



## RE-READING PETRARCA IN THE DIGITAL ERA Massimo Lollini and Pierpaolo Spagnolo

### Abstract

As part of the seminar Re-reading Petrarca in the Digital Age –taught at the University of Oregon in Winter 2014– a digital close reading of Francesco Petrarca’s *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta* (*Rvf*) led to a series of parallel and entwined activities and projects. Deeply integrated with the [Oregon Petrarch Open Book Project](#) (OPOB), the course was oriented towards the encoding of Petrarca’s masterpiece based on the implementation of a network of different themes (Poet, Laura, Metaphysics, Nature, Metamorphoses, and Urban Culture). The various occurrences and data obtained from the encoding were collected into an online database that is still operating and updatable. The results of this qualitative data collection were also compared with a quantitative computer-based research of selected keywords extracted from the various themes. From the beginning of the seminar, the class was divided into groups and each of them read the *Rvf* focusing on one of themes chosen while at the same time paying attention to the others. The different groups considered these themes as interrelated and interdependent. The poet is the sphere in which all the topics emerge in their specific connotations. However, his sphere is related to, dependent on and intersected by the other four spheres. The encoding allowed measuring the different manifestations, levels and meanings of the intersecting relationships. The study of the visual interpretation of the *Rvf* in the Inc. Queriniano G V 15 paralleled the close reading and encoding activity and helped students to develop a visual rendering of their themes and a pointed, original and creative interpretation of Petrarca’s masterpiece.

### Introduction

This article presents part of the activities and results of a seminar on Re-reading Petrarca in the Digital Era taught in Spring 2014 at the University of Oregon using the resources of the Oregon Petrarch Open Book, a working database-driven hypertext in and around Francesco Petrarca’s *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*. The class addressed the question of how to read Petrarca’s masterpiece in the digital world, in a pedagogical situation in which in most Western societies the single textbook and the traditional reading processes are not at the center of the learning experience anymore thanks to the resources available on the cultural Internet. [Stanley Fish's](#) recent challenging questions to the digital humanities were at the core of this course: "Does the digital humanities offer new and better ways to realize traditional humanities goals? Or does the digital humanities completely change our understanding of what a humanities goal (and work in the humanities) might be?" ("The Digital Humanities and the Transcending of Mortality").

In the first section of the course the class discussed some crucial theoretical and methodological premises of digital humanism. While our specific goal was to elaborate a digital close reading of Petrarca's *Rvf* based on the encoding of a thematic network of selected poems, we did at the same time contemplate the elaboration of a quantitative approach to the *Rvf* as a whole. The main activity of the class was focused on reading, encoding, and interpreting poems based on critical inferences rather than on numbers and quantitative data about a text or a series of texts. In this respect, we shared Stanley Fish's concerns about reducing the reading activity to numbers ("Mind Your P's and B's: The Digital Humanities and Interpretation"). However, in the end we did find useful to parallel the critical and qualitative approach to the text with a quantitative one. On the one hand, the possibility of reading the text of the *Rvf* in more than one version, in different media and formats belonging to different historical contexts proved to be extremely useful in triggering an informed and at the same time creative interpretation of the text. On the other hand, once we had elaborated the results of the digital close reading and encoding of selected poems we found worthwhile to approach a digital distant reading of the *Rvf* based on the thematic keywords collected through the close reading. The experience of our class proved that data mining, looking for word frequencies or patterns in texts, and comparing and analyzing different texts, can be a meaningful research tool if associated with what remains the basis of humanism: close reading.

The point of departure of our reading was the contingency of the individual poem. In the ten-week seminar students divided in groups read the entire *Rvf* and followed Petrarca's narration from the beginning to the end; however, they performed their interpretative activity encoding a selection of specific poems every week. The thematic network of the *Rvf* was not a series of abstract and general themes imposed from the outside; it was elaborated as a work in progress through the encoding and conceived as an organic inner part of the poems. On the one hand, the teacher was interested in particular to explore the presence and importance of nature in Petrarca's poems; on the other hand, after students started encoding and interpreting the poems, a new, more complex and articulated thematic network emerged. This network of themes extracted from within the poems themselves included the poet, Laura, metaphysics, nature, metamorphosis and urban life. Each group of students paid attention to all these themes in their encoding. Nonetheless, they chose from the sequences of the *Rvf* assigned weekly the poems to encode and interpret based on their special interest in and sensitivity to one of the themes.

We considered the themes as interrelated and interdependent, as an expression of the conception of the universe as "great chain of being" comprising an infinite series of links ranging in a hierarchical order and culminating in the *ens perfectissimum* (Lovejoy 59). The poet is the site at which all the topics emerge and converge in their specific connotations. However, his sphere is related to, dependent on, and intersected by the other four spheres. The encoding was meant to study the different manifestations, levels, and meanings of the intersecting relationships. Some students decided to learn the basic TEI encoding and worked towards this goal with Karen Estlund, quondam Director of the University of Oregon Digital Scholarship, who introduced them to the idea of digital close reading and encoding and followed their weekly encoding of Petrarca's poems. One example of students' encoding in TEI is included in Appendix 1 of this article. Nevertheless, all the students preferred to use a color-code system that was intuitive and

in the end proved to be a very effective interpretative tool to complement the reading of the poems.<sup>1</sup>

The goal of our encoding was to create the textual conditions for conceiving the poet, Laura, nature, urban life, and metaphysics not as separate entities but as the result of a complex and articulated system of relationships that the color encoding would reveal as varied in the different poems encoded. The colors related to the spheres were red for the poet, pink for Laura, green for nature, grey for urban life and blue for metaphysics. In the digital close reading we conceived metamorphosis as the result of the intersection of all these themes represented by the pentagon highlighted at the center of figure 1.

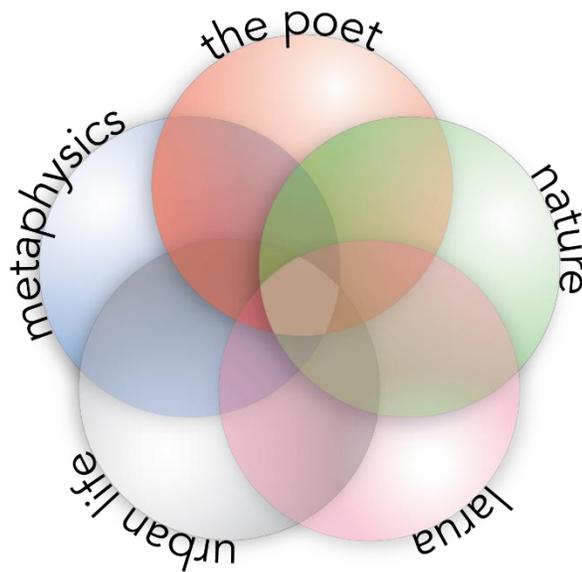


Figure 1

Depending on the frequencies of the words encoded as associated with one particular theme the close reading of the various poems disclosed four specific situations that the class used as criteria to summarize the results of the encoding for each poem:

1. Irreducible alterity of Nature, Laura and the divine; all the spheres are present as limits to the sphere of the poet that tends to prevail exhibiting his erotic desire and/or imposing paradoxes, antithesis and/or ethical reflections on his relationship to the other spheres.
2. The natural environment is removed or present only in the background in contrast to the urban setting of the poem. The poet tends to prevail again at times with a polemic voice and/or moral and/or political considerations.
3. Immersion in the natural environment perceived as a unitary and metamorphic, living reality in which the human being partakes; all the spheres are playing an important role in relation to each other but nature and the landscape tend to prevail and have a voice while the poet inclines to withdraw from the scene of the poem. In this case the encoding makes

<sup>1</sup> The color-code will be reworked and transformed into TEI code before being published in the OPOB.

visible to active role that nature plays in elevating Petrarca's thoughts, directing them towards a meditation on love, death, and eternity.

