all means a major part of the *intentio textus*. Ambiguities and textual complications were to be solved by the audience upon the act of reading, which the poet conceived of as a hermeneutic inquiry into both poetic diction and political practices. In fact, the unique rhetorical and metricological features of the poem constitute the ‘objective correlative’ of partisan and fundamentalist political positions within contemporary municipal conflict. The editor’s familiarizing practice certainly represents an attempt to lessen the modern reader’s estrangement from these texts. Nevertheless, “such a process amounts to the superimposing of one cultural matrix upon another cultural code”.<sup>58</sup>

An interesting example of a similarly self-aware and ideologically biased dismissal of the material condition of a text can be found in the *editio princeps* of Michelangelo Buonarroti’s poetic compositions, edited by his great-grandchild Michelangelo Buonarroti *il giovane* in 1623. The *Rime di Michelagnolo Buonarroti raccolte da Michelagnolo suo nipote* has been unanimously condemned by modern philologists for its censorial approach to the homoerotic theme of many of Michelangelo’s poetic compositions. What is more, their first editor imposed the structure of a Renaissance *canzoniere* onto extremely heterogeneous and often unarticulated texts. In the words of Leonard Barkan:

Di alcune poesie Michelangelo scrisse infatti sino a venti versioni differenti, apportando ossessivamente sempre nuove correzioni anche su fogli preparati per ospitare le stesure definitive dei componimenti. Utilizzando entrambe le facciate delle pagine e spesso orientandole in varie direzioni, in alcuni casi trascrisse su uno stesso foglio poesie diverse, in altri perfezionò la stesura di una lirica copiandola più volte su svariati fogli, secondo un’elaborazione compositiva e redazionale talmente intrecciata da rendere impossibile stabilire con certezza dove finisca una delle rime e dove inizi quella successiva.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> STOREY 1993, p. 76.

<sup>59</sup> BARKAN 2011, p. 375.

Of some poems Michelangelo wrote up to twenty different versions, obsessively producing new corrections even on folios intended to host final versions. Using both sides of the pages and often orienting them in various directions, in some cases he transcribed on the same folio different poems, in some others he perfected the version of a poem copying it many times in many folios. The strategy of composition and redaction he followed is so interwoven, that it makes it impossible to distinguish with certainty where one of the *rime* ends and a new one begins.

Firstly, the *editio princeps* represents an ideologically predisposed attempt to ‘protect’ Michelangelo’s memory from an alleged stain of sexual deviance and theological heterodoxy. Secondly, the editorial criteria of the *princeps* can be considered a deliberate strategy with the intent of inscribing Michelangelo’s poetic corpus within a classicistic canon by means of homogenizing his unstructured (or pre-structured) textual condition in line with standard late-Renaissance compilations. The *princeps*, in sum, is an interesting case of a quest for order and the superimposition of a historically illegitimate structure. In fact, the advantages in terms of legibility for a modern audience are completely counterbalanced by the lack of historicity in the editorial approach. The reader of the *princeps* is exposed to a text that, in fact, never existed: a compilation of poems so radically and systematically manipulated that one of its recent editors suggested that “[...] non sarebbe veramente lecito considerarle poesie di M[ichelangelo]” (“it should not be allowed to consider them poems of Michelangelo’s”).<sup>60</sup>

## 5. Transmission, Circulation, Reception

A concluding series of examples will allow for an expansion on the role of materiality within the broader context of the literary system. This introduction started with Plato’s fascinating description of a writer at pains with the re-reading and re-writing of a text. Most of the passage’s commentators interpret the text alluded to by Plato as written on a papyrus

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<sup>60</sup> GIRARDI 1964, p. 508.



roll:<sup>61</sup> long sheets of papyrus glued together with the text rolled up protectively in the internal side (the recto of the papyrus roll).<sup>62</sup> The reading of a papyrus in the Greek world would imply its slow unfurling, with the reader using both his or her hands, proceeding from left to right. When the reader was finished, he or she would furl the roll entirely back to its initial position. Scribes would leave blanks on the first sheet of the roll, the ἄγραφον (non-written sheet), since it was more susceptible to damage. Even when beginning or external titles were present,<sup>63</sup> or a tag (a σίττυβος)<sup>64</sup> was externally attached to the roll, these would easily deteriorate and leave the closed roll anonymous and unidentified. Therefore, author and title of a text would be regularly indicated in the most internal part of the roll, its ἐσχατόκολλον (final sheet).<sup>65</sup> However, the time-consuming and potentially damaging operation of repeatedly furling and unfurling the roll would discourage accessing the inner part of the papyrus to check the title. Consequently, the identification of a text was often inferred from the first written sheet of a roll, the πρωτόκολλον, where the work regularly started with its incipit. Therefore, the incipits themselves would be commonly used to refer to the works they belonged to. For instance, Virgil's *Aeneid* (according to his ancient commentator Servius) would be referred to as the *Arma uirumque*.<sup>66</sup> Analogously, Propertius' first book of elegies circulated with a double title. It was referred to as *Monobiblos*, as Martial calls it (xiv 189) due to the material feature of a book in which a single scroll contains the

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<sup>61</sup> See YUNIS 2011, p. 242.

<sup>62</sup> For this terminology, see TURNER 1978a.

<sup>63</sup> See CAROLI 2007.

<sup>64</sup> See DORANDI 1984.

<sup>65</sup> See CAPASSA 2005, pp. 95-99; see also SCHIRONI 2010.

<sup>66</sup> See CONTE 1974, pp. 45-64; BARCHIESI 1997, pp. 16-17; and BORGIO 2007.

entire work. Yet, it could also be called *Cynthia*, as Ovid knows it (*Remedia amoris*, 764), due to the incipit of the first elegy (that assumes an implicitly metatextual character). It is not irrelevant that the work is transmitted with a double title in the subscriptions of the best two mss. of the tradition.<sup>67</sup> To gesture to the overarching postmodern *épistème* in which we operate, it would be just as if, in sum, a virtual ancient Roman reader of a papyrus roll preserving Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* were to refer to this novella by calling it *Als Gregor Samsa eines Morgens* (*One Morning, When Gregor Samsa*). The element that I have described is the material pre-condition for the intertextual phenomenon which Gian Biagio Conte has so efficaciously named "specializzazione incipitaria della memoria ritmico-compositiva" ("a rhythmic-compositional memory focused on incipits"):<sup>68</sup> upon alluding to a text, the writer would recall (and therefore cite) the beginning better than other sections because he or she would have come across that specific section every time he or she would be looking for a text (as we now do when we recall what is on the spines of our books).

But there is a more pervasive effect of the hectic activity of re-reading and re-writing so suggestively depicted by Plato. The bookroll was characterized by a series of writing conventions that accounted for 'mise en page', division of texts based on stichometry, distinctive scripts for titles, and so on. As already noted, the very length of a text was strictly related to the notion of material unit (in fact, a roll).<sup>69</sup> In ancient texts, the division into books (here meaning sections: the *Iliad* consisting of 24 books) mirrors a division into rolls. We have seen how the terms indicating 'books of a text' and rolls were generally synonymic

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<sup>67</sup> The question is still debated. For a first approach and preliminary bibliography, see BUTRICA 1996.

<sup>68</sup> CONTE 1974, p. 10.

<sup>69</sup> See CAVALLO 1989.

in antiquity.<sup>70</sup> Even late-antique and medieval scholars were familiar with the correspondence between book and roll. To put it in Isidore's words (*Origines* 6, 13, 1): “codex multorum librorum est; liber unius voluminis” (“a codex consists of many books, a book of only one roll”). Since the first book of Diodorus Siculus’ *Bibliotheca historica* was too long, the author decided to “divide it into two parts due to its length” (1, 41, 10: “διὰ τὸ μέγεθος εἰς δύο μέρη διηρήκαμεν”). The transference from roll to codex of texts divided into several books contributed to the fixity of the sequential arrangement of the books.<sup>71</sup> On the same note, the common practice of beginning each book with a new preface was motivated by the necessity to make the consultation of these texts easier, given the material autonomy of the books/rolls.

The replacement of the roll by the codex has been described as “the most momentous development in the history of the book until the invention of printing”.<sup>72</sup> In some of his epigrams (xiv 184, 186, 188, 190, 192), published between 86 and 103 CE, Martial seems to consider codices of Homer, Virgil, Cicero, Livy, and Ovid as a mere extravagance. Until about 200 CE, therefore, we can infer that a codex for classical literature was the exception:

[...] the crucial date in the history of the codex is *cir.* A.D. 300, when the codex achieved parity with the roll. Thereafter the use of the roll rapidly diminished. By the fifth century, at least if we may judge from texts found in Egypt, the roll held barely 10% of the market; and by the sixth it had vanished forever as a vehicle for literature.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> *Supra*, p. 14.

<sup>71</sup> See CANFORA 1974, pp. 9 and 13.

<sup>72</sup> ROBERTS and SKEAT 1983, p. 1. See also REYNOLDS and WILSON 1968, pp. 29-31; CAVALLO 1975, pp. 83-86; CAVALLO 1983; ROBERTS and SKEAT 1983, pp. 35-61; CANART 1991, pp. 59-62; and CAPASSA 2005, pp. 113-130.

<sup>73</sup> ROBERTS and SKEAT 1983, p. 75.

In his seminal treatise on the philology of manuscripts, Alphonse Dain wrote that it would be worth inquiring into “les repercussions sur le livre”<sup>74</sup> (“the repercussions upon the book”) of the passage from roll to codex. These repercussions are evident both at a microtextual level and at a systemic level. In this section and the previous one we have seen some examples of microtextual repercussions. In contrast, one of the major systemic effects of that impact is represented by the loss and conservation of the classical literary tradition in textual form. In fact, conservation and preservation of ancient texts are often a variable of the book format: “[s]ingoli libri si perdono in età di rotoli, gruppi di libri consecutivi si perdono in età di codici” (“single books are lost in an age when rolls are used, groups of consecutive books are lost when codices are”).<sup>75</sup> The tradition of ancient historiography occurred in codices preserving groups of five books (pentads), which explains the common pattern of five-book lacunae.

But there is more. The activity of transcribing texts from a roll format into codices was a “major bottle-neck through which classical literatures had to pass”.<sup>76</sup> This material transference implied that scarcely read texts would not be transcribed into the new format. As a result, there might actually be no exemplar of these texts available anymore. In the case of texts consisting of several rolls, the unavailability of some of the rolls might result in a transcription beset with lacunae that might not ever be integrated. Guglielmo Cavallo rejects a deterministic connection between lack of transference of particular texts and loss of those texts, pointing out that “la trascrizione [...] fu un fatto non programmatico, non organizzato, non sistematico; non vi furono in alcun momento determinate scelte o selezioni di quel che

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<sup>74</sup> DAIN 1964, p. 116.

<sup>75</sup> CANFORA 1974, p. 37.

<sup>76</sup> REYNOLDS and WILSON 1968, p. 30.

doveva essere trascritto dall'una all'altra forma" ("transcriptions [...] were non-programmatic, non-organized, non-systematic. There never were specific choices or selections of what had to be transferred from one format into the other").<sup>77</sup> It is certainly accurate to maintain that these transcriptions happened over an extended period of time, in which texts could pass from roll to codex to roll, and the two formats often coexisted. It is also the case that transcription did not prevent loss, as the misfortune of most of Menander's (lost) production demonstrates. Nevertheless, despite the unexpected resistance and durability of papyrus itself as writing material (in *Naturalis historia* 13, 83, Pliny the Elder would marvel at the good condition of papyrus documents from two centuries before), the lack of external protection made the roll very susceptible to damage. No single literary text in papyrus roll has survived up to the present day (modern excavations notwithstanding).

The fragility, expense, and high-maintenance nature of papyrus rolls brought about its progressive substitution with more compact, resistant, and locally cheaper papyrus codices (eventually substituted by parchment codices). The process of material 'translation' from papyrus rolls to papyrus codices to parchment codices occurred throughout the first four centuries CE. It implied a corresponding practice of selection of the texts to preserve and hand down: a materially binding element that is at the base of the Western canon as we presently know it.

## 6. Materiality and Textuality in the *Trecento*

Literary production in the Italian peninsula throughout the fourteenth century (for Italianists, the *Trecento*) offers a peculiar vantage point for the analysis of the mutual relationship between materiality and textuality. I believe that the reasons for this peculiarity

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<sup>77</sup> CAVALLO 1989, p. 173.

will emerge in the three case studies that follow this heuristic preface. Nevertheless, a brief preliminary explanation will help infer some interpretive guidelines for the following chapters and make my discourse more consistent and cohesive.

Firstly, there is a quantitative and statistical reason at the base of my chronological selection. The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries witness a radical change in the system of book production and the establishment of a thriving book market. The documentation for these two centuries is far more comprehensive than what we have to account for the period up to the latest century of the monastic age, for which a material history of literature can only proceed by hypotheses, and any detailed reconstruction is illusory or, at best, fragmentary. The reasons for this increase in data are manifold, and can be only briefly pointed out here: among them, the differentiation of the cultural audience and the increase in private commissions, the concentration of centers of textual production and distribution within the cities, and the rise of a need for books in universities.<sup>78</sup>

Secondly, this increase in demand brings about a qualified microcosm of book specialists and a progressive professionalization of expertise (tanners, parchmenters, rubricators, scribes, illuminators, bookbinders, quill makers, etc.) that was salaried and thus needed precise regulations. Intermediaries (booksellers, *stationarii*) would centralize demand and offer. The growth of university libraries rationalized the access to texts and socialized it, often reducing the financial impact of book production and acquisition on the new readers.

Thirdly, the transformation of book production, distribution, and demand visibly affects the nature of the book format. Overall, the new philosophical and scientific culture spreading in universities has a major impact on the book as medium. In fact, the Gothic manuscript presents features that are strictly connected to Scholastic culture. According to

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<sup>78</sup> See ORNATO 2000, pp. 7-19.

Erwin Panofsky, elucidation and clarification were the major structural principles of Scholasticism.<sup>79</sup> Panofsky observes the self-exposure of these structural principles both in Gothic cathedrals and Gothic manuscripts. As to manuscripts, didactic and homiletic praxes necessitated an easy browsing of the immense repository of knowledge accumulated in classical, late-antique, and high-medieval periods. The attempt to order and organize these materials required formal and graphic devices to facilitate the location and retrieval of information. The systematic articulation of the *Summae* as codices with an overall plan of chapters and subdivisions reflects the ambition of the Scholastics to achieve a comprehensive and explicit order in their texts. This search for *manifestatio* implies both a scheme of literary presentation and a structural geometry aimed at maximizing the reading experience. On the one hand, the textual information massively occupies the writing space. On the other, the high concentration of information on the folio is methodically ordered through graphic expedients. The subject matter is organized according to principle of clarification and explanation in the expository order, and accessibility and usability in the material configuration of the text. It is indispensable to consider the general features of Gothic books in order to understand the attitude of compliance or reaction assumed by the authors studied here.

Fourthly, when we study fourteenth century codices, we have the privilege of comparing them to pre-Scholastic books, humanistic formats, and incunabula. This sort of implicit comparative approach underscores transformative elements, ruptures, and continuities: it allows us to question how changing technology affects the production and reception of visual and written information, from handwritten texts to print.

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<sup>79</sup> See PANOFSKY 1957, p. 30.

Finally, the *Trecento* witnesses a radical change in the very notions of authorship and authenticity. In the course of this dissertation, we will come across Bonaventure's justly famous fourfold classification of writers, which resolves all possible intellectual activities within the material and institutional frame of writing processes.<sup>80</sup> For now, it is enough to underline how authority, author, scribe, commentator, and compiler have mutually permeable borders. For instance, Bono Giamboni writes what is a vernacular translation of Lotarius' *De contemptu mundi* without mentioning his source text, presenting his *volgarizzamento* as a genuinely authorial primary text:

[...] la distinzione tra volgarizzamento e opera originale è assai elastica: se Bono tratta come cosa sua la materia del *De miseria*, rifacendone la cornice, eliminando e aggiungendo capitoli, riassumendo e ampliando, e guardandosi dal riconoscere il suo debito verso Lotario e le altre sue fonti, d'altra parte i racconti del *Novellino* (spesso, per quanto ci consta, abilmente rielaborati), son talora dedotti quasi alla lettera da raccolte affini.<sup>81</sup>

[...] the distinction between vernacular rendition and original work is very equivocal. On the one hand, Bono treats the subject matter of the *De miseria* as his own. He rewrites the frame, eliminates and adds whole chapters, summarizing and expanding, without recognizing his debt towards Lothar of Segni and other sources. On the other hand, the short stories of the *Novellino* (often, as it is known, skillfully reworked) are sometimes almost literally extracted from similar collections.

Armando Petrucci has outlined the influence of notary practices of authentication on the perception of autography, authorship, and authenticity, with particular reference to the trust ascribed to the written word, the attention to the precise transcription of a statement, and the correctness of quotations.<sup>82</sup> A notary act, an *instrumentum publicum*, required the direct participation of a notary (in fact, an author). It was supposed to be unique. It implied a progressive articulation into different phases of writing. It would explicitly show any sign of corrective intervention. We will find reference to similar writing and compositional practices

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<sup>80</sup> See *infra*, p. 76-78.

<sup>81</sup> See SEGRE 1963, p. 60. See also CAOCCI 2010.

<sup>82</sup> See PETRUCCI 1984.



in the three authors studied in this work. On this note, it is relevant to point out that our three authors operated in chancery environments or grew up in notaries' families, like most men of letters of their time.

The first case study is articulated as a thematological inquiry. It offers a sort of *catalogue raisonné* of the metaphors of the book and book production in Dante's *Vita Nova*. It studies, therefore, the description of the materiality of the book when it is embedded at the level of the 'enunciated'. Books are recursive figures in Dante's macrotext. The reference to the "libro della mente" ("book of the mind") in the early canzone "E' m'incresce di me sì duramente" ("I intensely hate myself") prefigures the "libro della memoria" ("book of memory") in the incipit of the *Vita Nova*. Eventually, the book is the metaphor for the revelation of the cosmos held together by a bond of love ("legato con amore in un volume") at the climax of Dante's mystical vision in the last canto of *Paradiso* (xxxiii 86). Dante's entire literary production is inscribed within the metaphors of the book, which is disseminated in poetically significant and hermeneutically decisive places. In this case study, I first chart Dante's images of and references to books in the *Vita Nova*. Basing my analysis on Ernst Robert Curtius' historical study of the book as symbol, and Hans Blumenberg's gnoseological implications of the metaphor of the legibility of the world (*mundus as liber*), I then outline the various semantic realms that the metaphors of the book entails. On the one hand, the hints at the book structure serve as meta-textual elements that guide interpretation, in that they convey information on the book format, the typology of expected readership, and the expository order of the text. In short, the metaphors of book and book production are chiefly concerned with the text's dramatizing its own creation. For instance, the material elements implied in the address to the reader in *Paradiso* x 22 ("Or ti riman, lettor, sovra 'l tuo banco", "Now, reader, stay by your bench") underscore a precise choice

of book format (the “libro da banco universitario”, according to Petrucci’s classification: university bench book, or university lectern book),<sup>83</sup> and a specific readership (scholars). On the other hand, the metaphorology of the book (and of the *Commedia* qua book) entails a more radical cognitive experience, in that it represents the *reductio ad unum* of scattered entities due to its nature as all-encompassing semiotic vehicle. The final step of my analysis is to compare the interpretive indications inferred from the reference to the materiality of the book embedded in the text with the actual renditions of some early witnesses of *Vita Nova*.

In the second study, I explore the editorial and intertextual relations between Giovanni Boccaccio’s autograph of the epic poem *Teseida delle nozze d’Emilia* and two exemplars of this poem (a manuscript and an incunabulum, both produced in Ferrara in the 1470s, now in the collection of the Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.). Basing my analysis on Marco Corsi’s systematic descriptive protocol of Boccaccio’s scripts,<sup>84</sup> I first delineate the complex system of authorial identities that Boccaccio impersonates in the manuscript. Then, I describe how visual and verbal elements in the autograph cooperate to engage the reader in a multi-sensorial aesthetic experience. Next, I investigate to what extent the material configuration of the Ferrara exemplars comply with the hermeneutic guidelines materially embedded by Boccaccio into his autograph as a means of conditioning the reception and controlling the interpretation of the poem. I outline how these two exemplars reveal the importance of Boccaccio’s editorial project in successfully inscribing his literary production within the canon of authoritative texts. In fact, the rich paratextual apparatus with which Boccaccio augments his autograph is the foundation upon which the *Teseida* grew into a classic and gave rise to the proliferation of commentaries and

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<sup>83</sup> See PETRUCCI 1979<sup>c</sup>, p. 141, and PETRUCCI 1983, pp. 513-517.

<sup>84</sup> See CURSI 2013.

accretions that came to materially surround the poem. By conducting this study under the aegis of material philology, I once again intend to show how the interpretation of a text needs to be accompanied by an inquiry into the material conditions of its production, circulation and fruition. My purpose in the second case study is therefore to show a paradigmatic example of the basic concurrence of textual datum and material unit, content and medium, verbal-iconic message and physical support.

The third and final case study focuses on Petrarca's *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*. Petrarca's songbook has been a privileged object of analysis of material philology since the publication of the fac-simile of the manuscript that preserves the partial autograph (or holograph) of the poetic collection (ms. Vat. lat. 3195). The study of the holograph shows Petrarca's editorial project of ideally associating the poet's activity with the scribe's, in a peculiar coincidence of literary expression and script, artistic creation and writing, text and book, composition and folio. Basing my inquiry on a close analysis of the sestinas in the fac-simile, I argue that the holograph should be considered an organized form of visual poetry. In fact, this exemplar can be thought of as an entity that systematically and purposely conjugates a linguistic/verbal message with an iconic formation. The two are not simply juxtaposed, but rather they coexist in a sort of hypostasis, in which the iconic element affects the linguistic substance. On the one hand, the verbal text brings about meanings that are of a linguistic nature. On the other hand, it is structured as a medium that conveys semantic implications that are generally portrayed by the other order of representation (the visual). Therefore, the autograph delineates a project of integration between graphic and linguistic elements, in compliance with the classical and medieval tradition of visual and concrete poetry (from Simmias' *taechnopagnia*, to Optatianus' *carmina figurata*, to the calligraphic production of those authors operating within the *Schola Palatina*). In the case of Petrarca's

songbook, the iconic element does not imply an apparatus of images, given the extreme essentialism of his editorial endeavors. Instead, it is chiefly limited to the graphic execution of the linguistic sign: its system of majuscules and minuscules, its layout, the regulation of written lines and blank spaces, the relation between verse and line, and the choice of different visual formats for different metrical forms. I will therefore indicate how the iconic character of the autograph can be interpreted as a series of logical connections between the poetic language and its graphic rendition by means of writing. My purpose in the third study is to show how this series of relationships conveys a specific set of visual guidelines that lead the reader through the decoding and interpretation of the text.

The three case studies are presented in a chronological order. By good fortune they also happen to fall into a methodological order, in that the first raises questions upon which the second elaborates and the third even more so. Nevertheless, I do not hide the overall impression of heterogeneity that emerges from the four sections of this work: the first being mainly theoretical, the second thematological, the third strongly influenced by reception theory, the fourth mainly focused on poetics. Therefore, this work offers no palliative for simplification. However, even if each case has required various hermeneutic approaches, the predominant and overarching principle that inspires all four sections is consistent: the belief in the basic hypostatic coincidence of material unit and textual datum. If our aim is to practice a literary criticism that has ambitions of historical relevance, we really must consider, understand, and underscore the material condition of the texts we are reading and studying.

## Dante's *Vita Nova*: A Metaphorology of the Book

Scrive  
lui scriba  
il già scritto da sempre  
eppure mai finito,  
mai detto, detto veramente.  
M. LUZI, *Nominazione*

### 1. Introduction

Bologna, 1927. Philologist and glottologist Vincenzo de Bartholomeis is lecturing on what was at the time considered the most ancient document of any Italian vernacular, the so-called ‘Veronese Riddle’. On the upper margin of f. 3r of a Mozarabic orational (a book of prayers of the Spanish Christians in Muslim Spain, dated late eighth century and preserved in Verona, Biblioteca Capitolare, ms. LXXXIX), a scribe tests his pen, writing (or maybe transcribing) three lines. The third line of this *probatio calami* is in correct Latin: “Gratias tibi agimus omnipotens sempiterne deus” (“We thank you, almighty sempiternal God”). The first and the second lines, on the other hand, are in what d’Arco Silvio Avalle would call a “registro intermedio” (“intermediate register”)<sup>1</sup> between Latin and vernacular:

† separebabouesalbaprataliaaraba & albauersorioteneba & negrosemen  
seminaba

The interpretive edition of the riddle reveals an enigmatic *Witz*: “*Se pareba boves, alba pratalia araba / albo versorio teneba, negro semen seminaba*” (“He led oxen ahead, he plowed white

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<sup>1</sup> AVALLE 1970, p. vii.

fields / He held a white plow, he sowed a black seed”).<sup>2</sup> The riddle had been discovered three years earlier. Luigi Schiapparelli had made note of it in the *Archivio storico italiano*.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the solution of the riddle continued to elude the finest minds of European philology. Much to illustrious professor de Bartholomeis’ surprise, a first-year student in his Romance Philology class managed to solve the enigma. Retrieving a popular riddle of her rural North-Italian hamlet, she suggested, in fact, that the subject of the action, the ploughman, might be a metaphor for the writer. His fingers (*boves* / the oxen) draw a white feather (*albo versorio* / the white plow) across the page (*alba pratalia* / the white fields), leaving black ink marks (*negro semen* / the black seed).<sup>4</sup> The text recording the first written occurrence of an Italian vernacular on the peninsula is itself a meta-textual document describing the act of writing. Italian literacy was born already an adult, aware of its own nature of textual code. What is more, the riddle both portrays and gives form to the act of writing in all its material implications. The conceptual framework is formalized within the material aspects of the technology of writing.

In this chapter, I explore *loci* of analogous meta-textual implications within Dante’s *Vita Nova*, with specific attention to the metaphorology of the book and book production and with a focus on its material features.<sup>5</sup> Book metaphors will work as a point of entry to the broader and more comprehensive discourse of the metatextual practices in the *Vita Nova*, and, only marginally in the present chapter, the *Commedia*. The scope of this project

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<sup>2</sup> I follow TAGLIAVINI 1969, pp. 524–527. See also MONTEVERDI 1945, pp. 39–58, and MARAZZINI 1994, pp. 151–152.

<sup>3</sup> See SCHIAPPARELLI 1924, p. 113.

<sup>4</sup> See TAGLIAVINI 1949, and MARAZZINI 2002.

<sup>5</sup> For a historical and theoretical introduction to the topic, see at least CURTIUS 1948, JOSIPOVICI 1979, BLUMENBERG 1981, GELLRICH 1985, and JAGER 2000.

does not allow for a comprehensive study of the *Commedia* as metatext, a task that would require an entire volume in and of itself. This chapter is, therefore, articulated as a thematological inquiry. Rather than offering a systematic *catalogue raisonné* of book metaphors in Dante's text, I will attempt to describe the basic conceptual structure within which these metaphors operate, the pragmatics of their functioning, and finally, I will make reference to the history of their evolution in the Dantean *corpus*. I will study, more specifically, the references to the materiality of the book when they are embedded both at the level of the enunciation and at the level of the 'enunciated' (or utterance): that is, I will consider book images as the *persona loquens* of the *Vita Nova* explicitly mentions them, and as they occur in the lyrical, narrative, and argumentative unfolding of the text.

Books are recursive figures in Dante's macrotext. Dante's entire literary production is inscribed within the metaphors of the book: a first reference to the "libro della mente" ("book of the mind") occurs in the early canzone (20 [lxvii, 10]) "E' m'incresce di me sì duramente" ("I intensely hate myself").<sup>6</sup> Similar images are disseminated in poetically significant and hermeneutically decisive places. References to books (and the context of their composition, circulation, and reception) entail various semantic realms. On the one hand, these hints serve as meta-textual indications that guide interpretation, in that they convey information on the genesis of the text, its format, its genre and style, its expository order, and the typology of its expected readership. These metaphors, in short, are chiefly engaged in dramatizing the text's own creation and fruition. On the other hand, the metaphorology of the book (and, specifically, of the *Commedia* qua book) involves a more radical cognitive experience, in that it eventually leads to representing the *reductio ad unum* of scattered entities,

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<sup>6</sup> See CONTINI 1946, pp. 60-66. The first Arabic numeral refers to the collocation in Contini's edition. The Roman numeral and the Arabic numeral in square brackets refer to, respectively, Barbi's and De Robertis' classifications.

in force of its nature as all-encompassing semiotic vehicle. Ultimately, at the climax of Dante's mystical vision in the last canto of *Paradiso* (xxxiii 86), the book becomes the metaphor for the revelation of the divine *nous* that holds the whole cosmos together by bond of love ("legato con amore in un volume", "bound with love in a single volume"),<sup>7</sup> and lists and categorizes all the dispersed information within the universe.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the metaphorology of the book implicates the more comprehensive notion of the legibility of the world, articulating the symbol of the *mundus* as *liber*.

In my analysis, I intend to consider images of the book in both their material trappings and their discursive and intertextual nature as *topoi*. As such, I propose a critical reflection that shows the complex interplay between literary texts and the media through which they are physically formed, starting from the level of strictly textual content. Based on the assumption that media and format both generate meaning and contribute to the semantic component of the literary work, I accordingly propose a study of book metaphors in their historical specificity as physical objects. Rather than referring to abstract and intangible entities, images of the book in Dante's corpus express and signify defined material forms, which in turn determine the connotative functions that control the very modes in which the metaphors operate.

The study of the material aspects of Dante's texts is notoriously complicated by the lack of autographs (not even a signature), which stands in stark contrast to the plethora of extant manuscripts. For instance, the tradition of the *Commedia* alone consists of ca. 840 mss.,<sup>9</sup> fragmentary or complete, corrupted and contaminated from its very first circulation in

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<sup>7</sup> All citations of the *Commedia* are from PETROCCHI 1966-1967. All translations are mine.

<sup>8</sup> See BATTISTINI 1985.

<sup>9</sup> More precisely 844, according to RODDEWIG 1984.



single canticles or groups of cantos. Florentine humanist Leonardo Bruni left a precious testimony of Dante's handwriting, which he could still read in some chancery documents. He described it as "magra et lunga et molto corretta" ("thin, elongated, and quite correct").<sup>10</sup> The autograph of the *Commedia* is the elusive pot of gold at the end of the rainbow of Italian philology, and the dream of its discovery has long haunted even sober philologists above suspicion, such as Vittore Branca and Gianfranco Contini.<sup>11</sup> But even without autographs, we can provide a critical reflection on the materiality of Dante's books virtually, by investigating the meta-textual guidelines embedded within his texts.

Before starting my actual analysis, two additional cautionary preambles are necessary. The first is about the title of this chapter. By evoking the notion of 'metaphorology', I mainly refer to the works of intellectual historian and philosopher Hans Blumenberg.<sup>12</sup> Blumenberg proposes a theory of 'absolute metaphors' as forms of non-conceptual and non-teleological learning. Absolute metaphors, irreducible to logical thinking, both reject literal paraphrase and express a tangible form of knowledge:

[t]he realm of the imagination could no longer be regarded solely as the substrate for transformations into conceptuality – on the assumption that each element could be processed and converted in turn, so to speak, until the supply of images was used up – but as a catalytic sphere from which the universe of concepts continually renews itself, without thereby converting and exhausting this founding reserve.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> VITI 1996, p. 548.

<sup>11</sup> See BRANCA 1987.

<sup>12</sup> See at least BLUMENBERG 1997, and BLUMENBERG 2010. A brief discussion of Blumenberg's metaphorology is in JOHNSON 2013, pp. 141-169.

<sup>13</sup> BLUMENBERG 2010, p. 4.

The relevance of my reference to Blumenberg's theoretical instruments will emerge at the end of my analysis, underscoring how Dante's metaphors of the book enable discernment and comprehension where concepts fail.

The second preamble both inquires into the plausibility of a metatextually-oriented study of figures of the book and circumscribes the territory of the analysis. In restricting my study to focus mainly on the *Vita Nova*, with references to the *Commedia*, I follow the theoretical premises proposed by Lucien Dällenbach as guidelines for the study of phenomena of metatextual reflection in a text. In a seminal essay on the *nouveau roman* and the *mise en abyme* (a textual sequence that is supposed to enclose the work that encloses it), Dällenbach suggests that a study on the self-reflexive nature of a text be allowed for by two general criteria.<sup>14</sup> Firstly, in order to give a metatextual value to a sequence, this value has to be authorized by the text as a whole. Secondly, a reflexive *allegorèsis* is plausible only in texts in which reflexivity is thematized and guarantees a certain degree of systematicity. The work's turning towards itself alone is not sufficient grounds:

[i]n order to derive a real benefit from the transaction [*scil.* between a text and its mirror image], one has to contrive to ward off the very otherness of the fictive character, and, in order to do so, to impose sufficient constraints on oneself: in other words to create it in one's own image, or, better still, to make it engage in the very activity that one is oneself undertaking in creating it – the writing of a novel [...] or the telling of a story [...].<sup>15</sup>

In part, the early canzone “E’ m’incresce di me sì duramente”<sup>16</sup> already complies with these criteria of compositional systematicity and protracted thematization. It does systematically employ the image of the “libro della mente” (l. 59), repeated in l. 66: “e se ’l

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<sup>14</sup> DÄLLENBACH 1989, p. 50.

<sup>15</sup> DÄLLENBACH 1989, p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> See, at least, BARBI 1935, CONTINI 1946, FOSTER-BOYDE 1967, PAZZAGLIA 1970, CRISTALDI 2005, DE ROBERTIS 2005, FENZI 2010, and BAROLINI 2013.

libro non erra” (“if such book is not wrong”). *Mente* also occurs in ll. 20, 44, and 87: therefore, it punctuates the text with such imagery. Consequently, its exclusion from this study demands a brief clarification. The canzone is representative of Dante’s Cavalcantian experience of love as sorrowful, destructive passion.<sup>17</sup> The occurrence in it of the ‘book of the mind’ is functional to the recollection and elaboration of the genesis of Dante’s painful feelings. The mind, like memory, is legible, and *mente* and *memoria* were considered paronymologically related (e.g. in Hugutio’s *Derivationes*),<sup>18</sup> in that both were thought to stem from Latin *memini*. What is more, besides the clear kinship between book of the mind and book of memory, the canzone bears some resemblance to the *Vita Nova* in other key ways. Firstly, it represents a balancing of Dante’s erotic and lyrical experience: a “primo tentativo di una storia totale di un’esperienza” (“first attempt at a complete history of an experience”).<sup>19</sup> In this, it resembles the more extended and encompassing account of the *libello*: Teodolinda Barolini appropriately gave the canzone the oxymoronic label “Cavalcantian *Vita nuova*”.<sup>20</sup> Secondly, the timeline of the narrative employs an analeptic structure (present, then past), which can be also associated with certain aspects of the *ordo artificialis* of the *Vita Nova*. Finally, the content of the canzone is, in fact, the act of retrieving the events that constitute the text of the canzone itself. Nevertheless, the image of the book appears in terms that are more ornamental than structural: it does not institute the pervasive series of correspondences and analogies between its semantic field and that of memory that we notice in the *Vita Nova*. It remains a genial rhetorical intuition, rather than an interpretive

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<sup>17</sup> See BARBI 1935, p. 663.

<sup>18</sup> See Hugutio’s text in CECCHINI 2004, II, pp. 749-752 (s.v. *memini*).

<sup>19</sup> PAZZAGLIA 1970, p. 663

<sup>20</sup> BAROLINI 2013.

instrument, and the act of reminiscence holds primarily onto the notion of *mente* rather than that of reading.

By contrast, the semantic realm of books in the *Vita Nova* (and the *Commedia*) is both systematically present and explicitly thematized. First of all, this reading feeds on the vital distinction between Dante-the-poet and Dante-the-character, famously described by Contini.<sup>21</sup> In fact, the reflexive nature of writing is exposed and exalted by the reflected figure of the writer. Moreover, a metatextual reading of Dante's texts finds its legitimacy in the texts themselves. The attribution of self-reflection to Dante's work is not merely the result of the post-structuralist theory retroactively applied to medieval texts, the abuse of which Claudio Giunta urgently discourages.<sup>22</sup> Dante's compulsive practice of self-anthologizing and self-exegesis<sup>23</sup> and his addresses to the audience<sup>24</sup> offer clear examples of a strategy aimed at electing a specific type of reader, controlling textual instability (the *movance* of the text), and conditioning hermeneutics by offering authoritative interpretations. For Dante, "[...] a modern poet worthy of the name must be able to demonstrate authoritative control over the informing interpretation of that work [...]; he must be able to interpret it".<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, rather than being a recent superimposition on the text, the metatextual reading of Dante's poetic diction was common practice even among his earliest commentators. Jacopo della Lana and Benvenuto da Imola repeatedly interpret Dante's journey in the *Commedia* as a metaliterary representation of Dante's poetic apprenticeship. For instance,

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<sup>21</sup> See CONTINI 1958.

<sup>22</sup> See GIUNTA 2010, pp. 28-29.

<sup>23</sup> See JENARO-MACLENNAN 1960.

<sup>24</sup> See AUERBACH 1954, SPITZER 1955, and RUSSO 1970.

<sup>25</sup> ASCOLI 2008, p. 197.

Benvenuto offers the following interpretation of *Inferno* ix 16-18 (“«In questo fondo de la trista conca / discende mai alcun del primo grado, / che sol per pena ha la speranza cionca?»”, “«Into this bottom of the miserable shell / does any from that first grade ever descend, / whose only penalty is lack of hope?»”):

Hic Dantes ad declarandum se de dubio quod conceperat ex verbis suspensivis Virgilio, statim movet sibi quaestionem circa hoc, et breviter petit: si unquam aliquis poetarum qui sunt in limbo cum eo, intravit unquam dictam terram? et vult dicere: si aliquis poeta paganus descripsit unquam infernum, sicut ipse christianus facere intendebat.<sup>26</sup>

Here Dante, in order to reveal his doubt about Virgil’s reticent words, formulates a question for him and briefly asks whether any of the poets in the Limbo with him ever reached the mentioned territory. And he means: whether any pagan poet ever described Hell, the way he, as Christian, meant to do.

Dante’s poems themselves make extensive use of literary allusive terminology, which functions as both auto-exegetical label and instruction for stylistic and thematic interpretation. For instance, in the *rima petrosa* (46 [ciii, 1]) “Così nel mio parlare voglio essere aspro” (“I want to be as harsh in my words”),<sup>27</sup> the adjective both anticipates the theme of a specific type of erotic lyric and indicates the stylistic category of *asperitas* (vis-à-vis the notion of *suavitas*). In the *Vita Nova*, additionally, we might consider the first stanza of the programmatic canzone “Donne ch’avete intellecto d’amore” (Ladies, who have an understanding of love”) as a series of metatextual indications: the election of a specific audience (through the vocative “Donne [...]”), the proposition of a new subject matter (“della mia donna”, “about my lady”), the *tópos* of the *reticentia* (“non perch’io creda sua laude finire”, “not that I think I can complete her praise”), and the rejection of the sublime/tragic style (“E io non vo’ parlare sì altamente”, “I will not find sublime words”). Finally, one

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<sup>26</sup> I cite from the *Dante Dartmouth Project*: <http://dante.dartmouth.edu> (retrieved on 01/15/2015).