4. Sacralization and idealization of the human being as isolated from reality; in this case "metaphysics" tends to prevail.

Ultimately, the relationships between the spheres are related to and depend on the two opposite ideas of God emerging in medieval Neoplatonism. On the one hand, the self-sufficient and disembodied One, expressing the conception of the fullness of the Good as being attained once and for all in God. On the other hand, the second conception – present in one of Petrarca's sources, Plato's *Timaeus* – conceived the Idea of the Good in terms of Self-Transcending-Fecundity becoming the spring of the many different facets of the creation (Lovejoy 45-55; Gentile). We considered the first two criteria along with the fourth described above as related to the otherworldly idea of God as One and self-sufficient; these two criteria tend to reflect the spiritual, ethical, and political concerns of the poet whose subjective sphere prevails over the others. On the other hand, we related the third criterion to the idea of Good as Self-Transcending fecundity and the originating principle of Becoming and the cosmos. This second conception finds its best expression in the Pythagorean idea of *anima mundi* elaborated in Plato's *Timaeus* (34c-36c), which with its holism fosters an analogical and "ecological" mindset pointing to the inter-dependence of human beings with their environment and the other organisms.

The encodings performed in our class reveal the different metamorphic facets of the productive thematic intersections between the poet, Laura, metaphysics, nature and urban life. In the following section we present one example of color encoding for each theme along with a very brief commentary. Moreover, we will present the general statistics of word occurrences per theme based on the limited number of poems we encoded. Finally, we will introduce the result of a distant reading of the *Rvf* based on the selection of key words encoded for each theme. These encodings were performed as an experiential contribution to the project of a thematic network of the *Rvf* that after the necessary revisions and improvements will be implemented in the OPOB.

### 1. Encoding for a thematic network of the *Rvf*

The 2014 seminar comprised ten students who were divided into three groups. Each group building on the semantic and cumulative value of the weekly encodings developed a specific theme, a special path in the *Rvf*, represented by a specific color. The first group was composed of three students who detected "metaphysics" as special theme and accorded it the color blue; the second group identified the "poet" as main theme, and used the color red to encode; the third selected "metamorphosis" as principal theme but, construing metamorphosis as the result of the interaction among the other themes, decided not to use a special color for the encoding. Finally, the teacher produced for each class a close reading and encoding of poems related to the theme of nature, creating in this way a fourth group which used the color green. The process of encoding a poem was fairly thorough and required an attentive method of close reading. For every group it was essential to break down not only the poem itself as a whole into stanzas but also to analyze every single verse and every single word. Furthermore, each group had to take into account the role of that particular poem within the *Rvf*. To this end the members of the different groups, taking advantage of the resources available in the OPOB and updating them as

well, introduced in every class meeting the summary of all the poems considered in that specific week, providing the narration of the major events taking place in Petrarca's masterpiece. The students used as main text of the *Rvf* Giuseppe Savoca's recent critical edition; also, they were exposed to the evolution of the text from the manuscript tradition to print culture. They could compare versions of a number of poems in the cod. Queriniano D II 21, in the Inc. Queriniano G V 15 and in the diplomatic edition of the text prepared by Ettore Modigliani. The class was taught in English; all the students but one could read and encode the text in Italian; some students of Spanish consulted *Los sonetos y canciones del poeta Francisco Petrarca*, translated by Henrique Garcés. All these resources were conveniently available in the OPOB. In particular, the weekly reading of the copy of the *editio princeps* of Petrarca's *Rvf* from the Queriniana Library in Brescia (Incunabulum Queriniano G V 15, – a unique and marvelous edition of the *Rvf* including extensive illustrations that serve as elaborate visual glosses of fundamental natural and psychological motifs in the poems, – was very inspirational and suggestive, providing a visual commentary to the poems that proved to be very important to elaborate the interpretation of the *Rvf* as a whole produced by this class.

We now introduce now some examples of encoding starting from group one. This group consisted of three students, two undergraduates, Beau Battista and Rebecca Rosenberg, and one graduate, Michele Agresta. They primarily focused on metaphysics. In one example, sonnet 244, the poet responds to a friend who asked him for advice about life and love. Petrarca responds saying that love is an endless war and that destiny cannot be stopped by anything. One must, therefore, trust heaven and encourage love while continuing the journey of life.

Il mal **mi preme**, et **mi spaventa il peggio**,  
 Al qual veggio sì larga et piana **via**,  
 Ch' **i'** son intrato in simil frenesia,  
 Et con duro penser teco **vaneggio**.

Né so se guerra o pace a **Dio** mi cheggio,  
 Che 'l danno è grave, et la vergogna è ria.  
 Ma perché più languir? Di noi pur fia  
 Quel ch' **ordinato** è già **nel sommo seggio**.

Ben ch' **i'** non sia di quel grand'onor degno,  
 Che tu mi fai, che te n'ingana **amore**,  
 Che spesso occhio ben san fa veder torto,

Pur d'alzar l'alma a quel **celeste regno**  
 È il mio consiglio, et di spronare il core,  
 Perché 'l **cammin** è lungo, e 'l **tempo è corto**.

Here are the thematic word frequencies collected for this poem and their visualization in a simple pie chart:<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The pronoun "tu" in verse 10 is encoded as a symptom of a conversation indicative of "urban culture". This theme is the less developed and explicit in our series. It requires further elaboration in the final encoding that will be published in the OPOB. We decided to include it as representative of an historical and cultural category distinct from "nature".

Table 1

	Nature	Mphys	Poet	Laura	Urban
Frequencies	0	9	4	1	1
Percentages	0%	60%	26.6%	6.6%	6.6%



Pie chart 1

The group related this poem to the fourth criterion outlined in the introduction, pointing to the sacralization and idealization of the human being.

Group two, on the other hand, consisting of graduate student Pierpaolo Spagnolo and the undergraduate students Adrian Leon and Steven Packard, decided to concentrate their readings on the figure of poet within the *Rvf*. An example of the poems they analyzed is sonnet 254 in which Petrarca does not know for sure whether his sweet and beloved "enemy" Laura is dead or not, and so his heart is torn. He imagines that God wanted to take her to the Heavens because of her beauty and her virtue. Petrarca states that if Laura is dead, his life has come to an end as well. The group members chose to encode this specific poem because it discussed the metaphysical and sentimental elements related to the poet's own persona, placing the poet at the center of the poem.<sup>3</sup>

I' pur ascolto, et non odo novella  
 De la dolce et amata mia nemica.  
 Né so ch'i' me ne pensi, o ch'i' mi dica,  
 Sì 'l cor tema et speranza mi puntella.

Nocque ad alcuna già l'esser sì bella,  
 Questa più d'altra è bella et più pudica.  
 Forse vuol Dio tal di vertute amica  
 Torre a la terra, e 'n ciel farne una stella\*,

Anzi un sole\*. Et se questa è la mia vita,  
 I miei corti riposi, e i lunghi affanni  
 Son giunti al fine. O dura dipartita\*,

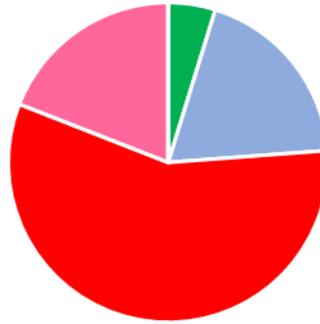
Perché lontan m'ài fatto da' miei danni?

<sup>3</sup> The asterisk attached to some key words indicates that those words are encoded for more than one theme.

La mia favola breve è già compita,  
Et fornito il mio tempo a mezzo gli anni

Table 2

	Nature	Mphys	Poet	Laura	Urban
Frequencies	1	4	12	4	0
Percentages	4.7%	19%	57.1%	19%	0%



Pie chart 2

The group related this poem to the first criterion outlined in the introduction, pointing to the alterity of Laura and the divine.

Unlike the other groups, group three, consisting of graduate students Jake Monzingo and Miriam Muccione and undergraduate students Emily Letcher and Peter Kinzig, identified a new element within the *Rvf*, one not previously identified by the class as a specific sphere. They chose to focus their readings on metamorphosis as the central theme throughout Petrarca's cycle. The group conceived this theme as the result of the interaction among the other thematic elements. In other words, metamorphosis is the underlying principle of all the intersecting spheres including the poet, Laura, nature, metaphysics, and urban life. An example of a poem studied by group three is sonnet 313. In this poem, Laura has died and the poet is suffering. She has left him alone with his tears and the poems he has dedicated to her. He imagines her in Heaven, where she will be rewarded for her virtue. Petrarca longs to be with her, surrounded by blessed souls. Metamorphosis occurs, in part, because everything has changed, starting from the moment his heart was pierced by her eyes. Laura is now a metaphysical figure and her eyes mediate between the poet and the metaphysical sphere.

Passato è 'l tempo omai, lasso, che tanto  
Con refrigerio in mezzo 'l foco vissi.  
Passato è quella di ch'io piansi et scrissi,  
Ma lasciato m'è ben la penna\* e 'l pianto\*.

Passato è 'l viso sì leggiadro\* et santo\*,  
Ma passando i dolci occhi al cor m'è fissi.  
Al cor già mio, che seguendo partissi  
Lei ch'avolto l'avea nel suo bel manto\*.

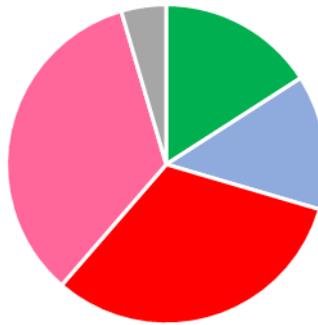
Ella 'l se ne portò sotterra, e 'n cielo

Ove or **triumpha**, ornata\* de l'**alloro**\*  
 Che meritò la sua invicta **honestate**\*.

Così disciolto dal **mortal mio velo**  
 Ch'a forza mi tien qui, foss'io con **loro**  
 Fuor de' **sospiri**\* fra l'**anime beate**.

Table 3

	Nature	Mphys	Poet	Laura	Urban
Frequencies	7	6	14	15	2
Percentages	15.9%	13.6%	31.8%	34%	4.5%



Pie chart 3

The group related this poem to the first criterion outlined in the introduction, pointing to the alterity of Laura and the divine.

Finally, the teacher based his encoding on the theme of nature. Here is one example, sonnet 9, which consists of a long metaphor comparing Laura to the sun. In spring, under the skies of the constellation Taurus, the sun (the “planet” that tells time) brings renewed life, color and energy to the world. Not only are the hills and banks of rivers filled with color (flowers), but this energy also penetrates the earthly moisture (*terrestro humore*). In this way, the world is fertile, producing fruit and other such natural goods. In this way, Laura is like the sun among women. She lays her brilliant gaze on Petrarca, and triggers in him amorous thoughts, acts and words. Despite this, spring will never come for Petrarca due to his unrequited love.

Quando 'l **pianeta** che distingue l'ore  
 Ad albergar col **Tauro** si ritorna,  
 Cade **vertù** da l'infiammate corna  
 Che **veste il mondo** di novel colore.

Et non pur quel che s'apre a noi di fore,  
**Le rive e i colli di fioretti adorna**,  
 Ma dentro dove giamai non s'aggiorna  
 Gravidò fa di sé il **terrestro humore**,

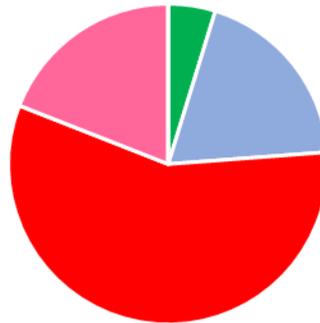
Onde tal **fructo** et simile si colga.

Così costei ch'è tra le donne un sole  
In me movendo de' begli occhi i rai

Cria d'amor pensieri, atti, et parole.  
Ma come ch'ella gli governi o volga  
Primavera per me pur non è mai.

Table 4

	Nature	Mphys	Poet	Laura	Urban
Frequencies	9	1	2	4	0
Percentages	56.3%	6.2%	12.5%	25%	0%



Pie chart 4

The teacher related this poem to the third criterion outlined in the introduction, pointing to the immersion of the poet in the natural environment perceived as a unitary and metamorphic, living reality in which the human being partakes. Also, the poem is indicative of the idea of God as Self-Transcending fecundity triggering productive intersections between the poet, nature, Laura and metaphysics, elevating Petrarca's thoughts and directing them towards a meditation on love that nevertheless remains unrequited.

After reviewing one example of encoding for each group we now introduce the general statistics that resulted from the limited number of poems encoded. Upon completing a number of encodings, we realized that the amount of information that we were collecting was significant. We thought that all the data collected could become very useful for further research and considerations. At this point we started looking for suitable software to collect the data. For us the most approachable and useful tool was without doubt Microsoft Excel; we decided to adopt it to collect the data of all our encodings. Another particularly valuable tool that we combined with Microsoft Excel was Google Drive. By uploading the Excel file into the Google Drive we made it accessible to every student. With this new tool, the class was eager to obtain an immediate graphic representation for each encoded poem to use for each class presentation. Specifically, Excel gave the opportunity for every single group to monitor the evolution of the five elements involved in the encodings. In detail, the Excel file is composed of six pages; one page is entirely dedicated to overall results shared among all the groups. Every single page connects to the file simultaneously so that each change made by the groups automatically updates the overall pie chart. This comprehensive page was very useful not only for visualizing the final result of the encoding for each group and for the entire class, but also to check the development of the project during the course. In fact, this page contains the pie charts for every single group and represents

at the same time the overall results for the individual paths. In this way, the students could constantly see the overall results of the group in comparison with the other groups and the project as a whole.

Each group had an entire page dedicated to its own path within the *Rvf*. The pages consisted of a table in which the group inserted the entries from every poem encoded week by week, and a corresponding pie chart, which changed as new entries were added. The page also allowed students to create tables and a pie chart for individual poems. The students thus always had an up-to-date chart that reflected their latest work for weekly assignments and presentation. Furthermore, we added another table in which the different groups could select the criteria chosen according to their encoding.

All the calculations made in this file were possible thanks to a simple mathematical formula; all the data were visualized directly on the user-friendly online Google Drive file. Following are the tables and charts recording the data for the class as a whole and for individual groups.