<sup>27</sup> See CONTINI 1946, pp. 165-171.

might easily think of the whole second canticle of the *Commedia* as both a literary *compilatio* of major figures in Dante's poetic career (from Dante's encounter with the singer Casella on) and an outline of literary history of Romance literatures culminating in Dante's own oeuvre and "new style".

## 2. A Model for the Mind

The *Vita Nova*<sup>28</sup> (ca. 1294) is "un libro subdolo" ("an insidious book"),<sup>29</sup> difficult to grasp. It is a *prosimetrum* (a combination of poetry and prose) that conjugates diary, symbolic narrative, poetic anthology, and commentary. Steven Botterill semi-seriously summarizes its plot in terms of a "venerable, if not archetypal, narrative paradigm (boy meets girl; boy loses girl; boy decides to console himself by writing about girl)".<sup>30</sup>

The text proper is presented as a recollection of memories, exploiting a complex *Buchmetaphorik* that is both rooted in traditional sources and made skillfully problematic. In fact, the insidiousness of the text is manifest from its very beginning. The proem is articulated into a cluster of images that denote the world of books and book production (1,1 [i 1]):

In quella parte del libro de la mia memoria dinanzi alla quale poco si potrebbe leggere, si trova una rubrica la quale dice: *Incipit Vita Nova*. Sotto la quale rubrica io trovo scripte le parole le quali è mio intendimento d'asemplare in questo libello, e se non tutte, almeno la loro sententia.

In that part of the book of my memory before which one could read very little, there is a rubric that says: *Incipit Vita Nova*. Below this rubric I find written the words that it is my

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<sup>28</sup> All citations are from GORNI 1996. In square brackets I indicate the corresponding chapters in BARBI 1932. For a balanced critical reflection on the often agitated debate on the text of the *Vita Nova* see, at least, TROVATO 2000, MALATO 2004, PIROVANO 2012.

<sup>29</sup> SANTAGATA 1979, p. 148.

<sup>30</sup> BOTTERILL 1994, p. 61.

intention to transcribe in this booklet: and if not all of them, then at least their overall meaning.

This proem is paradoxical because of its self-declared nature as secondary *incipit*: it is the proem of a booklet drawn from a pre-existing book (which, we can easily infer, had its own primary proem). The proem indicates a “racconto di un evento già accaduto e insieme chiamato a prodursi, senza il quale il racconto non potrebbe iniziare e che pure si attua solo nel racconto: evento della costituzione del soggetto e del senso” (“story of an event that already took place and, at the same time, is demanded to produce itself, without which the story could not begin, but that only occurs in the story: constitutive event of subject and sense”).<sup>31</sup> Analogously, the *explicit* of the *Vita Nova* also implies a certain degree of paradox, in that it brings about the much-debated “proleptic announcement”<sup>32</sup> of a new literary enterprise. The *libello* is a pre-text, of which the *Commedia* will be the figural fulfillment. Additionally, the *incipit* eludes any referentiality to the extra-textual by immediately focusing on its own metatextual character and ostentatiously parading its autotelic and intransitive nature. The proem explicitly describes, in sum, the *incipit* itself. It situates the *incipit en abyme*, pointing towards a citational (and intertextual) notion of literature and infinitely deferring the perception of its origin to other pre-texts.<sup>33</sup>

Relatedly, the hypocorism *libello* affects numerous orders of signification. Rather than simply implying a relation of endearment, it offers an intertextual reference to the incipit of Ovid’s *Remedia amoris* (l. 1) as indicated by Guglielmo Gorni: “Legerat huius Amor titulum

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<sup>31</sup> NOFERI 1985, p. 66.

<sup>32</sup> BARAŃSKI 2013, p. 12.

<sup>33</sup> See FARNETTI 1997, p. 421, and CRISTALDI 2005, p. 63.

nomenque libelli” (“Love had read the title of this book”).<sup>34</sup> More generally, it categorizes the *Vita Nova* within the tradition of Latin erotic poetry collections, to which the term *libelli* applies,<sup>35</sup> while concurrently inscribing it into a semantics of renovation with the adjoining reference to the rhetoric of the *novitas* (in terms of both linguistic choice and *Weltanschauung*). Furthermore, the term denotes the nature of material artifact of the *prosimetrum*. The *incipit* of the *Vita Nova*, in fact, seems to be deeply rooted in the context of Italian *scriptoria*. On this note, H. Wayne Storey has given ample evidence of the technical-editorial use of *libello* in the context of scribal practices in medieval Italy.<sup>36</sup> Dante’s *libello* materially refers to those codicological units somewhere between single quires and compact codices, studied by Pamela Robinson and Ralph Hannah III.<sup>37</sup> These units were semantically self-sufficient (unlike the *peciae* in university contexts) and produced as autonomous entities that could circulate independently. Storey even hypothesizes the possible original dimension of the *Vita Nova*: “[i]f the earliest copies of the work are reliable for their layout of the *libello*, the little book would have consisted materially of no more than two quinternions (10 bifolia / 20 *chartae*) or perhaps even two quaternions (8 bifolia or 16 *chartae*)”.<sup>38</sup>

As mentioned above, the proem is notable for the refined exactness of its editorial lexicon. Traditional *Quellenforschung* and recent intertextual inquiries on the pericope have accumulated a long catalogue of sources to which this exactness is due. Nevertheless, both approaches have mainly underscored the literary and discursive implications of these

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<sup>34</sup> See the note *ad locum* in GORNI 1996.

<sup>35</sup> BILLANOVICH 1996, pp. 49-52.

<sup>36</sup> See STOREY 2004, and STOREY 2005.

<sup>37</sup> See ROBINSON 1980, and HANNAH 1986. See also AVALLE 1984, and FIORILLA 2006.

<sup>38</sup> STOREY 2005, p. 120.



sources, bypassing their material component, as suitably demonstrated in the following example.

With distinctly positivistic competence Nicola Zingarelli identified a single epistle produced at the court of Frederick II as a plausible source for the metaphor of the book of memory.<sup>39</sup> The letter was probably composed by distinguished poet and jurist Pier delle Vigne and addressed to Henry III, king of England and Frederick's brother-in-law. The extender of the letter, on behalf of Frederick II, recounts reading (*perlegì*) of his own marriage to the late Isabella (Henry III's sister) in the *memorie liber* (book of memory). More recently, Giorgio Brugnoli rejected any metaphorical interpretation of Pier delle Vigne's *memorie liber*, pointing out that the reference is to the specific notion of family books.<sup>40</sup> For Brugnoli, in short, the phrase would indicate a specific genre and a material object, rather than a merely metaphorical book of memory. An attentive reader would have, therefore, to dismiss the Frederician source. A family book in medieval Tuscany would look like

[...] un testo memoriale diaristico, plurale e plurigenerazionale, in cui la famiglia rappresenta tutti gli elementi del sistema comunicativo instaurato dal libro, costituisce cioè sia l'argomento (o contenuto) prevalente del messaggio testuale, sia il mittente che il destinatario della scrittura, sia infine il contesto e il canale della trasmissione.<sup>41</sup>

[...] a memorial journal, plural and multigenerational, in which the family represents all the elements of the communicative system the book institutes: it establishes the main topic (or content) of the textual message, the sender and the receiver of the writing, and, finally, the context and the channel of transmission.

Rather than weakening the validity of the thesis that proposes the *memorie liber* as a possible source for the *libro de la memoria*, Brugnoli's corrective consideration on the historical (and

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<sup>39</sup> See ZINGARELLI 1893-94, p. 99.

<sup>40</sup> See BRUGNOLI 1997, pp. 56-58.

<sup>41</sup> See MORDENTI 2001, II, p. 15.

material) specificity of Zingarelli's discovery might strengthen it. In fact, references to books in Dante always sustain a high degree of materiality. Dante's keen competence of Virgil texts, for instance, assumes the material form of the search for his books (*Inferno* i 83-84): "vagliami 'l lungo studio e 'l grande amore / che m'ha fatto cercar lo tuo volume" ("let the long study and the fervent love / that made me seek for your book avail me now"). In the case of the proemial passage of the *Vita Nova*, the concurrent indication of the heading of the *libello* and the reference to the quantity of text that was omitted are conducive to an image of the book that consists of physical *chartae*. Several passages of the *Commedia* indicate a comparable way of measuring textual quantities: for instance, *Inferno* xi 101-102 ("e se tu ben la tua [*scil.* Dante's copy of Aristotle's] Fisica note, / tu troverai, non dopo molte carte", "and if you note your copy of the Physics carefully, / you will find after not many pages"), or *Purgatorio* xxix 103 ("e quali i [*scil.* the four animals] troverai ne le sue [*scil.* Ezekiel's] carte", "and as you find them in his pages"). The family book actually looks like quite a suitable model for Dante's storehouse of memories. On this note, it is intriguing to imagine a *libro de la memoria* that might include authorial and non-authorial texts, fragments and images, calculations and dates, similar to the *Specchio umano* by Domenico Lenzi,<sup>42</sup> who, incidentally, was an informed reader of Dante's texts.

Remembrance, we have seen, takes the visual form of a material book from which to draw a booklet: "Dante represents his 'libello' as a tactile counterpart to the intellectual experiences it records".<sup>43</sup> The metaphor of memory as a book generates a semantic constellation around which the whole proem is structured. It brings about, in sum, an alignment between the process of remembrance and the writing of literature as textual forms

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<sup>42</sup> See PINTO 1981.

<sup>43</sup> GINSBERG 1999, p. 26.

and book formats. From the more immediate metaphors of reading written words to the more technical use of terms such as ‘rubrica’, ‘asemplare’, ‘sentenzia’, and later ‘exemplo’ and ‘paragrafi’ (1, 11 [ii 10]), we see a specific representation of objective reality (through recollection), its textual dimension, the material dimension of the text, and its history. The image of the book of memory also comes back in the *Commedia*. It is the book from which to read past events prior to their inclusion in the poem: “libro ch’il preterito rassegna” (*Paradiso* xxiii 54: “the book that lists down past events”), where *rassegnare* indicates both the writing and the archival classification of memories. From this book, the words (and the ink) with which Beatrice invites Dante to gaze directly at her face will never vanish (*Paradiso* xxiii 53): “che [*scil.* la proferta] mai non si stingue” (“the offer that will never fade”). Moreover, the notion of memory as a written text will reappear in several passages of the *Commedia*, mostly in conjunction with the idea of *mente*, to which, as mentioned above, *memoria* is connected through a pseudo-etymology. In a highly significant passage like the proem to the first canticle in *Inferno* ii, following an invocation to the Muses (mythologically descending from Mnemosyne, memory) and his own “alto ingegno” (*Inferno* ii 7-8, “high intelligence”), Dante tests both his mind and the remembrance process connected to it: “o mente che scrivesti ciò ch’io vidi” (*Inferno* ii 9: “o mind, that wrote what I saw”). The same image returns, quite expectedly, in the third canticle, where it is associated with the usual theme of the excessive depth of the paradisiacal experience, which memory cannot fathom and words cannot express. In the heaven of the fixed stars, the soul of St. Peter dances thrice around Beatrice singing a song that Dante cannot recollect (*Paradiso* xxiv 259): “Però salta la penna e non lo scrivo” (“Therefore my pen leaps over and I do not write it”).

The case of the formula “trovo scripte” in the cited proem of the *Vita Nova* (1, 1 [i 1]) is very indicative of this polysemy and how the two orders of discourse, the strictly

textual and the material, cohabit and increase each other's level of signification. Firstly, the formula both presents a distinctive spatial connotation (almost indicating the shuffling of the pages in search of specific book sections) and insists on the material aspect of writing (due to the emphatic predicative position of the perfect participle); the same considerations apply to “trapassando” (“skipping”, 1, 11 [ii 10]). Secondly, the idea of unexpected discovery evoked by ‘trovo’ in connection with memory suggests the possibility that the *libro de la memoria* includes texts that are not strictly Dante's, but are part of his intertextual competence. Thirdly, the verb *trovare* etymologically reenacts the world of troubadour poetry: in fact, the verb stems from the late Latin *tropare*, which indicates the double literary activities of *inventio* and expression through tropes. (Analogously, the use of *verba dicendi* to indicate the act of composing is less an illocutionary act than the topical heritage of the declining oral tradition of poetry).<sup>44</sup> The phrase “trovo scripte” establishes, in conclusion, a genealogy of poetic affiliation. Eventually, Dante's insistence on the technology of writing as designed medium for the composition and transmission of his poems circumscribes his audience to an exclusive circle of friends and readers, “un pubblico intimo, un circolo di amici, magari una *societas amicorum* ancora nel 1292-1293 più ristretta di quella dell'eminente Guittone” (“an intimate audience, a circle of friends, maybe a *societas amicorum* still more exclusive than that of the distinguished Guittone”).<sup>45</sup> This exclusive clique might find within the book itself the main guidelines for its transmission and interpretation. Addresses to specific readers and dedicatees are an integral part of this rhetoric of exclusion that makes the *prosimetrum* an elitist text: “fedeli d'amore”, “primo amico”, “chi intende”, “Donne ch'avete intellecto d'amore”, “coloro a cui mi piace che ciò sia aperto” (“the faithful of Love”, “[my] first

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<sup>44</sup> See CURTIUS 1948, pp. 300-352.

<sup>45</sup> STOREY 2004, p. 282.

friend, “those who understand”, “ladies who have an understanding of love”, “those to whom I would like this to be revealed”).<sup>46</sup>

Then again, the indication of an elected audience is often linked to a specific set of codicological features. In the case of the *Commedia*, this can be indirectly inferred from one of the nineteen addresses to the reader (*Paradiso* x 22-23): “Or ti riman, lettor, sovra ’l tuo banco, / dietro pensando a ciò che si preliba” (“Now stay on your bench, reader, / thinking back on what one foretastes”). Dante seemingly has in mind an unambiguous book format and a specific reader for the poem. The format is what Armando Petrucci classifies as “libro da banco universitario” (“university bench or lectern book”):<sup>47</sup> a professionally transcribed parchment book of large format, in *littera textualis* (Gothic bookhand), written in a single column with ample margins for the paratextual apparatus, in Latin, of juridical, philosophical, or biblical-exegetical content. On the one hand, the passage formulates the hypothesis of a more diffuse circulation for his text than was the case for the *Vita Nova*. On the other hand, it seems to demand an audience endowed with specific cultural and intellectual qualities. The *lettore prelibante* (foretasting reader) of the *Commedia* has to be a ‘professional’ reader, able to detect the allegorical meaning under the literal sense and understand the interplay between Dante and the Christian and classical *auctoritates*.

Dante’s attention to the materiality of artistic composition further emerges from the care with which he deals with media beyond writing.<sup>48</sup> In *Vita Nova* 23, 1 [xxxiv 1], Dante explicitly (if fictitiously) mentions drawing figures of angels “su certe tavolette” (“on some little tablets”). Dante describes the act of drawing only briefly, but he uses a specific lexicon.

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<sup>46</sup> See DE ROBERTIS 1961, p. 11. See also PETRONIO 1965, and AHERN 1992.

<sup>47</sup> See PETRUCCI 1979<sup>c</sup>, p. 141, and PETRUCCI 1983, pp. 513-517.

<sup>48</sup> See CERVIGNI 2007.

Moreover, he insists on the concentration that possessed him during the act of this mimetic representation. In fact, it takes time before he notices the presence of bystanders (23, 2 [xxxiv 2] “anzi che io me ne accorgesse”, “before I realized they were there”). The realism of the scene ignites a series of associations. Intertextually, the scene alludes to Frederician texts such as Jacopo da Lentini’s “Meravigliosamente” (“Marvelously”), where the poet draws a portrait of his lady (ll. 19-20): “Avendo gran disio, / dipinsi una pintura” (“I painted a picture, moved by desire”).<sup>49</sup> Symbolically, it evokes the notion of the ineffability of the *gentilissima* and the attempts to overcome the limits of realism through different media. The insistence on Dante’s concentration almost assumes the features of an ecstatic rapture, similar to the *excessus mentis* (ecstasy of the mind) represented in the *Commedia*. Within the Dantean *corpus*, the passage eventually establishes a series of textual associations that find their climax in the vision of Christ’s face “pinta de la nostra effige” (*Paradiso* xxxiii 131: “painted with our effigy”). It does not seem fortuitous that the triple epiphany of the celestial *lógos* occurs in terms that refer to materially coded forms of medial representation: “[...] questo è l’itinerario artistico, segnico, teleologico e teologico del protagonista della *Vita nuova* e della *Commedia*, nonché anche, tramite la sua identificazione poetica con essi, dell’itinerario poetico e spirituale di Dante Alighieri” (“[...] this is the artistic, signic, teleological, and theological itinerary of the protagonist of the *Vita nuova* and the *Commedia*: moreover, through his poetic identification with them, it is also Dante Alighieri’s poetic and spiritual itinerary”).<sup>50</sup> I will return to this in the conclusions to this chapter.

A similar indication of the symbiosis between textuality and materiality can be gauged by the reference to the activity of *asemplare* (and the implicit agent of this activity, the

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<sup>49</sup> CONTINI 1960, I, pp. 55-57. See also ANTONELLI 2008, I, pp. 39-65.

<sup>50</sup> CERVIGNI 2007, pp. 33-34.

*assempratore*). The verb materially entails the action of transcription from a model (*asemplo*) to a copy, as already in Guido Cavalcanti (ix 43-44): “Canzon, tu sai che de’ libri d’amore / io t’asemplai” (“Canzone, you know that I transcribed you from the books of Love”).<sup>51</sup> What is more, as Brugnoli indicated, the term refers to the Scholastic and historiographical practice of *exponere per exempla* (to explain through exemplary stories), whereby Dante-the-character assumes the role of exemplary model of ethical and poetic renovation.<sup>52</sup>

Both material and discursive senses concur to define and expand meaning. The writer works within a specific grammar of memorial vision and hierarchy, psychologically based on analogy and metonymy and materially formed by *rubrica* and *paragrafi* (both *hápax legómena* in Dante’s work). Remembrance is, in sum, a reenacting procedure “analogous to reading letters that ‘stand for’ sounds (*voces*) that ‘represent’ things in a more or less adequate, fitting way”.<sup>53</sup>

A parallel series of multiple meanings (both material and textual) is inherent in the Latin rubric “*Incipit Vita Nova*”. From a technical paratextual point of view, the formula indicates the title of the work. Analogously in the notoriously disputed *Epistle* xiii to Can Grande della Scala, we read “*Libri titulus est Incipit Comedia Dantis [...]*” (28: “The title is *Incipit Comedia* by Dante”).<sup>54</sup> From a paleographical and codicological perspective, it signposts the material beginning of the booklet within the codex. Similarly, the final formula “qui est per omnia secula benedictus” (“who is blessed for all the centuries”) functions as *explicit* or colophon, often amplified by more technical elements. For instance, ms. Martelli 12 of the

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<sup>51</sup> I cite from DE ROBERTIS 1986, p. 34.

<sup>52</sup> See BRUGNOLI 1997, pp. 59-65.

<sup>53</sup> CARRUTHERS 1990, p. 25.

<sup>54</sup> Already indicated by MATTALIA 1938 in his commentary (*ad locum*) and then repeated in DE ROBERTIS 1980.

Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana,<sup>55</sup> the earliest manuscript preserving the *Vita Nova*, ends with the colophon “*Explicit liber. Deo gratias, amen.*”, which immediately follows (f. 52r) the formula of blessing. Furthermore, the rubric establishes a formal boundary to the text, which safeguards its cohesiveness and entirety: “[...] Dante costruisce una mappa interna al ‘libello’ che garantisce l’integrità materiale nella trasmissione del testo” (“[...] Dante builds an internal chart for the ‘libello’ that guarantees the material integrity of the text in its transmission”).<sup>56</sup> A similar strategy of expressing textual closure appears in *Purgatorio* xxxiii 136-141:

S’io avessi, lettor, più lungo spazio  
da scrivere, i’ pur cantere’ in parte  
lo dolce ber che mai non m’avria sazio;  
ma perché piene son tutte le carte  
ordite a questa cantica seconda,  
non mi lascia più ir lo fren de l’arte.

If I had, reader, more space to write,  
I would partially sing on about  
the sweet drink that would never satiate me;  
but since all the pages are filled,  
woven for this second canticle,  
the bridle of the art allows me no further.

The writer informs the reader (and the scribe) that *Purgatorio* is complete. Both discursive rules (“lo fren de l’arte”) and material elements (“piene son tutte le carte”) concur to put a closure to the second *cantica*. Dante emphasizes the textual and codicological caesura between canticles and features a coincidence between literary unit and fasciculation (the gathering of quires to form bigger units). On this note, it is worth pointing out that the tradition of the poem shows a high percentage of copyists tending to begin the transcription

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<sup>55</sup> See *infra*, pp. 48-49.

<sup>56</sup> PACIONI 2006, p. 60.



of a new canticle with a new quire.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, Dante stresses the rigorousness of the preparatory project preceding the *Commedia*. On the one hand, this project entails strictly textual elements: cantos extending between 115 and 160 lines, with a very similar number of lines for the three canticles (*Inferno*: 4720; *Purgatorio*: 4755; *Paradiso*: 4758). On the other hand, it also contemplates preliminary material considerations like the exact size of a volume whose blank folios were numbered and accounted for from the beginning.

The term *rubrica* is rich in symbolic interpretations that extend beyond the editorial practices it denotes. It reiterates the analogy between the *ordinatio* of a codex and the mnemonic *loci* that give memory its structure: “[o]nly those impressions that have been ordered so that they are *readable* have truly entered the memory”.<sup>58</sup> It institutes the relationship between *opus* (Dante’s life and works) and *opusculum* (the *libello*). It metaphorically marks the new phase of an authentically Christian life, according to the Augustinian model of conversion and the newly established correspondence between *vita nova* and *canticum novum* (new song).<sup>59</sup> Moreover, the semantic (and visual) implication of the color red stemming from the etymology of the word *rubrica* establishes a symbolic connection between the red ink used by the *rubricator* and the clothes that Beatrice wore upon first meeting Dante: “di nobilissimo colore umile e onesto sanguigno” (“dressed in noblest color, reserved and pure, crimson red”). The color red punctuates the narration of the *Vita Nova*, in that it occurs again in Dante’s first dream of Beatrice (1, 15 [iii 4]), when her almost naked body is hardly covered by a “drappo sanguigno” (“crimson cloth”), and again (28, 1 [xxxix 2]) in her final posthumous epiphany, when she is dressed in “vestimenta sanguigne” (“crimson clothes”).

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<sup>57</sup> See BOSCHI ROTIROTI, pp. 43-44 (97 exemplars with caesura out of a survey of 201 complete manuscripts). See also POMARO 1986.

<sup>58</sup> CARRUTHERS 1990, p. 30.

<sup>59</sup> See CASADEI 2013, pp. 227-238.

Both the *Vita Nova* and Dante's renewed life begin with a chromatic reference to Beatrice and hypostatically coincide with the *gentilissima* in what appears to be a journey of initiation: Dante's *itinerarium mentis in Deum* and its literary rendering. Dante's attention to the chromatic details implicated by the act of writing is not fortuitous, and it also becomes relevant in several passages of the *Commedia*. For instance, in *Paradiso* xv 49-52, Dante's ancestor Cacciaguida reveals that he had long attended his arrival after he could read it in a "magno volume" ("large volume"). Enrico Fenzi has indicated that this volume represents the *Liber vitae*, "l'elenco o registrazione dei beati [...] che da sempre è presente nella mente divina, e dunque, in senso lato, non è cosa diversa dalla mente divina medesima considerata nella sua infinita prescienza" ("the list or registrar of the blessed souls [...] that has forever been in God's mind, and is, therefore, broadly speaking, the very divine mind considered in its infinite foreknowledge").<sup>60</sup> Despite its metaphysical nature, this *Liber vitae* assumes distinctly material features, and its immutable writing is described by a reference to the brown color of the ink used (*Paradiso* xv 51): "du' non si muta mai bianco né bruno" ("where white and black are never changed"). The act of writing always implies the material elements (folios, stylus, ink) that give shape to it and is described in its physical process. In *Purgatorio* xxvi 112-114, Dante addresses Guido Guinizzelli and indicates in his poems the reason for his filial affection towards him:

E io a lui: «Li dolci detti vostri,  
che, quanto durerà l'uso moderno,  
faranno cari ancora i loro incostri».

And I to him: «Your sweet poems,  
which for as long as modern usage lasts,  
will make their inked pages precious».

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<sup>60</sup> FENZI 2005, p. 17.

Dante's affection is rooted in his admiration for Guido's poems: these will make the *inked papers* that preserve them dear to readers until the end of vernacular poetry. In the same *canto*, upon presenting himself to Guido, Dante had asked for his identity in order to be prepared to write about him. By disclosing his role of scribe-to-be of the *Commedia* and his relationship to a "texte en train de s'écrire" ("a text in the process of its own writing"),<sup>61</sup> Dante vividly represents himself in the act of materially ruling the folios in preparation for the writing (*Purgatorio* xxvi 64): "ditemi, acciò ch'ancor carte ne verghi" ("tell me, so that I rule the folios for it").

The book and the text, the container and the content, share "una reale solidarietà fisica e simbolica" ("a real physical and symbolic solidarity").<sup>62</sup> The continued analogy of memory as a book implies that the material aspects of the book – its layout, fasciculation, expository order, and graphic rendition – are the technological elements onto which the organization of the subject matter is mapped. The codex, then, is the figure the author chose to epitomize the act of articulating one's memory. What is more, the act of composing is conceived, and, above all, visualized, as a process of copying: not a text in abstract recollected from memory, but a booklet, which is copied as a booklet from the author's mind; not a text, but a book, with its set of material elements (initials, rubrics, diacritical and paragraphematic signs). Not a text, but a book is the *Vita Nova*, which clearly shows how Dante conceives textual datum and material unit as *one* holistic organism. The act of composition is an intellectual act that is modeled on exact book formats. The book represents the primary idea of the text. The text, conceptually, assumes the shape of a book.

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<sup>61</sup> SOLLERS 1965, p. 15.

<sup>62</sup> BATTAGLIA RICCI 2003, p. 27.

The conceptual (and material) organization of the text lends itself well to a comparison with Scholasticism, a major cultural model that we can associate with Dante's graphic-formal notion of memory.<sup>63</sup> Besides isolating Occitan *razos* and *vidas* as structural sources for the prose of the *libello*, Pio Rajna long ago indicated commentative practices of glossing and sub-dividing Scholastic texts in medieval universities as a major prototype for the textual model of the *divisioni* in the *Vita Nova*.<sup>64</sup> The textual influence should be accompanied by a just as much relevant visual impact. Between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, didactic and homiletic praxes required a relative ease of access to the immense repository of knowledge accumulated in classical, late-antique, and high-medieval periods, and the widespread attempt at synthesis and orderliness created a need for the invention of formal and graphic devices aimed at locating and retrieving information. I am referring to the strategies of *compilatio* (the bringing together of related materials from different sources) and *ordinatio* (a pattern of organization, a structured arrangement into parts). These are at the base of such encyclopedic works as Peter Lombard's *Sententiae* or Gratian's *Decretum*. In these texts, the material articulation of their contents is, in fact, both a heuristic principle and a hermeneutical hypothesis.

As a cautionary warning against excesses of a systematic application of this 'codicological model of the mind', however, it does not seem inappropriate to cite the watchful approach that Michael W. Evans has suggested in his pivotal essay "The Geometry of the Mind" about the dangers of methodically applying geometrical and algebraic models to the psychology of cognitive processes: "[...] no one ever pretended that these [*scil.* geometric] schemata represented, in any sense, the way the brain functioned. But they do

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<sup>63</sup> See PARKES 1991, pp. 35-70, and ROUSE 1991.

<sup>64</sup> See RAJNA 1902. See also STILLINGER 1992, pp. 44-117.

offer a unique commentary on the ratiocination thought processes and modes of intellectual perception of the Middle Ages”.<sup>65</sup>

### 3. Metatext, Textual Criticism, and Editorial Practices

In the previous section I referred to Dällenbach’s study on the *mise en abyme*. Dällenbach maps his description of the *mise en abyme* onto Roman Jakobson’s model of verbal communication. Consequently, he distinguishes a *mise en abyme* of the enunciation, a *mise en abyme* of the enunciated (or utterance), and a *mise en abyme* of the code. I will leave aside the third subcategory for now. The previous section showed the way the *mise en abyme* of the enunciation works, in that it exposes the producer (or the receiver) of the literary text, as in the common instance of the invocation to the Muses, or the address to the reader. In the case of the *Vita Nova*, it exposes and dramatizes, therefore, the emergence of a literary relationship between an author and an audience. It also makes the context of this production-reception relationship explicit, by constructing an authorial figure and making this one of the characters. Moreover, the *Vita Nova* tends to multiply the biographic persona of the author and partially reproduce the different figures of writing of its own time: *auctor*, *commentator*, *compiler*, *rubricator*, *glossator*. I will return to this multiplication of roles in the next chapter, upon dealing with Giovanni Boccaccio’s more secure and strategic use of those categories in composing the *Teseida*.

The *mise en abyme* of the enunciated (or utterance) replicates the narrative in its referential dimension as a story told. The *Vita Nova* offers various examples of this. The last section (28-31 [xxxix 1 – xlii 3]) of the *libello*, for instance, represents a brief account of the events narrated in the whole text, reenacting Beatrice’s story from her apparition and re-

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<sup>65</sup> EVANS 1980, p. 55.

consecrating the text to her: “quasi una ‘vita nova’ nella *Vita Nova*” (“almost a ‘vita nova’ in the *Vita Nova*”).<sup>66</sup> Similar strategies of inclusion and inside reduplication can also affect single episodes of the *prosimetrum*. The insertion of dreams and visions into the main narrative have often been interpreted as marks of metatextual awareness, in that it constructs an inside frame and embeds a secondary narrative sequence within the main storyline: “[t]he dream fiction, by representing in the dream an imaginative entity like fiction itself, often becomes self-reflexive. Dream vision is especially liable to become metafiction, thematizing issues of representation and interpretation”.<sup>67</sup> In the *Vita Nova* this effect is amplified. For instance, the account of the second dream (5, 9-16 [xii 2-9]) entails the vision *en abyme* of Dante sleeping and being observed by the hypostasis of love, with a fascinating kaleidoscopic effect (5, 10 [xii 3]):

Avenne quasi nel mezzo del mio dormire che me parve vedere nella mia camera lungo me sedere uno giovane vestito di bianchissime vestimenta, e pensando molto quanto alla vista sua, mi riguardava là ov'io giacea. E quando m'avea guardato alquanto, pareami che sospirando mi chiamasse, e diceami queste parole: «Fili mi, tempus est ut pretermittantur simulacra nostra».

It happened that about the middle of my sleep a young man appeared to me dressed in the whitest clothes, sitting next to me in my room, and, deeply pensive in his aspect, he regarded me where I was laying. And when he had regarded a while, he appeared to call to me sighing, and said these words: “Fili mi, tempus est ut praetermittantur simulacra nostra” (‘My son, it is time we abandoned our fictions’).

This metatextual effect of the passage is further intensified by the use of the Gallicism *riguardare* (Occitan, *reguardar*, Old French, *regarder*), where the prefix \*re- assumes both an intensive meaning (to watch with attention) and an idea of repetition: we watch Dante sleep;

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<sup>66</sup> GORNI 1996, p. 275.

<sup>67</sup> KRUGER 1992, p. 134 (and the whole chapter 6: “Dreams and fiction”, pp. 123-149). See also CERVIGNI 1986.

Dante watches himself and Love in the dream; Love watches Dante. Rather than being abandoned, the *simulacra* (simulations, fictions) deeply pervade the whole episode.

Most importantly, in the *Vita Nova*, the storyline that emerges from the poems finds a narrative and exegetical counterpart in the prose sections, which, in fact, duplicate and mirror them. The text precedes itself: “[...] it presupposes a pre-comprehension that will be confirmed, rectified or refined by the comprehension it permits”.<sup>68</sup> In this section, I will indicate how this articulates the structure of the *prosimetrum* and orients its reading. As mentioned above, the anthology of love poems for Beatrice is integrated with prose *ragioni* (accounts of the episodes occasioning the poem) and *divisioni* (partitions and explanations of the poems). The latter are quite common in medieval marginalia, but Dante embeds them within the narrative of the *prosimetrum*. Literally, he extracts them from the marginalia (and from their status of marginality) and places them in the continuum of the master text, informing the reader explicitly when these commentative pieces follow the poem and when they precede.

In the same way that the *rubrica* indicates the title, safeguards the integrity of the work, and offers hermeneutic suggestions for an allegorical interpretation of the text, the *divisioni* are not a mere paratextual explanatory tool with little relevance to the narrative of the *Vita Nova* (*pace* Boccaccio, who considered them merely reiterative “dichiarazioni per dichiarare”, “declarations to declare”).<sup>69</sup> In fact, they contribute to the general signification of the text. They help convey a fragmented persona of the writer-protagonist and his attempt to gather the scattered pieces of the self: they convey, in other words, “[...] la creazione da parte dello scrittore-protagonista di un’immagine complessa ed elusiva di se stesso” (“the

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<sup>68</sup> DÄLLENBACH 1989, p. 95.

<sup>69</sup> See *infra*, pp. 49-53.

writer-protagonist's creation of a complex and elusive image of himself").<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, they visually and textually expand the semantic component of the poems: "[...] the gloss displaces its object, and, contrary to the common assumption about the derivative nature of the commentary, medieval glosses became space for invention – scientific, philosophical, rhetorical, or artistic".<sup>71</sup> For instance, upon commenting on the section *in morte* (where the *divisioni* are set to precede the poems, instead of following them), the text clearly states that they help to deliver the sense of despair and loneliness that the poet and the whole city of Florence are experiencing after Beatrice's death (20, 2 [xxxii 2]): "E acciò che questa canzone paia rimanere più vedova dopo lo suo fine, la dividerò prima ch'io la scriva; e cotale modo terrò da qui innanzi" ("And in order for this canzone to look more desolate at its end, I will divide it before I transcribe it: and I will follow this style from now on"). The layout of the *divisioni* works, therefore, as the codicological correlative of the substance of the text's content. The indication that the narrative of the text offers in the *forma tractatus*

[...] intersects the interpretative plane of the *Vita Nova*, reinforcing the "loneliness" of the poem at the completion of its reading since there will be no commentary to follow. Dante has now designed the scribal apparatus to reflect the theme and tone of the lonely sorrow caused by Beatrice's absence.<sup>72</sup>

But there is more. As already underscored in dealing with the cluster of metaphors sprouting from the image of the book of memory, material aspects and textual elements form an indissoluble bond. This is true also and foremost for the *divisioni* and the *ragioni*. In fact, these are also clear attempts to condition the reception and safeguard the textual

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<sup>70</sup> D'ANDREA 1980, pp. 39-40.

<sup>71</sup> FRANKLIN-BROWN 2012, p. 62.

<sup>72</sup> STOREY 2005, p. 123.



correctness of the poems against scribal interpolations and corruptions.<sup>73</sup> The prose of the *Vita Nova* seems to fittingly endorse Wolfgang Iser's notion of fictional text as "an organization of signifiers which do not designate a signified object, but instead designate *instructions* for the *production* of the signified".<sup>74</sup> We can take as example the very articulated *divisione* of the sonnet "Morte villana, di Pietà nemica" ("Villainous Death, Pity's foe"; 3, 12 [viii, 12]):

Questo sonetto si divide in quattro parti. Nella prima parte chiamo la Morte per certi suoi nomi proprii; nella seconda, parlando a' lei, dico la cagione per che io mi muovo a biasmarla; nella terza la vitupero; nella quarta mi volgo a parlare a indiffinita persona, avegna che quanto al mio intendimento sia diffinita. La seconda comincia quivi *Poi ch'ài data*; la terza quivi *E s'io di gratia*; la quarta quivi *Chi non merta salute*.

This sonnet is divided into four parts. In the first part I call Death by certain proper names of hers; in the second, talking to her, I mention the reason why I move to blame her; in the third I insult her; in the fourth I turn to speak to an unnamed person, though she is specified to my knowledge. The second begins with *Poi ch'ài data* (*Since you have given*); the third with *E s'io di gratia* (*And if by grace*); the fourth with *Chi non merta salute* (*He who does not deserve grace*).

The *divisione* indicates the type of metric composition (in this case, a sonnet), the first line (in this case actually anticipated in the preceding *ragione*: 3, 3 [viii, 3]) and the lines correspondent to the inter-strophic divisions. By mentioning these lines, the *divisione* also gives partial information about the rhyme structure (this is limited, in this case, to l. 19, "Chi non merta salute", emphasis mine). Moreover, it provides a brief list of contents (the *forma tractatus* of the poem), the expository order, and a somewhat rudimentary argumentative scheme. It reveals, therefore, both the theme and the overall structure of the poem.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, it alerts the compiler and the copyist in advance about what transcriptional

<sup>73</sup> In this section I am deeply, and gratefully, indebted to STOREY 2005.

<sup>74</sup> ISER 1975, p. 18.

<sup>75</sup> See BOTTERILL 1994.

format to use for each poetic composition and, therefore, how to organize the layout and ruling of the folio.<sup>76</sup> This classificatory process makes an unsophisticated interpolation or expunction of sections of texts extremely burdensome. And, in fact, the textual tradition of the *Vita Nova* is generally correct, vis-à-vis the legion of non-eliminable textual corruptions of the *Convivio*.<sup>77</sup>

The same applicability of a primordial form of embedded editorial technique is true of both the *ragioni* of the poems and for the larger narrative context of the *Vita Nova*. The suggested inherence of both material and discursive features in the metatextual references of the prose sections allows for a clearer comprehension of the dynamics of ordering, attribution, authenticity, copy, address to a specific audience, and interpretation of the poems. The *Vita Nova*, in sum, exploits its nature of fiction in order to dramatize the process of its own composition and reception, control the modes of circulation, and prevent major textual corruptions. The dialogue between the poems and the prose establishes and secures their correct sequence. Altering the sequence implies an intervention at the level of the fiction as well. Moreover, only the poems that interact with (and are mentioned in) the narrative and the exegesis of the prose are to be considered authentically Dantean. The fiction itself and the concatenation of prose and poetry can be associated with the strategies of textual cohesion (and protection) plotted within the *Commedia*: the articulation of the poem in three canticles of an almost exact number of lines; the repetition of the same word (*stelle*: stars) to indicate the closure to all canticles; the connections between *canti* that deal with related material located in corresponding positions within the canticles (e.g.: all of the

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<sup>76</sup> See STOREY 2005, p. 122.

<sup>77</sup> In her edition of the *Convivio*, Franca Brambilla Ageno indicates ca. 20 lacunae and 1000 archetype errors, whereas the number of archetype errors of the *Vita Nova* oscillate between 4 (Barbi) and 3 (Gorni). Gorni proposes that the copyist of the archetype was transcribing from an original possibly extremely damaged or at a draft stage. See BRAMBILLA AGENO 1995, and GORNI 2001, p. 251.

sixth cantos focus on political discourse); last not least, the very rhyme scheme of the *terza rima*.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, as in the case of the *Vita Nova*, these technical editorial elements coexist with broader conceptual implications: for instance, the rhyme scheme of the *terzine* and the number of the canticles work as Trinitarian emblems (further amplified by the perfection of the total number of cantos: 1 + 33 + 33 + 33); the choice of *stelle* as closure signifies the upward motion of moral and metaphysical ascension that structures the narrative itself.

Dante's compulsive attempt to protect the textual integrity of the *libello* and condition its general interpretation shows an awareness of the risks of fragmentation, misattribution, and ideological misappropriation that texts could go through in the process of medieval anthologization:

Era difficile da parte dell'autore controllare e persino sapere, al di fuori della cerchia più ristretta degli amici poeti e degli abituali corrispondenti su quali basi il lettore avrebbe conosciuto e valutato la sua poesia. Le liriche circolavano per lo più per piccolo sillogi all'interno di più vaste antologie compilate a discrezione del lettore, secondo i suoi gusti e interessi, le sue possibilità di aggiornamento, la sua sensibilità e intelligenza poetica, il suo rigore, diremmo oggi, filologico.<sup>79</sup>

Outside his selected circle of friends and usual correspondents, it was difficult for the author to control and even know on what bases a reader would have comprehended and evaluated his poetry. Lyrical poems would mainly circulate in small compilations within bigger anthologies compiled by the reader according to his tastes and interests, his access to updates, his poetic cognizance and intelligence, his philological, as we now say, accuracy.

Dante's concern for correctness of the textual transmission of and interpretive approach to his poems was well justified. Justin Steinberg has explained Dante's dissatisfaction with the critical response to his work: the early reception of his texts "reveals a striking contrast

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<sup>78</sup> See TATLOCK 1936, and WCLASSICS 1975. See also AHERN 1982, and AHERN 1984.

<sup>79</sup> LEPORATTI 1994, p. 260.

between how he imagines the materiality of his texts and the historical reality of extant transcription”.<sup>80</sup>

The awareness of the ease with which texts could be reordered or given a newly made-to-measure meaning probably exacerbated Dante’s attitude. The very notion of providing the *sententia* of the events (and not the full account), as it emerges in the proem, is indicative of this. The *sententia* might mean both the overall meaning and the true metaphysical signification (as opposed to *sensus*, the literal meaning). Either way, the reader is explicitly told that the narrative is the mediated reconstruction of the events (and that the meaning of the poems is updated to the new poetics of the booklet): “Dante’s *libello* does not discover or describe the true meaning of the poems originally written as free-standing *rime*, but rather creates new poems which did not exist before and now exist alongside the originals”.<sup>81</sup>

In the *Vita Nova* Dante is the protagonist of this mystifying editorial practice on at least two occasions. In *Vita Nova* 2, 9 [v 4], he declares that he will omit transcribing the poems dedicated to the first *donna schermo* (screen lady), unless they can be re-used in terms of praise of Beatrice, showing a clearly revisionist approach to his own poetic *corpus*:

Con questa donna [*scil.* donna schermo] mi celai alquanti anni e mesi. E per più fare credente altrui, feci per lei certe cosette per rima, le quali non è mio intendimento di scrivere qui, se non in quanto facesse a tractare di quella gentilissima Beatrice; e però le lascerò tutte, salvo che alcuna cosa ne scriverò che pare che sia loda di lei.

I screened myself with this lady for some months and years: And to lead others to believe it, I composed certain little things for her in verse, that it is not my intention to write down, unless they comply to deal with that most graceful Beatrice; and therefore I will leave them all except one that I will write that can seem to be in praise of her.

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<sup>80</sup> STEINBERG 2007, p. 9.

<sup>81</sup> GRAGNOLATI 2010, p. 129.

A more sophisticated example of the same strategy occurs in *Vita Nova* 21, 2 [xxxii 2]. Dante recounts receiving a commission from an unspecified relative of Beatrice's for a poetic homage:

E poi che fue meco a ragionare, mi pregò che io li dovessi dire alcuna cosa per una donna che s'era morta; e simulava sue parole, acciò che paresse che dicesse d'un'altra, la quale morta era cortatamente. Onde io, accorgendomi che questi dicea solamente per questa benedecta, dissi di fare ciò che mi domandava lo suo prego.

And after speaking with me for a while, he asked me to write something about a lady who had died: and he disguised his words so that he seemed to speak of someone else, who had recently died. Hence I, realizing that this man spoke solely of that blessed one, told him that I would do as he demanded.

The sonnet resulting from this commission, “Venite a ’ntender li sospiri miei” (“Come listen to my sighs”), is a simulation. On the one hand, Beatrice's relative explicitly requires a poem for *un'altra* (another woman), not Beatrice. On the other hand, Dante accepts the simulation in order to be able to give vent to his sorrows and possibly continue the fiction of the *donna schermo*. The episode can be read as a theoretical self-denunciation of the practice of imposing a different semantic perspective on texts composed for specific purposes and circumstances. In short, the order of the poems reflects an *ordo artificialis*<sup>82</sup> that assumes a transcendental schema functional to a discourse of poetic apprenticeship and a palinode of the previous poetic production, all of which underscores a teleological route to literary and moral fulfillment. As Marco Santagata incisively writes, “il canzoniere «in morte» esiste solo in virtù del romanzo” (“the section *in morte* of the *canzoniere* exists only by virtue of the narrative”).<sup>83</sup> This route calls for the transcription of relevant data, their reordering in terms

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<sup>82</sup> See LAUSBERG 1998, p. 214.

<sup>83</sup> SANTAGATA 1999, p. 107.

of narrative effectiveness, the re-writing of ambiguous ones, and the elimination of non-pertinent ones.<sup>84</sup>

The poetic fragments of the *Vita Nova* constitute and simultaneously reflect the substance of the narrative through a duplication of the fiction, provided both in the poems themselves and in the prose that precedes or follows them. This doubling of the *Vita Nova*, which the denunciation of copied artifact of the *libello* indicates, presents the text in its materially coded nature of written work. In doing so, it also describes the various norms for its reception. The composition of the text (its constitution from selected fragments) provides the guidelines for its transcription, decoding, and interpretation. It presents itself, in sum, as a theory of poetic writing: “[...] la *Vita nuova*, insomma, non è racconto lungo, ma ragionamento storico intorno a un’idea di poesia” (“[...] the *Vita nuova*, in sum, is not a long tale, but a historical argument on an idea of poetry”).<sup>85</sup> This metatextual practice makes occult mechanisms visible. It is not limited to establishing the various readers and readings of the text. It implies a more wide-ranging contemplation of what makes reading possible and of the nature of the text as material artifact, textual datum, and fiction. The history of the text coincides with the story in the text. The narrative corresponds to its aetiology, and the text itself tries to answer the question: “*For how has it come to exist, in this form?*”.<sup>86</sup>

The *mise en abyme* of the code is an attempt to answer the same question. Some form of inside composition (i.e. an assembling of articulated elements within the text) generally epitomizes this type of *mise en abyme*: a work of art, a fabric, a machine, etc. The quest for this kind of inside representation within the *Vita Nova* risks involving a compulsive attempt

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<sup>84</sup> See PICONE 1977.

<sup>85</sup> SANGUINETI 1992, p. 5

<sup>86</sup> DÄLLENBACH 1989, p. 91.

to comply with Dällenbach's *esprit de système*: i.e. to hunt for an inside composition (or make one up) where there is none. Nevertheless, it is arduous not to engage in such a quest, when so many textual signals point towards a clear metatextual awareness on behalf of the *libello*. In *Vita Nova* 29, 1 [xl 1] Dante comes across a group of pilgrims traveling to Rome to worship an *acheiropoieton* (a religious icon not created by human craft): the Veil of Veronica or Sudarium, i.e. a fragment of cloth allegedly bearing likeness of the face of Jesus Christ:

Dopo questa tribulatione avvenne, in quel tempo che molta gente va per vedere quella ymagine benedicta la quale Gesocristo lasciò a' nnoi per exemplo della Sua bellissima figura, la quale vede la mia donna gloriosamente, che alquanti peregrini passavano per una via la quale è quasi mezzo della cittade ove nacque e vivette e morio la gentilissima donna, e andavano, secondo che mi parve, molto pensosi.

After this tribulation happened, at the time when many people go to see that blessed image which Jesus Christ left us as a copy of His most beautiful face, which my lady gloriously sees, that some pilgrims were passing by on a road which is almost central to the city where the most gentle lady was born, and lived, and died; and they went along very pensively, it seemed to me.

The lexical context of the episode is highly allusive to the figure of the *gentilissima*. *Ymagine* refers to the mental representation of Beatrice from her first appearance, in a context that stresses her divine nature by means of an indirect Homeric citation. Furthermore, it applies to the cruel protagonist of the canzone “E’ m’incresce di me sì duramente” (ll. 43-44), which we have seen as the first instance for the occurrence of the book metaphor in the Dantean *corpus*: “L’imagine di questa donna siede / su ne la mente ancora” (“And still the image of this lady / reigns above my mind”). Furthermore, *exemplo* refers to the copy from an original: the activity of *asemplare* is the one the copyist of the *libello* engages in upon transcribing from the book of memory. Finally, as Mary Franklin-Brown observes, *figura* could also refer to the overall visual appearance of the manuscript folio, as to both its organization and its

aesthetics.<sup>87</sup> In the broad terms described in Erich Auerbach, *figura* entails the various visual and textual approaches with which human perceptive modes understand the otherworldly. In our case, the Veronica represents the transcription into images of a superior reality, and para-etymologically exposes its own nature of reliable copy (*vera-icona*, true image). The Veronica appears as a codified organization of signs and discloses its own articulated composition in its manifestation as artifact (even if a product of divine craft). What is more, it institutes the series of hypostatic correlations already observed, in which the *libello* is to Beatrice as the Veronica is to Jesus Christ. The *mise en abyme* of the code seems to confirm the reading of the *Vita Nova* as *legenda Sanctae Beatricis* that was first suggested by Alfredo Schiaffini as subtitle for the *prosimetrum*.<sup>88</sup>

#### 4. The Copyist as Author

When we work on medieval textuality, we necessarily engage with the simultaneous study of both discursive and material dimensions of literary texts, a major *leitmotiv* of this study so far. In Martin Irvine's words:

[...] one must account for the systems of literary or textual language that formed the archive of discourse for medieval textual communities; these include the system of literary language, genres, styles, and rhetorical strategies that provided the ground of possibility for writing new texts and for interpreting those texts already received. One must *also* account for the material or physical form of texts in actual manuscripts; these include the material conditions of textual culture and the mode of signifying specific to the format, script, layout, and individuality of manuscript books.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> FRANKLYN-BROWN 2012, pp. 38-48.

<sup>88</sup> SCHIAFFINI 1934.

<sup>89</sup> IRVINE, p. 181 (emphasis mine).



Copyists modify, adulterate, restructure, reorder, and recodify the texts, often despite or against the instructions encoded in the exemplars from which they transcribe. We have seen how, in the *Commedia*, the election of a specific audience is related to the choice of a specific book format (at least as an indication for the reader-copyist): the university bench or lectern book. This suggestion was not univocally received in the early textual tradition of the poem. The effective diffusion of the poem seems to follow a route different than that suggested by the metatextual indications embedded in the poem. The extraordinary number of extant codices of the *Commedia* indicatively covers the full range of possible codicological formats manuscript culture could provide in the first half of the fourteenth century. The *Commedia*, in fact, is “l’unico grande testo volgare che nel corso del trecento sia stato riprodotto e diffuso secondo tutta la gamma dei modelli grafico-librari correnti” (“the only important vernacular text that, during the fourteenth century, was reproduced and circulated in compliance with all contemporary graphic and book models”).<sup>90</sup> The university bench book format possibly wished for in *Paradiso* x 22 only counts for a limited number of exemplars. An example of this format is ms. Riccardiano-Braidense (denoted by the *siglum* Rb in Giorgio Petrocchi’s edition of the poem), copied in *littera textualis bononiensis* (Gothic bookhand used in Bologna) by a Maestro Galvano (and his son Tommaso) in the second quarter of the fourteenth century, modeled on juridical codices, enriched with historiated initials, accompanied by Jacopo della Lana’s commentary, and now divided between Florence (Biblioteca Riccardiana, ms. 1005: *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*) and Milan (Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, AG.XII.2: *Paradiso*).<sup>91</sup> The Riccardiano-Braidense aptly reflects the initial circulation of the *Commedia*: eight out of nine of the oldest codices of *Commedia* present

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<sup>90</sup> PETRUCCI 1988, p. 1229.

<sup>91</sup> See PETROCCHI 1966-67, I, pp. 83-84, RODDEWIG 1984, p. 126 and pp. 195-196, POMARO 1995, BOSCHI ROTIROTI 2004, p. 127, and ROMANINI 2007, pp. 57-58.

features similar to those of Rb. Nevertheless, the Riccardiano-Braidense represents an exception, if considered within the manuscript corpus of the so-called *antica vulgata* (the manuscripts preceding Giovanni Boccaccio's editorial activity on Dante's text). In this case, the codicological and paleographic organization of Rb is rather exceptional, while the "libro registro di lusso" (deluxe register-book)<sup>92</sup> is the most diffuse format. One might mention the editorial activity of Francesco di Ser Nardo da Barberino and the so-called "Danti del Cento", a group of codices dating around the middle of the fourteenth century, legendarily linked to a scribe who allegedly provided the dowry for his daughters by producing and selling a hundred copies of the poem.<sup>93</sup> The use of parchment, the distribution of the text in two columns, a decorative apparatus of average execution, and chancery minuscule are some of the recursive features of this homogenous group of manuscripts. Patronage determines book formats more than authors do: we can infer a certain "desiderio di ostensione, più ancora che di acculturazione, della nuova committenza borghese" ("new bourgeois commissioners' desire for ostentation, rather than acculturation").<sup>94</sup> The mercantile and notary audience that determined the success of the *Commedia* as a classic would commission luxurious exemplars to enrich their private libraries, without giving up the codicological features (e.g.: the layout and the chancery minuscule script) to which they were more accustomed.

The textual condition of the *Vita Nova* is infinitely less problematic than that of the *Commedia*, with a total of forty-three extant manuscripts. In this section, I intend to explore the 'afterlife' of some of the embedded hermeneutic guidelines in three of these exemplars

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<sup>92</sup> See PETRUCCI 1983.

<sup>93</sup> See PETROCCHI 1966-67, I, pp. 289-313, SAVINO 2001, and BOSCHI ROTIROTI 2004, pp. 75-98.

<sup>94</sup> MIGLIO 1995, p. 629.

(pertaining to two families of the stemma), each of them prominent within the textual tradition of the *libello*, although for very different reasons.

The first manuscript is ms. Martelli 12 preserved in the Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana in Florence, denoted by the *siglum* M after Michele Barbi's edition.<sup>95</sup> This parchment codex was produced in Gubbio (Umbria), approximately during the first quarter of the fourteenth century. It is the most ancient witness of the *Vita Nova* and was probably copied when Dante was still alive. It is a miscellaneous manuscript, written by six different hands. The scribe that we indicate with  $\gamma$  is the copyist of a selection of poems by Guido Cavalcanti and Dante (separated by a ballata by the otherwise unremarkable poet Caccia di Castello) and of the *Vita Nova*. Sandro Bertelli purports to identify  $\gamma$  with the second scribe of the Occitan anthology P (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, 41.42), completed in 1310.<sup>96</sup>

The scribe writes in two columns, in a sober *littera textualis* (Gothic book hand). Each poem starts with a filigreed majuscule, alternatively blue and red, whose height is equivalent to two lines. The only letter greater in size than these is the first initial on the *libello* (whose height is nine lines). The transcription of the poems follows the same format throughout the text. Sonnets are transcribed continuously in one column, as is the only ballata. Canzoni are transcribed as prose, and paragraph signs indicate strophic divisions.

The prose sections also show a distinctive series of diacritical notations. Paragraph signs mark Latin quotations with certain regularity. Also, they mark the prose sections (*divisioni*) after each poem before Beatrice's death. In the section of the *libello* after Beatrice's

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<sup>95</sup> See BARBI 1907, pp. xvii-lxxv. See also CASTELLANI 1998. A digital reproduction is available at <http://vitanova.unipv.it> (retrieved 01/15/2015).

<sup>96</sup> See BERTELLI 2004.

death, they still follow the poems, therefore introducing the *ragioni* (the narrative sections), since the *divisioni* precede the poems.

The early date around which scribe  $\gamma$  operates (optimistically less than twenty-five years after the composition of the *Vita Nova*) makes ms. Martelli 12 a unique witness of the early circulation, reception, and reproduction of the *libello*. What is more, this scribe shows a clear understanding of the material implications of the meta-textual guidelines provided by the text itself at the level of the enunciation. A few examples will help qualify this statement.

In ms. Martelli 12, the *Vita Nova* is preceded by the rubric: *Incipit uita noua*. In the context of medieval manuscripts, as we saw *supra*, this notation is above all, prior to all its symbolic implications of regeneration through the experience of love, the indication of the title of the work. As such, it assumes the clear position of a title on the upper margin of the folio, heading the text proper.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, the scribe provides all the poems and the *divisioni* without interruption, but he also marks them with alternating blue and red illuminated initials, clearly indicating beginnings and ends of the sections. We do not know how many *interpositi* separate ms. Martelli 12 from the archetype of the *Vita Nova*. What we do know, however, is that the earliest witness of the *Vita Nova*, closest to the author of the *libello* as to date of completion and linguistic competence (poetic diction of *Duecento* poetry, occasionally variegated by *umbrismi*), preserves a material execution of the text that is in compliance with the interpretive guidelines embedded in its enunciation.

The second set of manuscripts is notable for a completely different series of reasons, i.e. the role of the copyist in shaping the early canon of Italian literature. In this case, our copyist is in fact none other than Giovanni Boccaccio. From the 1350s on, Boccaccio devotes much of his intellectual effort to the celebration of Dante as *auctor*, possibly well

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<sup>97</sup> See DE ROBERTIS 1980 (*ad locum*), and DE ROBERTIS 2001, p. 104 n. 4 for a list of the manuscripts that follow the same practice.

aware of the positive repercussions of this critical strategy for his own literary career. We have two extant copies of Boccaccio's transcription of the *Vita Nova*, transmitted in two manuscripts that represent the richness of the so-called *b* branch of the  $\alpha$  family of the *stemma*. These are the ms. Zelada 104.6 (ca. 1350) of the Biblioteca caputular in Toledo (known by the *siglum* To after Barbi's edition), and the Chigi L V 176 (1363-1366), preserved in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (known by the *siglum* K<sup>2</sup> after Barbi's edition).<sup>98</sup> We do not have the exemplars Boccaccio worked on, but editors generally agree that the Chigi is copied from the Toledo, with the exception of Gorni, who thinks the two manuscripts are collateral.<sup>99</sup>

The Toledo manuscript (*non uidi*) is Boccaccio's first extant compilation of Dante's texts.<sup>100</sup> It is a parchment text of medium format in semi-Gothic script. It preserves the *Trattatello in laude di Dante*, the *Vita Nova*, the *Commedia* with the *Argomenti* (or *Brieve raccoglimento*, brief synthesis) in *terza rima*, and Dante's fifteen *canzoni distese* (i.e.: polystrophic canzoni). The *Vita Nova* occupies ff. 29r-46v. Boccaccio opts for a single column of text with ample margins. Consequently, his transcription of the *Vita Nova* presents centralized narrative and poetic texts and marginalized commentary. Poems and narrative sections that follow are marked by filigreed red and blue majuscules. These are followed by a majuscule in brown ink with yellow traits. The lines of the poems are transcribed continuously like prose and separated by a *coma*, “un punto sormontato da una virgola con svolazzo verso destra” (“a dot beneath a comma with a swash leaning right”).<sup>101</sup> The closure of the poems is indicated

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<sup>98</sup> For the dates of composition, see CURSI 2013, pp. 129-134.

<sup>99</sup> See GORNI 1993.

<sup>100</sup> For a description see BERTELLI and CURSI 2014, CURSI and FIORILLA 2013, PIROVANO 2012, and PIROVANO 2014.

<sup>101</sup> PIROVANO 2012, p. 281.

by a *periodus* (similar to a semicolon). Internal partitions of the sonnets (the final two *terzine*) and the canzoni (the interstrophic divisions) are indicated by majuscles. A similar set of majuscles and diacritical signs also mark the ballata. A single blank line separates the section *in vita* and *in morte* of Beatrice. The citation from Jeremiah's *Lamentations* (19, 1 [xxviii 1]) is marked by a blue majuscule *Q* of bigger module (three lines, only smaller than the incipit *I* that opens the *libello*). Paragraph signs and yellow majuscles indicate the commentative prose, which is in the margins and in a smaller module.

Ms. Chigi L V 176 is a *descriptus* of ms. Toledo 106.4 (that is, a manuscript transcribed from ms. Toledo).<sup>102</sup> It is a parchment codex preserving the *Trattatello in laude di Dante* (in the second redaction), the *Vita Nova*, Guido Cavalcanti's canzone "Donna me prega" (with Dino del Garbo's Latin commentary), Boccaccio's Latin *carmen* to Petrarca "Ytalie iam certus honos", Dante's fifteen *canzoni distese*, and Petrarca's *Fragmentorum liber* (the so-called 'Chigi form' of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*). The *Vita Nova* occupies ff. 13r-28v. The manuscript presents a set of paragraphematic and diacritical signs similar to ms. Toledo's. Minor differences in paragraph division (e.g.: the ascription to the text of parts of the division of the ballata, placed in the margins in ms. Toledo) are not relevant to our overall discourse. The Chigi also presents the materially dramatic separation between section *in vita* and *in morte* of Beatrice: a blank line and a three-line-high red majuscule with blue filigree mark the citation from Jeremiah, even if the following narrative section ("Io era nel proponimento [...]"), "It was my intent [...]") is not marked. This noteworthy accentuation of the two-part form of the *Vita Nova* through a corresponding bipartite format seems to comply with the similar treatment reserved for the *Liber fragmentorum*, the redaction of Petrarca's *canzoniere*

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<sup>102</sup> See DE ROBERTIS 1974 (fac-simile reproduction). For a description see BERTELLI and CURSI 2014, CURSI and FIORILLA 2013, PIROVANO 2012, and PIROVANO 2014.

transmitted by ff. 43v-79r of the same Chigi codex. In fact, in the *Liber fragmentorum*, f. 72rv is left blank after the sonnet “Passa la naue mia colma doblo” (*Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* clxxxix).<sup>103</sup>

The format that Boccaccio chooses entails an active editorial process of expunging sections of Dante’s prose (the *divisioni*) from the center of the folio and ascribing them to the margins as commentary. Boccaccio’s sensibility to and awareness of these *mise en page* (layout) and *mise en texte* (textual style) is clearly indicated in the editorial note with which he justifies this innovation in the Toledo manuscript (f. 29r, right margin), and again in ms. Chigi (f. 13r, *bas de page*): “Maraviglierannosi molti, per quello ch’io advisi, perché io le divisioni de’ sonetti non ho nel testo poste, come l’autore del presente libretto le puose; [...]” (“A great many will wonder, by what I am claiming, why I have not placed the divisions (*divisioni*) of the sonnets in the text as the author of this little book placed them [...]).<sup>104</sup> Even though in the *Trattatello* Boccaccio explicitly refers to the tripartite articulation of the *volumetto* into poems, *cagioni*, and *divisioni*,<sup>105</sup> in his redactions of the *Vita Nova* he literally extrapolates the exegetical sections from the narrative continuum and puts them in the margins. On the one hand, he institutes a structural, codicological, and hierarchical difference between *ragioni* and *divisioni* that one could not gauge from Dante’s text. On the other hand, he submits this peculiar decision to a discourse of philological accuracy, in that he aims to restore an alleged final authorial intention:

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<sup>103</sup> See WILKINS 1951, pp. 145-194, and SANTAGATA 1992, pp. 253-267.

<sup>104</sup> I cite from BARBI 1907, pp. xiv-xv (n. 1).

<sup>105</sup> See RICCI 1965, p. 629.

[...] e tra l'altre cose di che si dolea d'averlo fatto, si ramaricava d'averle inchiusse le divisioni nel testo, forse per quella medesima ragione che muove me; là ond'io non potendolo negli altri emendare, in questo che scritto ho, n'ho voluto sodisfare l'appetito de l'autore.<sup>106</sup>

[...] and among the other things he regretted having done, he complained about having included the divisions in the text, perhaps for that same reason that moves me; and so, being unable to emend any of the other copies, in the one I have written I have endeavored to satisfy the author's intention.

Boccaccio's editorial self-awareness is clearly indicated by the fourfold *geminatio* of the first person subject pronoun *io*, a notable action of interposition between Dante and his audience: "Boccaccio nella funzione di editore si assume così alcune funzioni proprie dell'autore" ("Thus Boccaccio, in his role as editor, assumes functions proper to the author").<sup>107</sup> Boccaccio "renders the editorial favor of virtually destroying the *Vita Nova*'s unique and often intricate narratives which interweave episodes with notes on *how* and *why* the poems were composed, *how* they should be read, and *how* they should be copied and ordered by the private reader".<sup>108</sup>

Boccaccio's authority among scribes, men of letters, and literary critics has determined the peculiar reception of the *Vita Nova* through the centuries until Barbi's magisterial edition in 1907. The *descripti* manuscripts of the *Vita Nova* stemming from Boccaccio's copies follow his redaction of the *prosimetrum* more or less consciously.<sup>109</sup> The *editio princeps* of the *libello* (Florence, Sermantelli, 1576) completely obliterates the *divisioni*, instituting their editorial and critical misfortune for the following three and a half centuries.

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<sup>106</sup> See BARBI 1907, pp. xiv-xv (n. 1).

<sup>107</sup> BANELLA 2014, p. 392.

<sup>108</sup> STOREY 2005, p. 124.

<sup>109</sup> See BANELLA 2014.



The textual transmission of the *libello* in the three codices mentioned here seems to materially enact the internal dialectics between a tripartite articulation of the *Vita Nova* (poems, *ragioni*, *divisioni*) and its bipartite scansion into sections *in vita* and *in morte* of Beatrice, emphasized by the symmetry between the Latin *incipit*, the Latin *explicit*, and the new *proemio al mezzo* (halfway proem)<sup>110</sup> marked by the Latin citation from Jeremiah's *Lamentations*. Well aware of the three discrete formal elements of the *prosimetrum*, Boccaccio's editorial practice seems nonetheless oriented towards a more distinctively thematic (and narrative) partition. On the contrary, the copyist of ms. Martelli 12 keeps the sections separated by means of diacritical signs and majuscules, but transmits them continually as one compact block of text. In this, the scribe possibly follows the nonchalant arrangement of *divisioni* and *ragioni*, a distinctive feature of the *libello* that still puzzles modern critics: "[...] intense self-consciousness in these areas [*scil.* Dante's own poetic evolution and vernacular predecessors] only makes the absence of meta-critical reflection on the book as a whole – and especially of its unique brand of auto-commentary – all the more noticeable".<sup>111</sup>

It is not immediately clear whether Boccaccio simply dismissed the metatextual guidelines embedded in the *Vita Nova*, maybe pursuing a purer narrative and novellistic structure, or more subtly chose to assign the status and role of marginalia to the *divisioni*. Susan Noakes argues that Boccaccio aimed to establish a hierarchy between gloss and text that reflects a central role for the author at the expense of the reader. Boccaccio advocates for the *Vita Nova* a textual stability that the medieval readers' proactive role in establishing textual meaning and their practice of interweaving reading with writing could have endangered. Jason Houston reads Boccaccio's practice as an attempt to shape Dante's poetry

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<sup>110</sup> I borrow Gian Biagio Conte's efficacious formula from CONTE 1976.

<sup>111</sup> ASCOLI 2008, p. 178.

“so that it could rival the works of Latin authors whose dominating presence in Italian humanism threatened to stunt the growth of a nascent vernacular literature”.<sup>112</sup> The very multiplicity of these compilations suggests that Boccaccio was working with an audience in mind, not just merely to augment his collection:

Anche la dichiarazione che egli fa per giustificare il distacco delle *Divisioni* della *Vita Nuova* dal testo è rivolta evidentemente al gran pubblico, dicendovisi “Meraviglierannosi molti” con quel che segue; i *molti* sono il pubblico de’ lettori, presso i quali il novello editore vuole preventivamente giustificare la novità.<sup>113</sup>

Even the statement made to justify the separation of the *Divisioni* of the *Vita Nuova* from the text is directed to the great audience. When saying “Meraviglierannosi molti” (with what follows), *molti* indicates the audience of readers for whom the new editor wants to preemptively motivate the novelty.

What is certain is that Boccaccio’s version of the *prosimetrum* is inspired by a more accustomed distribution between commentary and poetry, the same one that characterizes the relationship between an authoritative text and its exegetical apparatus. This is true for instance, of Boccaccio’s ms. of Statius’ *Thebaid*.<sup>114</sup> Boccaccio’s transcription of the *Vita Nova* materially crafts and institutes Dante’s first work as an *auctoritas*, a text deserving an exegetical apparatus. A recent discovery by Sandro Bertelli and Marco Corsi in the final flyleaf of the Toledo manuscript encourages such an interpretation.<sup>115</sup> On f. 267v, Bertelli and Corsi, with the help of Wood’s lamp, noticed the profile portrait of a laurelled poet. A heading in majuscules above it reads the Dantean words (*Inferno* iv 88): “Homero poeta sovrano”. The portrait and the heading seal the collection of Dante’s texts and seemingly associate the ancient poet with Gian Battista Vico’s “Toscano Omero” in an ideal genealogy

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<sup>112</sup> HOUSTON 2010, p. 44.

<sup>113</sup> VANDELLI 1923, pp. 21-22.

<sup>114</sup> See *infra*, pp. 65-67.

<sup>115</sup> See BERTELLI 2012, and CURSI 2013, pp. 105-106.

that Dante himself had contributed to outline in *Inferno* iv. In the next chapter, Boccaccio's editorial and critical work on Dante's texts with regard to his own strategic pursuit of the canonization of vernacular literature will emerge.<sup>116</sup>

## 5. Conclusions

In this chapter I analyzed the imagery of books and book production in the *Vita Nova*. I indicated their textual and material denotation. I underscored how they convey precious information about the material context of the composition, circulation, and reception of the *libello*. I also showed how they contribute to direct readers and copyists towards a preferential route in their textual interpretation and transmission. Moreover, I suggested that these interpretive guidelines are always accompanied by a series of more strictly literary implications. They convey a surplus of meaning: they function, in Maria Corti's words, as "ipersegno" (hyper-sign).<sup>117</sup> In the course of my analysis I also turned to relevant passages in the *Commedia* in order to stress the pervasiveness of these figures in Dante's poetic imagination. In the *Commedia*, the meta-textual indications remain, and the metaphorical element assumes new and more comprehensive suggestions, in compliance with the encyclopedic nature of the poem as *summa*. In the *Commedia*, that is, we notice a continuous movement from the conception of the book of memory to the metaphor of the world as book, and, therefore the notion of the legibility of the world. The world is a book in that it is a system of signs divinely written. Consequently, reality manifests itself in an intelligible form. The supreme instance of this concomitant persistence and progression seals

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<sup>116</sup> See EISNER 2013.

<sup>117</sup> CORTI 1976, pp. 119-148.

Dante's literary activity under the same sign with which it had begun and thus marks the end of the poem (and this chapter).

In *Paradiso* xxxiii, in fact, Dante finally gains access to the contemplation of God through a triple series of epiphanies, aimed to manifest his all-encompassing nature (the book), the Trinitarian mystery (the three circles), and the mystery of the Incarnation (one of the circles enclosing a human figure). At the apogee of manuscript culture, the book is the designated instrument of understanding and representing the coherence of God's plan of creation (*Paradiso* xxxiii 85-87):

Nel suo profondo vidi che s'interna,  
legato con amore in un volume,  
ciò che per l'universo si squaderna.

In its depth I saw ingathered,  
bound with love in a single volume,  
what through the universe becomes unbound quires.

John Ahern has argued that the metaphor of binding institutes an analogy between God, Dante, and the reader as scribes of *libri coelestes* (heavenly books) due to the polysemy of *volume* (book, but also heaven in the Ptolemaic universe):

(1) after creating the elements of the universe, God binds them, metaphorically, into a book; (2) after experiencing these elements singly, Dante the pilgrim beholds a vision of them in their unity; (3) after writing these experiences in a series of *quaderni*, Dante the poet-scribe binds them, in principle, into a single volume; (4) after reading or copying these *quaderni*, the reader has them bound together – an act that parallels the effort to grasp the poem's aesthetic unity.<sup>118</sup>

The dual track of signification, metatextual and metaphorical, that we have seen through this chapter is once again confirmed. *Interna*, like *legato*, refers to the binding of the *quaderni* into

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<sup>118</sup> AHERN 1982, p. 804.

the single volume of the *Commedia* (*uno* retaining the Latin meaning of “only one, unique”). In dialectical connection to *un volume*, it also denotes the Trinitarian mystery. *Squaderna* metaphorically refers to the composite series of scattered entities, gathered together in God but unfolding like quires in the sensitive world. Also, it possibly refers to the circulation of the *Commedia* in canticles, or groups of cantos, finally to be bound together, as already indicated in *Purgatorio* xxxiii.<sup>119</sup> Moreover, it perhaps alludes to the quadrangular format of the quire (and the codex). As suggested by Antonio Rossini,<sup>120</sup> the dialectic between three and four that the passage institutes seems to anticipate the problem of squaring the circle possibly alluded to further in the *canto* (*Paradiso* xxxiii 133-135):

Qual è 'l geomètra che tutto s'affige  
per misurar lo cerchio, e non ritrova,  
pensando, quel principio ond' elli indige.

Like the geometer, who fully gives  
himself to measuring the circle, nor,  
through thinking, discovers the principle he wants.

Dante institutes a biblical correspondence between his “sacrato poem” (sacred poem) and the phenomenic world. The book contains the world and is contained in it. The frame that separates reality and fiction becomes extremely porous and ambiguous: at least if we agree with Singleton that “[t]he fiction of the *Comedy* is that it is not fiction”.<sup>121</sup> The *Commedia*, in its aspiration to totality and its encyclopedic will, seems to reify that sort of autonomous textual cosmos that Franco Moretti has efficaciously named “opera mondo” (“world-text”).<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> See *supra*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>120</sup> ROSSINI 2011, pp. 55-80.

<sup>121</sup> SINGLETON 1957, p. 129.

<sup>122</sup> MORETTI 1994. The English translation *Modern Epic* (1996) is not as captivating.

The metaphor of the book in *Paradiso* xxxiii generates a non-conceptual form of comprehension, where *mýthos* eventually supersedes *lógos*. Dante's work ends with one of Blumenberg's 'absolute metaphors': one that is non-deducted, irreducible, paradigmatic. An extreme elusiveness of its exact semantic limits counterbalances the depth of its imaginative implications. The accuracy of the material connotations of the book metaphor, that is, paradoxically brings about a semantic ephemerality made of metaphysical allusions, which frustrates the reader's effort to gain some level of rational understanding. In Osip Mandel'shtam's words, "[l]eggere Dante è prima di tutto un lavoro interminabile, che a misura dei nostri successi ci allontana dalla meta" ("reading Dante is first of all an interminable labor: the extent of our achievements distances us from our final purpose").<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> MANDEL'SHTAM 2003, p. 50.

## Textual Condition and Materiality in Boccaccio's *Teseida*

Il n'y a pas de difference entre ce dont un livre parle et la maniere dont il est fait.  
G. DELEUZE – F. GUATTARI, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie. Mille plateaux*

### 1. Introduction

In a brief geographical note on the Peloponnesus in the *De re publica* (2, 8), Marcus Tullius Cicero incorrectly refers to the citizens of *Phlius* by calling them *Phliuntii*. Then, in a letter to his friend and publisher Titus Pomponius Atticus (*ad Att.* 6, 2, 3), he demands that *Phliuntii* be emended into *Phliasii*:

'Phliasios' autem dici sciebam et ita fac ut habeas; nos quidem sic habemus. sed primo me ἀναλογία deceperat, Φλιοῦς Ὅποῦς Σιποῦς, quod Ὅπούντιοι Σιπούντιοι; sed hoc continuo correximus.

I know that the people of Phlius are called *Phliasii*: please correct your copy accordingly. I already corrected mine, but at first a false analogy deceived me. Since Opus and Sipus make *Opuntii* and *Sipuntii*, I thought Phlius would make *Phliuntii*. But I corrected this at once.

Cicero realizes he has made a mistake in deriving a demonym, modeling it analogically on other names of peoples. Therefore, he asks Atticus to emend his copies, in the same way he had emended his own copy. We do not know whether Atticus was able to edit any of his exemplars, at least partially; the only direct witness of the treatise (the legendary Vat. lat. 5757, rediscovered by Angelo Mai in 1821) has the reading *Phliuntii*, without any trace of emendation. It is the task of modern philologists to restore Cicero's intended reading. *Habent sua fata libelli*: books have their own destiny.

The episode anecdotally tells of the modes of circulation in republican Rome.<sup>1</sup> It also tells of the author's tenacious attachment to his work, even after its publication. It shows his stubborn attempt to condition the reception of his texts, even after his own Barthesian death. The author's effort to condition the reception of his own oeuvre is the object of this case study.

In this chapter, I will inquire into the editorial and literary connections between three books (two manuscripts and an incunabulum), which transmit Giovanni Boccaccio's *Teseida delle nozze d'Emilia* (henceforth: *Teseida*). The current shelf marks of these books are:

Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, ms. Acquisti e doni 325;

Cambridge (Mass.), Houghton Library, ms. Typ 227;

Cambridge (Mass.), Houghton Library, Inc 5735 (28.2).

First, I will outline, in the terms proposed by Louis Trolle Hjelmslev in his *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*,<sup>2</sup> how the form of content (the textual narrative of the *Teseida* and its commentary) and the form of expression (its writing, its graphic rendition, its codicological features) both concur to determine trajectories for the interpretation of the poem. Then, I will show pertinent aspects of the textual proliferation of the *Teseida*, underlining the relationship between the material condition of Boccaccio's autograph and the two exemplars in the collection of Houghton Library. Finally, I will conclude with some considerations on the notions of authorship, and the historical nature of the commentary form.

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief introduction to the modalities of textual circulation in antiquity see DORANDI 2007.

<sup>2</sup> See HJELMSLEV 1953.



## 2. Boccaccio's Desk: Book Forms and Texts

Armando Petrucci based his interpretive paradigm of Francesco Petrarca's writing on three major elements:<sup>3</sup> his profound competence with different book formats; his choices of different book forms for different textual genres; and his active role in the different phases of book production (a particularly innovative aspect, since a “contributo fisico dell'autore alla registrazione materiale dei propri testi era praticamente assente” (“physical contribution by the author to the material registration of his texts was basically inexistent”).<sup>4</sup> A similar set of heuristic guidelines can be fruitfully applied to our study of Boccaccio's autograph of the *Teseida*. Some preliminary considerations will help understand why and how.

We possess some twenty-two manuscripts of which Boccaccio's complete or partial autography has been identified and ascertained.<sup>5</sup> Within this compact corpus, which shows a broad knowledge of books and book models, Boccaccio appears to use different book forms for different texts, with significantly diversified options of *mise en texte* and *mise en page*. Moreover, he seems to work towards the creation of a causal nexus between material container and textual contents. The choice of a specific container, therefore, produces certain semantic elements.