**Table 5: Overall course**

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



**Pie chart 5: Overall course**

**Table 6: All groups**

	Nature	Mphys	Poet	Laura	Urban
Group 1	13	56	28	22	4
Percentages	10.5%	45.5%	22.7%	17.8%	3.2%
Group 2	14	42	75	29	3
Percentages	8.5%	25.7%	46%	17.7%	1.8%
Group 3	100	145	139	84	40
Percentages	19.6%	28.5%	27.3%	16.5%	7.8%
Group 4	244	158	157	64	6
Percentages	38.7%	25.1%	24.9%	10.1%	0.9%



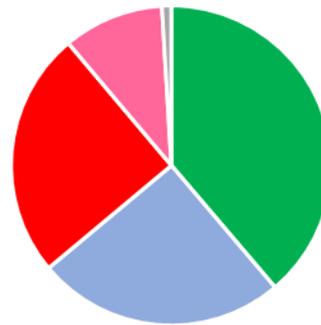
Pie chart 6: Group 1



Pie chart 7: Group 2



Pie chart 8: Group 3



Pie chart 9: Group 4 (Prof. Lollini)

The following is the general list of frequencies for the four criteria identified through the encoding:

**Table 7: Criteria overall course**

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>II</b>	<b>III</b>	<b>IV</b>
<b>Frequencies</b>	15	2	17	135
<i>Percentages</i>	28.3%	3.7 %	32%	35.8%

As part of our research effort, after compiling the statistics for the different themes based on the poems that we close-read and encoded, we carried out a mixed-initiative experiment in the interpretation of the *Rvf*, which we termed “distant reading”. First, the different groups of student readers selected poems that well represented the diverse topics, adding this time metamorphosis as a special theme to the list that included the poet, Laura, metaphysics, nature, and urban life. Then, from their encoded poems, each group compiled a set of words that best exemplified or indicated the presence of their primary theme. The following are the words selected by the different groups through a contextual encoding and close reading:

Theme one (Metaphysics): Giove, Marte, regno del ciel, regno dei cieli, carta, carte, emisfero, emisferi, hemispero, hemisperi, padre, padri, adversario, adversary, Signor, croce, croci, Dio, mortale, mortali, tormento, tormenti, sol, sole, soli, verdeggia, verdeggiare, male, mali, Adamo, prego, pregare, ombrare, ombra, beato loco, beati loci, nebbia, nebbie, vivo fonte, sommo padre, caro dono, doni, peggio, via, vie, sommo

seggio, sommi seggi, amore, amori, celeste regno, celesti regni, camin, camino, tempo, tempi, mondo, mondi, salute, pace, paci, forza, forze, morte, morti, riva, rive.

Theme two (Poet ): I', io, mio, mei, miei, mia, mie, mi, me, aggio, proferto, lui, scaccio, sa, gire, chiama, suo, ama, son, colpe, temo, dilivarmi, affatico, passo, darà, riposi, levimi, accoglie, smorsa, tene, sento, suoi, ardo, vorrei, devrei, rime, veggio, noi, ascolto, odo, dica, tema, puntella, affanni, ài, fatto, pensava, nodo, assolve, lega, trovaimi, poria, ritegno, era, ò, visto, giunto, sentia.

Theme three (Laura): Onesto amor, guerra, quella, colei, voglia ardente, belli occhi, sol, soave foco, donna, bella, desio, amor, giogo, atti, vaneggio, dolce, guerriera, occhi, for, ambedue, noi, ferra, tigre, orsa, angel, colei, sola, ella, bellezza, dolce, amata, nemica, bella, amor, madonna, bel piede, viso, occhi, questa, essa, sola, sorda, rigida, rosa, lauro, sue, oneste, onesta, dolci parole, Laura, nobel alma, alma, ella, ben nata, tua morte, lei, gita, àmmi, quella, bella donna, tuo nome, svegliata, sola, suo, nodo, costei, capei d'oro, faville, l'aura, costei, dolce, ride

Theme four (Nature): Fiore, fiori, erba, erbe, herba, herbe, piaggia, fronda, frondi, fronde, arboscello, arboscelli, viola, viole, selva, selve, fiume, fiumi, scoglio, lauro, pianta, colle, erbetta, elce, mare, animali, boschi, augelletto, augelletti, aspide, aspidi, ghiaccio, ghiacci, foco, fuoco, fuochi, aura, aere, alloro, campagna, campagne, acqua, acque, pesce, pesci, sasso, sassi, monte, monti, valle, valli, ramo, rami, terra, terre, Zephro, riva, rive, mare, abete, faggio, pino, rosignol, deserto, deserti, terreno, terreni, alba, albe, aurora, aurore, notte, verbo, natura, carne, terrestre, terrestre, limo, uomo, homo.

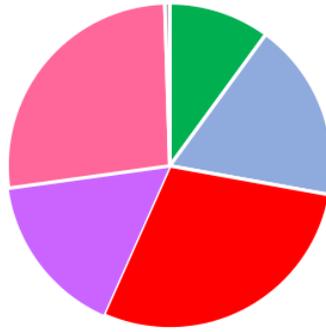
Theme five (Urban Culture): Roma, Giudea, Borgo, tu, huom, città nemiche, fango.

Theme six (Metamorphosis): luce, luci, traluce, cielo, cieli, l'aura, vento, tempo, alba, inalba, tramonto, notte, giorno, di, luna, ombra, stella, stelle, aurora, fenice, morte, morto, vita, vivo, cambiare, sole, sol', sol, solo, solean, lume, orione, cambiare, cangiar, portartene, venir, passato, passata, passando, trapasso, volubil, fuggendo, volar, partissi, altrove, remove, novo, nove, rinove, errante, fuggitiva.

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

Table 8

	Nature	Mphys	Poet	Mphos	Laura	Urban
Total word count	848	1502	2433	1361	2253	42
Poems with most occurrences	21	22	174	31	1	1



Pie chart 10: Distant Reading

There are clearly a number of shortcomings associated with our method of distant reading. Some words are found in two thematic sets. Given that words can have more than one meaning, one of those meanings may support a given theme, another meaning may not. By considering words out of context, the distant reading process has no way of knowing which meaning of a given word corresponds to a particular occurrence in a poem. On the positive side, we realized that the profiles computed for the poems by the distant reading process can guide the selection of further poems for close readings, indicating which poems have potentially interesting thematic interactions or best represent a given theme. In Appendix 2 we present the statistics of our thematic distant reading poem by poem; in the long list of 366 poems it is possible to check how these statistics may help the reader to identify the poems in which the various themes selected by our class are best reflected.

In the final weeks of the course, the adaptable Excel file was provided with an additional page dedicated to the distant reading. The overall page in which we collected all the data of the digital close readings was then equipped with an additional table and pie chart entirely dedicated to the distant reading (Pie chart 10). One of the valuable points of having the two pie charts together (close reading and distant reading) is that it gave the opportunity to the class to compare the general and partial result of two different ways of reading the *Rvf*. Limiting our comments here to the overall results, it is interesting to note that, on the one hand, the outcome of our digital close reading had Metaphysics as a prominent theme and the Poet and Laura as second and third, followed by Nature and Urban life; on the other hand, the result of the distant reading had the Poet as the principal theme immediately followed by Laura, and then, at a farther remove, Metaphysics, Metamorphosis, Nature and finally Urban life. It is interesting to note that the thematic picture suggested by the distant reading is coincident with traditional readings of the *Rvf* as a love story that has two main protagonists and a prevalent metaphysical orientation. In this reading, Nature does not deserve the role of protagonist and metamorphosis is just one theme among others. On the other hand, the digital close reading based on an attentive semantic encoding of Petrarca's poems tells a different story. In this case, Poet and Metaphysics have a prominent role but the distance between them and Laura and Nature is not as large as to rule out the interpretation that they play a role of co-protagonists in the *Rvf*.