For instance, the *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta* can only be a “picciolo libretto” (“small book”) of modest form. Upon addressing her own diary-booklet (9, 1-5), Fiammetta maintains that:

Tu dei essere contento di mostrarti simigliante al tempo mio, il quale, essendo infelicissimo, te di miseria veste, come fa me; e però non ti sia cura d'alcuno ornamento, sì come gli altri

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<sup>3</sup> See, at least, PETRUCCI 1967, PETRUCCI 1979<sup>b</sup>, PETRUCCI 1983, PETRUCCI 1984, and PETRUCCI 1992.

<sup>4</sup> PETRUCCI 1992, p. 354.

<sup>5</sup> See MAZZA 1966, AUZZAS 1973, CURSI 2013, CURSI and FIORILLA 2013, and DE ROBERTIS 2013. The most recent descriptions of these manuscripts can be found in the relative codicological profiles in DE ROBERTIS *et alii*, eds. 2013, *passim*.

sogliono avere, cioè di nobili coverte di colori varii tinte e ornate, o di pulita tonditura, o di leggiadri minii, o di gran titoli; queste cose non si convengono a' gravi pianti li quali tu porti; lascia e queste e li larghi spazii e li lieti inchiostri e le impomciate carte a' libri felici; a te si conviene d'andare rabbuffato con isparte chiome, e macchiato e di squallore pieno, là dove io ti mando, e co' miei infortunii negli animi di quelle che ti leggeranno destare la santa pietà.

You must be contented to appear similar to my time, which (being extremely unhappy) dresses you with sadness, like it does with me. Therefore don't worry about any decoration, like other books usually do: i.e. noble covers in various colors and adornments, a clean cut, graceful illuminations, or grand titles. These things are not appropriate for the long cryings that you bring with you. Leave for the happy books these things, together with the ample margins, the happy inks, and the papers rubbed with pumice stone. Where I send you, you should go around ruffled, with your hair messed up, stained, and squalid. Arouse pity with my disgraces in the souls that will read you.

The book is explicitly required to assume a form that is congruous with the genre and elegiac content of the text. On the one hand, the address *ad libellum* evokes a common practice of classical poetry: in this case, the obvious reference is to Ovid's *Tristia* (i 1). On the other hand, the classical rhetorical principle of *conveniens* (correspondence between style and content) is extendedly reconfigured to more aptly comply with the material aspect of literary composition as well.

The autograph of the *Decameron* (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, ms. Hamilton 90) offers further probative evidence of the relation between literary elements and material features. The codex is modeled on the scholastic treatise format, which Petrucci calls “libro da banco universitario” (“university bench or lectern book”):<sup>6</sup> Gothic book hand (*littera textualis*), large dimensions, text in two columns, and ample margins for annotations. Moreover, the hierarchical system created through a wide gamut of different majuscules and paraf signs is intended to draw attention to the argumentative prefaces rather than the narrative novellas proper. As Lucia Battaglia Ricci observed, the nature of the book is therefore materially shaped as a didactic text, rather than a merely fictional one. The spatial

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<sup>6</sup> See PETRUCCI 1979<sup>c</sup>, p. 141, and PETRUCCI 1983, pp. 513-517.

architecture of the text implies an attempt to provide a model for reproduction and fruition.<sup>7</sup> The extreme sophistication and difficult reproducibility of Boccaccio's autograph was generally ignored by amateur and professional scribes, who tended to privilege the narrative component of the *Decameron* over its embedded self-commentary and overarching frame.<sup>8</sup> The choice of a different book form by those who undertook to transmit the text brought about an interpretation significantly different from the one Boccaccio had inscribed within the material features of his last autograph.

We possess some six manuscripts of established autography that predate the composition of the autograph of the *Teseida* (ca. 1348 according to Marco Corsi's recent proposal).<sup>9</sup> Upon writing the *Teseida*, that is, Boccaccio had already acquired significant skills as a copyist of different textual genres in different scripts and forms: historical and moral treatises in the so-called *zibaldone laurenziano* (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, ms. Pluteo 29.8), a commentary to Thomas Aquinas' *Ethics* in the form of marginal glosses (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, ms. Ambr. A 204 inf.), part of his personal copy of Statius' *Thebaid* (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, ms. Pluteo 38.6, limited to ff. 43, 100, 111, and 169), the whole corpus of Terence's six comedies (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, ms. Pluteo 38.17), and the rare *Carmina Priapea* (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, ms. Pluteo 33.31).<sup>10</sup> Moreover, from the years around and immediately following the composition of the *Teseida* comes the first result of Boccaccio's assiduous editorial and critical work on Dante Alighieri: ms. Toledo Zelada 104.6, which contains the

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<sup>7</sup> See BATTAGLIA RICCI 2000, pp. 122-128. See also MALAGNINI 2002.

<sup>8</sup> See CURSI 2007.

<sup>9</sup> See CURSI 2013, pp. 15-41.

<sup>10</sup> See CURSI 2013, pp. 129-134.

first redaction of the *Trattatello in laude di Dante*, the *Vita Nova*, the *Commedia*, and the fifteen *canzoni distese*.<sup>11</sup> As Marco Corsi summarizes:

[p]er la realizzazione di progetti librari così eterogenei, il Boccaccio aveva fatto ricorso a varie soluzioni grafiche, codicologiche e di organizzazione del testo nella pagina; [...] era pienamente cosciente della stretta interrelazione che regola i rapporti tra «forma del libro e forma dell'opera».<sup>12</sup>

for the realization of such heterogeneous book projects, Boccaccio had resorted to various graphical and codicological solutions for the layout of the text on the page; [...] he was fully aware of the tight connection regulating the relationships between «book format and text format».

It is worth noting that Boccaccio's commitment to and zeal for manuscript production is not limited to transcription and composition. It involves a diversified use of diacritical marks; it includes an interest in drawings, illustrations, and illuminations;<sup>13</sup> eventually, it entails Boccaccio's active role in the restoration of a manuscript through the implementation of missing folios (as in the case of the aforementioned ms. Laurenziano Pluteo 38.6 with the *Thebaid*).

### 3. The *Teseida* between Autography, Philology, and Hermeneutics

The scholar interested in studying the *Teseida* will face a challenging poem characterized by a discontinuous critical fortune. The *Teseida* consists of twelve books in octaves, a strophic form that Boccaccio probably adopts from *cantari* and whose rhyme scheme he regularizes into the definitive pattern ABABABCC.<sup>14</sup> The poem is preceded by a dedicatory preface to Fiammetta. Synoptic sonnets head each book, and the whole work is

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<sup>11</sup> See BRESCHI 2013 and TANTURLI 2013.

<sup>12</sup> CURSI 2013, p. 98. The text between quotation marks is from BATTAGLIA RICCI 2003, p. 29.

<sup>13</sup> See MORELLO 1998.

<sup>14</sup> See GORNI 1978 and BARTOLI 1999-2000.

closed by two caudate sonnets (an invocation to the Muses, and the Muses' response). The text is articulated into subdivisions, indicated by rubrics; in the autograph, a system of majuscules and diacritical marks points out these subdivisions. The poetic text proper is accompanied by various commentaries (Boccaccio's or others') in about one third of the manuscripts.

The poem takes its cues from the closure of Statius' *Thebaid*, of which, for those counting,<sup>15</sup> it roughly replicates the number of lines. Initially the poem focuses on Theseus' victory over Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons (whom he then marries), and Creon, king of Thebes. It then deals with Theban warriors and prisoners Arcita and Palemone and their love for Emilia, Hippolyta's younger sister. Theseus instigates a duel between Arcita and Palemone for Emilia's hand. The duel results in Arcita's victory, without Palemone being killed. After marrying Emilia, Arcita dies of wounds from the duel. Funeral honors are duly performed, and Theseus determines that Palemone and Emilia should marry.

Influential critics of the *Teseida* have often agreed on its experimental nature. Nevertheless, they have generally expressed a negative evaluation of its aesthetic value. Vittore Branca underlined the triteness in the choice of *tópoi* and critiqued the still immature versification, often leading to desinential rhymes.<sup>16</sup> Alberto Limentani highlighted the mechanical juxtaposition of chivalric and classic elements, and the failure to integrate them into a harmonic whole.<sup>17</sup> Piero Boitani emphasized the lack of historicity in its representation and lamented the redundancy in its descriptions.<sup>18</sup> Even after the more recent positive

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<sup>15</sup> See ANDERSON 1994, pp. 141-142.

<sup>16</sup> See BRANCA 1958, pp. 51-93.

<sup>17</sup> See LIMENTANI 1964, p. 233.

<sup>18</sup> See BOITANI 1977.

remarks of Francesco Bruni and Battaglia Ricci,<sup>19</sup> who both stressed the coherence and continuity between the poem and the other texts of Boccaccio's corpus, the impression of literary failure still characterizes this peculiar poetic experiment.

The scholar interested in studying the *Teseida* nevertheless benefits from the unusual privilege of having access to an autograph of the text. Giuseppe Vandelli first declared the Boccaccian autography of ms. Acquisti e doni 325 (henceforth: *Aut*) of the Florentine Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in 1929.<sup>20</sup> Vandelli also recognized Boccaccio's hand in the interlinear *notulae* and the marginal commentary. Critical editions by Salvatore Battaglia (1938), Aurelio Roncaglia (1941), and Limentani (1964) all argue for *Aut* as archetype in their respective *stemmata codicum*, based on the *recensio* of about half of the manuscripts now known. More recently, William E. Coleman has uncovered many fallacies in these *stemmata*. For instance, Battaglia divides the witnesses of the *Teseida* into families  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ . Witnesses from family  $\alpha$  would generally offer a more reliable text, but lack the commentary. Manuscripts from family  $\beta$  have the commentary, but they are generally characterized by a very deficient text from an ecdotic point of view. *Aut* is based on  $\alpha$ , but is then provided with a commentary. Coleman (after Gianfranco Contini)<sup>21</sup> recently proposed a third family  $\gamma$ , uniquely represented by Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, ms. Palatino 352. Also, he noticed that short versions of the commentary appear in all three families. Furthermore, he considered the case of possible redactions of which we have no knowledge or trace, which would inevitably haunt the stemma with an invisible horizontal contamination.<sup>22</sup> In fact,

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<sup>19</sup> See BRUNI 1990 and BATTAGLIA RICCI 2003.

<sup>20</sup> See VANDELLI 1929.

<sup>21</sup> See CONTINI 2007, pp. 535-546.

<sup>22</sup> See COLEMAN 1997, COLEMAN 2012, and COLEMAN 2013. See also AGOSTINELLI 1985-1986.

multiple redactions of a single text are a common aspect of Boccaccio's corpus. We have two versions of the *Amorosa visione*, the *Genealogie*, and the *De casibus virorum illustrium*; three redactions of the *Trattatello in laude di Dante*; and some seven versions of the *De mulieribus claris*:

Per il Boccaccio dovremo dunque abituarci a pensare non ad un «originale» da cui sia discesa meccanicamente tutta la tradizione manoscritta, e neppure soltanto a più originali a ciascuno dei quali risalga meccanicamente la tradizione manoscritta delle varie redazioni, bensì ad un ventaglio di autografi alcuni dei quali si collocano all'interno dello stemma di una medesima redazione: autografi copie di precedenti trascrizioni (magari anche non di mano dell'autore: cioè copie, autografe, di codici esemplati da copisti di professione conservati presso di sé dall'autore per proprio uso).<sup>23</sup>

For Boccaccio we should think neither of an 'original' from which the whole manuscript tradition mechanically derived, nor of various originals to which the manuscript tradition of the various redactions goes back. Instead, we should think of a range of autographs, some of which position within the stemma of the same redaction: autographs that are copies of previous transcriptions (even those not in the author's hand: meaning autograph copies of codices by professional scribes, preserved by the author for personal use).

Until the announced publication of a new critical edition of the poem (expected in 2015) by Coleman and Edvige Agostinelli, we really should employ a Husserlian *epoché*, suspending our judgment and focusing on significant and confirmed data in our analysis.

The exceptional peculiarity of the existence of an autograph has not led many to a special consideration of its non-strictly-textual data, which could help elucidate Boccaccio's specific editorial project. The material dimension of *Aut*, its *forma tractatus* (or *ordinatio partium*, or *divisio textus*, i.e. its articulation in sections and subsections),<sup>24</sup> and its rich paratextual apparatus have most often passed unobserved. Vandelli himself made short work of the

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<sup>23</sup> PADOAN 1979, pp 3-4.

<sup>24</sup> See MINNIS 1984, pp. 145-159.

commentary: by defining the glosses “singolarissime” (“very peculiar”),<sup>25</sup> he helped to instill the idea that the paratext was merely a frivolous literary divertissement.

I refer to Francesca Malagnini for a systematic description of *Aut.*<sup>26</sup> Instead, I intend to delineate a set of codicological features that will make clear the literary-textual implications of the book’s materiality.<sup>27</sup>

As to its material support, *Aut* is a parchment codex, whereas most of the manuscripts of the *Teseida* consist of paper. The autograph, therefore, is conceived of as an exemplar to invest in economically: that is, an exemplar made to last. The autograph, consequently, is *ab origine* considered to be worthy of its long-lasting transmission and circulation. Moreover, it is inscribed within a circle of works that implies expectations of a certain level of cultivation. When patrons, purchasers, and scribes opt for a paper redaction, however, they underscore a paradox: on the one hand, they suggest that there was a widespread diffusion of the text; on the other hand, they show an apparent discrepancy between the authorial project of the *Teseida* as noble epic poetry, and its effective reception as popular fiction. On one side, there is an expensive codex to be preserved due to its high value, which demonstrates an anticipated elite audience; on the other, there is a series of less expensive paper witnesses that effectively made the *Teseida* a classic, since they allowed for its wide circulation.

I have called this paradoxical datum an *apparent* discrepancy. In fact, it is not wholly improbable that Boccaccio had planned on or predicted a similar textual itinerary for his poem. Boccaccio might seemingly have plotted to pass off the pioneering *ottava rima*

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<sup>25</sup> VANDELLI 1929, p. 65.

<sup>26</sup> See MALAGNINI 2006. For a briefer description, see VANDELLI 1929, BRANCA 1958, p. 66, and *Mostra di manoscritti, documenti e edizioni* 1975, pp. 31-32.

<sup>27</sup> I conducted my analysis on a digital copy ordered from the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana and realized by G.A.P. – Digital Imaging of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Florence.



vernacular epic by an emerging author as an already established classic, able to compete with classical and Christian *auctoritates*, at least in terms of its material connotations. On this note, it is relevant to point out the properly paleographic element of the manuscript tradition of the *Teseida*: its script typology. Whereas *Aut* is written in an elegant semi-Gothic book hand, the majority of the witnesses adopt the more common (and popular) chancery cursive and *mercantesca*.<sup>28</sup> In short, the *Teseida* becomes a classic mainly because it becomes popular. And it becomes popular because it is endowed with the material features of a literary and cultural *summa*, a notable text to learn from, reproduce, and circulate.

Two ornamental elements further suggest an intended high status for the manuscript: a system of decorated initials, and a planned iconographic apparatus (only partially executed). *Aut* displays, in fact, different types of filigreed calligraphic initials: two red initials on a blue background, with tempera phytomorphic decorations corresponding to the preface incipit (f. 1r) and book i incipit (f. 3r); filigreed cave red and blue initials (with inverted blue and red geometric decoration) for the eleven incipits of the other books (books ii-xii, ff. 18v, 30v, 40r, 50r, 62v, 70r, 86r, 100r, 109v, 122v, 133r); alternating blue and red filigreed initials for the first line of the octave immediately following a rubric, and for the first line of each tercet of the sonnets; yellow majuscules for lines 1 and 7 of each octave.

Moreover, *Aut* presents clear evidence that Boccaccio meant to realize a sophisticated and rich series of illustrations. The manuscript, in fact, has one executed watercolor illustration (f. 1r): a man offering a red book to a woman, with a possible third anthropomorphic figure (hypostasis of Love?). What is more, *Aut* presents some fifty-eight empty spaces on both lower and upper margins, as well as within the written space (often intersecting the octaves), all evidently designated for as many illustrations.

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<sup>28</sup> DANIELS 2009, pp. 42-47.

From these first elements of codicological analysis it is possible to infer a notable aspect of the typology of our manuscript. The material features of *Aut* seem to refer to a dedication or presentation copy. On this note, it is relevant to underline that the aforementioned single realized illustration most probably depicts the author himself in the act of giving a book to his beloved. Moreover, the preface of the poem, in its dual nature of fiction and paratext, also thematizes the dedication of the poem to Fiammetta. The material, paratextual, and thematic levels all seem to mirror one another.

A dedication or presentation copy evidently implies that the text preserved by the codex should be considered ‘high’ literature. That is to say, the text is meant to be perceived as worthwhile to copy, since it emerges from the contemporary vernacular literary production and is able to challenge important texts of the classical and Christian tradition.

I will consider the meaning of the visual aspects of the autograph *infra*, in order to underline their indissoluble relation with the content of the poem. For now, I will stress the relevance of the material features of *Aut* in terms of the wished-for self-canonization of Boccaccio as *auctor*.

The *Teseida* can be ascribed to Boccaccio’s lifelong attempt to create a canon of vernacular texts and thus institute a vernacular *auctoritas*, an undertaking which is also manifest in his curatorial-editorial intervention in Dante’s oeuvre.<sup>29</sup> In the first chapter I indicated how, from the 1350’s on, Boccaccio devotes much of his intellectual *Streben* to the celebration of Dante as *auctor*, which made him the most competent Dantista of the fourteenth century together with Dante’s sons Jacopo and Pietro. Boccaccio was possibly well aware of the positive repercussions of this critical strategy for his own literary career.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See the recent HOUSTON 2010, and relative bibliography.

<sup>30</sup> See *supra*, pp. 50-54.

Significant contact points can be observed between the material setting of *Aut* and Boccaccio's editions of Dantean texts. We have three extant copies of Boccaccio's transcription of the *Commedia*, transmitted in three manuscripts: Toledo Zelada 104.6 (ca. 1350), Riccardiano 1035 (ca. 1360), and Chigi L vi 213 (1363-1366). We do not have the autographs Boccaccio worked on. Nevertheless, the extant witnesses produced in Florence in the fourteenth century present a rather regular and uniform aspect that resembles Petrucci's definition of the "libro-registro di lusso" ("de luxe register-book"):<sup>31</sup> parchment support, large format, two columns of text, and chancery minuscule script.<sup>32</sup> Boccaccio rejects this model *in toto*, and chooses a different codicological format, opting instead for a medium format, semi-Gothic script, and a single column of text with ample margins. Coherently with this editorial project, his transcriptions of the *Vita Nova* present a similar format: centralized poetic texts, marginalized commentary.<sup>33</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, this format entails an active editorial process of expunging sections of Dante's prose (the *divisioni*) from the center of the folio and ascribing them to the margins as commentary. Boccaccio's sensibility to these *mise en page* and *mise en text* is clearly indicated in an editorial note with which he justifies this innovation in ms. Toledo 104.6 (f. 29r), and again in ms. Chigi L v 176.<sup>34</sup> The convergence between the Dantean texts and the *Teseida* is evident for us, though not historically obvious or predictable. It reveals an attempt to create a series of authoritative classics in the vernacular.

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<sup>31</sup> PETRUCCI 1983, pp. 510-515.

<sup>32</sup> See BOSCHI ROTIROTTI 2004, and CURSI 2013, pp. 83-97.

<sup>33</sup> See HOUSTON 2008.

<sup>34</sup> See *supra*, pp. 51-54.

The autograph of the *Teseida* also presents a single column of text with ample margins. Each side of the folio has four octaves. The beginning of each book does not coincide with the upper margin of the folio, nor with a new quire. This indicates an attention to the integrity of the poem as a whole, in competition with the discrete measure of books and subsections. This *mise en page* seemingly refers to the classical notion of *carmen continuum*. Such an attention to the codex as a whole is very indicative and can be compared to the care that a young Petrarca and his father Petracco di Parenzo put into the imposition of a material continuity between different works in the construction of the so-called Ambrosian Virgil (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, ms. A 79 inf.), where the *explicit* and *incipit* of each text never coincides with the end of a quire.<sup>35</sup> This aspect is of particular interest when we compare it to the codicological choices of the older Petrarca for the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* and his innovative strategy of tendentially beginning and closing each bifolio with the incipit and explicit of a poem, interpreting each folio as a visual and semantic unit.<sup>36</sup> With the *mise en page* of *Aut*, Boccaccio aims to reproduce an “effetto classicità” (“effect of classical antiquity”)<sup>37</sup> that he could associate with manuscripts preserving classical poetry, characterized by a master text in single centered columns for each side of the folio, as well as ample margins for annotations. This *mise en text* was the most common for the long sequences of dactylic hexameter in epic poetry.

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<sup>35</sup> See BILLANOVICH 1996, pp. 11-12, and PETOLETTI 2006. See also *infra*, p. 100.

<sup>36</sup> See Belloni 2004, pp. 124-126. See also STOREY and CAPELLI 2006, p. 177.

<sup>37</sup> SCHNAPP 1991-1992, p. 196.

#### 4. *Teseida* and *Thebaid*

Among the manuscripts transmitting hexametric poetry in Latin, those of Statius's *Thebaid* play a major role. The *Thebaid* was undoubtedly the closest literary model for the *Teseida* on Boccaccio's desk. In a letter written in Naples in 1339 and preserved in his Zibaldone Laurenziano (*Epistole* iv, "Sacre famis"), Boccaccio asks an anonymous friend for a copy of the *Thebaid* with a commentary, possibly Lactantius Placidus'. In fact, the copy of the poem that he recently acquired lacks that exegetical apparatus, and he finds it extremely difficult to read Statius "sine magistro vel glosis" ("without a teacher or notes"). The epistle is probably a mere rhetorical exercise (without a real addressee) and the request for a copy of the *Thebaid* with a commentary merely conventional: most probably, Boccaccio had already procured that copy for himself upon writing the letter.<sup>38</sup> When referring to Boccaccio's relationship to Statius' poem, we can think of the former's literary activity as an eminent example of that ideal continuation between sources and of the sort of creative writing that characterized medieval cultural models of literary composition:

il dotto [...] leggeva per scrivere, leggeva, cioè, per comporre un testo proprio fatto in buona parte di citazioni altrui; e leggeva scrivendo, poiché annotava continuamente i libri nei margini e negli interlinei; e dunque scriveva praticamente leggendo o subito dopo aver letto.<sup>39</sup>

scholars read to write: they read, that is, to compose a text of their own that to a large extent consisted of citations from others; and they read while writing, since they continuously annotated books in the margins and interlines; therefore, they basically wrote while reading or immediately after having read.

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<sup>38</sup> See BILLANOVICH 1947, pp. 69-78.

<sup>39</sup> PETRUCCI 1983<sup>a</sup>, p. 528.

We have one manuscript of Statius's poem that unquestionably belonged to Boccaccio: Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, ms. Pluteo 38.6.<sup>40</sup> Also, we know of two more manuscripts of the *Thebaid* that were at some point on Boccaccio's desk: one, without Lactantius Placidus's commentary, can be probably identified with Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, ms. Barberiniano lat. 74,<sup>41</sup> even if this codex carries no evidence of Boccaccio's hand. Moreover, we have indirect proof of Boccaccio's use of at least a third manuscript of the poem. In fact, David Anderson has identified in the *Teseida* conspicuous references to a commentary to the *Thebaid*, known from its incipit as the *In principio* (composed in Northern France in the twelfth century), which is not transmitted by mss. Pluteo and Barberiniano.<sup>42</sup>

The *Thebaid* is above all a textual and literary model for the *Teseida*: "the poem's allusive style and its scholarly apparatus propose [...] a vernacular experience of poetry in the classical tradition".<sup>43</sup> The extensive gloss (at *Teseida* iii 5) on the plot of the *Thebaid* confirms the attention allocated by Boccaccio to the exact comprehension by the audience of the subtle references to structural elements and specific passages of the *Thebaid*. A shared knowledge between text and audience is at the base of the 'social' aspect of Boccaccio's intertextuality as "arte allusiva" ("allusive technique", according to Giorgio Pasquali's recognized formula).<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> See CURSI 2013<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> See PUNZI 1994.

<sup>42</sup> See ANDERSON 1988, pp. 251-253, and ANDERSON 1994.

<sup>43</sup> ANDERSON 1988, p. 59.

<sup>44</sup> See PASQUALI 1968.

Boccaccio's poem can be considered a continuation and expansion of Statius's plot. Boccaccio alludes to and imitates episodes and *tópoi* of the poem, in compliance with that principle of active and explicit *imitatio* that is a constant in his literary career: invocations to the Muses, catalogues, *aristíai* (scenes of heroes having their finest moments in a battle), *ludi funebres*, *ekphrásaes*, sacrifices to the gods, and so on. What is more, the practice of *imitatio* draws not only on the strictly verbal and literary aspects of the *Thebaid* but also involves its material and codicological features. The *Thebaid* is never, for Boccaccio, an abstract text; it is always linked to concrete manuscripts. We must constantly keep in mind “un Boccaccio scriba influenzato dal modello relativamente alla sfera grafico-estetica e quindi teso a riprodurne fedelmente, o almeno nell'intenzione di fondo, l'assetto e l'aspetto” (“Boccaccio the scribe as influenced by the graphical-aesthetic dimension of the model and, therefore, dedicated to faithfully reproducing its layout and aspect, at least in terms of an overall intention”).<sup>45</sup> This sort of codicological mimicry is well witnessed by Boccaccio's ability to restore ms. Laurenziano Pluteo 36.8 by integrating four missing folios between 1340 and 1345. In this restoration, Boccaccio transcribes the missing portions of text and commentary in compliance with the general material features of ms. Pluteo. Furthermore, he also provides the poem with his own marginalia, modeled on those by Lactantius.<sup>46</sup>

Boccaccio's imitative ability is evidenced by specific material components of the Statian manuscripts that can be observed in *Aut.* One might perhaps consider negligible that the dicolic title *Teseida delle nozze d'Emilia* complies with the two-membered *titulus* of the *Thebaid* as it appears in the aforementioned Pluteo 38.6 (f. 1r): *Statius Thebaydos ystoria destructionis thebarum*. But we also might want to consider the summarizing *argumenta* at the

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<sup>45</sup> RAFTI 1998, p. 284.

<sup>46</sup> See ANDERSON 1994.

beginning of the books of the *Thebaid*, which resemble the introductory sonnets to each book of the *Teseida*. We might further consider the interlinear annotations to the text of the *Thebaid*, which also are a feature of *Aut*. We should above all consider the material and morphological similarities between Lactantius Placidus's commentary to Statius<sup>47</sup> as it appears in ms. Pluteo 38.6 and Boccaccio's self-commentary in *Aut*.

By providing his poem with a commentary himself, Boccaccio outlined an ambitious and complex codicological project. What is more, Boccaccio enjoyed the privileged position of controlling the architecture of the space of the book, the geometry of the page, and the density of information in a unique way. In fact, whereas the scribe would generally have to copy a commentary from an antigraph that would not necessarily have the same material features of the codex that conveyed the primary text, Boccaccio could undertake a project that *a priori* maximized space and the relation between text and commentary.

### 5. Morphology of Boccaccio's Self-Commentary

Among the paratextual devices, the marginal commentary is undoubtedly the most ingenious aspect of Boccaccio's editorial strategy. It also represents the most controversial section of the text as far as the critical fortune of the *Teseida* goes. Therefore, it assumes a pivotal role in terms of the poem's *Rezeptionsästhetik*. Its brief description will pave the way for some considerations on the historicity of the notion of authorship and on the hermeneutical process hinted at in this chapter's introduction.

A cautionary word is necessary at this point. The Boccaccian commentary should not be invoked as an absolute model of hermeneutics. It does not convey *the* correct and authentic interpretation of the text, authoritatively imposed by the author. In fact, the

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<sup>47</sup> For Lactantius Placidus' commentary on Statius, see SWEENEY 1969.



relevance of the commentary does not preclude the availability and openness of the *Teseida* to alternative readings. These readings might even be more persuasive or refined than Boccaccio's: actually, we often have the paradoxical impression that Boccaccio is not the most convincing interpreter of his own work. Above all, the attempted reconsideration of Boccaccio's self-exegesis is not aimed at confuting the aforementioned Barthesian notion of the "mort de l'auteur" as condition for unrestricted interpretive practice. The commentary is relevant because it is consubstantial to the octaves in terms of a common critical and editorial project, aimed at inscribing the poem within the vernacular literary canon. This project is made evident in the concluding sonnet of the poem, which most probably alludes to the well-known Dantean complaint in the *De vulgari eloquentia* (ii ii 8) about the absence of an epic poetry in Italian vernacular: "Arma vero nullum latium adhuc invenio poetasse" ("I find that no Italian has sung of arms yet"). The *Teseida* is ostentatiously proposed to its readership as a commented text, because it is conceived as a text open to commentary, or rather, as a text that *must* necessarily be commented upon:

[e]vidently, Boccaccio considered the heart of the process of making literature to be not the production of a beautifully written out final text, but the unending collocation which the author-text conducted with the readers in the margins, the background for memory. By giving his new work all the trappings of a glossed book, Boccaccio was claiming for it the immediate institutional role of an *auctor*.<sup>48</sup>

On this note, it is significant that the *commentator* is always presented as a different persona from the *auctor* (with one ambiguous exception, to which I will return *infra*). Moreover, in the paratextual fiction of the dedicatory preface to Fiammetta, the *auctor* evokes his own incompetence in matters of interpretation of the poem. Also, he indicates Fiammetta as the one in charge of deciphering the *trobar clus* of the octaves, their "chiuso

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<sup>48</sup> CARRUTHERS 1990, p. 218.

parlare”. As Janet Smarr has suggested, we have a separation not only between poet and commentator, but also between poet and lover. In fact, the lover is the target of a denigratory strategy on behalf of the *persona loquens*, who paradoxically coincides with the lover himself.

In terms of material features, Battaglia offered a brief description of the commentary in his critical edition of the poem: “[...] commento dispiegato, organico, che si rifà al contenuto della poesia, integrando, allargando, parafrasando; esso si dispone lungo i quattro margini della pagina, attorno al testo poetico, ma con regolare e bella simmetria” (“extended and organic commentary that deals with the content of the poem by means of integrating, expanding, and paraphrasing; it positions itself along all four margins of the page, around the poetic text, but with regular and beautiful symmetry”).<sup>49</sup>

Even if the border between text and commentary seems porous and permeable,<sup>50</sup> it is clear that an attempt is being made to distinguish the main text from the commentary, and to keep their respective writers separate. The *mise en page* and *mise en text* of the octaves and the marginalia show a strategic distribution and hierarchization of text-space, commentary-space, and blanks.

The architecture of the page reflects a specific knowledge design. Poetry and commentary are kept distinct to comply with the fictitious distinction of the *personae* of the author and the critic. The centrality of the octaves aims to institute the *Teseida* as a unique, stable, and definitive classic. The organization of the glosses in the margins (and often all around the octaves) conveys an idea of the commentary as a necessary instrument of interpretation. However, the decentralized and peripheral collocation of the glosses implies

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<sup>49</sup> BATTAGLIA 1938, p. xiii.

<sup>50</sup> Guidelines for an analysis of glossed manuscripts are in MANIACI 2002.

the notion of commentary as a fluid and constantly evolving text. This dual relationship of distinction and implication of author and commentator is coherently maintained through the choice of an identical script, which is, however, hierarchically reduced in size for the commentary. This effect of dissimilation is counterbalanced by the juxtaposition of the two texts, aimed at minimizing the reader's visual itinerary between master text and ancillary text. I will return to this dialectics of simultaneous vs. sequential fruition upon dealing with the visual nature of the poem as iconic artifact.

In terms of strictly hermeneutical features,<sup>51</sup> the ca. twelve hundred marginalia can be classified into four typologies:

- i. Linguistic notes and rhetorical notes that are devoted to explaining unusual or obsolete words, and to interpreting tropes and figures.
- ii. Narratological notes that analectically recall previous episodes and prequels, or that catalectically disclose events to follow. We might include mythological episodes parallel to the poem's main *fabula* within this category. These notes, that is, provide effective *paralipómena*, i.e. narrative and motivic expansions that offer a further perspective on Boccaccio's compositional skills. In this case, we can describe Boccaccio as *compiler* rather than commentator: "other glosses contribute to the illusion of the multiplication of the narrative's temporal sequence by making explicit a subtheme that is only implicit in the text".<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> See LIMENTANI 1958 and SCHNAPP 1991-1992.

<sup>52</sup> NOAKES 1988, p. 91.

- iii. Antiquarian notes that are often not strictly pertinent to the section they gloss. Therefore, due to their whimsicality, they mainly contribute to the presentation of the commentator as erudite and exegetically trustworthy.
- iv. Notes of allegorical interpretation that are the most relevant for Boccaccio's literary and critical project and, therefore, deserve an analysis of their own.

The marginalia of allegorical inspiration can be inscribed within the general tendency to *allegorésis* that characterizes most of Boccaccio's literary criticism, from the analysis of Dantean texts to the monumental conceptual system of the *Genealogie deorum gentilium*. In the *Teseida*, *allegorésis* plays a central role, since it is connected to the apologetics for poetic fiction. The meaning of the text is not limited to the elaboration of its own plot. Instead, it offers a *sub velamine* meaning, whose ultimate goal is the spiritual elevation of the reader. Whereas the poem is presented, in the dedication, as the lover's attempt to seduce the beloved, the dedicatee is invested with the hermeneutic capabilities to read beyond the literal meaning: "in the *Teseida*, we are dealing with a writer who pretends to miss the point of his own book, while Fiammetta provides the proper answer to the narrator's erotic hope".<sup>53</sup> On the one hand, this mythopoietic writing is the literary transfiguration of the author's personal elegy ("Proemio", addressed to Fiammetta):

[...] ciò che sotto il nome dell'uno de' due amanti e della giovane amata si conta essere stato, ricordandovi bene, e io a voi di me e voi a me di voi, se non mentiste, potreste conoscere essere stato detto e fatto in parte.<sup>54</sup>

[...] what under the name of either of the two lovers and the beloved appears to have been, with me reminding you of myself and you reminding yourself of me, unless you lied, you could realize it was said and in part done.

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<sup>53</sup> SMARR 1986, p. 82.

<sup>54</sup> I cite from LIMENTANI 1964, pp. 4-5.

On the other hand, the “chiuso parlare” implies the deciphering of a deeper message. In this case, the meaning is about the essence of erotic feelings, and it inscribes the poem within the inquiry into the nature of Amore. The courtly combination of love and arms is resolutely unbalanced towards the former and re-read in a “moralizing” manner.

The discourse on and re-semanticization of the nature of love is made evident in the well-known marginal note that accompanies the digression on Venus’ temple (and the homologous note on Mars’ temple) in book vii. This note offers a number of relevant points of analysis. A distinction is proposed between married love and passionate love, with the priority of the former over the latter (an innovative twist from the tradition of troubadour poetry). Also, the courtly notion of erotic vassalage is rejected in favor of monogamy and marriage (the same marriage already alluded to in the title of the poem). Above all, the note offers a series of elements that aim at that authorization of the text (and its author) that I have repeatedly hinted at. This is the case of the clear diffraction between the alleged *intentio auctoris* (voiced in the dedicatory section) and the *intentio operis* (proposed by the commentator): in order to gauge the true hidden meaning of the text, one needs a specific doctrinal competence as a way to elucidate poetic obscurity. It is also the case of the reference to an apparatus of poetic and critical texts that provide the cultural context for the poem. By referring to these texts, the marginalia inscribe the poem *de facto* within a canon of authoritative texts. In the note to Venus’ temple, Guido Cavalcanti’s canzone “Donna me prega” is directly quoted. The reference to physician Dino del Garbo’s scientific commentary on Cavalcanti’s poem<sup>55</sup> further broadens the chain of intertextual references and increases the dependability of Boccaccio’s epos. It is also relevant to notice how the figures of *auctor*

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<sup>55</sup> See FENZI 1999.

and *commentator* seem to further diverge as to their specific intertextual strategies. The *auctor* is more strictly linked to classical texts, whereas the *commentator* is open to contemporary medieval literary production.

Allegorically inspired commentary would be given a precise theoretical foundation in the *Genealogie deorum gentilium* (xv 6 13-14), where the commentary is presented as an unavoidable supporting instrument of poetic *factio*:

Sola poesis, quoniam perpaucorum semper domestica fuit, nec aliquid afferre lucri avaris visa sit, non solum per secula multa neglecta atque deiecta, sed etiam variis lacerata persecutionibus his caret subsidiis. Quam ob causam saltem huc illuc ad quemcunque possumus, absque tam celebri selectione recurramus necesse est; et si non multum, a quocunque saltem quod modicum potemus excerptamus. Quod me persepe factum intelligenti satis apparet, cum non nunquam non tantum ad novos autores diverterim, sed ad glosulas etiam autore carentes recursum habuerim. Et id circo queruli, sic oportunitate volente, non solum inauditis veteribus, sed et novis etiam autoribus acquiescant.

Since it was always familiar to few and brought no profit to greedy people, poetry alone, not only neglected and rejected for many centuries, but also torn by various persecutions, still lacks these explanatory tools. Therefore, it is necessary that, here and there, we appeal to whomever we can, without too solemn a choice. And even if it is not much, let us excerpt what we can from every author. Whoever has ears to hear will understand that I often did this myself, resorting not only to modern authors, but also to brief glosses, even anonymous ones. Therefore, let the grumps get used to *both* ancient authors never heard of *and* modern authors.

Allegorical commentaries are the instruments through which Holy Scriptures reveal the inscrutabilities of the history of salvation. Similarly, through allegorical analysis, poetic *factio* acquires a veritative statute that discloses the effects of vices and virtues. The hermeneutic practice of commenting invests poetry and theology with the same *modus operandi*. Commentaries also explain the excellence and necessity of poetic *ornatus*: plain truth gives no pleasure and is easily forgotten. In the case of the *Teseida*, however, it is not disproportionate to maintain that the crucial presence of the commentary plays a greater role than its effectiveness or reliability in terms of correct interpretation: “[a]uthorial intention in itself is

given no more weight than that of any subsequent reader who uses the work in his own meditative composition”.<sup>56</sup>

## 6. The *Teseida* between Verbal and Visual

Marginal glosses and interlinear *notulae* are just two of *Aul*'s numerous visual and verbal paratextual devices. Verbal elements include:

- i. The dedicatory preface to Fiammetta.
- ii. A series of fifteen sonnets: one introducing the whole poem; twelve heading each book and summarizing their content; and two as a closure to the poem.
- iii. About two hundred prose rubrics. These can be classified in two groups: rubrics marking *incipits* and *explicitis* of each book of the poem; and rubrics dividing each book into subsections and revealing the content of the octaves that follow. These rubrics briefly explain the text, coordinate its interpretation, and make it more cohesive and coherent through a sophisticated set of cross-references.

Visual paratextual elements include the aforementioned program of illustrations, the system of decorated initials, the ca. one hundred paraf signs (until book vi, when they stop being used), the under-dots indicating cases of synalepha and apheresis (for the recitation of the poem).

The combination of these elements seems to suggest an interaction, or rather a hypostatic coincidence, between *forma tractatus* (the expository and narrative order of the text, its principle of poetological and stylistic organization), *forma tractandi* (the structural order of

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<sup>56</sup> CARRUTHERS 1990, p. 191.

the poem, its division in sections and subsections), and material form (*mise en page*, diacritical indications of books and sections).<sup>57</sup> The visual articulation that materially characterizes the codex mirrors the textual order of the poem, which continuously resumes and summarizes the development of the plot. For instance, the rubric is a brief synthesis and explanation of the octaves that follow. Similarly, the sonnets refer to the contents of each book and elicit a specific reading of it, synopsis being, *de facto*, a form of hermeneutics. This mode of textual organization is both precursive / proleptic, and recursive / analeptic.

But there is more. This textual schema involves the very level of enunciation and thus affects the content of the poem. This is particularly true for the digressive sections of the *Teseida*. On the one hand, they allude to the alexandrine practice of *ekphrāseis* of classical epic. On the other, they inscribe this coincidence of expository order and visual-material apparatus within the textual content of the poem. In book vii, for example, the digression on Mars' and Venus' temples represents a descriptive excursus in compliance with epic formats. It also offers an allegorical interpretation of the poem, explained through an extremely original form of architectonic and figurative mimesis. A second example is offered by the description of the temple dedicated to Arcita, erected by Palemone (xi 71-88). The historiatised walls of the temple represent the story of Theseus, Arcita, and Palemone as it is narrated in the *Teseida* itself. They summarize, that is, the *fabula* of the poem *en abyme*. The repeated use of *uerba uidendi* and synesthetic transitions underline a diffused sense of visibility and materiality (xi 74, emphasis mine):

E per li monti si *vedean* fuggire  
 le dolorose madri co' figliuoli;  
*pareanvisi* le voci ancor sentire  
 de' lor dolenti e dispietati duoli;

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<sup>57</sup> See, at least, CARRUTHERS 1990, pp. 234-273, and MINNIS 1984, pp. 118-159.



*e vedeansi le donne achive gire  
nell'alte torri, con diversi stuoli,  
e ardere ogni cosa, poscia ch'esse  
ebber le corpor nelle fiamme messe.*

Through the mountains you could see  
sorrowful mothers flee with their children;  
it seemed that their voices of howl  
and desperate lament were still heard;  
you could see Achaean women move  
in the high towers in various groups,  
burning everything, after having  
given the corpses to the flames.

The ekphrastic technique seems to stress the relationship between image and word by framing the presence of sound within the image. Moreover, the description of the historiated walls offers a rich phenomenology of the material mechanisms of visual observation: looking left and right, proceeding sequentially (xi 76, 3-6: “e rimirando un poco più avante, / in prigion si vedeano, e l'amoroso / giardino ancora allato loro stante”, “and looking a little further, / you could see them in prison, and the amorous / garden near them”); zooming from long shots to close-ups (xi 72, 4-6 “e similmente si vedeva il sito / di Tebe qual el fu né più né meno, / e' monti ancor donde era circuito”, “you could also see the site / of Thebes like it was, neither more nor less, / and the mountains by which it was surrounded”); concentrating the eyesight to distinguish what one sees (xi 73, 4-6 “[...] e quale era valente / e qual codardo assai bene avvisati / eran da chi mirava fisamente”, “who was valiant / and who a coward, easily distinguished / by those who stared”). The ekphrastic device is structural to the narration, and it also raises questions of visibility and representation in a text that makes constant use of visual aids as a means to condition the fruition of the poem. One might even suggest that the experience of ocular and mental disorientation that the reader experiences in switching from master text to commentary is metaphorically re-enacted by the viewer's sequential observation of the walls in Arcita's temple.

The aforementioned coincidence between content, *forma tractatus*, *forma tractandi*, and materiality now assumes a clearer physiognomy. On the one hand, at the level of enunciation, the reader is exposed to the narrative continuum in the form of visual representation. On the other hand, at the material level of the manuscript, the reader comes into contact with the graphic and formal strategies of articulation, visual order, and reprise of the codex: “[m]arginal notations, glosses, and images are an integral part of the ‘painture’ of literature, addressing the ocular gateway to memory and meditation”.<sup>58</sup> This inextricable connection between visual and verbal would obviously be more explicit and effective if the program of illustrations had been executed. Nonetheless, even the mere disposition of the empty space for the illustrations shows how the manuscript and the poem were conceived in a compact and unique textual and graphic format. In fact, there is a significant difference between the systematic disposition of illustrations in fixed areas of the text (upper or lower margins, initials, etc.) and the choice of specific *loci* in order to accomplish an ideal correspondence and dialogue between word and image.

“Qui si conviene usare un poco d’arte” (*Purgatorio* x 10: “Here it behooves us to use a little art”): here, it is quite appropriate to cite Dante’s amphibology. His notion of “visibile parlare” (*Purgatorio* x 95: “visible speaking”) is undoubtedly useful in approaching Boccaccio’s attempt to conjugate the pictorial and the poetic, to inscribe the presence of language within images, to provide a language to talk about art, and to scrutinize the linguistic and sensorial issues of poetic mimesis.<sup>59</sup> Boccaccio’s interest in figurative art characterizes various aspects of his work.<sup>60</sup> Several examples will be useful to situate *Aut*

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<sup>58</sup> CARRUTHERS 1990, p. 245.

<sup>59</sup> See BARKAN 2013, pp. 27-73.

<sup>60</sup> See GILBERT 1999, and CICCUTO 2002.

within this verbal and visual discourse. In the *Amorosa visione*, a Dantean *visio in somniis* in *terza rima*, not only is the narrative structure organized as a sequential description of figurative panels, but Giotto himself is evoked as master of mimetic representation, since from him “la bella / natura parte di sé somigliante / non occultò nell’atto in che suggella” (iv 16-18: “beautiful nature / did not hide any resembling part / of herself, in the act that he seals”). Giotto is also listed as a notable Florentine in the so-called Zibaldone Magliabechiano (Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, ms. Banco Rari 50, f. 232)<sup>61</sup> with men of letters and scientists: “Gioctus florentinus, pictor illustris” (“Giotto from Florence, illustrious painter”). Eight novellas of the *Decameron* have painters (Giotto, Calandrino, Buffalmacco, and Bruno) as protagonists. And the conclusions of the *Decameron* explicitly connect poetry and painting for their freedom of operative modes: “alla [...] penna non dee essere meno d’auttorità conceduta che sia al pennello del dipintore” (*Conclusioni*, 6: “the pen must be granted the same authority as the painter’s brush”).

These strictly textual elements often have figurative repercussions. The autograph of the *Genealogie deorum gentilium* (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, ms. Pluteo 52.9) is provided with family trees for each of the first thirteen books: “disegni a penna acquerellati, foglie cuoriformi, mistilinee, tripetale, rotondeggianti, gigliformi, a scudo o a cinque lobi” (“watercolored drawings by pen; heart-shaped, multiline, three-petal, round, fleur-de-lis-shaped, shield-shaped, or five-lobe leaves”).<sup>62</sup> This decoration is presented as a useful visual aid for the often-convoluted intricacies of mythological genealogies. Moreover, their presence is explicitly mentioned in the text itself as an inherent element of the work (“Prohemium 3”, editor’s emphasis):

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<sup>61</sup> See PETOLETTI 2013.

<sup>62</sup> VOLPE 2011, p. 287.

*In arbore signata desuper ponitur in culmine Demogorgon versa in celum radice, nec solum infra descripte progeniei sed deorum omnium gentilium pater, et in ramis et frondibus ab eo descendantibus describuntur eius filii et nepotes de quibus omnibus hoc in primo libro prout signati sunt distincte scribitur.*

*In the drawing of the tree above, the roots towards the heavens, Demogorgon is at the top, the father not only of the aforementioned progeny, but of all pagan gods; in the branches and leaves that stem from it the children and grandchildren are inscribed. These are distinctly described in this book, in the way they are noted.*

A similar visualization-driven initiative marks the thirteen portraits in two or three colors used as catchwords in the autograph of the *Decameron* (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, ms. Hamilton 90). The illustrative apparatus seems to comply with the revision of the text, aimed at making the characters more vivid and the narrative rhythm more cohesive and expressively intense. Narrative and stylistic elaborations go hand in hand with figurative visualization.

Boccaccio's peculiar project of trans-mediality can be easily associated with the diffuse *Poetik der Visualität* of medieval literature.<sup>63</sup> More specifically, it correlates with the rise and development of codices that present a strict interweaving of text and illustration,<sup>64</sup> as in the case of Guittone d'Arezzo's sonnet corona *Del carnale amore* (*Of Carnal Love*) in ms. Escorial e. III. 23 (Madrid, Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de El Escorial). The sonnets accurately describe the miniature of Amore that was meant to fill in the empty space around which they are arranged; this physical placement enacts an intermedial dialogue between word and page. In the end, the planned picture constitutes an integral part of the project.<sup>65</sup> The same is true of the partial autographs of Francesco da Barberino's *Documenti d'amore*: mss. Barberiniano latino 4077 and Barberiniano latino 4076, kept in Vatican City, Biblioteca

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<sup>63</sup> For a general overview on the topic, see WENZEL 1995.

<sup>64</sup> See CICCUTO 1995.

<sup>65</sup> See STOREY 1993, pp. 171-192, and CAPELLI 2007.

Apostolica Vaticana. The two manuscripts preserve the vernacular poetic text, an authorial Latin commentary in prose, and a series of high-quality illustrations. They are examples of *libri d'autore*, wisely structured in terms of writing, layout, and ornamentation. The strict relationship between these three aspects is clearly indicated by the author himself: “cum non sit lictera in hoc libro nec figura que ante alicuius transcriptum per me ad minus non fuerit tracta quater” (“since there is no letter or image in this book that I did not deal with directly at least four times before anybody else’s transcription”).<sup>66</sup> One final example can be found in the illustrative cycle that accompanies Guido da Pisa’s Latin commentary to Dante’s *Inferno* in ms. Chantilly 597, kept at the Musée Condé in Paris. The illustrations resemble the text of the commentary to such an extent that they seem directly inspired by the interpretation of Guido, who has been often considered the *autor intellectualis* behind the figurative project.<sup>67</sup>

In conclusion to this section, there is a fruitful comparison to be made between the material articulation of *Aut* (its *ordinatio*), and scholastic culture.<sup>68</sup> In the previous chapter,<sup>69</sup> I have mentioned how didactic and homiletic praxes required an easy access to the immense repository of knowledge accumulated in the Middle Ages. The attempt at synthesis goes hand by hand with formal and graphical devices that facilitate the retrieval of information. The aforementioned strategies of *compilatio* and *ordinatio* determine that the material articulation of the textual contents functions both as heuristic principle and as hermeneutical hypothesis. Boccaccio would likely have wanted to provide a similar paratextual apparatus, investing his book with the authority of a text to be studied, and instituting a specific

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<sup>66</sup> See PETRUCCI 1984, p. 404.

<sup>67</sup> See BATTAGLIA RICCI 2010, p. 124, and BALBARINI 2011. See also BATTAGLIA RICCI 2008.

<sup>68</sup> See PARKES 1991, pp. 35-70, and ROUSE 1991.

<sup>69</sup> See *supra*, p. 40.

interpretive itinerary – a sort of ‘instruction booklet’ – in order to do so. Finally, even if this apparatus does not manage (or intend) to impose a specific interpretation, it urges the reader to pursue an interpretation of his or her own.

## 7. Provisional Conclusions: Notions of Authoriality

The notion of authorship that permeates the *Teseida* is not our own. When Boccaccio writes his poem, the perception of authorship, authoriality, and authority is extremely mobile, and not unambiguous. Its ambiguity is the effect of a set of dramatic changes occurring at the border between medieval and (early-)modern *Weltanschauungen*. These changes include, but are not limited to, the development of a modern lay culture, the proliferation of vernacular literatures, the relativization of authoritative texts through *disputationes* and *questiones* within the flourishing universities, and new dynamics of book production, circulation, and fruition. In order to approach this fluid and evolving scenario, one might refer to Bonaventure of Bagnoregio’s fourfold articulation of manners of making books (*libros faciendi*) to which as many authorial figures correspond (*scriptor, compiler, commentator, auctor*):<sup>70</sup>

Aliquis enim scribit aliena, nihil addendo vel mutando; et iste mere dicitur scriptor. Aliquis scribit aliena, addendo, sed non de suo; et iste compiler dicitur. Aliquis scribit et aliena et sua, sed aliena tamquam principalia et sua tamquam annexa ad evidentiam; et iste dicitur commentator, non auctor. Aliquis scribit et sua et aliena, sed sua tanquam principalia, aliena tamquam annexa ad confirmationem; et talis debet dici auctor.<sup>71</sup>

Some write the words of others, without adding or changing anything: these are simply scribes. Some write the words of others, adding words but not their own: these are compilers. Some write the words of others as well as their own, but the former are the main text and the latter elucidate the meaning: these are commentators, not authors. Some write

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<sup>70</sup> See MINNIS 1984, pp. 94-103.

<sup>71</sup> FLEMING 1882, I, pp. 14-15.

their own words and those of others', but their own words are the main text, and those of others are added to confirm: these must be called authors.

The *scriptor* is the copyist, the scribe, the individual that materially writes someone else's text; the *compiler* is the one who adds texts (not his own) to a primary text (also not his own); the *commentator* supplements such texts with a written commentary; and the *auctor*, finally, conceptually indicates the intellectual producer of one's own texts but is more generally used to refer to authoritative texts. An *auctor*, in short, does not indicate a physical person. Instead, it is metonymically perceived as a text, or a *corpus* of texts, whose authority is granted by a tradition: either a direct manuscript tradition, or, indirectly, a tradition in terms of citations and allusions. *Auctoritates* are, in fact, the Holy Scriptures, the Church Fathers' texts, or classical texts typologically (figuratively) reinterpreted. The notion of *auctor* entails a trans-historical reliability that transcends individuals:

While authority of this kind was expressed through texts bearing the proper names of time-bound human beings [...], the essential point was that these texts had been proven to have transcended the limitations of the inevitably fallible men who wrote them and to bear truths that exceeded the limitations of historical contingency – being valid in any time and any place.<sup>72</sup>

The self-appointment of the title of *auctor* for a vernacular poet is, therefore, a wholly unprecedented move.

Bonaventure's articulation reflects an attempt to systematize a far less homogenous set of notions. In this non-unequivocal series of classifications and acceptions, the notion of authorship often conflates the originator, the inventor of a text (*auctor intellectualis*, or *concepteur*), with its material executor. The latter often has the capacity (and, in fact, the opportunity and legitimacy) to modify or integrate the text he or she is copying,

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<sup>72</sup> ASCOLI 2008, p. 7.

consequently taking possession of its authorship, signing it, and circulating it as his or her own. The example of the Oxonian witness of the *Chanson de Roland* is well known. Tuoldus, a scribe, ambiguously signs the manuscript with his name: “Ci falt la geste que Tuoldus declinet” (“Here ends the geste that Tuoldus recounts”).<sup>73</sup> Tuoldus appropriates the work, equivocally declares himself its author-composer, and makes it hard to distinguish his own literary choices from the heritage of a centuries-long oral tradition.

Boccaccio works syncretically and eclectically within these reciprocally permeable distinctions, hastening to (or, rather, contributing to the institution of) the modern notions of author and authorship. The array of Latin and vernacular commentaries that had immediately followed the circulation of Dante’s *Commedia* undoubtedly helped him shape a new definition of author, one which entailed both a rejection of a depersonalized figure of author<sup>74</sup> and the conflation of the four levels of writing described by Bonaventure. This paradoxical activity of distinction and synthesis is particularly evident in the *Teseida*’s different textual roles, kept separate and yet nevertheless executed by the same biographical figure. In the next chapter, we will see to what extent Petrarca performs and personifies this conflation, in an attempt to condition reception and prevent textual *mouvance* (the sprouting and propagation of widely divergent manuscript versions of a given text).<sup>75</sup>

As indicated *supra*, in the marginalia the *persona loquens* refers to the poet of the octaves as *auctore*. The formulas are generally homogenous: “Poscia che l’auctore ha dimostrato che [...]” (“After the author has shown that [...]”), “Vuole in questa parte l’auctore mostrare poeticamente fingendo [...]” (*Teseida* i 14: “In this section the author

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<sup>73</sup> See RIQUER 1957, pp. 105-116.

<sup>74</sup> See SPITZER 1946, and ZUMTHOR 1980, p. 58

<sup>75</sup> See ZUMTHOR 1972, pp. 72-73.



wants to show, by means of poetic fiction [...]”), and so on. At a macrotextual level, this strategy entails a double effect. On the one hand, it appoints the poet with the title of *auctor*, of authoritative and authorized *litteratus*, able to rival the classics. On the other hand, it plays with the ambiguity and porousness of the notions of *scriptor*, *compiler*, *commentator*, and *auctor*, on which the medieval notion of authorship is based. It is not by chance that the notion of *compiler* is mentioned twice in the poem: in the preface to Fiammetta; and in the Muses’ responsive sonnet to the author. If the notion of *compiler* can technically indicate the intertextual weaving of different sources,<sup>76</sup> nevertheless it also proves consistent with this diffraction of multiple writing personae.

In only one instance in the entire poem do these distinctions seem to fade, and *commentator* and *auctor* end up coinciding, with an enigmatic self-denunciation that intensifies textual difficulties more than it offers a solution to them: the marginal note found on f. 33v of *Aut*, where the text deals with the effects on Arcita and Palemone of their love for Emilia (iii 35):

E da’ sospiri già a lagrimare  
 eran venuti, e se non fosse stato  
 che ’l loro amor non volean palesare,  
 sovente avrian per angoscia gridato.  
 E così sa Amore adoperare  
 a cui più per servizio è obligato:  
 colui il sa che tal volta fu preso  
 da lui e da cota’ dolori offeso.

They had already moved from sighs  
 to weeping, and hadn’t they  
 wanted not to manifest their love,  
 they would have often cried in anguish.  
 Thus Love consciously treats those  
 to whom He is most indulged to serve:  
 he who sometimes was seized by him  
 and hurt by such sorrows does know this.

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<sup>76</sup> See ANDERSON 1994, pp 52-54.

On the outer margin of l. 7, just above the word “preso”, the commentary explicitly identifies commentator and author, with a deictic and peremptory personal pronoun: “che sono io” (“who I am”). Vandelli first considered this a *sotto voce* revelation, “come si trattasse di parole da mettere in mostra il meno possibile e, sto per dire, di confidenza segreta” (“as if they were words meant to reveal as little as possible, almost a secret confidence”).<sup>77</sup> Cursi further elaborates on this, by focusing on the paleographic features of the annotation. The marginal note is not in the usual gloss script (semi-Gothic, of reduced size). On the contrary, it is an example of what Cursi calls a “scrittura sottile” (“thin script”).<sup>78</sup> Even if this script can be associated with other interlinear notes in the poem, where Boccaccio offers elements of exegesis for obscure or obsolete words, the “scrittura sottile” is mostly connected to “riflessioni di carattere strettamente personale, nelle quali l’autore abbozza un dialogo tutto interiore con il suo testo” (“personal reflections in which the author gives a hint of an interior dialogue between his text and himself”).<sup>79</sup> Rather than a dramatic *agnitio* addressed to the reader, the unexpected revelation seems a self-contented and ludic note from an author well acquainted with multiple literary personae.

An often-reiterated opinion<sup>80</sup> suggests that Boccaccio’s self-commentary would have enjoyed a more effective critical fortune had he only been less cryptic in presenting himself with a split identity of *auctor* and *commentator*. Only one third<sup>81</sup> of the *Teseida* manuscripts have

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<sup>77</sup> VANDELLI 1929, p. 47.

<sup>78</sup> CURSI 2013, pp. 61-63.

<sup>79</sup> CURSI 2013, p. 63.

<sup>80</sup> From VANDELLI 1929 on.

<sup>81</sup> See AGOSTINELLI 1985-1986.

a “commento disteso” (“extended commentary”). What is more, the choice of which commentary to transcribe does not always privilege Boccaccio’s. In fact, the popularity of Boccaccio’s commentary is challenged by non-authorial commentaries, such as the anonymous commentary in ms. Par. Ital. 582 in the collection of the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris. It is also the case of the better-known commentary by the Ferrarese humanist Pietro Andrea de’ Bassi, about which more will be said in the following section.

Contrary to the critical consensus, my analysis of the *Teseida* suggests a more complex literary and editorial project behind its apparently incongruous data. It seems that Boccaccio did not aim to impose a definitive hermeneutic version of the poem. Instead, it is not implausible to infer that he meant above all to elicit other commentaries: “it is commentary and imitation which make a text an ‘auctor’ – not the activities of its writers but its readers”.<sup>82</sup> The most notable aspect of Boccaccio’s literary experiment is its instigation of a continuous hermeneutic process. Interpretations engender interpretations; the writing of commentaries brings about new commentaries. As *Qobelet*, the ‘author’ of *Ecclesiastes*, writes (12:12): “of making many books there is no end”.

## 8. The Textual Proliferation of the *Teseida*: Ferrara, 1466-1475

In a recent (and very thorough) history of the octave in Italian poetry, Giancarlo Alfano describes the progressive decline of the fortune of the *Teseida* in the second half of the fifteenth century:

In effetti, è da osservare come – nell’età di Gutenberg – il vero successo abbia arreso al Boccaccio prosatore, e ovviamente *in primis* all’autore del *Decameron*. Pur essendo Boccaccio il responsabile del trasferimento della nostra forma metrica [*scil.* l’ottava] dal mondo orale della poesia canterina alla dignità della pagina manoscritta, gli incunaboli e le edizioni di primo

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<sup>82</sup> CARRUTHERS 1990, p. 214.

Cinquecento raggiunsero un risultato piuttosto scarso rispetto alla diffusione massiccia che l'ottava rima conosceva nello stesso periodo come forma del racconto misto di fatti d'arme e d'amore; i dati evidenziano inoltre un autentico tracollo nei restanti cinquant'anni del XVI secolo, quando apparvero soltanto due edizioni di opere boccacciane, ed entrambe a Firenze: segno di affezione per una gloria locale.<sup>83</sup>

It must be observed how, in Gutenberg's age, success smiled upon Boccaccio the prose writer, and obviously the author of the *Decameron* above all. Even if Boccaccio was responsible for transferring our meter [*scil.* the *ottava rima*] from the oral dimension of *cantari* to the dignity of manuscripts, incunabula and early *Cinquecento* editions reached a rather mediocre result compared to the massive diffusion that *ottava rima* gained in the same age as form of mixed tales of arms and love. Moreover, these data underscore a real collapse in the second half of the sixteenth century, with only two editions of Boccaccio's works, both in Florence: an indication of affection for a local glory.

Alfano's analysis is for the most part accurate and persuasive. Nevertheless, the role played by the *Teseida* in the development of the octave form and romance and heroic literature is all but negligible if we focus our attention on Ferrara in the early Renaissance, an obvious vantage point for the study of this genre.

Between 1466 and 1475, two exemplars of the *Teseida* are commissioned and produced by the Este court: a manuscript, and an incunabulum;<sup>84</sup> now in the collection of the Houghton Library, Typ 227 and Inc 5735 (28.2), respectively. The two books constitute a literary and editorial microcosm, whose exponents (often scarcely-known philologists, copyists, illuminators, and printers) represent an effective *trait d'union* between the literary production of Tuscan *Trecento* and the artistic experience of the Renaissance. For the purpose of this study, the two books are witnesses to the circulation and transmission of the *Teseida*. They also show the outcome of the authorial zeal of hermeneutic control over the reading audience, which I have described as one of the major aspects of Boccaccio's critical project. In fact, both books are extremely relevant to this study since they transmit the poem with a

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<sup>83</sup> ALFANO 2012, p. 32.

<sup>84</sup> ISTC ib00761000, GW 4499, IGI 1810.

commentary that is not Boccaccio's. Given the material inspiration of this inquiry, it will be profitable to briefly sketch the physical features of both texts.<sup>85</sup>

### 8.1. Cambridge (Mass.), Houghton Library, ms. Typ 227

The Cambridge manuscript of the *Teseida* (henceforth *CaM*)<sup>86</sup> was sent as a gift to Galeazzo Maria Sforza (whose murder in 1476 is our *terminus ante quem*), probably to inform him of Ercole's succession and empowerment as duke of Ferrara.

The parchment, exemplarily polished vellum, is enriched by a refined series of decorated initials and illuminations:

- i. Illuminations. On f. 1r, an illuminated frame borders the writing space. The decoration is phytomorphic and geometric. On the upper left corner, a *notabilior* initial O ("O sorelle castalie [...]", *Teseida*, i sonnet) is historiated with a portrait of Arcita and Palemone in arms, with rich starry decorations on their shoulders. They are indicated by name with a filigreed caption. The size of the initial corresponds to eight lines of text. In the upper right corner, there is a phytomorphic medallion, formed by laurel leaves, containing a radiant cloud in it. On the outer margin, a scroll with seventeen lines of remarkably damaged text. In the inner margin, a scroll with the inscription 'ICH' between two crosses. In the *bas de page*, the acronym of Galeazzo Maria Sforza in capital script "GZ MA D. MLI QUINTUS": *Galeazzo Maria Dux Mediolani Quintus*. The acronym is

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<sup>85</sup> An exhaustive description of the manuscript and the incunabulum can be found in AGOSTINELLI 1985-1986, pp. 9-11, MARIANI CANOVA 1999, pp. 301-303, and DANIELS 2009, pp. 41-75. In this section I will outline the material aspects that are relevant in terms of literary analysis.

<sup>86</sup> A digital version of the manuscript is available at <http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/46819736> (retrieved on 01/15/2015).

accompanied by three *tondi*, indicating the Sforza coat of arms: on the inner *tondo*, a bicolor shield with a helmet; in the central *tondo*, a very damaged quadripartite shield with a *biscione*, surrounded by six arrows; on the outer margin, a lion with a helmet, holding a cane from which two buckets are hanging. Agostinelli identified the illuminator as Carlo di San Giorgio, according to the *Creditori e debitori* register of the Este family.<sup>87</sup> Carlo di San Giorgio was Borso d'Este's chamberlain. He had already been commissioned to compose a prosopographic series of Este portraits.

- ii. Decorated initials. The manuscript has twenty-one decorated initials, one for each introductory sonnet and the first octave of books iii-xii. Filigreed, on a golden background, with phytomorphic or geometric decoration, these initials extend vertically to form a decorative braid limited on the top and bottom margins by two triangles with phytomorphic and geometric decoration. The initial of each octave is colored alternatively in gold or blue (on a red background).
- iii. The manuscript presents a humanistic book hand: tending to verticality, stylistically essential, formally very rigorous and accurate. In the same hand, in the margins, Pietro Andrea de' Bassi's commentary and infrequent annotations: "Nota bene" and "Comparison" (also a feature of Bassi's edition). Agostinelli identifies the scribe in Niccolò dei Passini (or de' Panino). The same scribe also authored Houghton Library ms. Typ 226, containing Pietro Andrea Bassi's mythological prose work *Le fatiche de Hercule*.

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<sup>87</sup> See AGOSTINELLI 1985-1986, pp. 9-11.

- iv. Collation: I + i<sup>10</sup> (wants 4 and 7), ii<sup>10</sup> (wants 3-8), iii-xv<sup>10</sup> xvi<sup>10</sup> (wants 10) + P. The first and second fascicles were originally *quinterni*. Therefore, the fall of four bifolios results in an incomplete text. The sections affected by the lacuna are: book i: 25-32; 49-56; 97-138; book ii 1-4. The dedicatory preface, the general introductory sonnet, and the introductory sonnet to book i are also missing, possibly indicating an omission by the scribe, the loss of a bifolio, or a lacunous antigraph.
- v. From a textual point of view, *CaM* is contaminated with manuscripts from both families  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ . The result is a very unreliable text.
- vi. The colophon (f. 155v) reads: “Sit laus christo omnipotenti deo. / Finito libro referamus gratia [*sic*] christo / FINIS DEO AMEN / FINI” (“Be praise to Christ the almighty God. The book is over: let us thank Christ. The end. Amen to God. The end”).
- vii. Various pencil notes by a modern hand can be read on the inside of the binding, and the flyleaves. Numeration of the folios and indication of the first folio of every fascicle are also by a modern hand.

The *Teseida* was probably chosen as a gift due to Sforza’s fascination with soldiery. The Estes, however, would not have made a considerable investment in the production of a literary text that was not considered unanimously excellent and uniquely appropriate. This is even more evident if one considers the richness of the Este libraries, where it would not have been difficult to find precious texts. The result is an elegant “libro umanistico” (“humanistic book”),<sup>88</sup> that shows all the material characteristics of a presentation copy:

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<sup>88</sup> See PETRUCCI 1979<sup>c</sup>, pp. 141-142.

parchment support, illuminations, and the new *antiqua* script in compliance with the latest humanistic models and trends.

The choice of the *Teseida* as a gift for a foreign power and the accuracy with which the exemplar was realized are signs of the status of the poem as canonical vernacular text. As such, the proliferation and circulation of the *Teseida* seem to confirm the effectiveness of the hermeneutical guidelines that Boccaccio had materially embedded in the poem. Yet another element shows the success of Boccaccio's project. The poetic text is accompanied by a commentary composed by humanist Pietro Andrea de' Bassi, a notable protagonist of Ferrara's cultural life under Niccolò III.

Significantly, the *mise en texte* and *mise en page* of Bassi's commentary resemble those of Boccaccio's autograph of the *Teseida*. By this, I do not mean to infer a direct genealogic relation between the two manuscripts (such as an antigraph/apograph relation). Instead, the similarity in physiognomy between the two exemplars can be read as motivated by the extension of commentary practices in classical, biblical, and scholastic texts to vernacular literature: an innovation that Boccaccio himself had helped to institute.

## **8.2. Cambridge (Mass.), Houghton Library, Inc 5735 (28.2)**

The printing of this incunabulum of the *Teseida* is strictly connected with the diffusion of typography in Ferrara and the development of Ferrarese humanism. A preliminary consideration, however, needs to be articulated: the distinction between manuscript and print will be descriptive, but not operative. On the one hand, I am obviously aware of the novelty introduced by movable type in terms of composition, circulation, and fruition of a text. On the other hand, we should constantly keep in mind Malcolm Parkes' memorable dictum that "[...] the late medieval book differs more from its early medieval



predecessors than from the printed book of our own day”:<sup>89</sup> between the manuscript of the poem and its printed version one can notice a relationship of porousness and permeability rather than fracture and distance. In fact, from a material point of view, the *Teseida* in print reflects the usual similarity between codices and incunabula:<sup>90</sup>

- i. Like *Aut* and Typ 227, the incunabulum presents the poem in a single central column, four octaves on each side of the folio. The commentary occupies the upper, lower, and lateral margins. Bassi’s preface, which takes the place of Boccaccio’s dedicatory epistle to Fiammetta, occupies the entire writing space. Boccaccio’s preface might have actually been destined for f. 5r-v, which is blank in the copy preserved at Houghton Library but appears in some other copies (*non uidi*), according to the *Incunabula Short Title Catalogue*. The dedication is sometimes found attached in error to Carnerio’s edition of Bassi’s *Le fatiche de Hercule* (1471).
- ii. The incunabulum presents empty spaces for decorated or rubricated initials to be placed in correspondence with the first lines of all books and introductory sonnets.
- iii. Every book is headed by a majuscule Latin rubric in capital epigraphic script (e.g. LIBER TERTIUS INCIPIT).
- iv. Every fascicle has a catchword to the following fascicle. Catchwords are printed vertically, at the centre of the lower margin.

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<sup>89</sup> PARKES 1991, p. 60.

<sup>90</sup> A digital version of the incunabulum is available through Gallica, the digital library of the BNF at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k70419x.r=teseide.langEN> (retrieved on 01/15/2015).

From an ecdotic point of view, Carnerio's edition was based on ms. Ambrosiano D 524 inf, now in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan. Battaglia's description of Bassi's editorial technique is not flattering:

non solo contaminando due e più testi, ma anche introducendo non poche varianti personali, ed esercitando nel complesso un'assai sospetta sorveglianza critica [...], P. A. de' Bassi ne ha fatto la infelice compilazione, affidandosi troppo al suo discutibile gusto poetico e alla sua presunta dottrina umanistica.<sup>91</sup>

not only by contaminating two or more texts, but even introducing many personal variants and exercising an overall very suspicious critical surveillance, P. A. de' Bassi made this unsuccessful compilation, trusting his own debatable poetic taste and alleged humanistic doctrine.

The incunabulum has a colophon (f. 155v). It is a double elegiac couplet that indicates the date of printing and its publisher Agostino Carnerio (or Carneri):<sup>92</sup>

Hoc opus impressit theseida nomine dictum  
Bernardo genitus bibliopola puer:  
Augustinus ei nomen cum: dux bonus urbem  
Herculeus princeps ferrariam regeret

M°. CCCC°. LXXIIII°

The young bookseller son of Bernardo  
Printed this work entitled *Teseida*  
(His name is Agostino), at the time when  
The good duke Ercole ruled over Ferrara.  
1475

Carnerio's career as printer and publisher was short. The catalogue of his production only covers the years 1474 to 1479. Nevertheless, the physiognomy of this catalogue may illuminate some aspects of the reception of the *Teseida*.

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<sup>91</sup> BATTAGLIA 1938, p. xxxiv.

<sup>92</sup> For Carnerio's biography, see VENEZIANI 1977.

Boccaccio-Bassi's *Teseida* is accompanied by a series of texts that are clearly humanistic in nature. Besides the more devotionally inspired vernacular translations of the *Vitae sanctorum patrum* (books iv-v), we have: Guarino Veronese's Latin grammar, Ognibene da Lonigo's Latin grammar, Horace's *carmina*, Bassi's mythological 'novel' *Le fatiche de Hercule*, the Pseudo-Hyginus' *Poeticon astronomicon*, and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.<sup>93</sup> Carnerio's catalogue seems to confirm the success of Boccaccio's plan to be inscribed within the canon of cultivated literature. A brief glance at the typographical features displayed by these texts also leads to the same conclusion; in fact, the choice of a *rotunda* typeface seems to give these texts a humanistic quality. This is even more evident if one compares the choice of the *rotunda* against the Gothic type used to print two classics of canonical law (Clemens V's *Constitutiones* and Boniface VIII's *Liber sextus*): "[b]y using a roman font for vernacular as well as Latin works (including the *Teseida*), it may have been Carnerio's intention to emphasize classical elements and make them more appealing to readers with learned humanistic pretensions".<sup>94</sup> It is also appropriate to underline how the critical fortune of the *Teseida* is intimately connected with Bassi. Boccaccio's *Teseida* and Bassi's *Le fatiche de Hercule*, executed by the same scribe and illuminator, had already been paired as a single gift for Galeazzo Maria Sforza.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> See DANIELS 2009, pp. 57-75.

<sup>94</sup> DANIELS 2009, p. 60.

<sup>95</sup> The current shelf mark of this exemplar of *Le fatiche de Hercule* is Cambridge (Mass.), Houghton Library, ms. Typ 226. See AGOSTINELLI 1985-1986, pp. 9-11.

### 8.3. Pietro Andrea de' Bassi's Commentary to the *Teseida*

Biographical data about Pietro Andrea de' Bassi are scarce. Giuseppe Orlandi proposes the last quarter of the fourteenth century as his date of birth.<sup>96</sup> Giulio Bertoni places his death around mid-fifteenth century.<sup>97</sup> Cristina Montagnani is responsible for the most recent and comprehensive studies dedicated to Bassi.<sup>98</sup> The texts we can assuredly ascribe to him are his commentary to the *Teseida*, a commentary to a canzone by Niccolò Malpigli dedicated to Niccolò III, and the mythological romance *Le fatiche de Hercule* (often alluded to as forthcoming in the commentary to the *Teseida*).

Bassi's fortune is closely associated with the court of Ferrara and the printer Carnerio's publishing activity. In fact, Carnerio published both *Le fatiche de Hercule* (1471) and Bassi's 'edition' of the *Teseida* (1475). Bassi's commentary is preserved in four manuscripts and in the 1475 incunabulum.<sup>99</sup> The two books (*CaM* and the copy of the incunabulum at Houghton Library) that I have examined each present different commentaries, with regard to both language and content.

The commentary in the incunabulum is more comprehensive. It opens with a dedication to Niccolò III, which is essentially an Este genealogy. Every time a representative of the Este family is first mentioned, a red rubric in the margin indicates his or her name. Following the dedication is a preface, with the proposition of intent, and the commentary proper which then continues in the margins. The manuscript completely omits the dedication to Niccolò III, the preface, and the beginning of the commentary (unless a whole

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<sup>96</sup> See ORLANDI 1924.

<sup>97</sup> See BERTONI 1903 and BERTONI 1921.

<sup>98</sup> See MONTAGNANI 2004, MONTAGNANI 2004<sup>a</sup>, and MONTAGNANI 2004<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>99</sup> See MONTAGNANI 2004, pp. 12-13: besides the Houghton library ms., Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, ms. D 524; Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, ms. Vat. lat. 10656 and ms. Urbinate lat. 691. Montagnani neglects to cite Chicago, University of Chicago Library, ms. 541.

fascicle fell out). These were probably considered a single textual unit, and they were evidently perceived irrelevant (if not politically inappropriate) in a manuscript sent as a gift to a foreign power. This results in the lack of indication of the author of text and commentary, thus notably reproducing the condition of *Aut*, in which, however, the distinction of author and commentator and the anonymity of the latter were part of a specific editorial strategy.

The dedication and the prosopographic section imply a strong connection between the incunabulum and the Este family and Ferrara. This connection is also noticeable at a linguistic level, connoted by characteristically Romagnolo elements, whereas the manuscript is closer to a Tuscan *koiné*. At an orthographic and phonetic level, the incunabulum employs *ȝ* instead of *ç* to indicate the voiceless palatal affricate (f. 2r: *ȝo* for *ciò*), and again *ȝ* instead of *g* to indicate the voiced palato-alveolar affricate (f. 1r: *inȝegno* for *ingegno*). Moreover, whereas the manuscript shows a certain tendency to keep double consonants, a typically Northern Italian halving of consonants and improper doubling due to hypercorrection characterize the incunabulum. At a lexical level, we note an inclination to retain cultivated variations, as in *glossa* (instead of *giosa* of the incunabulum). At a morphological level, we may just cite the option for the Northern Italian use of *mi* as nominative, instead of *io* (regularly used in the more Tuscan language of *CaM*).<sup>100</sup>

From the perspective of literary criticism and exegesis, Bassi's hermeneutic goal is very different from Boccaccio's (f. 2v):

E p(er) lo amore, el q(ua)le a poesia portati, avendo vuy de la lectura del Theseo sommo piacere, ritrova(n)dossi alchu(n) a li q(ua)li le historie poetice no(n) sono cussì note come a vuy, vi ha piazuto co(m)mandare a mi, Piero Andrea de i Bassi, vostro antiquo e fidele famiglia, dechiari lo obscuro texto del ditto Theseo, face(n)do a quello giose p(er) le q(ua)le li lecturi possano cavare sugo de la loro lectura, el quale texto p(er) la obscurità de le fictione poetice è difficile ad i(n)te(n)d(e)re.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>100</sup> See MONTAGNANI 2004 for further linguistic considerations.

<sup>101</sup> I cite from the incunabulum, with few adjustments as to punctuation and orthography.

And because of Love, which led you to poetry, you immensely enjoy the reading of the book of Theseus, since there are people to whom these poetic stories are not so well-known as they are to you, you wished to order to me, Pietro Andrea de' Bassi, your long-time and loyal servant, to explain the obscure text of said book of Theseus, adding glosses through which the readers can get the gist of the reading, since the text is difficult to understand due to the obscurity of poetic fictions.