We believe that this different result is due to the effort that we made in our qualitative reading and encoding to conceive the thematic spheres as separate but at the same time as interdependent. In other words, in our perspective digital close reading favors a holistic approach

to the text considered as a metamorphic reality, resulting from the interaction between different agencies that in certain moments surpass the pure subjectivity of the poet. On the other hand, distant reading, like traditional literary approaches, tends to focus on certain aspects of the text that remain separate from the others, mainly the subjectivity of the poet. In reality, the same argument can be made for the close reading performed by each of the groups in the seminar that produced an encoding focused on a specific theme. However, what makes the difference is the collective voice of the class that in the end was able to embrace a broader and comprehensive point of view that took stock of the interdependence of the poems' various themes.

## 2. Close reading and visual interpretation

The study of the visual interpretation of the *Rvf* by Antonio Grifo in the Inc. Queriniano G V 15 paralleled our close reading and encoding activity described above. The teacher presented in each class Grifo's miniatures in the incunabulum Queriniano, which thanks to an ACLS digital innovation fellowship he was able to publish in a digital edition within the hypertext project OPOB. The teacher held that Grifo's miniatures capture the essential role that nature plays in Petrarca's poetry, encouraging an expansive reading of the *Rvf* that includes images and commentaries. Grifo creates an effect of continuity by inventing a thematic and iconographic network based, on the one hand, on figures of the poet such as the poet-book quite often pierced by an arrow as metaphor of heartbreak and grief (fig. 2; 1v *Per fare una leggiadra sua vendetta*).



Figure 2

On the other hand, Grifo constructs his narrative around the figure of the serpent that has a truly broad metaphoric value, as it alludes to vital amorous spirits and fertility (fig. 3; 3v).



Figure 3

The serpent is not simply reducible to lust and desire, or to the memory of the biblical snake. Rather, it recalls ancient Greek myths where the serpent was an attribute of Earth personified, one of the four elements, and of Ceres who represents Earth. Moreover, Grifo's serpent may be interpreted as the *genius* as conceived in ancient Roman religion, a sort of spirit that could be incarnated also as a serpent, which, as the etymology from *gignere* suggests, has a generative meaning as a symbol of fecundity. Among the writers that used it there is Bernadus Silvestris in his commentary on the *Aeneid* and in *Cosmographia*, a possible source of Francesco Petrarca's *Rvf.* (Hall 285; Canova; Chance 7-8; Donati; Folena Goldolin)

The serpent accompanies the book performing many different expressive positions and attitudes. In the illustration of sestina 237, *Non à tanti animali il mar fra l'onde*, five serpents bite the book to convey the idea of a solitary poet wandering immersed in the natural landscape and pervaded by erotic desire (Figure 4; 3v).

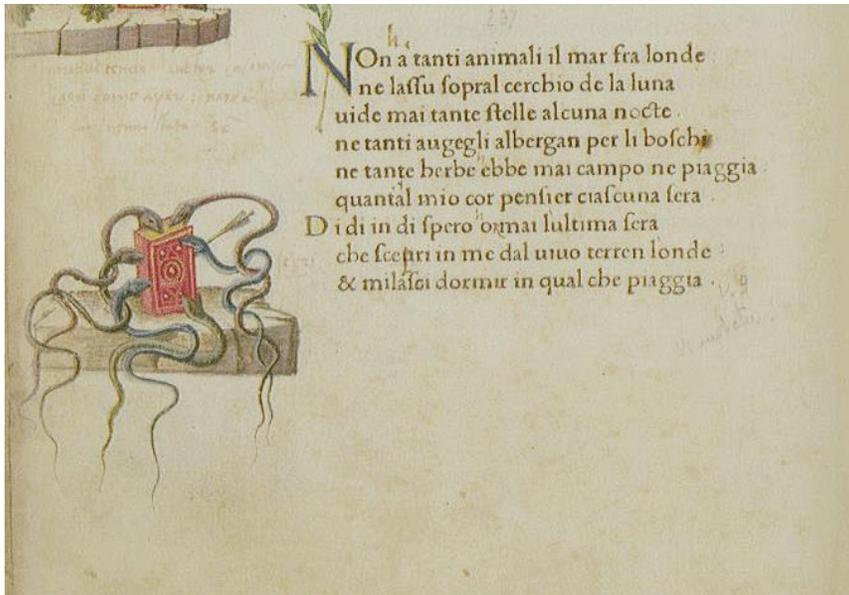


Figure 4

Student comments emphasized how the tails of the snake root the poet-book in the vital spirit of the earth (fig. 4); and how the poet-book and the serpent are always inserted in the ever-present garden-valley with river and flowers, in the *trompe l'oeuil* style of Vaucluse.

Class discussion based on Grifo's images and reading of commentaries led to emphasize the idea that the miniatures trigger an interpretation of the *Rvf* centered on the idea of metamorphosis that is essential to the interpretation of Petrarca's masterpiece and was already suggested by Filelfo (one of Grifo sources), author of one of the late fifteenth-century commentaries of Petrarca consulted by the students of this class. (*Petrarcha: con doi commenti*; Cossutta 425-427; Frasso 76-84) One student in the class, Peter Kinzing, transcribed Filelfo's commentaries to poems 5 and 6 in which he explicates the role of metamorphosis. The students recognized how in the miniatures the poet of the *Rvf* is still a "porous" and susceptible individual in deep dialogue with nature and intensely implicated in different forms of natural metamorphoses triggering metaphysical reflections on the salvific power of love.

The teacher drew students' attention to some illuminations where the serpent assumes a human male face (fig.5).



Figure 5

This transformation takes place in the illustrations of a group of poems, 314-319 characterized by a stringent reference to the death of Laura. Finally, the face of the serpent becomes the face of

a woman, Laura, incarnating the vital, earthly energies once exclusively belonging to the dominion of the reptile (fig. 6).



Figure 6

It is not by chance that this transformation takes place in poem 264 (*I' Vo pensando, et nel penser m'assale*), which in the Incunabulum Queriniano G V 15 does not open part two of the *Rvf* but immediately precedes the last poem, the *Canzone alla Vergine* (132r).

The class appreciated the fact that the metamorphosis of the serpent does not completely erase the animal-like nature of the reptile until the very last poem. Grifo depicts and creates a transient hybrid figure, which has the body of a serpent and the face first of a man, and then of a woman. In other words, he captures the deep nature of the metamorphosis not in the transformation from one state (animal) to another (human) but in the terrestrial metamorphic process itself, alluding at the same time to the fact that the process of becoming human is a work in progress and entails not only terrestrial transformations but also a metaphysical projection toward eternity. The turning point of this process is death – as Petrarca writes in poem 316 – which “le disuguaglianze nostre adegua” (“evens out all our inequalities”).

Drawing in the second part of the course on the imagery elaborated by Grifo's miniatures presented in class and on the symbolism reflected in the students' encoding of Petrarca's poems, the teacher asked each group of students to elaborate a visual interpretation of its theme by choosing a series of images that would represent its importance and serve to synthesize their reading of the *Rvf*. Also, the class discussion led the students to conceive the idea of a general synthesis of their images to be realized in a creative drawing that would reflect all the symbolism and the color-code themes they had elaborated. In other words, the seminar decided to realize an artistic rendering of the statistics developed through the encoding, a visual interpretation of Petrarca's *Rvf* conceived as the result of a reading that includes different textual and iconographic layers.