The *obscurità* mentioned by Bassi is something other than Boccaccio's "chiuso parlare" in his dedicatory preface to Fiammetta. Bassi seems uninterested in the lexicological and rhetorical aspects of the *Teseida*. Above all, he completely neglects *allegorésis*, Boccaccio's distinctive hermeneutical practice, strictly linked to medieval exegetical models, even if, in principle, he underscores the relevance of "la medulla q(ua)le se cava de le fictione poetice" (f. 2r: "the kernel that can be gauged from poetic fictions"). Unsurprisingly, then, Bassi does not offer any gloss on Mars' and Venus' temples, whereas in Boccaccio's commentary they constituted a whole nexus of interpretive directions and an implicit poetic manifesto. Boccaccio considers *allegorésis* an apologetic proposition on the usefulness of poetry, since poetry is the matrix of an edifying message *sub velamine*. Bassi, on the contrary, operates in a cultural milieu in which such an apology is both unrequested and taken for granted, thanks to the strenuous activity of justification of vernacular literature of Boccaccio's generation: "appare ormai del tutto superata la necessità di giustificare per via allegorica un mondo classico altrimenti avvertito come pericoloso, mentre prevale il gusto della libera narrazione, del fantastico, che tanto peso avrà nella cultura ferrarese a venire" ("the necessity to give an allegorical justification to a classical world otherwise perceived as dangerous is completely overcome: the enthusiasm for free narration and fantasy prevails, which will be so relevant in the Ferrarese culture to come").<sup>102</sup> Bassi's reference to the poem's obscurity must be read in terms of the *recherché* and cultivated nature of Boccaccio's mythological references, which

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<sup>102</sup> MONTAGNANI 2004, p. 16.

are the real focal center of Bassi's criticism. The mythographical and narrative expansions in Bassi's commentary seem to comply well with the traditional interest in fiction at the Este court, which was soon to witness the climax of narrative texts in *ottava rima*.

The marginalia are a privileged area for the development of the narrative and motivic subject matter of the *fabula*. We might very well consider some of the digressions as autonomous mythological novellas. An extreme case is Bassi's deliberate insertion of a gloss to comment on a reading that he explicitly (and erroneously) opts against at an editorial level (f. 20v):

Perché trovo i(n) uno altro texto el verso qui desso sotto nottato e p(ar)me star meglio, p(er)hò nota che haveva questa glosa q(ui) scripta credendo di luculare [*sic*] quello che nel texto deceva lo auctore, el quale, come è usanza de li poeta(n)ti, no(n) se curano di narrare una cosa fuor de la natura di quello che tractano p(er) alegrare una pelegrina historia. [...] No(n) mi è però discaro haverre narrata la scripta historia p(er)ché altrove lo auctore la tocha, sicché pur era necessario sap(er)la.

Since I find in a different text the line noted below and I reckon it is a better reading, note, therefore, that it preserved this gloss transcribed here. This gloss was intended to elucidate what the author said in the text. Poets customarily do not care to make a bizarre tale more entertaining. However, it does not displease me to have told this story, since the author touches on it elsewhere; thus, it was still necessary to know it.

The passage indicates Bassi's ignorance of the authoriality of Boccaccio's commentary, whose gloss inspires him to extemporaneously expand on the poem in spite of choosing a non-authorial *lectio*. Furthermore, it is a confirmation of a certain tendency to indiscriminately contaminate texts and commentaries from various editions without many philological concerns. Finally, it is a sign of Bassi's chief literary codes: narrative *varietas* and *delectatio* (both clearly emerging from the reference to "alegrare": entertain).

Bassi's commentary is a test bench for a humanist who is also the narrator of his own fiction, and who sometimes sets up an antagonistic attitude towards Boccaccio in matters of narrative skills. What is more, the material disposition of these often-

heterogeneous digressions can be considered the objectification of the practice of narration as *entrelacement*. The narrative subject matter develops along parallel lines. Consumption occurs in simultaneous, rather than sequential phases, to use Roman Jakobson's well-known formulation. It is both fascinating and materially motivated to compare Matteo Maria Boiardo's and Ludovico Ariosto's rhizomatic fiction with the spatial irradiation of narrative units in the *mise en page* and material disposition of Bassi's (and even Boccaccio's) commentary. Bassi's digressive endeavour is manifest in the introductory formulas for this kind of *excursus*, e.g.: “*E benché no(n) faẏa a p(ro)posito, perché mi pare fra l'altre degne de memoria no(n) lasserò [...]*” (f. 3r in the incunabulum, emphasis mine: “*And although it is not appropriate, since this fact is worth remembering among the others, I won't neglect [...]*”). These formulas indicate an awareness of the heterogeneity of many of these expansions in relation to the main structure of the poem.

As mentioned *supra*, Boccaccio's glosses mostly circulated anonymously, due to a specific textual strategy of his choosing. Thus, Bassi probably read this commentary without recognizing Boccaccio's authorship. In his preface, in fact, Bassi clearly indicates the authorship of the poem: “*lo auctore del presente libro fo Zohanne da Certaldo cognominato Bochazo*” (f. 2v: “the author of this book was Giovanni Boccaccio from Certaldo”). He is also aware of authoriality of the introductory sonnets and books division, but he never refers to the commentary as particularly authoritative due to Boccaccio's paternity (ff. 2r-3v):

[...] vegneremo alla divisione la quale il sapientissimo auctore ha elega(n)tissimame(n)te facta: zoè diviso in .xii. libri ciaschuno co(n) debito ordine, p(er)ché nel principio de ciaschuno de li detti .xii. libri lui ha ordinatamente premissi .xiiii. versi li quali, sotto brevità, sono co(n)tine(n)ti de tutto quello che lo auctore vuole tractare nel dicto libro.

we will come to the division that the very knowledgeable author very elegantly made: that is twelve books, each of which with an appropriate order, since at the beginning of the said twelve books he neatly started with fourteen lines which compendiously contain everything the author wants to deal with in each book.



This attitude is clear in the discontinuous use of Boccaccio's rubrics, which are very rarely cited *ad verbum* and most of the time completely neglected.

Boccaccio's *doctrina* paradoxically returns as an indirect presence in Bassi's commentary, since Bassi often finds his mythological sources in the *Genealogie deorum gentilium*. But Boccaccio's philological effort to provide different versions of a myth in different authors is mostly absent in Bassi's commentary:

non c'è più traccia della attenta e, nei limiti del possibile, scrupolosa ricostruzione delle varie versioni di una stessa vicenda di una *fabula* nei diversi autori: i nomi degli scrittori che Boccaccio cita come fonti per taluni miti, o scompaiono, o lasciano il posto al vaghissimo "alchuni", come d'altra parte vengono eliminate le differenti versioni di una stessa vicenda, a volte addirittura fuse in un solo racconto, con i ben prevedibili danni per la connessione logica degli avvenimenti.<sup>103</sup>

there is no trace of the attentive and, as far as possible, meticulous reconstructions of different versions of the same episode of a *fabula* in various authors: the names that Boccaccio quotes as sources for some myths either disappear or are replaced by the extremely vague formula "alchuni" [some authors]. Analogously, different versions of the same facts are eliminated, or at times even merged into a single tale, with the easily predictable damages to the logical connection of the events.

What is more, Bassi seems irritated by the textual multiplying of different versions of a myth and often expresses a defeatist discouragement:

E nota che li auctori han ta(n)to ampliata questa [*scil.* di Ceres] historia ch'el no(n) si può cognoscere la mera veritade e p(er)ché non fa a proposito p(er)ò no(n) ho p(ar)lato più oltre.

And note that the authors have amplified this story [*scil.* Ceres'] so much, that one cannot know the mere truth anymore, and since it is not appropriate I did not talk further about it.

Without attempting to overturn Battaglia's severe judgment of Bassi as a philologist, Bassi's critical and editorial agenda should probably be taken into consideration for a more

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<sup>103</sup> MONTAGNANI 2004, p. 17.

balanced evaluation of his work. Bassi was definitely not a Lachmannean editor. He was not an excellent narrator, and his literary interpretation is often limited and shortsighted. Moreover, his mythological accounts are often mere vernacular translation of relevant passages from Boccaccio's *Genealogie*. Nonetheless, Bassi's tendency to source contamination, his narrative eclecticism, his striving for semantic complication, and his literary *curiositas* best represent some of the aspects of Boccaccio's literary heritage for subsequent generations of writers in the vernacular, constituting a significant *trait d'union* between late Tuscan production and Northern Italian early Renaissance culture.

## 9. Conclusions

On details in literature Roland Barthes writes: “dans l'ordre du discours, ce qui est noté est, par définition, notable: quand bien même un détail paraîtrait irréductiblement insignifiant, rebelle à toute fonction, il n'en aurait pas moins pour finir le sens même de l'absurde ou de l'inutile: tout a un sens ou rien n'en a” (“within the order of discourse, what is noted is, by definition, notable: even when a detail appears irreducibly insignificant, rebellious to any function, it would still have to serve the very sense of the absurd or useless: everything has a sense, or nothing does”).<sup>104</sup> The analysis I have carried out throughout this chapter suggests that we should extend Barthes' notion of *détail*. Consequently, we should include not only the various elements of discourse semiotics, but also the material *minutiae* of the ‘container’ of the text. If we want our interpretation to be historically relevant, we have to consider the bijective correspondence between textual unit and material unit, content and medium, iconic-verbal message and material support.

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<sup>104</sup> BARTHES 1966, p. 15.

By outlining the material features of the autograph of the *Teseida*, I indicated the literary relevance of Boccaccio's choice of a specific book format for his complex editorial project. On the one hand, the autograph clearly indicates an attempt to condition the perception and reception of the text it carries, by means of portraying its author as an *auctor*. On the other hand, it displays a strict interweaving between its visual configuration and the content of the poem. The account of visual elements within the text, the visual apparatus of the codex, and the writing as graphic-visual medium all concur to set up this fascinating *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

Boccaccio's sophisticated literary strategy was successful and left its traces in the *Quattrocento* tradition of the poem. As Guglielmo Cavallo points out, “[i] caratteri materiali connotanti i vettori del testo possono indicare in determinati casi fatti, modi, fasi della sua storia (e talora della sua stessa scrittura)” (“in specific cases, the material characters denoting the vehicles of the text can indicate facts, modes, and phases of its history, and even of its own writing”).<sup>105</sup> In fact, my analysis of the *Teseida* reception in Ferrara showed how the poem was actually perceived as a text to comment on, and how its author came to be associated with Christian and classical *auctoritates*. The autograph might not be the archetype of the extant manuscript tradition, as the editors of the poem used to think in the past. Nevertheless, its material prestige is witnessed by the homogenous physiognomy of those manuscripts provided with a commentary, in that they resemble *Aut*'s textual architecture. The choice of a non-authorial commentary sanctions our reading, rather than invalidating it. In the end, Boccaccio's literary, critical, and editorial project proved effective, and he certainly contributed to the establishment of a hermeneutical tradition for his own pioneering vernacular text that might rival that of the classics.

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<sup>105</sup> CAVALLO 1987, p. 150.

## Visual Argumentation in Petrarca's Sestinas

Se lei cerca un poeta meccanico vero e proprio, dovrà aspettare ancora qualche mese: è in fase di avanzata progettazione presso la nostra casa madre a Fort Kiddiwanee, Oklahoma. Si chiamerà *The Troubadour*, "Il trovatore": una macchina fantastica, un poeta meccanico *heavy-duty*, capace di comporre in tutte le lingue europee vive o morte, capace di poetare ininterrottamente per mille cartelle, da  $-100^{\circ}$  a  $+200^{\circ}$  centigradi, in qualunque clima, e perfino sottacqua e nel vuoto spinto.

P. LEVI, *Il versificatore*

### 1. Introduction

Manuscript Riccardiano 1088 is a paper codex of seventy folios, dated between end of the fourteenth century and beginning of the fifteenth, and conserved in Florence in the Biblioteca Riccardiana.<sup>1</sup> It is a miscellaneous manuscript, one that preserves a vernacular version of Aesop's fables, a redaction of Francesco Petrarca's *canzoniere* (in the so-called 'Malatesta form'),<sup>2</sup> and an anthology of Tuscan poets (from Dante Alighieri and Guido Cavalcanti to such lesser-known poets as Pietro Faitinelli and Lancillotto Angoscioli). It is written by one main hand, with minor additions by two other scribes and various annotations in modern hands. The copyist starts transcribing Petrarca's poems in two columns, the odd lines on the left and the even lines on the right, with the significant exception of the sestinas, which are copied in a single column on ff. 17r, 20rv, and 25v. After folio 26v, a sudden change of pen, ink, and layout occurs. Halfway through his transcription of the *canzoniere*, the copyist leaves a dramatic testimony of his scribal resolutions. From now on, as he warns the readers on f. 27r, he will discontinue the practice of following different

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<sup>1</sup> See DE ROBERTIS 2002, v. 1 (t. 1), pp. 354-356.

<sup>2</sup> See WILKINS 1951 and SANTAGATA 1992.

layouts for different metrical genres, distancing himself from Petrarca's conventions as we know them from his partially autograph manuscript of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 3195). Instead, the copyist will uniformly transcribe poems of any type in the same format, one verse per line, proceeding vertically:

Non mi piace di piu seguire discriuere nel modo cheo tenuto da quince aditro cioe di passare daluno colonello alaltro, ançi intendo di seguire giu p(er) lo cholonello tanto che si co(m)pia la chançone o sonetto chesia.

I don't wish to continue writing the same way I have done so far, i.e. switching from one column to the other. Instead, I plan on writing down in one column until either canzone or sonnet is complete.

An urge for standardization and simplicity replaces a more philological approach to the *mise en page* of the exemplar and Petrarca's authorial (and authoritative) editorial decisions.<sup>3</sup> The attitude of the copyist of ms. Riccardiano 1088 seems to provide a material confirmation of Remigio Sabbadini's criterion for detecting trivializations in textual traditions: *poeta variat, librarii iterant*.<sup>4</sup> Copyists repeat, and therefore tend to uniformity, whereas the poet varies and opts for specific solutions.

In the first chapter of this study I indicated how copyists of the *Vita Nova* tended to misconstrue or ignore Dante's embedded instructions for the transcription and interpretation of his *prosimetrum*. In the second chapter, I observed how Boccaccio's strategies of materially distinguishing his persona into different scribal roles were not always correctly or efficaciously perceived by the copyists of the *Teseida*.

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<sup>3</sup> See STOREY 1993, pp. 226-227. See also STOREY 2005, p. 875, and STOREY 2011, pp. 34-35.

<sup>4</sup> Sabbadini's epigrammatic 'rule' can be found in the critical apparatus to *Georgica* iv 173 of his edition of Virgil's *opera*: see SABBADINI 1930. I thank my Harvard colleague and friend Marco Romani Mistretta for providing me with the exact bibliographical reference with the usual accuracy and courtesy.

In this chapter,<sup>5</sup> I will explore Petrarca's material treatment of the poetic genre of the sestina in the autograph of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (henceforth: *Rvf*): the aforementioned ms. Vat. lat. 3195. I will outline how Petrarca's material choices isolate the sestinas from both the poetic experiments of the precursors of this form (Raimbaut d'Aurenga, Arnaut Daniel, Dante Alighieri) and the other metrical genres in the autograph of the *Rvf* (sonnets, canzoni, ballate, madrigali). Then, I will study how the *mise en page* of the sestinas interacts with their metrical form and their subject matter. Finally, I will focus on this interaction and how it relates to the other lyrical forms and their layouts in the autograph in terms of their semantic contribution to the structure of the *canzoniere* as an organic book of poems. I intend to show how the sestinas work as material and poetic *loci* for the progressive synthesis and assessment of the narrative of the songbook, or as niches for meta-literary considerations.

A preliminary investigation into the proto-history of the sestina and a description of those material aspects of Vat. lat. 3195 that are relevant to this study will help engage with the treatment of Petrarca's sestinas.

## 2. Proto-History of the Sestina

Often referred to as lyrical sestina in order to distinguish it from the narrative sestina or *sesta rima* (rhyme scheme: ABABCC), the sestina is a form, which, in Aurelio Roncaglia's words:

[...] consta di sei strofe esastiche, più una tornada di tre versi. Le parole che terminano i versi non soggiacciono, entro la singola strofa, a vincolo di rima, ma si ripetono identiche in ogni strofa, combinando all'insistenza lessicale il dispositivo dei *rims dissolutz* [...]. Da una

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<sup>5</sup> This section partially re-elaborates ARESU 2010.

strofa all'altra varia soltanto l'ordine di successione, che risulta a ciascuna ripresa diverso, governato però da una legge di permutazione rigorosa.<sup>6</sup>

[...] consists of six stanzas of six lines each and a *tornada* [*scil.* coda] of three lines. Within each strophe, words at the end of the lines are not subject to any rhyme scheme, but repeat identically in all strophes, combining lexical insistence with the device of *rims dissolutz* [...]. From strophe to strophe, only the order of presentation varies: it is different at every round, though it still complies with a rigorous law of permutation.

Roncaglia's succinct definition requires some expansion. The notion of *rims dissolutz* (or *rimas dissolutas*; also *rims estramps* or *rimas estrampas*, literally 'rhymes with a limp') refers to a rhyme scheme of Old Occitan poetry,<sup>7</sup> one which calls for no correspondence between rhymes within the stanzas. Interstrophic correspondences are a result of the law of permutation of the sestina, which obeys the rules of the so-called *retrogradatio cruciata*. Both *retrogradatio* and *crucifixio* are medieval Latin techniques,<sup>8</sup> the former term having been first documented in Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis Mercuri et Philologiae* (fifth century CE).<sup>9</sup> Whereas the *retrogradatio* describes the backwards progression of the rhyme words, the *crucifixio* refers to their mutual contiguity and their chiastic arrangement. It was philologist and metricologist Giovanni Mari who provided both a name and a description for the combination of the two techniques:<sup>10</sup> the same rhyme words close the lines of each stanza; their retrograde presentation throughout the poem is determined by the position that they occupy in the previous stanza: 1-2-3-4-5-6 > 6-1-5-2-4-3 > 3-6-4-1-2-5 and so on. A hypothetical seventh stanza would repeat the rhyme scheme of the first, re-starting the cycle. More recently, Dominique Billy has proposed the notion of "permutation antipodique" to

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<sup>6</sup> RONCAGLIA 1981, pp. 5-6.

<sup>7</sup> For a general introduction to Old Occitan metrics, see DI GIROLAMO 1979.

<sup>8</sup> See MARI 1901.

<sup>9</sup> See MARI 1901, p. 86; also see RONCAGLIA 1981, p. 19 n. 80.

<sup>10</sup> See MARI 1899. The term *retrogradatio cruciata* appears on p. 961 n. 18.

replace Mari's successful formula: "l'ordre de reprise procède en effet de la recherche des termes les plus éloignés – donc aux antipodes – dans l'ordre de départ, dans les limites des choix successivement possibles" ("the order of refrain effectively proceeds from the search for the furthest terms – the antipodes – based on the starting point, within the limits of the successively possible choices").<sup>11</sup>

If a morphological description of the sestina as form is relatively easy, its genealogy (its 'invention', in Roncaglia's words) is a more elusive topic. A long-undisputed critical consensus provided a genetic interpretation that only the most recent studies have challenged. Influential Renaissance critics such as Pietro Bembo, Ludovico Dolce, and Ludovico Castelvetro<sup>12</sup> all agree in recognizing the Occitan troubadour Arnaut Daniel as the 'inventor' of the sestina with his *canço* "Lo ferm voler qu'el cor m'intra" ("The firm will that enters my heart"). The same is true for all early commentators of Petrarca's *Rvf*. With an approach to metrical forms that is more teleological than historical, they then outline a sort of *translatio studii* from Provence to Tuscany, where Dante and Petrarca received the form and perfected it. Dante's unique sestina (44 [ci, 7]) "Al poco giorno e al gran cerchio d'ombra" ("To the short day and the great circle of shadow") would standardize the metrical signifier. Following in his footsteps, Petrarca would methodically expand the corpus with nine sestinas (among which a double sestina). Moreover, he would work towards a more intimate connection between the sestina as form and its contents. The intricate geometry of the metrics, that is, would be the one and only form able to express a specific set of semantic features.

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<sup>11</sup> BILLY 1989, pp. 200-201.

<sup>12</sup> Respectively in *Prose della volgar lingua*, i 9; *I quattro libri delle Osservationi*, iv "Delle sestine"; *Opere varie critiche*, "Se sia male scritto il verso del Petrarca *Si ch'alla morte in un punto s'arriva*".



However, the textual situation of the *sestina*, both genetically and morphologically, is far more articulated and complex. A dynamic of intertextual exchanges undoubtedly occurs between Arnaut, Dante, and Petrarca. Also, it is legitimate to see a progression from Arnaut's *trobar ric* (rich form of poetry) to Dante's reconciliation of verse and theme into a superior unit. In Mario Fubini's words, "[...] Dante ha inteso la *sestina* come esasperazione della coscienza dell'artista" ("Dante understood the *sestina* as intensification of his artistic consciousness").<sup>13</sup> Dante, therefore, viewed the metrical form not only as a way to create a technical challenge, but also as a chance to maximize the 'message' of the poem. At a technical level, Dante's version of Arnaut's 'sestina' is characterized by the elimination of irregularities and the rejection of excessively captious techniques. In fact, like Occitan troubadour Pons Fabre d'Uzes before him,<sup>14</sup> he imposes on the stanzas a definite homeometry, i.e. he assigns the 'sestina' a strophe of all hendecasyllables, whereas the first line of every stanza of Arnaut's "Lo ferm voler" is a feminine heptasyllable. Also, Dante's *sestina* is characterized by regular inter-strophic correspondences between rhymes and the "statutaria assenza dell'*aequivocum*" ("the statutory absence of the *aequivocum*", i.e. the use of homophones as rhyme words).<sup>15</sup> It is also philologically correct to read Petrarca's *sestinas* in terms of dialogue with his two illustrious precursors and appropriation of technical and lexical features from their corpus, in line with his distinctly 'active' intertextual practices.<sup>16</sup> Finally, it is clear that after Petrarca's standardization, we can track the progressive

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<sup>13</sup> FUBINI 1962, p. 303.

<sup>14</sup> See FRASCA 1992, pp. 118-122.

<sup>15</sup> FRASCA 1992, p. 153.

<sup>16</sup> See VELLI 1976.

involution of the form in the exhibition of *ars combinatoria* of mannerist and baroque collections of poems.

Nevertheless, it is difficult and perhaps incorrect to consider the sestina a well-defined metrical form before Petrarca. The sestina, that is, did not clearly constitute a genre in and of itself before Petrarca institutionalized it and established an awareness of its individuality. In sum, Petrarca emerges as the one responsible for the codification of the sestina as a genre, i.e. he assumes “piena coscienza di comporre un testo individuabile come tipologicamente riproducibile e perciò facente parte d’un insieme omogeneo” (“full consciousness of composing a text recognizable as typologically reproducible and therefore part of a homogenous series”).<sup>17</sup>

I have mentioned Renaissance scholars’ interest in the sestina. By contrast, medieval *trattatisti* (writers of treatises) on the art of metrics (Antonio da Tempo, Gidino da Sommacampagna, etc.) ignore the name of the sestina and the notion of it as a distinctive form. Guilhem Molinier’s Old Occitan grammar *Leys d’amors*, written between 1328 and 1337 to provide a description of the troubadours’ corpus at the twilight of Old Occitan culture, offers no help either: Arnaut’s ‘sestina’ is simply treated as *canço*.

Dante’s *De vulgari eloquentia* poses more questions than it provides answers.<sup>18</sup> In fact, Dante refers to his own sestina “Al poco giorno e al gran cerchio d’ombra” twice. In the first instance (ii x 2), he discusses different typologies of stanza. More specifically, he associates his poem with those of Arnaut’s with no division (*diesis*) between *fronte* (or two *piedi*) and *sirma* (or two *volte*) within the stanza:

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<sup>17</sup> PULSONI 1996, p. 56.

<sup>18</sup> See MENGALDO 1968.

Quia quedam [*scil.* stantie] sunt sub una oda continua usque ad ultimum progressive, hoc est sine interatione modulationis cuiusquam et sine diesi – et diesim dicimus deductionem vergentem de una sola in aliam (hanc voltam vocamus, cum vulgus alloquimur) – : et huiusmodi stantia usus est fere in omnibus cantionibus suis Arnaldus Danielis, et nos eum secuti sumus cum diximus

*Al poco giorno e al gran cerchio d'ombra.*

Some stanzas are based on an uninterrupted melody, in an ordered progression from beginning to end, without any repetition of musical phrases or any *diesis* – *diesis* being a movement from one melody to another, which we call *volta* in the vernacular. Arnaut Daniel used such stanzas in nearly all of his canzoni, and I followed him when I wrote *Al poco giorno e al gran cerchio d'ombra*.

The second mention of Arnaut is even more problematic (ii xiii 2):

Unum est stantia sine rithimo, in qua nulla rithimorum habitudo attenditur: et huiusmodi stantiis usus est Arnaldus Danielis frequentissime, velut ibi:

*Se·m fos Amor de ioi donar,*

et nos dicimus

*Al poco giorno.*

One of these is the unrhymed stanza, in which no organization according to rhyme occurs. Arnaut Daniel often used this kind of stanza, as in his *Se·m fos Amor de ioi donar* [*If Love granted joy to me*], and I also used it in *Al poco giorno*.

This second passage deals with the rhyme scheme of the canzone. Dante refers to the technique of the *coblas dissolutas* (or *estrampas*): stanzas without rhymes within the stanzas themselves. Dante's self-exegesis offers no elements to consider "Al poco giorno" anything other than a peculiar configuration of canzone. There is no evidence to suggest that Dante's 'sestina' is, for its author, a genre of its own with a name of its own. Moreover, Dante never mentions the one poem by Arnaut that is generally indicated as the archetype of the sestina, the aforementioned "Lo ferm voler".

The plot thickens. Benvenuto da Imola leaves an enigmatic note in his commentary to Dante's *Commedia*. Upon commenting on Arnaut's (Daniel?) appearance in *Purgatorio* xxvi 115-120, he describes him in these terms: "Qui [*scil.* Arnaldus] invenit multa et pulchra dicta vulgaria. A quo Petrarca fatebatur sponte se accepisse modum et stilum cantilenae de quatuor rhythmis et non a Dante" ("He composed many beautiful texts in the vernacular. From him, and not from Dante, Petrarca maintained to have directly derived the mode and style of the song of four rhymes").<sup>19</sup> In anticipation of a reliable critical edition of Benvenuto's *Comentum super Dantis Aldigherii Comediam* within the series of the "Edizione nazionale dei commenti danteschi" currently being published by the Centro Pio Rajna, it is intriguing to think of a misreading (a metathesis) from *VI* (*sex*) to *IV* (*quattuor*) in the transmission of the commentary (or an incorrect deciphering of the sequence of Gothic minims).<sup>20</sup> Petrarca's reported self-affiliation with Arnaut would fittingly appear next to his celebration of Arnaut as *maître à penser* (*contra Dantem*, reduced to a mere erotic poet in company of Beatrice) in the *Triumphus Cupidinis* (iv 40-42): "fra tutti il primo Arnaldo Daniello, / gran maestro d'amor, ch'a la sua terra / ancor fa honor col suo dir strano e bello" ("among them all the first is Arnaut Daniel, / master in love, who his native land / still honors with his beautiful strange verse").

The first occurrence of the term *sestina* is reportedly connected to Petrarca's corpus.  
<sup>21</sup> Manuscript Laurenziano Strozzi 178 of the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence is a parchment codex, miscellaneous, generally dated to the end of the fourteenth century. Folios 4r-137r preserve the 'Chigi form' of Petrarca's *canzoniere* interspersed with other

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<sup>19</sup> I cite from the *Dante Dartmouth Project*: <http://dante.dartmouth.edu> (retrieved on 03/15/2015).

<sup>20</sup> But see CAMPORESI 1951.

<sup>21</sup> See PULSONI 2011, p. 202.

*disperse* (poems not included in the final version of the *Rvf*). Ms. Strozzi 178 is divided into two blocks: the first organizes the poems according to their meter, the second in alphabetical order (by the first letter of their *incipit*). Not only do the sestinas occupy their own section in the first block (*Rvf* 22, 30, 66, 80, and 142), but the heading *Sestina* also opens this section on f. 21r. This testimony is even more relevant if we consider that the typology of glosses in ms. Strozzi 178 implies “un codice molto vicino allo scrittoio del poeta” (“a manuscript very close to the poet’s personal desk”).<sup>22</sup>

The very number of Petrarca’s sestinas (nine) indicates his leading role in the elevation to a systematic genre of what had been an *unicum* for both Arnaut and Dante (whose so-called *sestina doppia* “Amor tu vedi ben che questa donna” (45 [cii, 8]), is actually a *sestina rinterzata*).<sup>23</sup> A prime candidate for Harold’s Bloom anxiety of influence, Petrarca appropriates Old Occitan techniques through Dante’s magisterium (with the usual dismissive tone towards him). He works these techniques out in terms of both regularization and sublimation. More specifically, like Dante, he opts for isosyllabic stanzas of all hendecasyllables. Like Dante, he generally avoids *aequivocatio*, i.e. the aforementioned use of homophones (with few, but very substantial exceptions: *Rvf* 30: “riva”: “arriva”; 214: “corso”: “(è) corso”; 332: “pianto”: “(ho) pianto”). Even when a rhyme word is used in a metaphorical sense, the signifier does not change: that is, he avoids homophones with different meanings. Like Dante, he also avoids *rims derivatis*, the systematic rhyme alternation of terms with identical lexical morpheme but different grammatical morpheme (e.g.: the alternation between masculine and feminine endings of the same noun or adjective). Finally, in a noteworthy departure from both Arnaut and Dante, Petrarca’s last five sestinas present a

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<sup>22</sup> See BELLONI 1992, p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> See CONTINI 1946, pp. 160-164. See also JEANROY 1913.

fixed rhyme scheme in the *tornada*: (A)B(C)D(E)F (with parentheses indicating internal rhyme words), another feature that contributes to a regularization of the form.

The last sestina is a double sestina (twelve stanzas and a coda), which furthers the technique by providing a metrical reduplication of the form (we will see *infra* with what semantic repercussions). Ideally, the *sestina doppia* reconnects Petrarca's own corpus to the Old Occitan structure of the *canço redonda*, the circular song where the permutation of the rhymes stops after completing all configurations. Concurrently, however, he defies the limits of the *redonda* by restarting the rhyme scheme, thus underscoring the incantatorial and obsessive force of the rhyme words.

Petrarca's role in the canonization of the form operates in the direction of both providing a conspicuous and homogenous corpus and conjugating a series of technical elements from various authors into a cohesive and coherent structure dedicated to the expression of specific themes: Petrarca "ha [...] sottratto la sestina allo sperimentalismo degli *unica* di dei suoi predecessori" ("took the sestina away from the experimentalism of his predecessors' single realizations").<sup>24</sup> The individuation of the sestina as form and its elevation to reproducible genre is further confirmed by its material presentation in the autograph of the *Rvf*. Whereas Petrarca's strictly textual treatment of the sestina is for the most part a re-functionalization of features that he could read in Dante and the troubadours, his *material* treatment of it is rigorous and systematic, yet also extremely innovative:

[...] la sestina è sempre copiata su due colonne indipendenti, secondo un percorso di lettura "in verticale" che contrasta con quello "in orizzontale" degli altri generi della raccolta poetica: il lettore deve pertanto arrivare in fondo alla colonna di sinistra prima di passare a quella di destra. Dal momento che nel sistema combinatorio dei testi dei *Fragmenta* la preferenza petrarchesca sembra cadere sull'abbinamento sestina/sonetto [...], emerge immediatamente il contrasto percepito tanto in fase di trascrizione, quanto in fase di lettura,

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<sup>24</sup> PELOSINI 1998, p. 665.

tra un andamento cursorio della penna o dell'occhio verticale (per la sestina) o orizzontale (per il sonetto).<sup>25</sup>

[...] the sestina is always copied in two independent columns, following a vertical reading track that contrasts the horizontal reading track of the other genres of the poetic collection. The reader, therefore, has to reach the bottom of the left column before moving to the right one. Since in the combinatory system of the texts of the *Fragmenta*, Petrarca's preference is for the pairing sestina/sonnet [...], what is immediately clear is the contrast perceived (while both transcribing and reading) between a vertical cursory proceeding of the pen or the eye (for the sestina) and a horizontal one (for the sonnet).

The systematic vertical disposition of the sestina (vis-à-vis sonnets and canzoni) manifests the cognizance of a difference between genres as to the materiality of the signs, and even more so if we consider the material treatment of Arnaut's and Dante's 'sestinas'. The outstanding number (twenty)<sup>26</sup> of Provençal *chansonniers* that preserve Arnaut's "Lo ferm voler" almost universally presents the text like the other *cançons*, written as prose in *scriptio continua*, indicating the end of each line with a *punctus* (or other diacritical signs). The only extant exceptions are two codices (belonging to the so-called "terza tradizione" of Occitan *chansonniers*),<sup>27</sup> dated between the end of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth: Oxford, Bodleyan Library, ms. Douce 269 (denoted by the *siglum* S after Karl Bartsch's classification)<sup>28</sup> compiled in the Veneto and Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, ms. Pluteo 41.43 (denoted by the *siglum* U after Bartsch) produced in central Tuscany.<sup>29</sup> These two codices do present Arnaut's 'sestina' in a vertical layout, but the exception is only relatively compelling, because the same format applies to all poetic

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<sup>25</sup> STOREY 2004, p. 155.

<sup>26</sup> See D'AGOSTINO 2009, p. 93. See also EUSEBI 1984, pp. 128-136.

<sup>27</sup> See AVALLE 1993, pp. 98-103.

<sup>28</sup> See BARTSCH 1872.

<sup>29</sup> See D'AGOSTINO 2009 for a diplomatic transcription of "Lo ferm voler" in S (pp. 191-192) and U (pp. 193-194). In the list of manuscripts, D'Agostino (p. 223) erroneously identifies U with Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms. 15211. See GRÜTZMACHER 1964, p. 381. For a diplomatic edition of S see SHEPARD 1927.

compositions, possibly due to the unusual elongated form of the support. Analogously, authoritative fourteenth-century manuscripts that preserve Dante's "Al poco giorno" present the sestina in the usual horizontal prose-like layout: e.g. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, ms. Martelli 12 (ff. 27v-28r); Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, ms. Magliabechiano VI.143 (f. 25rv); Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, ms. Chigi L VIII 305 (f. 31rv).<sup>30</sup> Boccaccio's treatment of "Al poco giorno" is a further confirmation of this argumentation. In fact, Dante's 'sestina' is always included (as canzone) in the Boccaccian corpus of the fifteen *canzoni distese*, as Boccaccio's autographs ms. Toledo 104.6, ms. Riccardiano 1035, and ms. Chigi L v 176 preserve it. Moreover, they always employ the horizontal transcriptional format for the 'sestina' that is characteristic of the canzone genre in Gothic codices.<sup>31</sup> It is not superfluous to remark that Boccaccio follows the same format even for the visual rendition of Petrarca's sestinas in the 'Chigi form' of the *Rvf* (the *Liber fragmentorum*), preserved in the previously mentioned ms. Chigi L v 176 (ff. 43v-79r), as a result of either a misreading (deliberate or unconscious) of the layout of the exemplar he was copying from, or a testimony of a still-horizontal disposition of the sestinas at the time of transcription.

Petrarca's 'material awareness', in fact, seems to precede a critical and theoretical consciousness. On the margin of the canzone "Vergine bella, che, di sol vestita" (*Rvf* 366)<sup>32</sup> on f. 72v of Vat. lat. 3195, a gloss in Petrarca's hand indicates that sestinas and canzoni are still typologically and numerically associated: "38. cu(m) duab(us) q(ue) s(un)t i(n) papiro"

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<sup>30</sup> Digital reproductions of these mss. are available at <http://vitanova.unipv.it> (retrieved 01/15/2015). For ms. Martelli 12 see also *supra*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>31</sup> See GRIMALDI 2014. See also PACIONI 2004.

<sup>32</sup> All citations are from SANTAGATA 1995, unless otherwise indicated.



(“thirty-eight, counting two that are in the papers”).<sup>33</sup> The discrepancy between Petrarca’s new material treatment of the sestina and his own gloss seems to indicate an incomplete stage of the progressive emancipation of the sestina from the canzone in his system of genres. Furthermore, Petrarca’s specific solution for the sestina is a proof of the relationship of consubstantiality (if not of immanence) between literary word and writing, between text as linguistic sign and visual datum, between the verbal and the pictorial: words become “building blocks in a visual edifice”.<sup>34</sup>

Graphical arrangement and textual composition are mutually dependent. Furthermore, they affect the reception of the literary text by readers who are, first of all, viewers. In the following section, I will inscribe Petrarca’s material treatment of the sestina within the system of the final version of the *Ryf* preserved in ms. Vat. lat. 3195 and as it relates to a larger perspective on his ‘poetics of manuscripts’.

### 3. A Poetics of Manuscripts

Books embody Petrarca’s literary and intellectual career: they constitute a source of inquiry into classical antiquity, a textual laboratory for references and critical annotations, and a distinct component of his literary production as a poet.

As I have mentioned, manuscripts represent, first of all, one of Petrarca’s constant preoccupations, figuring as major characters in his epistolary, as object of continual craving and searching. In a letter that comments upon his gift of Augustine’s *Confessiones* to Luigi Marsili (*Seniles* xv 7), Petrarca describes this *pugillaris* (small format book) as an ideal extension of his hand, a book that accompanied his trips throughout his whole life: “eundo

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<sup>33</sup> I transcribe from the fac-simile of the autograph. See BELLONI *et alii* 2003.

<sup>34</sup> BOHN 2011, p. 13.

et redeundo mecum senuit” (“coming and going it has become old with me”). What we call Latin Humanism had its prodromes in Petrarca’s library, one that consisted of books avidly accumulated and heavily glossed (e.g.: Roma, Biblioteca Nazionale, ms. Vitt. Em. 1632, preserving Giovanni Malpaghini’s transcription of Cicero’s *Tusculanae disputationes*),<sup>35</sup> as well as books that always eluded his meticulous network of book hunters (such as those he asked his relative Giovanni dell’Incisa to search for on his behalf, in *Familiares* iii 18). Petrarca figures prominently in the material connections between Renaissance philology and the library of Cassiodorus and Roman private and public collections, a narrative that Pierre de Nolhac,<sup>36</sup> Remigio Sabbadini,<sup>37</sup> and Giuseppe Billanovich<sup>38</sup> reconstructed in the first half of the twentieth century.

Moreover, books represent an inexhaustible source for intertextual references. On the flyleaf at the end of his copy of Cassiodorus’ *De anima* and Augustine’s *De uera religione* (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms. latin 2201) a young Petrarca jots down a list of his favorite books (“libri mei peculiare”) in a fast cursive script.<sup>39</sup> Also, on the margins of the so-called Ambrosian Virgil (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, ms. A 79 inf.),<sup>40</sup> we observe, in Vincenzo Fera’s words, “una vera e propria centrale organizzativa delle note degli altri libri, un grande punto di raccordo di dati, dove si dipanano e si tirano le fila delle principali note disseminate dal Petrarca nei volumi della sua biblioteca” (“a real organizational center

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<sup>35</sup> See SIGNORINI 2005.

<sup>36</sup> See NOLHAC 1907.

<sup>37</sup> See SABBADINI 1905-1914, pp. 23-27.

<sup>38</sup> See BILLANOVICH 1996.

<sup>39</sup> See DELISLE 1896, and ULLMAN 1955.

<sup>40</sup> See BAGLIO *et alii* 2006.

of the annotations on other books, a great connector of data, where Petrarca disentangles and wraps up the notes he disseminated in the volumes of his library”).<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, books often represent for Petrarca an archive for personal annotations and a textual laboratory where he expresses noteworthy literary and critical reflections. The Ambrosian Virgil once again provides us with an example of this. In *Georgica* ii 385-386, Virgil refers to peasant farmers and their ‘uncultivated’ poetic performances: “coloni / versibus incomptis ludunt” (“peasants / play with unrefined verses”). Servius’ commentary (transmitted in the same manuscript) explains the passage by referring to the dual nature of ancient Roman poetry, both metrical (quantitative) and rhythmical (based on stressed accents). On f. 31v, Petrarca partially transcribes Servius’ explanation in the margin, in a sophisticated chalice-shaped gloss: “Rithmum solum vulgares componere solitos” (“the common people used to compose rhythmical poems”). The passage re-occurs in Petrarca’s corpus (*Familiars* i 1, 6), when he deals with the tripartite classification of his own opus into Latin prose, Latin poetry, and vernacular poetry, i.e. when he seeks an erudite validation of his production in vernacular as a form of humanistic recovery of classical antiquity. In sum, in Servius’ commentary he finds “la legittimazione a poetare in volgare” (“the legitimation to compose in the vernacular”),<sup>42</sup> and this legitimation is promptly appropriated in his own manuscripts for further reference and use. What is more, the flyleaves of the Ambrosian Virgil transmit the obituaries of Petrarca’s own friends (f. 1r) and the narrative chronology of one of the most relevant episodes in his life: his encounter with Laura and her death (f. 1v).

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<sup>41</sup> FERA 1992-1993, p. 380.

<sup>42</sup> FEO 2001, p. 276.

Finally, and above all, it is from the remarkable number (ca. sixty)<sup>43</sup> of autographs (written entirely in Petrarca's various hands, preserving his own texts or other authors'), idiographs (transcribed under Petrarca's supervision), and annotated manuscripts (with either verbal or figurative marginalia)<sup>44</sup> that Petrarca's "religione dello scrivere" ("religion of writing")<sup>45</sup> most vividly emerges.

One could easily maintain that manuscripts constitute a fundamental feature of Petrarca's literary production. In his research on visual poetics in early Italian literature,<sup>46</sup> H. Wayne Storey explained how authors, as scribes of their own work, used tools like the *mise en page* as a material counterpart to the poetic message. Petrarca is clearly among the most innovative of those experimenters who "integrated scribal forms as part of their written poetics and codes of meaning".<sup>47</sup> Storey's studies have such probative force that their conclusions sound like they should have been long obvious after one reads them. In the remainder of this chapter I will attempt to direct his analysis of visual forms towards the literary aspects of Petrarca's poetry.

Petrarca's dissatisfaction with contemporary manuscript culture, its scribes and its scripts is well witnessed in his own corpus, particularly in a letter to his brother Gherardo written in 1354 (*Familiars* xviii 5) and in the section "De librorum copia" of the *De remediis utriusque fortunae*. In the former, he connects the textual unreliability of contemporary codices to the authors' lack of interest for the correct circulation and transmission of their own

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<sup>43</sup> See PETRUCCI 1967, pp. 115-129.

<sup>44</sup> See FIORILLA 2005.

<sup>45</sup> PETRUCCI 1983, p. 517.

<sup>46</sup> See, at least, STOREY 1993.

<sup>47</sup> STOREY 1993, p. xxi.

works; furthermore, he critiques the multiplication of roles in manuscript production, lamenting the lack of a unity of artistic control. In the latter, he stresses the deficiency of technical training and the failed professionalization of contemporary scribes. His evaluation of the excessive calligraphy of the *litterae scholasticae* (Gothic bookhands used for university textbooks) is no better. In a letter to Philippe de Cabassoles (Bishop of Cavaillon, Seigneur of Vaucluse) dated 1366 (*Seniles* vi 5), Petrarca spurns the excessive thickness of the written space, the frequency of abbreviations, and the lack of any harmony in the ratio between blanks and words on the page.<sup>48</sup>

Petrarca's literary and editorial project intends to fix these problems in terms of both the writing and the circulation of his own texts. On the one hand the semi-Gothic script with which he works<sup>49</sup> is based on the formal equilibrium of *littera textualis* (Gothic book hand), but it attenuates the excessive compression and angularity of that script with the clarity, sobriety, and legibility of the Caroline minuscule that he could read in Carolingian manuscripts. Petrarca's semi-Gothic is the material counterpart to his literary classicism. With it, he undertakes the reduction of complexity as an ideal, and he experiments with a "fiorentinità trascendentale" ("transcendental Florentinity")<sup>50</sup> as linguistic model for his vernacular compositions. On the other hand, Petrarca attempts to condition the circulation and correct reproduction of his texts by providing a small circle of men of letters with the autograph of his works for transcription and divulgation. The autograph, in fact,

rappresentava il culmine di un lungo processo di elaborazione testuale tutto strenuamente controllato dall'autore stesso attraverso una totale autografia, dal primo abbozzo su carta

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<sup>48</sup> See PETRUCCI 1979<sup>b</sup>, pp. 5-6 and pp. 12-14.

<sup>49</sup> See CENCETTI 1954, p. 264. See also PETRUCCI 1992, pp. 162-166, and SUPINO MARTINI 1998.

<sup>50</sup> CONTINI 1970, p. 175.

sino all'ultima pagina del codice definitivo; che poi spesso tornava ad essere codice-archivio, opera aperta, ricevendo anch'esso correzioni, aggiunte, ripensamenti.<sup>51</sup>

represented the climax of a long process of textual elaboration, completely and strenuously controlled by the author himself through a total autography, from the first draft on paper to the last page of the definitive codex. Then, this could often become a codex-archive again, an open work, receiving in turn corrections, additions, second thoughts.

Manuscript Vat. lat. 3195, the latest (though not definitive) version of the *Rvf*, well represents both of these attempts. A compendious description of Vat. lat. 3195, followed by a more analytical one, can be read in the commentary that accompanies the fac-simile reproduction of the codex.<sup>52</sup> The aim of the brief description given below is to recap some of the material features that are functional to what will follow.

Vat. lat. 3195 is a parchment manuscript, consisting of 72 folios, organized in nine quires. It is the result of the collaboration between Petrarca and the young scribe and man of letters Giovanni Malpaghini, who was a guest of Petrarca's in his Venetian house between 1364 and 1367 (and then briefly again in 1368). With few exceptions, Malpaghini is responsible for the writing on ff. 1r-38v and 53r-62v, produced in the spring of 1367. The other folios, ff. 38v-49r, and 62r-72v, are in Petrarca's hand; his contributions to the writing were sporadic in the final years before his death in 1374. The text of the *Fragmenta* occupies ff. 1-72, with the exception of 49v-52v, which are blanks, creating a material division into two sections, generally referred to as *rime in vita* and *rime in morte*. Two initial additional folios (commonly referred to as 1<sup>a</sup> and 1<sup>b</sup>) transmit the incipits of the poems in a contemporary or perhaps slightly later hand. The title of the work heads f. 1r: *Francisci petrarche laureate poete. Rerum uulgarium fragmenta*, in red except for the initial *F* in blue. The initial of *Rvf* 1 (f. 1r, "Voi ch'ascoltate") and *Rvf* 264 (f. 53r, "I vo pensando") are accurately decorated in pink, scarlet,

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<sup>51</sup> PETRUCCI 1983, p. 517

<sup>52</sup> See ZAMPONI 2004.

green, and violet, on a golden background, with geometric (golden globes) and foliate motifs. These two *litterae florissae* further underscore the aforementioned material bipartition of the songbook. On ff. 1r-39v and 53r-62v, red and blue initials alternately mark the incipits of the poems (with the red letter always being the first of the folio, even in the cases where the last poem of the previous folio had also begun with a red initial). Red and blue paragraph signs also mark the stanzas following the first in all pluristrophic compositions (except for the sonnets). Majuscules also mark the first letter of each verse. Finally, red Arabic numerals (in Petrarca's hand) appear on the right margin of the first line of the last thirty-one poems. They reorder the sequence of the poems after the addition of a *binio* (or *duerno*: two bifolios) between ff. 66v and 71r. The renumbering of the sequence leads to the assumption that Vat. lat. 3195 slowly shifted from fair copy to working draft.

The 366 poems of the *canzoniere* include sonnets (317), canzoni (29), sestinas (9), ballate (7: four *grandi* and three *mezzane*), and madrigals (4). In the previous section of this chapter I indicated how the *mise en page* of the sestina is characterized by a distinctly vertical orientation. This feature is all the more distinct when we consider the overall horizontal alignment of the other poetic genres. These are distributed in two columns, with two (or less commonly three) verses per line, separated by an intercolumniation (substituted by punctuation in the case of three verses per line). As indicated *supra*, reading proceeds first horizontally, from left to right, and then vertically. A single blank line separates poems from one another. Exceptions to this architecture do not affect the overall homogeneity of the codex. Petrarca's project seems to balance the specificity of different metrical forms with the necessity for the overall harmony and proportion of the manuscript: he is, in sum, "attento ad armonizzare tutti gli aspetti del prodotto letterario, nell'ottica di una corrispondenza ideale tra chiarezza ed omogeneità di contenuto e possibilità strutturanti del contenitore"

(“accurate in harmonizing all aspects of the literary product, in light of an ideal correspondence between clarity and homogeneity of the content and structuring capacities of the container”).<sup>53</sup> The case of the canzone is emblematic: the extremely flexible and diversified argumentative and syntactical structure of the twenty-nine canzoni is counterbalanced by a highly systematic visual rendition.

The optical tension between the layout of the sestina and that of the other metrical forms accomplishes various effects. Firstly, it underscores the peculiar retroactive rhyme scheme so unique to the sestina. The *retrogradatio cruciata* and the vertical sequence of the hendecasyllables create a tension between sequential progression in the deciphering of the text and the necessity to reconsider the rhyme scheme in the previous stanzas, so as to appreciate their prosody and peculiar meter. The verticality of a diachronic and sequential reading coexists with the horizontality of a synchronic and simultaneous (re-)reading. While the reader proceeds sequentially, the rhyme scheme demands a regressive movement and, therefore, a recursive reading. This implies a repeated inversion of the usual rhythm of temporal and linear progression in the appreciation of the text, in order to retroactively identify a rhyme pattern and check its regularity.

Secondly, the peculiar layout of the sestinas isolates them within the macrostructure of the *canzoniere*; concurrently, it connects the various sestinas in a cohesive corpus (a “sistema-sestine”)<sup>54</sup> that entails an intermediate status between the microstructure of the single poem and the macrostructure of the whole text-book. It institutes, that is, a visual coherence, an iconic cohesiveness, which corresponds to a structural uniqueness and a semantic organicity. The consistency of a highly codified graphic pattern works as a set of

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<sup>53</sup> STOREY 2004, p. 131.

<sup>54</sup> PELOSINI 1998.



systemic isotopies (repetitions of basic meaning traits):<sup>55</sup> the *Rvf*, that is, exhibit visual constants that bring about and enhance a corresponding set of thematic common traits. The next section of this chapter will further expand on this intersection between metrical, semantic, and visual elements.

#### 4. Micro- and Macro-Poetics in the *Fragmenta*

Petrarca's treatment of the madrigals (*Rvf* 52, 54, 106, 121), one of the least codified metrical forms of early Italian poetry,<sup>56</sup> in terms of semantic unities makes a compelling case for reading clusters of poems arranged by layout and meter. On the one hand, Petrarca regularizes both the meter and the *mise en page* of the madrigals, opting for a couplet as closure in three out of four cases (*Rvf* 52, 54, 106), and adopting a double transcriptional format: binary (two hendecasyllables per line, one in each column) and ternary (two hendecasyllables on the first line, and then one hendecasyllable on the left column of the second line, followed by a blank on the right column).<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, the four madrigals present a homogenous *Stimmung* imbued with the pictorial and auditory effects of pastoral and idyll. They all depict Laura assuming different forms within a rural scene: shepherdess, pilgrim, angel, and temptress. Rather than expressing a cyclical, anti-historical contemplation or a purely poetic pause, the madrigals also articulate a narrative: "the poet falls in love and then repents of his love (52, 54); tempted, he falls again (106), only to encounter, in the end, cold indifference (121)".<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> See GREIMAS 1983.

<sup>56</sup> See BELTRAMI 1991, pp. 281-283 and *passim*; see also CAPOVILLA 1982.

<sup>57</sup> See STOREY 2004, pp. 159-160.

<sup>58</sup> FOSTER 1984, p. 110.

In the instance of the madrigals, what we could call an iconic isotopy (chiefly: a common *mise en page*) corresponds to a series of recursive semantic isotopies. These entail a continuity of themes and a series of temporal and spatial circumstances (chronological and spatial isotopies, respectively). They allow for a group of homogenous texts to constitute a coherent corpus within which they share semantic traits and integrate one another. They constitute, that is, a semantic constellation that works as a textual environment in which the *persona loquens* acts as subject of the action and is dealt with as topic of the discourse. They establish, in sum, an intricate system of correspondences that urge the reader to connect the different texts of that homogenous corpus, one which mediates between the single poem and the overarching book structure of the *Ryf*. Furthermore, not only does this system organize the scene of the ‘action’, but it also presents itself as the space of enunciation of poetic writing that unfolds as the topic of its own composition.

The sestinas offer another paradigmatic instance of a homogenous corpus.<sup>59</sup> Isotopies and common traits do not figure systematically in all of the sestinas, but do create a thick network of internal memories, innuendos, references, and connectors. They implicate the overall structure of the *canzoniere* in order to acquire sense, through their uninterrupted relationship with the wider poetic background of the collection. Additionally, they explicate the *canzoniere*, by means of recapping or correcting its narrative sequence. In sum, they constitute its peculiar mirror image: one that is “rifratta e parziale, anamorfica e paradossale” (“refracted and partial, anamorphic and paradoxical”).<sup>60</sup> In this section I will indicate some of the common features that unify the sestinas into a cohesive and coherent assembly.

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<sup>59</sup> I will treat the last sestina of the corpus (*Ryf* 332) autonomously, in the final section of this chapter, due to its peculiar structure of double sestina and the semantic repercussions of this duplicated form.

<sup>60</sup> TESTA 1983, p. 12.

The rhyme words are one of the major elements that give the corpus its cohesiveness by articulating the aforementioned isotopies. A major aspect of co-reference within the group is in fact the insistent gathering of the rhyme words around a delimited set of topics: the cycle of seasons and the passing of time (*Rvf* 22: “giorno”, “alba”; *Rvf* 30: “anni”; *Rvf* 237: “notte”, “sera”; *Rvf* 332: “notti”); notions of cosmology (*Rvf* 22: “terra”, “stelle”, “sole”; *Rvf* 142: “cielo”, “lume”; *Rvf* 237: “luna”), in which “traspare [...] un senso di fatalità, di destino invalicabile” (“a sense of fatality and insurmountable fate appears”).<sup>61</sup> These two semantic nuclei bring about an existential component that can be fruitfully read in terms of the poet’s constant, unsatisfied desire.

The sestinas are privileged loci for the intertextual appropriation of the recognized precursors of the genre: Arnaut Daniel (particularly “Lo ferm voler”) and Dante (more specifically: his *rime petrose*, especially “Al poco giorno”, and his ‘comic’ production).<sup>62</sup> This is true for those sestinas that more directly express an experience of sensual *éros* and carnal possession (*Rvf* 22, 31-33; 237, 31-36). Arnaut’s distinctive adjective “ferm” modifies the poet’s desire (*Rvf* 22, 24) and underscores his obtuse constancy in sinning (*Rvf* 80, 1) and his loyalty to the dear image of the beloved. Dante’s *rime petrose* punctuate the sestinas with continuous references: the very ethereal and spiritual nature of Laura as *aura* can even be made to yield to the adamant consistency of stones and metals (*Rvf* 30, 24 and 37). From Dante’s ‘sestina’ Petrarca derives the persistence on the spatial and meteorological representation of the landscape, particularly cogent in the rhyme words: “selva” (*Rvf* 22); “neve”, “riva” (*Rvf* 30); “nebbia”, “venti”, “pioggia”, “fiumi”, “valli”, “ghiaccio” (*Rvf* 66); “frondi”, “poggi”, “rami” (*Rvf* 142); “bosco” (*Rvf* 214); “boschi”, “piaggia” (*Rvf* 237); “fiori”

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<sup>61</sup> VANOSSI 1980, p. 282

<sup>62</sup> See De ROBERTIS 1983, CESERANI 1987, and BOLOGNA 2003. See also SANTAGATA 1969.

(*Rvf* 239). This attention is particularly meaningful, given Petrarca's tendency to represent the relationship between nature and Laura (or nature and himself) in terms of homology. The insistence on the representation of landscape and weather is, therefore, a continued reference to Laura, be it the winter of his displeasure and restlessness or the spring as correlative of her beauty.

The sestinas are, in fact, the privileged locus for the epiphany of the persona and the name of Laura (in addition to *Rvf* 5 and its wordplay on Laura/Laureta). Of the three unequivocal occurrences of Laura's name in the *canzoniere*, two are in the sestinas (*Rvf* 239, 8; 332, 50; see also 291, 4). Moreover, the sestinas directly play with Laura's *senhal* (*laura/l'aura/l'aurora* and *l'auro/lauro*) and indirectly with its metonymic and synecdochical derivatives ("frondi", "chiome", and "rami" all imply Laura's persona).

I mentioned *supra* that within this corpus we find the only two explicit references (to my knowledge) to a longed-for physical intercourse with Laura. The sudden, unexpected, expression of the desire to carnally possess Laura occurs in *Rvf* 22 (ll. 31-33; almost identically in *Rvf* 237, 31-36), where Petrarca retrieves from Propertius (ii 15, 37-40) the theme of a single but never-ending night of sex to spend with his beloved, represented through the rhetorical strategies of hyperbole and *adynaton*:

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.

May I be with her from when the sun sets,  
And no one see us but the stars,  
One single night, and may there be no dawn.

The use of *adynata* (or *impossibilia*, i.e. the rhetorical devices for magnifying an event by comparisons with something impossible) is an unusually frequent strategy in the sestinas

vis-à-vis the *canzoniere* as a whole. We have five instances of this device in the sestinas (*Rvf* 22, 37-39; *Rvf* 30, 7-10; *Rvf* 66, 22-24; *Rvf* 237, 16-18; *Rvf* 239, 10-12)<sup>63</sup> and three in the rest of the songbook.<sup>64</sup> On the one hand, these *impossibilia* reiterate the fixity of love in spite of any external obstacle: the “sense of catastrophe”<sup>65</sup> that they convey entails the inability to conceive of a plausible alternative. On the other hand, the *adynata* specifically represent an inversion of the natural cycles. Before the poet is able to find peace, the light will pass from sun to moon and night will become day: “e ’l giorno andrà pien di minute stelle / prima ch’a sì dolce alba arrivi il sole.” (*Rvf* 22, 38-39: “Daylight will be full of minute stars, / Before the sun achieves such sweet dawn”); “Ben fia prima ch’i posi, il mar senz’onde / Et la sua luce avrà ’l sol da la luna” (*Rvf* 237, 16-17: “Before I rest, the sea will be void of waves, / And the sun will receive light from the moon”). The oceans will be dry, analogously to Dante’s rivers flowing backwards to the sea (“Al poco giorno”, l. 31). It is meaningful that the reversal of natural events and cycles finds its metrical counterpart in the *retrogradatio cruciata*, in which a retrograde motion counteracts linearity. The actual regression of forms mirrors the cataclysmatic *adynata*, and Petrarca’s sestina, like Arnaut in his *canço* “Ab gai so cundet e leri” (“On a nice, joyful and happy melody”), “nadi contra suberna” (l. 45: “swims against the torrent”). The reference to Arnaut is not coincidental, since the other two *impossibilia* with which Arnaut presents himself in that poem (hoarding the air, hunting with the ox) are alluded to in *Rvf* 239 (l. 36: “et col bue zoppo andrem cacciando l’aura”, “we will hunt the air with a limping ox”; l. 37: “In rete accolgo l’aura [...]”, “I hoard the air with a net”). Moreover, the last *adynaton* seems to imply a metaphor for poetic writing: the net easily

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<sup>63</sup> See SHAPIRO 1983. See also SPAGGIARI 1982.

<sup>64</sup> See CAMPORESI 1952.

<sup>65</sup> SHAPIRO 1983, p. 235.

implicates the notion of text as interwoven structure; “l’aura” hides the *senhal* for Petrarca’s beloved woman; what is more, *ret-* echoes the Occitan diminutive for Laura (*LauRETa*), which would constitute, in Saussure’s terms, a paragrammatic artifice:<sup>66</sup> the dissemination of the lexical and graphemic constituents of a theme-word (Laura/Lauret(t)a) within the text. The *adynaton*, therefore, loses its character of impossibility when confined to the realm of literature. Literature makes everything possible: “Nulla al mondo è che non possano i versi” (*Rvf* 239, 28: “Nothing on earth is impossible for poetry”). The sestinas seem to ideally connect Petrarca to Raimbaut d’Aurenga, whose *son novelb* offers early examples of *coblas doblas* and *ternas*, chiasmic rhyme schemes, and rhyme words that constitute the technical apparatus of the sestina. In his poem “Ar resplan la flors enversa” (“Now the flower shines”),<sup>67</sup> Raimbaut finally gives the rhyme word *enversa/enverse* the meaning of “put into verse”, semantically associating the inversion/transfiguration of reality and compositions in verse: “il principio dell’inversione è insomma dichiarato come principio essenziale della poesia” (“the principle of inversion is, in sum, declared the essential principle of poetry”).<sup>68</sup>

The last reference allows for the consideration of another recursive feature in the corpus of the sestinas: their meta-literary references. A discourse on poetry common to the sestinas is above all indicated by the high number of rhyme words of poetic relevance, mainly gathered within the *sestina doppia* but re-occurring elsewhere in the corpus overall (not always in verse clauses): “lauro” (*Rvf* 332, “laurel”), “note” (*Rvf* 239, “notes”), “nove” (*Rvf* 214, “new, unusual”), “pianto” (*Rvf* 332, “cry”), “rime” (*Rvf* 332, “rhymes”), “stile” (*Rvf* 332, “style”), “venti” (*Rvf* 66, used as “sighs”), “versi” (*Rvf* 239, “verses”). Further cues of meta-

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<sup>66</sup> See LEPSCHY 1992, pp. 37-55.

<sup>67</sup> See PATTISON 1952, pp. 199-203, and FOLENA 1967, pp. 26-27.

<sup>68</sup> RONCAGLIA 1981, p. 30.

literary reflection include: the use of a literary-critically connoted terminology to refer to the poet's experiences; the frequent identification of poetry with the semantic cluster of *pianto* (e.g. *Rvf* 22, 21; 30, 3; 239, 35); the Orphic references to the incantatorial powers of poetry (*Rvf* 239, 29: “et li aspidi incantar sanno in lor [*scil.* dei versi] note”, “(verses) can bewitch asps with their notes”), again reiterated by the use of “versi” for magic spells (*Rvf* 214, 17); the stress on the power of poetic creation of alternative realities. I will return to the metatextuality of the sestina in dealing with *Rvf* 332.

The linguistic and thematic uniformity of the sestinas, the thickness of the intertextual references to Arnaut's *trobar ric* and Dante's *rime petrose*, the insistence on the natural and cosmological elements as set for the scene, the magnified sense of fixity achieved through the *adynata*, and the delay of the narrative due to metaliterary consideration constitute a homogeneous background that well corresponds to the choice of a highly codified transcriptional format. Within the larger frame of the *canzoniere*, these texts constitute the spine of the *Rvf*, where the narrative sequence is recapped, reconsidered, or corrected. This corpus, dispersed throughout the songbook, organizes “un insieme organico che compendia il percorso complessivo dell'opera, di questa riflettendo anche, attraverso il gioco della duplicazione tematica, la riflessività” (“an organic whole that summarizes the overall itinerary of the work; by means of a playful thematic reduplication, it also reflects the text's reflexivity”).<sup>69</sup>

### 5. *Carmina figurata*

It is fascinating to conceptualize Petrarca's sestina in terms of a project of integration of linguistic and graphical elements, in compliance with the modes of composition (and

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<sup>69</sup> VANOSSI 1980, pp. 282-283.

reception) of visual and concrete poetry. Visual poetry is historically represented by the poetic tradition that traverses western literary civilization from the Hellenistic experiments of Simmias of Rhodes' *technopaegnia*, through Optatianus Porphyrius' *carmina figurata*, to the calligraphic tradition of the Carolingian *Schola palatina*. In Giovanni Pozzi's brief definition, a visual poem is

[...] un'entità composta da un messaggio linguistico e da una formazione iconica, non giustapposti [...] ma conviventi in una specie di ipostasi, nella quale la formazione iconica investe la sostanza linguistica. La lingua, pur producendo significati a lei congeniali, viene usata come medium per ottenere significati prodotti normalmente dall'altro ordine di rappresentazione.<sup>70</sup>

[...] an entity consisting of a linguistic message and an iconic formation, not simply juxtaposed [...] but coexisting in a sort of hypostasis, in which the iconic formation affects the linguistic substance. The language, though still producing its own congenial meanings, is used as medium to achieve meanings that are normally produced by the other order of representation.

Petrarca's *canzoniere* presents an iconicity of a peculiar kind. In fact, there is no apparatus of images, as might be expected from the graphic-editorial project of the *Rvf*: one for which Petrarca and Malpaghini mainly attempt to achieve minimalism, clarity, and essentiality. The visual element of Vat. lat. 3195 mostly entails the *mise en texte* of the poems, the regulation of blanks and rulings, the presentation of the verses on each line. The iconic character, therefore, involves a series of logical relationships between language and graphic rendition by means of writing signs. These relationships are connoted as logics of reading: that is, their main goal is to visually guide the reader through compatible tracks of textual decoding.

The very modes of Petrarca's writing seem to confirm the hypothesis that the tension between linguistic structure and material disposition entails an artistic project. On

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<sup>70</sup> POZZI 1981, p. 27.



the one hand, Petrarca's verse is organized upon a "dominante ritmica" ("rhythmic dominant"): in Contini's words, "la parola più corposa e aggressiva sta all'inizio, con tutte le possibilità di distendersi e ripararsi" ("the most substantial and aggressive word holds the incipit of the line, with full possibilities to distend and hide").<sup>71</sup> On the other hand, the constraint imposed by the limited numbers of rhyme words brings about the concentration of the most semantically momentous morphemes in the verse clause. The hendecasyllable extends towards its own extremities, a phenomenon emphasized by the dichotomic urge of which Contini writes.<sup>72</sup>

This centrifugal traction orients the phrasing on a horizontal axis, further supported by figures of repetition and amplification. This "bilanciamento bipolare" ("bipolar equilibrium")<sup>73</sup> of the meter orthogonally to the vertical sequence of the hendecasyllables in the stanza describes a quadrangular shape, reminiscent of the late-antique *carmina quadrata*. The tension between the two directions of perception, horizontal and vertical, seemingly invalidates a sequential reading (word by word, line by line). Instead, it seems to presuppose a simultaneous approach to all the components of the text.

The particular presentational format of the sestina, one that underscores stasis and even retrogression over progression, makes this genre particularly suitable to functioning as reflection and reconsideration of the various textual portions of the *Rvf*: "specialissima canzone, luogo deputato al contrappunto e, in un certo senso, al riepilogo delle forze in campo della dinamica amorosa" ("most special canzone, locus devoted to the counterpoint

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<sup>71</sup> CONTINI 1970, p. 186.

<sup>72</sup> CONTINI 1970, p. 186.

<sup>73</sup> FRASCA 1992, p. 244.

and, in a way, summary of the forces engaged in the amorous dynamics”).<sup>74</sup> The corpus of the sestinas constitutes both a story of the story and a story within the story. In this section I intend to underscore this recapitulative and reflexive aspect of each sestina. In the next section, I will focus on how this evaluative feature assumes more explicitly metatextual connotations in the double sestina.

“A qualunque animale alberga in terra” (*Rvf* 22: “For every animal that inhabits earth”)<sup>75</sup> is the first long poem of the *canzoniere*. It displays several of the major themes of *Rvf*: insomnia due to love torments, isolation, solitude, estrangement, physical pain, and sensual torsion of the *persona loquens*. It stresses the fixity of the poet’s erotic obsessiveness against the passing of time, underlined by the hammering insistence of the semantics of temporal expressions. It can, therefore, be considered as a sort of *manifesto* of the love’s labors of the *canzoniere*. In fact, sestina 22 is a paradigmatic example of alienation and obsession expressed through the recursiveness of the rhyme words and of the *retrogradatio cruciata*’s regressive motion, not to mention its layout. Moreover, it introduces the *fil rouge* of the *canzoniere*: the myth of the metamorphosis of Apollo and Daphne. Metamorphosis is the paradoxical combination of change and persistence: thus, it seems appropriate that it figures, for the first time, in a poem consisting of structural permutations. The reference to the myth employs the only narrative tense of the poem (imperfect indicative), vis-à-vis the overall gnomic use of present tenses of this sestina, underscoring the meditative aspect vs. the narrative. The rewriting of the myth itself is especially close to the classical version: “l’ineffabilità dell’oggetto d’amore e la frustrazione del desiderio si accampano senza il compenso di alcuna sublimazione” (“the ineffability of the love object and the frustration of

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<sup>74</sup> FRASCA 1992, p. 173.

<sup>75</sup> See FUBINI 1962, pp. 305-308, PICCHIO SIMONELLI 1973, SHAPIRO 1980, FRASCA 1992, pp. 273-206, and CARRAI 2005.

desire appear without any compensation or sublimation”).<sup>76</sup> The crude indifference of the beloved woman brings about the exacerbated and hopeless *adýnaton* of the *tornada*.

“Giovene donna sotto un verde lauro” (*Rvf* 30: “A young lady under a green laurel”)<sup>77</sup> is the first explicit anniversary poem. It is, therefore, a re-evocation of erotic desire and a provisional balance of the poet’s experience, placed against the background of the evanescence of time. The sestina is an oneiric contemplation of Laura by means of her *senhal*. The pun between *l’auro* and Laura appears here for the first time, constituting a real cardinal point in the presentation of the poet’s relationship to his beloved. The poem evokes her beauty in terms of harshness and cruel indifference, often recurring to the lexis of Dante’s *rime petrose*: her vivid hardness assumes the shape of a sculpted idol (l. 27: “l’idolo mio scolpito in vivo lauro” “my idol sculpted in vivid laurel”), both as image to worship and deviation from the proper divinity.

“L’aere gravato, et l’importuna nebbia” (*Rvf* 66: “The heavy air, and the oppressive mist”)<sup>78</sup> constitutes a variation on the *tópos* of the *amor de lohn* (love from afar) and a reprise of the lover’s anxiety as expressed in such texts as *Rfv* 37. The constancy in referring to a winter landscape institutes the aforementioned homology between the harsh and cold *mise en scène* and Laura’s indifference. Also, with significant variation, the same meteorological metaphors empathically applies to the poet’s state of being: the cold of the elements is the cold within the poet’s soul. *Variatio* of the same trait prevents linear development and reiterates a closed and circular poetic discourse. The reference to the closed valleys of Valchiusa (ll. 9-10: “valli, / serrate”, “valleys, / enclosed) seems to establish an analogy

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<sup>76</sup> SANTAGATA 1990, p. 279.

<sup>77</sup> See DURLING 1971, and FRASCA 1992, pp. 263-272.

<sup>78</sup> See SHAPIRO 1980, pp. 108-115, BLASUCCI 1982, and FRASCA 1992, pp. 272-278.

between orography, the poet's soul, and the prison house of the meter (underlined by the *legatissimo* phrasing of the syntax), which entraps the lover in a condition of immobility and fixation on a desperate desire. The sestina is “il metro più congruo per rendere questi avvolgimenti meandrici della passione senza speranza” (the most appropriate form to express these meandering twists of hopeless passion”).<sup>79</sup> Petrarca's temporality assumes an emblematic character of stasis, and appears as a “registrazione di uno stato permanente” (“record of a permanent state”).<sup>80</sup>

In a classification of the sestinas based on their thematic dominant, Werner von Koppenfels divides the corpus into three groups: a first group (*Rvf* 22, 30, 66) of strictly erotic inspiration (in line with the precursors of the genre); a second group (*Rvf* 80, 142, 214) dedicated to the conflict between sacred and profane love; and a third group that re-reads the themes of the first group under the tragic presentiment of death (*Rvf* 237, 239, 332).<sup>81</sup> The *correctio* of the erotic narrative of the *Rvf* would start therefore with “Chi è fermato di menar sua vita” (*Rvf* 80: “He who is set on leading his life”),<sup>82</sup> a variation on the existential *tópos* of life as sailing (with all its perils).<sup>83</sup> The sestina analyzes past experiences in light of a new religious ethos. It deepens the disphoric hints already transpiring in the trilogy of the so-called *cantilene oculorum* (*Rvf* 71, 72, 73, canzoni of the eyes, in Petrarca's own words from Vat. lat. 3196, f. 17v). Whereas these were mainly focused on the moral perfection of Laura and the possibility of spiritual elevation for the beholder, sestina 80 develops the negative

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<sup>79</sup> PETRINI 1993, p. 121.

<sup>80</sup> BLASUCCI 1982, p. 57.

<sup>81</sup> See KOPPENFELS 1967.

<sup>82</sup> See Shapiro 1980, pp. 210-213, and Frasca 1992, pp. 278-284.

<sup>83</sup> See BLUMENBERG 1997.

consequences of an obsession that brings about a mutable state of the soul, the impossibility of thinking one's life without the beloved, and the obliviousness of the true source of all good. The theme of the ephemerality of human life assumes the new meaning of a bitter awareness that so short a life might not be long enough to endure the whole itinerary of salvation: "[...] gran viaggio in così poca vita" (l. 27: "a long voyage in so short a life"). Sestina 80 functions as a penitential text: Arnaut's "ferm voler" (alluded to in l. 1) is re-read in terms of obtuse obstinacy in a sinful life. It is a poetic confutation of Petrarca's own 'stilnovismo': the *tornada* is in the form of a prayer for salvation, which links sestina 80 to the explicitly religious outcome of sonnet 81.

Wilkins' reconstruction of the 'Correggio form' (or pre-Chigi redaction) of the *canzoniere* situates "A la dolce ombra delle belle frondi" (*Rvf* 142: "To the sweet shade of the charming leaves")<sup>84</sup> as closure to the first part of the *canzoniere*. However, it is not necessary to speculate on the exact sequence of a book that does not materially exist in order to understand the relevance of sestina 142 within the economy of Petrarca's collection. Its intratextual connections to previous poems in the book, as indicated by Riesz,<sup>85</sup> further underline its nature of recapitulation and rethinking of past poetic and existential experience. The sestina, profane form *par excellence*, continues to adapt to a new poetics of conversion. It continues, that is, the palinode of profane *éros* in favor of spiritual *caritas*. At a formal level, the poetics of conversion affects the rhyme scheme of the *tornada*, such that from this point on in the *canzoniere* it will mirror the sequence of the first stanza: a formal conversion in response to a spiritual one. The opposition between the present condition of the poet and

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<sup>84</sup> See RIESZ 1971, pp. 79-81, SHAPIRO 1980, pp. 115-119, VANOSSI 1980, FRASCA 1992, pp. 284-292, GORNI 1993, pp. 171-182, and PASQUINI 2004.

<sup>85</sup> See RIESZ 1971, p. 80.

the harsh and passionate desire of the first three sestinas is confirmed by the opposition between the historical tenses of the more strictly narrative sections and the principal tenses of the commentative portions. The nature of recapitulation and epilogue as prelude to a new spiritual phase is also evident in the uninterrupted sequence of narrative sonnets that follow the sestina: a strictly historicized context that further underscores the meditative nature of *Rvf* 142. The subsequent sonnets are the anticipation (*in vita*) of Laura's assumption into heaven. The polarization of the rhyme words around the two opposite isotopies of the heavenly world ("luce", "light"; "cielo", "heaven") vis-à-vis an earthly environment ("frondi", "leaves"; "rami", "branches"; "poggi", "hummocks") further stresses the end of the erotic component of the songbook and the conversion from the rami as *senhal* for Laura to "altri rami" ("other branches") as religious symbol for the Christian cross. What is more, the very notion of laurel as *senhal* is revisionistically reinterpreted. The laurel is poetry: thus, the poet escapes frenetic passion through the sublimation into poetry of the object of desire. The *polyptoton* of "altro" in the *tornada* finally sanctions the striving for the Augustinian *mutatio animi* (ll. 37-39):

Altr'amor, altre frondi et altro lume,  
 altro salir al ciel per altri poggi  
 cerco, ché n'è ben tempo, et altri rami.

I seek another love, other leaves, other light,  
 another ascent to heaven through other hills,  
 since it is time, and other branches.

"Anzi tre dì creata era alma in parte" (*Rvf* 214: "Three days created, my soul was where")<sup>86</sup> revisits structural and thematic elements of the previous sestinas: the poem shares the overall structure of a continued metaphor (*Rvf* 80), the poet's invocation to God to

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<sup>86</sup> See SHAPIRO 1980, pp. 119-130, FRASCA 1992, pp. 292-299, and BELLOMO 2007.

ransom him from a sinful life (*Rvf* 142), and the representation of the poet as a feral and churlish dweller of the woods (*Rvf* 22, then again 237). The poem further expands on the dichotomy between the time of falling in love and the desperate appeal for freedom from the agonies of love. In fact, sestina 214 marks a peculiar type of anniversary: the *persona loquens* was in the third age of human life (*adulescentia* after *infantia* and *pueritia*), when he fell in love with Laura. It is probably not by chance that this text comes after two anniversary sonnets and opens with a temporal datum. On the one hand, the chronological indication leads to retracing the genesis of Petrarca's 'stilnovistic' error. On the other hand, the urge to overcome that error transpires from the semantic shift in the rhyme word "bosco", which changes from denoting a *locus amoenus* to alluding to the Dantean "selva oscura" of perdition. The landscape assumes infernal connotations in the fourth and fifth stanzas (l. 23: "folto di spine", "full of thorns"; l. 25: "Pien di lacci et di stecchi", "Full of traps and brambles"), exhibiting a "maggiore tensione emulativa" ("significant emulative tension")<sup>87</sup> towards Dante and, indirectly, Arnaut.

"Non ha tanti animali il mar fra l'onde" (*Rvf* 237: "The sea does not have so many creatures in its waves")<sup>88</sup> re-uses the motif of the poet's insomnia and the identification between a nocturnal landscape and the poet's soul. The alternating rhythm of daylight and night antithetically underscores the duration and continuity of the poet's condition. In fact, the unceasing cycle of time contrasts with the immutability of the poet's sorrows. The psychopathology of the lover's labors evokes such texts as *Rvf* 50, 212, 216, and 223, to which the incantatorial rhythm of the sestina adds a somewhat oneiric tone. The sestina is centered on the commentative aspect of the present indicative. More specifically, the aspect

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<sup>87</sup> BELLOMO 2007, p. 346.