In the end the class chose the image of the serpent to illustrate an interpretation of the *Rvf* that emphasize the centrality of the profound metamorphic and natural inspiration of Petrarca's poems. This interpretation was implicit in the original idea of metamorphosis as the master theme governing the dynamic interaction of all the poems' various themes. At this point, the students wanted to find a parallel to Grifo's book-symbol, one that would speak to the different context of their reading in a digital environment. They found this other pregnant symbol in the marvelous lines of canzone 239, 28-30:

Nulla al mondo è che non possano i versi,

Et li aspidi incantar sanno in lor note,  
Non che 'l gielo adornar di novi fiori.

[There is nothing in the world that cannot be done by verses/ they know how to enchant  
asps with their notes / not to speak of adorning the frost with new flowers.]

While admitting the power of poetry not only to enchant asps but, more generally, to conquer nature in its beauty, the poet in the coda of the canzone is left with what at a first glance looks like an adynaton, “catching the breeze in a net” (*in rete raccolgo l’aura*). In the following image, Grifo renders this idea by presenting Aeolus blowing his wind toward the book and the serpent, which are supposed to hold it:

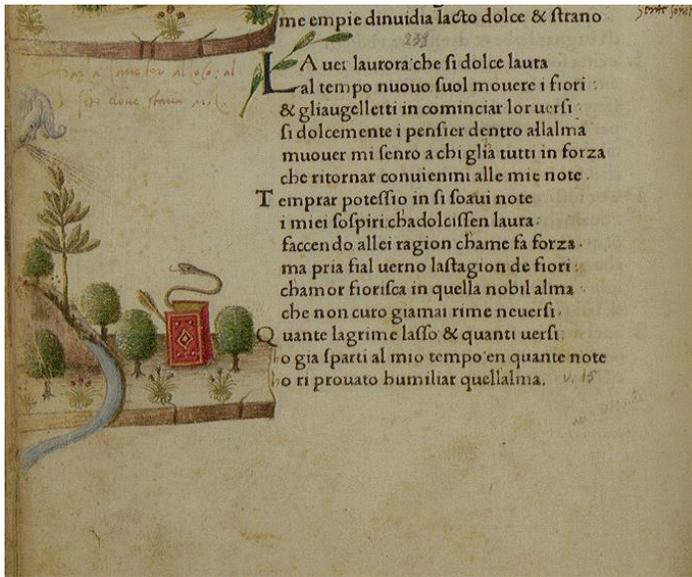


Figure 7

Here are Petrarcha’s verses (239, 37-39) that caught the attention of the students:

In rete accolgo l’aura, e ’n ghiaccio i fiori.  
E ’n versi tento sorda et rigida alma,  
Che né forza d’amor prezza, né note.

[In a net I catch the breeze and on ice flowers, and in verses I woo a deaf and rigid soul  
who esteems neither the power of Love nor his notes.]

The class decided to maintain Petrarcha’s symbolism of the net as a poetic symbol more apt than the book to convey the main idea of the poem. What is relevant here is not the confirmation of an unrequited love and the impossible task of his poetry to move Laura who never cared for rhymes or verses. The image of the poet trying to catch *l’aura* – the breeze– in a net suggests furthermore the powerful and marvelous intersection of Petrarcha poetry with the breath of life in nature. This image reveals the awareness of the intermediary role of nature between the world of being and the world of becoming, connecting the earthly with the heavenly. As we wrote in the Introduction, this conception of nature is related to the Idea of the Good in terms of a Self-

Transcending-Fecundity that serves as the wellspring of the many different facets of creation.<sup>4</sup> In other words, we interpreted *rete* following the Latin etymology related to *serere* (to weave) as the perfect symbol for the infinite connections of Petrarca poetry with life, nature, history, and culture. The net in our reading became also the symbol of the thematic network that we created in our class. In this way, the image of the serpent along with the one of the net became prominent in students' visual interpretation of the *Rvf*. It is noteworthy that while the first printed edition of the *Rvf* was focused on the image of the book, our interpretation, made possible by an attentive qualitative reading of Petrarca's poems within the digital environment provided by the OPOB, in the end had at its core the image of the net. The class recognized how the incunabulum Queriniano already offered a hypertextual interpretation of Petrarca's cycle, one that is still inspirational for us today.

The other symbols that were chosen by students for their visual interpretation included those openly connected to specific spheres, for instance, laurel (*alloro*) for nature, Laura and poetry, and others that were considered important like the knot as a symbol of the connectivity of life. The seminar agreed that there was, for example, a clear allegorical parallel between the laurel and the name of Laura. That is why the laurel is one of the symbols that the class adopted and is amply present in the drawing. In detail, every single group was asked to provide a list of the most significant symbols from their own encodings, but eventually, during the last weeks, they were asked to select only the one that best embodied their reading paths. These symbols selected by each group are: for group one (metaphysics), the sky; for group two (the poet), the knot and the rhymes themselves; and, leaving aside for the moment group three, which presented a special case, for group four (nature), the serpent. Group one chose the sky mostly because of its obvious metaphysical connection with the divine imagery of the Heavens. On the other hand, group two chose the knot because this metaphor is related to the semantic field of weaving which is proper to the creative activity of poetry. As the net discussed above, the knot connects the poet not only to Laura but to life in all its forms. The most powerful example of this image is in poem 307:

Io pensava assai destro esser su l'ale  
 Non per lor forza, ma di chi le spiega,  
 Per gir cantando a quel bel nodo eguale,  
 Onde morte m'assolve, amor mi lega.

[I thought I was skillful enough in flight (not by my power, but by his who spreads my wings) to sing worthily of that lovely knot from which Death looses me, with which Love binds me.]

The image of weaving is crucial not only for the poet but also for Nature, which Petrarca conceives as a creative power as it appears clear in lines 8-11 of this poem:

Mai non poria volar penna d'ingegno,  
 Non che stil grave, o lingua, ove natura  
 Volò, tessendo il mio dolce ritegno.

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<sup>4</sup> Lollini refers this conception of *natura parens* to Bernardus Silvestris' *Cosmographia*. For the relationship between Petrarca and Bernardus Silvestris see the article by Daniela Folena Goldolin in Bibliography.

[Never could any pinion of wit, let alone a heavy style or tongue. Fly so high as Nature did when she made my sweet impediment.]

Group 2 also chose the rhymes because they are an unambiguous symbol of poetry, and thus, the poet. Group four selected the serpent both for the aforementioned reasons and because of persuasive power of Grifo's illustrations.

For Group 3, there was greater difficulty in selecting a symbol that represented the dynamic and abstract concept of metamorphosis. The group initially chose the phoenix because it is the symbol of metamorphosis par excellence, but also because we can find this allegory throughout the *Rvf*. Nonetheless, when the drawing project was added to the seminar, the group decided that the drawing itself was their symbol of metamorphosis because it captures the dynamic and vital movement of the metamorphic process that includes all the protagonists and their natural and metaphysical dimensions.

Following are all of the symbols identified as the most important in the poems that the various groups encoded and as the ones to be included in the drawing (fig. 8): Alloro (laurel/bay), Rete (net), Cielo (sky), Serpente (serpent) and Nodo (knot).<sup>5</sup> The drawing created by Pierpaolo Spagnolo included all the symbols that the various groups indicated as essential to the interpretation of the *Rvf* elaborated by the class. It's hard to explain the drawing without the full understanding of the work done in class. Nevertheless, we will now offer considerations that will facilitate the reading - or one of the possible readings - of the drawing. Once the reasons why the class decided to use these particular symbols have been explained, it seems appropriate to explain how we decided to put those symbols together. Basically, nothing in the drawing is accidental. Grifo's illustrations surely inspired the conception of the drawing, but on the other hand, he had the chance to draw a picture for every single poem, thus following the entire evolution of the *Rvf*. The class' most difficult choice was the planning process. How can only one drawing represent a large collection of poems? Pierpaolo Spagnolo stated that in many cases the decision on how to include specific elements took place during the actual drawing process.

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<sup>5</sup> Here is a partial list of occurrences: *Alloro* (laurel/bay): 23 (167-169); 190 (3-4); 291 (7); 313 (9-11) 323 (53-54); 325 (22); *Rete* (net): 4 (7); 105 (47); 181 (1-3) (12); 239 (37). *Cielo* is the symbol for which we found most occurrences, 212. *Serpente* (serpent): 99 (6); *Nodo* (knot): 59 (17); 71 (51); 73 (79); 119 (76); 175 (2) (14); 197 (7); 214 (20); 256 (10); 268 (65); 270 (70) (93); 271 (1) (13); 283 (4); 296 (14); 305 (1); 307 (3); 330 (13); 359 (56); 361 (12). Nonetheless, there are other symbols that were suggested by the class but that for different reasons were not openly included in the drawing. For instance, the symbol of the bird (and the dove) was omitted from the drawing because the idea of flying, thus reaching the sky, heaven and Laura, was already communicated by the whole serpent that in the drawing is clearly attempting to reach the sky. On the other hand, in some cases, such as with the symbol of the labyrinth, the group initially selected this symbol but later, during the planning of the drawing, simply considered it not essential. *Uccello/Colomba* (bird/dove): 23 (165); 81 (13); 187 (5); *Fenice* (phoenix): 135 (14-15); 185 (1); 210 (4); 321 (1); 323; *Labirinto* (Labyrinth): 211 (14); 224 (4).



Figure 8: Drawing. For a better view, see p. 97.

The students decided that the percentage of colors in the drawing, and thus degree of prominence accorded to each symbol, should reflect the corresponding ratios in the pie chart that summarized their close readings. If the blue (metaphysics) had the highest percentage in the pie chart, consequently the predominant color in the drawing should be blue, and so on.

Although the most prominent color in the drawing is blue, the most visible figure is the serpent that allegorically represents nature. The snake divides the illustration in two equal parts. Moreover, it rises from the lowest corner on the left, representing the base of urban culture. At the same time, it tries with all its strength to reach the highest point on the right, which represents not only the sky but also the deceased Laura. Similarly important is the hand that comes out the serpent's mouth. This allegory was chosen to represent the idea of becoming human, the ongoing metamorphosis of the poet deeply rooted in earth and nature and at the same time attempting to reach the metaphysical dimension indicated by the sky, where, in the final part of the *Rvf*, he imagines the deceased Laura rests. The elevation towards the sky is triggered by the dialogue with nature and made possible by the force of poetry, mostly represented by the net that traps the hand of the serpent. This part of the drawing represents the verse "*In rete accolgo l'aura, e 'n ghiaccio i fiori*" (239, 37) that is transcribed in the drawing itself. It is possible to partially see them by clicking on fig. 8 and enlarging it. Visibly, the net is trying to capture the hand of the serpent and is at the same time projected towards the sky. It represents an important portion of the *Rvf* in which the poet, after the death of Laura, tries to reach Heaven through visions, dreams and poems. It is important to note that, although the hand, and thus the human part of the poet, never reaches the upper right corner, the verses penetrate the clouds and eventually ascend into Heaven. This concept refers mostly to the verse "*Nulla al mondo è che non possano i versi*" (239, 28).

A peculiar aspect of the colors used in the drawing is that the verse “*Voi ch’ascoltate in rime sparse il suono*” (1, 1), the very first line of the entire *Rvf*, included in the lower part of the picture as a symbol of the poet, should have been colored completely in red. Nonetheless, by attentively observing the drawing, one notices that the full verse is not written with normal characters, but rather represented as entwined with the knot and the serpent. There is a reason why these three components are eventually combined into one. This representation is the fruit of a question that recurred throughout the course: “Can one actually separate these three elements (Poet, Laura, Nature) in Petrarca’s *Rvf*?”. All the students agreed that to obtain a reliable picture of the entire *Rvf*, and not just part of it, we have to consider all these features not only independently, but also as a whole. In other words, without the figure of Laura the *Rvf* would lose its original meaning; at the same time, as we realized through the encoding of the poems, the omission of elements, such as the nature or the poet himself, leads to an incomplete picture of Petrarca’s masterpiece. Furthermore, we noticed that from each word sprout leaves. They are not just leaves, they are laurel leaves, and thus clearly refer to a constant allegory that Petrarca emphasizes with “*alloro/Laura*”. For this reason, the color, or colors, used are a combination of red, pink, and green. Red because the verse is one of the two symbols chosen for the poet (together with the knot), green because the laurel is a natural element connected to both the poet and Laura, and finally pink because the laurel is Laura and Petrarca’s verses are mostly, but not exclusively, inspired by her. It is possible to apply these criteria also for the color of the sky and the clouds. As we can see, both clouds and sky are predominantly blue, but also with undertones of pink.

In summary, the visual interpretation elaborated by our class emphasized the active role of the main protagonists of the *Rvf* while at the same time pointing to Petrarca’s humanism conceived as centered on the metamorphic process of becoming human through deep involvement with the natural vital forces of *natura parens*. Grifo’s miniatures centered on the garden and the serpent, both of which play an important role until the very last poems, in part triggered this interpretation. Even in poem 366 the *Canzone alla Vergine*, the garden still represents the necessary context of a projection toward eternity. While this poem affirms the power of poetry, it shows at the same time the poet’s awareness of its transient status as language involved in the process of *mutabilitas*.

## CONCLUSION

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

make it up are grasped as essences” (16). In other words, the relational nature of the part is reinforced through the distance/difference existing among different particulars. In this perspective the relativization of the parts transforms each of them as separate units in a mirror in which all the others reflect themselves. The reciprocal relation among all the units creates the comprehensive whole in which all of them partakes in different ways. Ultimately, these units work as Leibniz’ monads: each of them is unique and has at the same time the power of representation, by which it reflects all other monads in such a way that a seeing eye could, by looking into one monad, observe the whole mirrored therein (*Monadology*, 56).

The following scaled visualization of the thematic network elaborated by our class allows such a simultaneous and comprehensive synthesis.

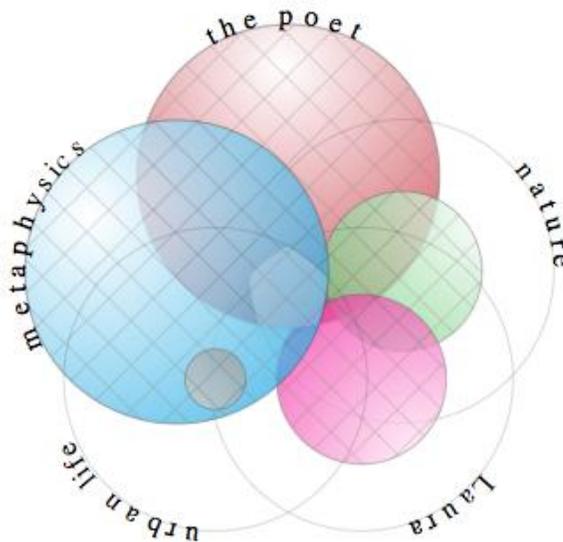


Figure 9- Overall Course scaled intersecting spheres

Our point of departure was found by considering the independence and autonomy of the individual poems. Digital close reading and encoding led us to identify their provisional discrete grouping in five major themes; these themes became the point of departure of an articulated reading strategy that privileged the active forces in the poems, the protagonists, the natural and historical settings, along with the metaphysical culture of Petrarca. As suggested by Kate Singer, in her article on [Digital Close Reading: TEI for Teaching Poetic Vocabularies](#), digital encoding was used in the classroom both as a method of teaching close reading and as a technology that helped to reconsider and challenge the terminology used in literary reading. By color-coding our readings we learned to develop interpretative language beyond the discursive and rhetorical terminology that somehow has become unable to register the synthesizing, visualizing, and outlining needs of reading in our digital time. The statistics of the thematic network created through encoding keywords and terms allowed a first visualization that revealed the qualitative and quantitative relation among the different protagonists of the *Rvf*. From this point of departure, we were able to conceive a distant reading that provided us with a comprehensive view of the *Rvf* based on the quantitative data of the thematic keywords extrapolated from all the poems in the collection. The statistical difference between close and distant reading revealed that while the distant reading produced results in line with those of traditional criticism, the close