<sup>88</sup> See FRASCA 1992, pp. 299-306.

of incompleteness of the Latin *infectum* emerges, suggesting a dimension of waiting and anticipation, which foresees the *cupio dissolvi* of the last sestina. The poem switches to the optative subjunctive in the sixth stanza, evoking an eternal, but never attainable, night of passion. On the one hand, the text reiterates the carnal desire of sestina 22. On the other hand, the unusual absence of Laura from this “teatro del desiderio” (“theater of desire”)<sup>89</sup> stresses the negative implication and self-deceiving aspects of profane love.

“Là ver’ l’aurora, che sì dolce l’aura” (*Rvf* 239: “Towards the dawn when the sweet breeze”)<sup>90</sup> represents the peak of intertextual references to Arnaut (with the aforementioned *adynata* of hoarding air and hunting with an ox). Also, it offers a systematic metatextual discourse. It acts, therefore, as the most appropriate prologue to the treatment of the *sestina doppia* in the next section of this chapter. This sestina, in fact, presents two explicitly stylistic words in rhyme (“versi”, and “note”), and is punctuated by various metatextual signifiers throughout the stanzas: “temprar” (l. 7: “modulate”), “rime” (l. 12: “rhymes”), “si legge in prose e ’n versi” (l. 20: “one reads in prose and poems”, with clear reference to Guido Guinizzelli’s description of Arnaut in *Purgatorio* xxvi), and so on. In addition to evoking the usual complementarity between *lagrimare* and *cantare* (l. 35: to cry and to sing), it also revisits the theme of Laura’s indifference in terms of the metaliterary contemplation of poetry. The orphic references to the incantatorial powers of music in the fifth stanza evoke the notion of poetry’s ability to create alternative models to reality. All the same, Laura’s refusal of the poet’s love is decisive. The opposition between real and virtual, past and future, reignites a yearning for the first term of the antithesis. The power of poetic *lógos* is hyperbolically unlimited (ll. 25-30), yet Laura’s soul is “sorda” (l. 38: “deaf”) to verse. The explicit

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<sup>89</sup> FRASCA 1992, p. 302.

<sup>90</sup> See RIESZ 1971, pp 84-86, and SHAPIRO 1983.



pronunciation (and profanation) of Laura's name (l. 8) marks then the last revival of a desperate passion that foresees the celebration of her death in the section *in morte* and the poet's wish for an end to his own poetry in the double sestina.

## 6. The Perpetual Revolution of the Forms: The *Sestina Doppia*

References to the writing of the text, its circulation, and the dynamics of its reception are frequent in the *Ryf*, beginning with the very opening sonnet. Poems on poetics often represent the rational nexus of a poetic collection: "l'esercizio della scrittura sembra rallentare per riferirsi, in maniera più o meno esplicita, alle sue impalcature, al suo procedere e, talvolta, al suo etimo ideologico e psicologico" ("writing seems to slow down, in order to refer, more or less explicitly, to its scaffolds, its proceeding, and sometimes its ideological and psychological etymon").<sup>91</sup> This is the case of "Mia benigna fortuna e 'l viver lieto" (*Ryf* 332).<sup>92</sup>

As observed *supra*, the visual element that most urgently emerges from the convergence of prosody, meter, and graphic arrangement is the *Streben* between holistic closure and resistance to it, between structural cohesiveness and, vice versa, irreducibility to a completed entity. On the one hand, therefore, there is the rigorously interweaving rhyme structure and the formal closure imposed by the *tornada*; on the other hand, there is its continuous reopening and its potential reproducibility: "one of Petrarch's major innovations was to show how the same poem could be reinvented endlessly".<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> TESTA 1983, p. 96.

<sup>92</sup> See SHAPIRO 1980, pp. 130-140, BERRA 1991, FRASCA 1992, pp. 207-258, and ARESU 2010.

<sup>93</sup> SHAPIRO 1980, p. 134.

In a thorough study of the interaction between meter and syntax in the *sestina* from the troubadours to Renaissance Petrarchists, Gabriele Frasca recognizes in Petrarca's nine *sestinas* the achievement of formal stability. Various factors concur to safeguard this stability: the algebraic and geometric exactness of the relationship between textual elements, their tight interconnections, the formal frame reiterating the exhaustion of possible variations of the rhyme scheme, and the *tornada* sealing the poem like a *sphragis*:

[...] alla circolarità della *sestina* arnaldiana e dantesca (tolto il congedo, la sesta strofa può logicamente ingenerarne una settima, vale a dire tornare sulla prima) si contrappone la 'completezza' dei telai petrarcheschi (e quindi petrarchisti), in cui il congedo svolge un vero e proprio ruolo conclusivo, ovvero la 'duplicazione' (che non è tanto un raddoppiamento quanto l'indizio di una moltiplicazione, diciamo, 'narrativa').<sup>94</sup>

[...] the circularity of Arnaut's and Dante's *sestina*, where the sixth stanza can logically generate a seventh (i.e.: return to the first, the envoy notwithstanding), contrasts with either the 'completeness' of Petrarca's (and therefore the Petrarchists') frames, in which the envoy achieves a closing function, or the 'duplication' (that is less a doubling than the beginning of a multiplication that we could call 'narrative').

Frasca's analysis is extremely rigorous and probative. Nonetheless, his conclusions regarding the algid finitude of the Petrarchan *sestinas* are challenged by Petrarca's double *sestina*. This poem does not just complicate its own narrative substance: it also re-invents its entire structure with the continuation of the sequence of hendecasyllables and its material execution. In fact, in spite of the *sestina*'s "eccezionale coesione estetica" ("exceptional aesthetic cohesiveness"),<sup>95</sup> its only feature that actually qualifies as a rigorous boundary is the *tornada*: it indicates that the poem is complete and ready for circulation. Without this conclusive sanction, the possibility of repeating the rhyme scheme of the first stanza and, therefore, restarting the cycle of permutations is theoretically unlimited.

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<sup>94</sup> FRASCA 1992, p. 208.

<sup>95</sup> CANETTIERI 1996, p. 62.

The material features and the metrical structure of Petrarca's sestinas are responsible for a tension between aperture and closure, centripetal and centrifugal forces, the end of a cycle and its continuous re-invention. The final object of this study, Petrarca's unique *sestina doppia*, reinforces this reading. On the one hand, it is a clear example of the virtually endless reiterability of its rhyme scheme as well as its irreducibility to a closed system. On the other hand, its eminently self-referential and metatextual nature deals with the potentialities of writing itself and its reproducibility.

We have seen that the interaction between *mise en texte* of the sestina, its *mise en page*, and the metrical artifice of the *retrogradatio cruciata* effects an iconic element that lessens the narrative and sequential aspects (the 'plot') of the *canzoniere*. In their place, these elements create niches of both stasis and simultaneity. The diachronic dimension of the *fabula* gives way to the synchronic nature of meditation:

[...] it [*scil.* the sestina] 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.<sup>96</sup>

A spatial, static dimension replaces the chronological element. The motionlessness of the sestina occasions a meditation on the essence and form of Petrarca's poetry.

As indicated *supra*, rhyme words orient semantic features due to their recursive nature and privileged position as verse clauses. In the *sestina doppia*, two of the rhyme words ("rime" and "stile") are directly related to the lexicon of poetic diction. Another rhyme word, "pianto", can also be associated with these. *Pianto*, in fact, alludes to the late-antique genre of the *planctus* (Occitan, *planh*), a codified dirge or funeral lamentation. Moreover, the semantics

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<sup>96</sup> BAROLINI 1989, p. 14.

of *pianto* is a constant metatextual reference to the elegiac features of Petrarca's poetry (e.g. *Rvf* 1, 5: "Del vario stile in ch'io piango et ragiono", "of the various style in which I weep and talk").

Roncaglia recognizes as specific to Petrarca's sestina the archetypal conciliation of invariants and variation.<sup>97</sup> A trans-phrastic analysis of the rhyme words will show how this conciliation breaks down to a sophisticated contemplation of the variety and complexity of the erotic subject matter in Petrarca's *canzoniere*.

A persistent thematic matrix, emerging from both the rhyme words and their relationship to the other semantic nuclei of the verse, is the dramatically dichotomous nature of the erotic experience. The most evident repercussion of this dilemmatic tendency for the *Rvf* is the macrostructural division, both thematic and material, into two sections, commonly (if imprecisely) referred to as *in vita* and *in morte* of Laura. However, virtually every line of the *Rvf* hinges on this dichotomous predisposition. One might mention the distinctive and systemic use of rhetorical devices such as hendiadys and dittologies of synonymous or complementary terms, which are a typical stylistic cipher of Petrarca's diction. In the next section, I will consider the rhyme words *stile* and *rime*. More specifically, I will analyze the semantic (and poetological) itinerary that marks the sequential and combined use of those rhyme words in the double sestina.

In the first stanza (ll. 3-4), the *stile* is characterized as "dolce" ("sweet"):

e i soavi sospiri e 'l dolce stile  
che solea resonare in versi e 'n rime.

And the mellow sighs and the sweet style,  
Which would sound in my verses and rhymes.

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<sup>97</sup> See RONCAGLIA 1981, p. 15.

The sweet style is, nevertheless, an irretrievable experience of the past, and it coincides with the writing of poems “in versi e ’n rime”. The imperfect “solea” implies repetition and continuousness in the past. By means of alliteration, it is strictly connected to “stile”, “soave sospiri”, and the infinitive “resonare”. Poetic practice implicitly becomes the content of literary writing itself. More than an elegiac connotation, the epithet “dolce” seems to intertextually imply a synthetic historico-critical allegiance to the Tuscan tradition. Analogously, the Latinism “resonare” possibly alludes to the incipit of the first eclogue of Virgil’s *Bucolica* (l. 5: “Formosam resonare doces Amaryllida silvas”, “You teach the woods to resonate the name of beautiful Amaryllis”). The two lines ideally conjugate classical tradition and *uso moderno*.

*Dulcedo* (sweetness) does not seem, however, a viable stylistic typology to express the poet’s present emotional status. The second stanza (ll. 11-12) marks the abandonment of “ogni stile” (“every style”), and the previous correspondence between style and sighs does not foster new rhymes. The only outcome for poetry seems to be an auto-reflexive evaluation of poetry itself:

I miei gravi sospir’ non vanno in rime,  
E ’l mio duro martir vince ogni stile.

My grave sighs do not go into rhyme,  
And my harsh martyrdom vanquishes every style.

From the first two stanzas on, the double sestina appears to be a compendious *ars poetica*. It refers to intertextual relations, in an uninterrupted textual conversation with the remote tradition of classical literature and contemporary poetry in the vernaculars. It outlines the subject matter of poetry, by providing a sample of *inventio* of those materials in which poetry consists. It institutes, with an explicitly technical vocabulary, the relationship between the

subject matter of poetry and categories of style. In sum, it works as a reflection on the ineffability of the intellectual and emotional status of the *persona loquens*, and it entails a shift from the traditional notion of diction as technical artifice to a more refined idea of aesthetic contemplation.

The third stanza more subtly implies the negation of poetic writing, and calls into question the plausibility itself of the sestina as form. Poetic writing is associated with the *ubi sunt* theme: the ephemeral and transient character of whatever is not divine. Whereas in the classical tradition poetry is, in Horace's words (*Odes* iii 30, 1), a "monumentum aere perennius" ("monument more lasting than bronze") and exorcises human perishability and evanescence, the third stanza questions the validity of poetry in general, and this poem in particular. In fact, the captious amphibology "u' son giunte le rime" ("where have the rhymes gone?"), but also "where do the rhymes rhyme?") inquires both about the plausibility of poetry and the peculiar nature of these *rimas*: *dissolutas* (disjointed) and therefore not *giunte* (interconnected). Such explicit skepticism towards the hermeneutical value of poetry compromises poetic writing in the very moment of its own conception.

The fourth stanza depicts the poet's style as "agro" (l. 22: "bitter") and further underlines the various declinations of the erotic subject matter of the *canzoniere*. The pathetic subject, however, is not a plausible topic of poetic writing any longer: it is no more the "alto soggetto" ("noble subject") of the poet's "basse rime", which used to console and relieve him even when they found expression in the stylistic categories of *asperitas* (harshness). The *sestina doppia* ostensibly re-evaluates the admissibility of poetry, when poetry itself is deprived of one of its major sources of inspiration: the hope (if only a vague one) for earthly love. The double sestina questions, in sum, the conceivability of a songbook *in morte*. Hope, in

fact, had previously made *asperitas* and *lenitas* hypostatically coincide, despite their mutual differences (ll. 19-20, emphasis mine):

Già mi fu col desir sì *dolce* il *pianto*,  
che condia di *dolcezza* ogni *agro stile*.

Desire used to *sweeten* my *weeping*,  
Which touched with *sweetness* any *sour style*.

The rhetorical principle of the *conveniens* (i.e.: the poetic and ontological correspondence between subject matter and style) is the topic of metatextual analysis in the fifth through seventh stanzas. Stylistic *varietas* (l. 28: “cangiando stile”, “changing style”) is the direct emanation of the poet’s sentimental situation after Laura’s death. The variable style of the fifth stanza anticipates the “vario stile” (l. 35: “diverse style”) of the sixth, with a clear echo that reverberates back from the double sestina to the opening sonnet. Stylistic mutations affect the analysis and expression of the ‘lyrical I’*s* “pietoso” (“pitiful”) status, having replaced the “lieto” (“blissful”). On a macrostructural and thematic level, the shift from sweet style to sour verses (l. 32: “roche rime”, “hoarse rhymes”) corresponds to the partition into the two sections *in vita* and *in morte*.

[l]a sesta stanza che idealmente dovrebbe chiudere la tematica della sestina prima dello slancio duplicatore, ripercorre gli effetti ‘stilistici’ della morte della donna amata, preparando nella constatazione del mutamento dello stile il suo raddoppiamento.<sup>98</sup>

the sixth stanza, which should ideally close the sestina’s theme before the doubling impulse, revisits the ‘stylistic’ effects of the death of the beloved, giving way to the reduplication of the style by the verification of its change.

In the seventh stanza, style is strictly connected to the figure of *conduplicatio* (the recurrence of the same word in successive clauses). The *polyptoton* of the verb *doppiare* works as an

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<sup>98</sup> FRASCA 1992, p. 208.

exemplary instance of that “incitamento alla dicotomia” (“incitement to dichotomy”)<sup>99</sup> that Contini isolated as a distinctive trait of Petrarca’s diction:

[s]u questo verbo [*scil.* doppiare] (costruito entrambe le volte intransitivamente) ruota inevitabilmente il senso tutto della sperimentazione petrarchesca; il dolor, infatti, raddoppia, perché al dolore di vivere tristo (dopo la morte di Laura) si aggiunge quello di sapere di aver vissuto, mentre ch’ella viveva, più d’ogni altro lieto.<sup>100</sup>

the overall sense of Petrarca’s poetic experimentation revolves around the verb *doppiare* (used intransitively twice). In fact, the *dolor* (grief) doubles, since the grief of living sad after Laura’s death is now joined to the notion of having lived happier than anybody else while she was alive.

The *polyptoton* of *doppiare* invests the overall syntactic structure of the period and the prosodic alignment of the stanza (ll. 37-42), characterized by figures of repetition and variation (anaphora, *polyptota*, antitheses), *dicolon* of complementary terms, and *parallelismus membrorum*.

Nesun visse già mai più di me lieto,  
nesun vive più tristo et giorni et notti;  
Et doppiando ’l dolor, doppia lo stile  
che trae del cor sì lagrimose rime.  
Vissi di speme, or vivo pur di pianto,  
né contra Morte spero altro che Morte.

Nobody ever lived happier than I,  
Nobody lives more sadly days and nights.  
The grief doubles, so doubles the style,  
That draws from the heart such tearful rhymes.  
I lived in hope, now I live on weeping:  
My only hope against death is death.

These rhetorical features model the duplication of this sestina, which reignites the permutation of the forms in its seventh stanza. They also articulate the bipartite structure (narrative, stylistic, conceptual, and material) of the *Rvf* into poems *in vita* and *in morte* of Laura. In the ninth stanza, the doubled (and infinitely amplifiable) sestina proposes a style

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<sup>99</sup> CONTINI 1970, p. 186.

<sup>100</sup> FRASCA 1992, p. 228.



that is “pietoso” (l. 49: in its active sense of “inducing to piety”). Such a style results in the writing of this very sestina, now defined in terms of poetry “senza rime” (l. 52: “without rhymes”). In this definition we can observe the continuity between technical datum and stylistic principle. The notation of versification technique is embedded within the overarching mythical episode of Eurydice and Orpheus (a common mythical reference in the sestinas). In fact, Orpheus’ metrics and prosody (quantitative, not accentual) would not imply rhyme schemes and is, in fact, “without rhymes”.

In the eleventh stanza, the sestina eventually shifts in the direction of tragic themes and the stylistic register of *asperitas*. The sestina encompasses now the two poles towards which Petrarca’s poetry is directed, from the very beginning sonnet: “piango et ragiono” (*Rvf* 1, 4: “I weep and talk”) and “fra le vane speranze e ’l van dolore” (*Rvf* 1, 4: “between vain hopes and vain grief”).

The *tornada* reconfigures the rhyme structure of the first stanza, with a sophisticated alternation of the rhyme words in desinential and internal positions: (A) B (C) D (E) F. The reoccurrence of the initial metrical scheme again implies the possibility of iteration and recombination of the sestina (ll. 73-75):

Far mi pò lieto in una o ’n poche notti:  
e ’n aspro stile e ’n angosciose rime  
prego che ’l pianto mio finisca Morte.

It can make me happy in one or few nights,  
In harsh style and anguished rhymes,  
I beg that my weeping will end with death.

The supplication to death to end the poet’s *planh*, which, in fact, constitutes the theme of the sestina itself, is also a request for the closure of this poem, characterized in terms of an “aspro stile” that produces “angosciose rime”. Here, meta-poetical reflection seems to work

on multiple levels, affecting the sestina itself, the songbook, and its poetic diction at large. It constitutes, in short, both the microstructural (subject matter, style, genre, prosody, and meter) and the macrostructural levels (the narrative continuity, the section *in vita* and the one *in morte*).

But there is more. As mentioned *supra*, the interaction between the iconic codification of the textual sign, the metrical orchestration of the sestina, and the meditative (and often anti-narrative) features of its content all concur to confer on this poetic form a character of stasis that assumes the spatial form of a metatextual refraction. The narrative content in textual form of the sestina and its material expression (its writing and its editorial project) provide the reader with guidelines (if not constraints) for its fruition and interpretation. The conclusion of this chapter aims at underlining how the textual aspects of the sestina mirror material features of the book-text of the *Rvf*.

Petrarca's editorial project ideally associates the scribe's activity with the poet's, by fostering a coincidence between literary expression and writing, text and book, poem and *charta*.<sup>101</sup> This project implies a bijective relationship between the textual domain and the material domain. Consequently, the following metatextual implications of the verse technique in the sestina correspond to as many interpretive consequences as far as the material writing of Petrarca's *canzoniere* is concerned.

First, one should consider the tension between openness and closure, which is an immanent principle of the articulation of the sestina and its distinctive feature with regard to the reader's horizon of expectation. This tension can be fruitfully associated with the longing for a final closure of the book of the *Rvf*, frustrated by the continuous activity of its revision and reordering. The final act of this materially indisputable practice is the project of

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<sup>101</sup> PETRUCCI 1967, pp. 71-88.

recombination that affects the last thirty-one poems of the songbook, following the insertion of a new *binio* (ff. 67-70). The aforementioned re-numeration of these poems with red Arabic numerals in the margin sanctions a new postponement of the closure of the book.

Furthermore, the very technique of permutation and recombination of the rhyme words of the sestina works as a micro-textual correlative of the notion of *canzoniere* as macro-text in progress. The practice of *rasura*, revision, and substitution continuously re-functionalizes the whole arrangement of the *Rvf*: “[...] each composition’s revision reinterprets the larger genre structure of the songbook itself”.<sup>102</sup>

Finally, the metrical concurrence of *retrogradatio* and *crucifixio* brings about a continuous regressive reconfiguration that elicits a simultaneous consumption of the text in all its parts. Analogously, any new intervention over the sequence of the composition or within a single poem demands the overall reconsideration of the *canzoniere*’s occult geometries.

With its ambivalent nature of further-perfectible text and non-modifiable cohesive structure in which *tout se tient*, the double sestina reproduces *en abyme* the systemic characteristics of Petrarca’s songbook. What is more, it reflects both its indissoluble organic structure and the mutual correspondence of its parts, underscoring the unremitting practice of *labor limae*, which (with compelling evidence) distinguishes Petrarca’s critical and editorial project.

## 7. Conclusions

Corrado Bologna suggested that an edition of the *Rvf* aspiring to be *critical* would need to “considerare, scavando nell’ordinato universo del [Vat. lat.] 3195 anche la ‘mise en

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<sup>102</sup> STOREY 1993, p. 354.

page' autorizzata e riprodurla" ("consider and reproduce even the authorized *mise en page* of Vat. lat. 3195, digging into its ordered universe").<sup>103</sup> Although ms. Vat. lat. 3195 was the nucleus of the early circulation of the *canzoniere*, the complexity of its graphical-visual strategies did not prove easy to reproduce serially.<sup>104</sup> Consequently, only the autograph itself and a few manuscripts from the late fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth centuries preserve Petrarca's sophisticated system of *mise en page* and *mise en texte*: among these, mss. Laurenziano Pluteo 41.17, Laurenziano Pluteo 41.10, Laurenziano Segni 2, Morgan M 502, and few others.<sup>105</sup>

The passage from manuscript to print witnessed the progressive detachment between Petrarca's material resolutions and the finished editorial artifact. With the advent of print, the author, in sum, is kept out of typography, where the separation between text format and book format is progressively institutionalized. Practical and financial reasons gradually impose standardized serial reproductions versus the individual choices dictated by writers' artistic purposes.

The early print runs of the *canzoniere* in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries reflect this tendency, in compliance with the streamlining of various textual styles into the one that we are now familiar with. In the case of Petrarca's editorial print history, three early milestones influenced subsequent production in a profound way: the *editio princeps* (Venice, Vindelino da Spira, 1470), the Valdezoco edition (Padua, 1472), and the Aldine (Venice, 1501), curated by Pietro Bembo. Contrary to what the frontispiece reads, Bembo's copy for Aldo's publishing house (Vat. lat. 3197) did not derive from Petrarca's autograph and was

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<sup>103</sup> BOLOGNA 1993, pp. 301-302.

<sup>104</sup> See SIGNORINI 2003.

<sup>105</sup> See SAVOCA 2008, pp. 97-129.

only collated against it at an advanced stage of Bembo's transcription. The Venetian editions curated by Alessandro Vellutello (de Sabbio, 1525, then reprinted 26 times before the end of the century) further established an ideal separation between Petrarca's *canzoniere* and the Gutenberg galaxy. First of all, Vellutello codified the practice of encapsulating the text with a commentary, in a notable departure from Petrarca's minimalist editorial project. Secondly, and more importantly, this bizarre editor-commentator reorganized the poetic sequence to establish a (non-authorial) chronological order and a narrative coherence in the allegedly scattered *scartafacci* on Petrarca's desk.

The conscious dismissal of Petrarca's editorial strategies by the copyist of Riccardiano 1088, with which this chapter began, had effectively become common practice. The diversified visual techniques that Petrarca had cultivated until the very last days of his mortal life were irretrievably lost within the first few decades of editorial intervention in his work after his death.

## *Afterword*

### **Codex to Kindle**

If you think of brick [...] you say to brick, ‘What do you want, brick?’ And brick says to you, ‘I like an arch’. And if you say to brick: ‘Look, I want one too, but arches are expensive, and I can use a concrete lintel over you, over an opening. What do you think of that, brick?’ Brick says, ‘I like an arch.’ It’s important, you see, that you honor the material that you use. [...] You can only do it if you honor the brick and glorify the brick instead of shortchanging it.

L. KAHN, *Lecture at Pratt Institute* (1973)

*Óstraka*, i.e. fragments of broken pottery, often served as material to write on in ancient Greece and Hellenized Egypt. Given the cheapness and easy accessibility of the material, the nature of such inscriptions was generally ephemeral: private messages, votes, receipts, prescriptions, recipes, elementary school exercises, and so on. There are, however, notable exceptions. In June 1937 Italian papyrologist Medea Norsa published a text deciphered and transcribed from an *óstrakon* previously acquired in Egypt by archeologist Evaristo Breccia and now conserved as a relic, in a velvet case, at the Istituto Papirologico “Girolamo Vitelli” in Florence (PSI xiii 1300).<sup>1</sup> This potsherd dates back to the second century BCE and transmits seventeen lines of an ode by Sappho describing a shrine to Aphrodite (fr. 2 Lobel-Page [fr. 2 Voigt]). The knowledge of this ode had previously been limited to a few of its lines, some cited by grammarian Athenaeus of Naucratis in his *Deipnosophistae* (xi 463 e) and others by rhetorician Hermogenes of Tarsus in his treatise on style (*De ideis* ii 4). The cursive

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<sup>1</sup> See NORSA 1937, MALNATI 1993, CRIBIORE 1996, pp. 231-232, FERRARI 2000, PINTAUDI 2000, CANFORA 2005, pp. 135-138, and COPPOLA 2006 (1937), pp. 86-89.

script and the considerable mistakes and omissions in the text point towards a dictation exercise, one that reveals the student's scarce familiarity with the Eolic dialect of Sappho's poem. The combined analysis of material and textual aspects of this shard makes it possible to draw conclusions, or at least to make hypotheses, about the modality of production (or reproduction), circulation, and reception of the text itself. If you ask *óstrakon* PSI xiii 1300 the same question Louis Kahn asks brick in the epigraph to this afterword, *óstrakon* says to you: "I like a poem".

In the preceding pages, I explored the relationship between the material aspects of editorial artifacts and the characteristics of the texts they contain. I attempted to show how the interpretation of a text needs to be accompanied by an examination of the material conditions of its composition, dissemination, and consumption. I intended this study to be both an investigation into the material foundations of literary texts and a reflection on notions of textuality, writing, and media in medieval and early-modern Italy. My purpose was to show a series of paradigmatic examples of the basic coincidence of textual datum and material unit, content and medium, verbal-visual message and physical support.

In Friedrich Kittler's words, "[m]edia determine our situation which – in spite or because of it – deserves a description".<sup>2</sup> In the context of medieval Italian literature, a critical reflection on the non-deterministic interplay between cultural constructs and the media which form and formalize them affects all levels of communication: the author, the audience, the code, the utterance, and the material channel.

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<sup>2</sup> KITTLER 1999, p. xxxix.

In the first case study, I outlined how the codex is the figure that Dante chooses to epitomize the act of composing. Writing is conceived and visualized as a process of copying. Dante envisions textual datum and material unit as one holistic organism. The act of composition is an intellectual act that is modeled on exact book formats. While the book represents the primary idea of the text, the text, conceptually, assumes the shape of a book. Furthermore, Dante peruses the image of the bound volume to express both the closure of his encyclopedic work and its figural coincidence with God's revelation through the cosmos. At the apogee of manuscript culture, the figure of the book signifies an ultimate centripetal attempt to hold together the intellectual discourse of western civilization in front of the secular centrifugal directions of the modern era. In the second case study, I indicated how, one generation after Dante, Petrarca's rare metaphors of book and book production revolve around fragmentary notions of textual *disiecta membra*. His authorial need for unity and closure is frustrated by continuous additions and corrections. The absence of a final and finalized book implies awareness of and intentional reference to its fragmented nature: "rime sparse" (*Rvf* 1, 1: "scattered rhymes"); "disviate rime" (*Rvf* 322, 8: "deviant rhymes").<sup>3</sup> Petrarca dedicates his literary career to the integration of scribal forms as part of his written poetics, literary codes of meaning, and strategies of textual preservation: "la testualità perfetta, diretta emanazione dell'autore, garantita dalla sua autografia era – e rimaneva per sempre – garanzia di assoluta leggibilità" ("perfect textuality, the author's direct emanation, guaranteed by his autography was –

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<sup>3</sup> See PICONE 2004 and GERI 2007.



and forever remained – guarantee of absolute legibility”).<sup>4</sup> Analogously, Boccaccio chooses specific book formats for individual texts and playfully optimizes and conjugates the various writing practices connected with different intellectual activities. In the third case study, I showed how Boccaccio’s impersonation of various roles (scribe, compiler commentator, author) matches his exploration of different literary genres. Intertextuality and imitative practices affect both the textual components of composition and their material counterparts. Throughout the unfolding of the present work, Boccaccio’s function in the constitution of a modern notion of authorship and in the institution of a vernacular canon emerges undauntedly.

The conspicuous number of autographs represents a fascinating novelty in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Classical authors offer interesting testimonies on autography in the Greek and Roman world, where they were rather exceptional, as opposed to direct dictation of one’s own text. Even when authors actually produced their own written copies, the nature of these was ephemeral; autographs were in fact limited to first drafts and rough copies, from which authors would then dictate to a secretary or a professional scribe for the production of a final copy.<sup>5</sup> One might mention the autograph *codicilli* that allegedly preserved the first drafts of Catullus’ poems, which, as he informs us, were stolen by a “moecha putida” (*carmen* xlii 11: “dirty whore”). One might also cite the enormous parchment (*membrana ingens*) on which Eumolpus, an impoverished and libidinous poet in Petronius’ *Satyricon* (cxv),

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<sup>4</sup> PETRUCCI 1984, p. 412.

<sup>5</sup> See CAVALLLO, p.

writes a poem on the Trojan War in the middle of a shipwreck. The practice of delegating the production of fair copies to scribes is still common in the thirteenth century. Thomas Aquinas used to write his notes in a *littera inintelligibilis* (unintelligible script), a type of shorthand that he alone was able to read and that still stymies modern philologists. He would then summon his secretaries, who would take turns writing down what Thomas read aloud.<sup>6</sup> The author's participation in all phases of composition, book production, and 'publication' is therefore a surprising innovation. Autographic documents begin to proliferate only at the twilight of the Middle Ages, both in Latin and in the vernacular, although they are generally limited to subscriptions or signatures in public records and most often connected to marginal figures in literary history. The exceptions, once again, are particularly notable, as in the case of the small sheet of parchment (mm 100 x 135) that preserves the *Laudes Dei altissimi* in the Gothic hand of its author, Francis of Assisi.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, exceptional authors such as Petrarca and Boccaccio tend to progressively assume the functions and strategies of copyists and conceive literary composition as a combination of both textual and material components. Of the *tre corone* of Italian literature, only Dante leaves no extant autographs. A virtual reconstruction of what the autographs of such texts as the *Vita Nova* and the *Commedia* could look like is only possible in a virtual sense, by conjugating what the early exemplars of his works tell us about the context of their production with what the texts tell us about themselves.

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<sup>6</sup> See CARRUTHERS 1990, pp. 4-7.

<sup>7</sup> See BARTOLI LANGELI 2013.

The presence of autographs and the editorial and artistic planning that these entail demand a reconsideration of the post-structuralist notion of author as depersonalized function. Authors regain their corporeality and historical immanence. They do so despite the anonymity, pseudonymity, partial onymity, and obscure identity that often characterized authors during the High Middle Ages.<sup>8</sup> They also do so by resisting the progressive abstraction and dematerialization into texts to which their personas and their books are reduced and obliterated by various ‘textualist fundamentalisms’.

Media determine our situation, whether we are talking about the object of our research or our role in relation to it, ourselves as subjects performing humanistic research. The documents that were used in researching for this project came in various material forms: manuscripts, incunabula, digital reproductions, facsimiles, critical editions, diplomatic editions, digital texts. Multimedial sources challenge the assumption of neutrality of every technology, as well as the interfaces that we are most used to. What is more, the use of many forms of material documents calls into question the inherent value of a specific cultural tradition and its usefulness for research, qualities often taken for granted. When cultural materials are easily available in networked environments, we must motivate and at times even justify our recourse to traditional and less accessible forms of documents, and we must have better reasons for doing so than nostalgia for their aura, bibliophilism, and our familiarity with or affection for them. On the one hand, documents from the past have an inherent value

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<sup>8</sup> See GREENE 2006.

*for research* when they are indispensable for understanding aspects of that past. On the other hand, whereas the use of (Ersatz-) digital materials does not necessarily imply advancement over analogic technologies, it undeniably allows for new modes of inquiry. For instance, digital materials force their user to question notions of origin, authenticity, authoriality, and transmission. The scroll, far from a neutral container of meaning, both shaped and modeled the text it bore, and its way of doing so visibly emerges when one studies the transition from scroll to codex. The same is true of the transition from manuscript to print. The notion of manuscript culture, after all, becomes a notion only in retrospect. It adopts a marked character (and a name) with the advent of print: until then, there is no theoretical (or practical) difference between writing and handwriting.<sup>9</sup> Our trans- and multi-medial environment of research brings about a deeper awareness of media-specificity and underscores the variety of technologies of inscription and material support: “print culture’s centuries of stability undermined humanists’ ability to ‘see’ the materiality of their practices: the book became a transparent medium”.<sup>10</sup>

Traditional problems are confronted with new approaches. For example, the concurrent access to different manuscripts when these migrate to the network helps to overcome the notion of Lachmannean critical editions, which relegate alternative readings to the status of errors and therefore to a marginal position in the critical apparatus. It permits the researcher to work with less defined notions of authorship

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<sup>9</sup> See GITELMAN 2014, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> BURDICK *et alii* 2012, pp. 83.

within which copyists and authors often overlap. It underlines the perception of *mouvance*, textual instability, and transitional textuality.<sup>11</sup> It reframes the texts in the presence of non-textual and non-linear elements like glosses, musical notations, and images. It can recover the performative and fluid textuality of medieval works that pass unobserved even (or especially) in the most reliable critical edition. One might mention the often-unconvincing results that the critical edition of Domenico Lenzi's *Specchio umano* (or *Il libro del biadaiole*) accomplished by forcing a codex that was compiled as a rhizomatic congeries of various textual entities and heterogeneous visual units into a textually linear form.<sup>12</sup>

Digital representations of manuscripts allow for the isolation of portions of text and the highlighting of the contours of an unclear script. Image enlargement, layering techniques, altered color levels, and the employment of filters (even with inexpensive raster graphics editors like Adobe Photoshop)<sup>13</sup> make it possible to decipher heavily obliterated, deleted, or obscured codices. They allow for the continuous 'shuffling' of fragile materials without compromising their integrity. They enable easy side-by-side comparison of manuscript imaging with critical text. They expand access to an extent that is virtually unlimited, and they permit less guarded conditions for research. They bring about new models of display and storage, even if they still require material (paper?) backup systems to protect them from the fragility of digital supports and from software deterioration and bit rot. They sanction shared

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<sup>11</sup> See CERQUIGLINI 1989 and ZIOLKOWSKI 2001, p. 118.

<sup>12</sup> See PINTO 1978.

<sup>13</sup> See HAVENS 2014.

expertise, cooperation, and real-time feedback, implying a fruitful notion of universal scholarship and the decentralization and de-territorialization of humanistic practice.<sup>14</sup> They make the borders between library, archive, and classroom more permeable, removing the barriers imposed by physical edifices and geographical distance. They make what is unique ubiquitous.

Nevertheless the autoptic consultation of material artifacts remains indispensable for various reasons. I will mention but a few. First of all, only a limited amount of manuscripts worldwide has been accurately described and inventoried: even the exact number of non-described manuscripts is yet to be determined. The descriptions that accompany digital reproductions often require a direct contact with the material artifacts that they describe. The counterpart to this is the redundancy of metadata disseminated in the digital network, which makes it necessary to possess navigational expertise, a solid technical background in specific disciplines, and selective criteria.

Secondly, a direct examination of the codices is crucial to ascertain specific aspects of their formation. An example of these aspects is the fasciculation of manuscripts, i.e. the organization and binding of the codicological units (fascicles, also known as gatherings or quires) of a codex, for which inexpensive strategies have not yet been developed. The analysis of the making of the book points towards the cultural project behind it. One could mention but a few examples from the manuscripts that have for various reasons appeared in this study. In ms. Martelli 12

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<sup>14</sup> See BURDICK *et alii* 2012, pp. 58-60.

the quire preserving the anonymous and anepigraphic Italian translation of the *Somniale Danielis*, a popular medieval dream book, immediately precedes Dante's *Vita Nova*, in which the oneiric subject matter plays a decisive role in the narration.<sup>15</sup> In ms. Chigi L v 176, Boccaccio begins the transcription of Dante's *Vita Nova* immediately after the explicit of the *Trattatello in laude di Dante* and within the same fascicle. He thus assigns his own essay the function of an *accessus ad auctorem*, with notable repercussions for the status of Dante's *prosimetrum*. In the autograph of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* Petrarca uses fascicles as separate codicological units in such a way that allows him to continually add on and correct without undermining the presentational unity of the songbook. A state-of-the-art codicological description has yet to rely on direct, physical contact with the codex in order to provide information about its fasciculation. The compensation for the librarians' nasty looks one unavoidably receives at every attempt to move the manuscript from its book holder is the admission into the factory of the codex, the appreciation of its inner structure, the unveiling of precious hints to the understanding of how it was conceived, compiled, and assembled. Before and besides being an undeniable personal satisfaction, this compensation is, in sum, the revelation of how a manuscript continues to produce meaning.

A third reason for the direct consultation of editorial artifacts lies beneath the two already mentioned. Most often what the object of the research is emerges only after the result of that research has been achieved. New strategies of inquiry often develop retrospectively. Sophisticated imaging or advanced systems of optical

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<sup>15</sup> See CAPPOZZO 2014.

character recognition constitute not only a mediated access, but also a partial representation, one that is already an interpretation. What to look at is often visible only after knowing what it looks like: the x never marks the spot to excavate.

The operative combination of analogic and digital technologies and artifacts and the focus on their irreducible specificities have been a constant aspiration of this project. Another major ambition, which I hope has been at least partially successful, has been the attempt to conjugate literary theory and philological expertise. In fact, I have tried to avoid what I see as two major problems with respect to the lack of dialogue between these two fields. On the one hand, theoretically driven critical inquiries often aim to eliminate (or fail to stress enough) the boundary and distance between primary text and critical work: what is worse, they often de-historicize what should be understood in its radical alterity, in an ill-concealed attempt to actualize and conform it to modern subjectivity. On the other hand, the often crypto-positivistic nature of many historicizing approaches, especially in the field of textual studies, tends to envision and present the technical and numeric datum as the guarantee of sound scientific methodology. However, the measuring, counting, attributing, describing, situating, deconstructing, reconstructing, decoding, charting, and critiquing can only attain an elusive registration of literary phenomena. These often remain evanescent and only tentatively definable. Our hermeneutic strategies mostly achieve mere working hypotheses.



In Maria Corti's words, "[l]a letteratura è materia indocile [...]" ("literature is an unruly subject matter [...]").<sup>16</sup> Literature is difficult to grasp not only in the subjectivity of aesthetic judgment, but also in the allegedly verifiable truths of its social and material aspects. Like Arnaut Daniel, as researchers, we hoard the air and chase the hare with an ox. We build on data that previous researchers accumulated for us, and we try to fill in detail and add sense: *nani gigantum humeris insidentes*. Literature is an unruly subject matter, difficult to tame: one that reduces all our interpretive efforts to an inescapable, methodical, perplexity.

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<sup>16</sup> CORTI 1995, p. 130.

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