reading via encoding triggered instead an interpretation of the *Rvf* conceived not as a static and finished reality around the subjectivities of the poet and Laura but rather as a relational structure in which all the parts are mirroring each other in multiple perspectives.

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

The digital reading produced by our class was the result of intense work, dialogues and discussions in which each individual and each group was a protagonist. The teacher had his own story to tell based on his ongoing research on the role of nature in Petrarca's poems. He was open to listening to all the other stories the students were inspired by their interaction with the material to tell. How many stories and readings of the *Rvf* were there in the class? At least five, one for each of the themes we considered and expressed at first in the drawing of the intersecting circles that include the main protagonist of Petrarca's *Rvf* (fig. 1). Those intersecting circles triggered students' interests in finding new themes and new relations among the different themes. On the one hand, some students were interested in studying the authorial voice of Petrarca and the role of Laura in the *Rvf*. On the other hand, some students were interested in studying how Petrarca's metaphysical culture inspires his poems. Other students developed an interest in studying Petrarca's relation to cities, urban and historical culture more generally. The class took in all these stories as they unfolded in our weekly meetings, in which each group had to present its close reading and encoding. In this way we rejected the idea that meaning is embedded solely in the text and avoided what is called textualism in favor of openness to reader response and to different textualities and intersemiotic renderings available in the hypertext OPOB. Reading in our class was conceived as an activity that combined individual and group work. The semantic encoding of the poems allowed us to ponder that the meaning of the poems rather than being simply imbedded in formal features is the result of the reader's interpretive strategy. To work in groups allowed the class to maximize the value of interpretive communities in looking for some agreement on the different meanings of texts. Thus, the most innovative results are related precisely to the group and collective dimension of our experiment.

Our digital reading and interpretation does not pretend or want to be "exemplary," since we believe that each act of reading is in some way always singular, original, and *sui generis*. In this perspective our encoding is not meant to introduce a fixed and stable layer to the text. As Buzzetti and McGann write, "to approach textuality in this way [that is, as susceptible to a definitive reading] is to approach it in illusion." They go on to say that "markup should be

conceived, instead, as the expression of a highly reflexive act, a mapping of text back onto itself;" and that "as soon as a (marked) text is (re) marked, the metamarkings open themselves to indeterminacy." (Buzzetti and McGann 2006, par. 49). It is clear that in this perspective quantitative reading can only be a tool of a digital reading of literary texts. Our reading and encoding may be considered as a groundwork for other layers of encoding that will be introduced in the near future in the OPOB. All acts of interpretation occur in some context or other; our context is the late print time or digital era in Western capitalist society in which there is an unprecedented abundance of textualities and images that we need to learn to master in order to preserve the cultural memory of the past while pursuing at the same time the humanist project in original ways. To this goal digital close reading, encoding and visualization may become fundamental tools available to an ethical reader aware that reading is not simply a cognitive and epistemological matter and that the new nature of reading in the digital era is characterized not only by hyper and pervasive attention but also by a deep involvement with the text.

Critics like J. Hillis Miller have promoted the notion of ethics of reading books and the importance of prosopoeias. Some of his ideas were reflected in our experience. He writes, "You can never be sure what is going to happen when someone in a particular situation reads a particular book," and that "reading is always the disconfirmation or modification of presupposed literary theory rather than its confirmation." (21) Reading in a digital context can be even more intricate, especially when you read with someone else and have to listen not only to the story supposedly told in the book but also to the stories told by other readers and editors of the text, even including the story told by the machine via a distant reading. From a theoretical point of view, our approach to reading and encoding the poems of the *Rvf* resisted both the quantitative and doxographic reduction of theory based on statistics and taxonomy of theoretical schools, in favor of a theoretical inquiry based on wonder in which there are still opportunities for the individual to tell his/her own story.

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## Appendix 1

Example of TEI encoding: poem 21, completed by Adrian Leon. We include first the color code:

## 21

Mille fiate o dolce mia guerrera  
 Per aver co' begli occhi vostri pace  
 V'aggio proferto il cor. M'a voi non piace  
 Mirar sì basso colla mente altera.

Et se di lui fors'altra donna spera,  
 Vive in speranza debile et fallace.  
 Mio perché sdegno ciò ch'a voi dispiace  
 Esser non può giamai così com'era.

Or s'io lo scaccio, et e' non trova in voi  
 Ne l'exilio infelice alcun soccorso,  
 Né sa star sol, né gire ov'altri il chiama,

Poria smarrire il suo natural corso.  
 Che grave colpa fia d'ambeduo noi,  
 Et tanto più de voi, quanto più v'ama.

TEI Code:

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

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

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

</lg><lg type="tercet"><l><rs type="poet">Or s' io lo scaccio</rs>, et e' non trova in voi</l>
```

<l>Ne l' exilio infelice alcun soccorso,</l>

<l><rs type="poet">Né sa star sol, né gire ov' altri il chiama</rs>,</l>

</lg><lg type="tercet"><l>Poria smarrire il suo <seg an="metaphysics">natural  
corso</seg>.</l>

<l>Che grave colpa fia <rs type="Laura">d' ambeduo noi</rs>,</l>

<l><rs type="Laura">Et tanto piú de voi</rs>, <rs type="poet">quanto piú v' ama</rs>.</l>  
</lg>

## APPENDIX 2

The statistics of the thematic distant reading poem by poem.

Poem #	Nature	Mphys	Poet	Mphos	Laura	Urban
1	0	3	7	1	0	0
2	1	1	1	1	2	1
3	0	3	4	3	6	0
4	2	8	0	1	3	3
5	2	1	5	0	2	0
6	2	3	6	3	7	0
7	3	4	0	2	1	0
8	1	5	1	4	5	0
9	1	3	1	1	7	0
10	6	6	2	2	3	0
11	0	3	5	4	7	0
12	0	3	8	3	3	0
13	0	4	1	1	9	1
14	0	5	4	2	5	0
15	2	1	5	0	3	0
16	0	5	1	2	3	1
17	1	1	6	2	6	0
18	0	4	7	9	7	0
19	2	3	3	3	5	0
20	0	2	4	1	2	0
21	0	2	12	1	5	0
22	22	13	10	33	7	1
23	17	24	59	27	33	1
24	1	4	3	1	3	0
25	0	3	3	2	2	0
26	2	2	1	1	2	0
27	0	0	0	0	3	2
28	7	22	6	11	17	1
29	2	8	19	8	22	0
30	19	16	11	14	25	0
31	0	5	1	5	6	0
32	1	2	4	2	2	0
33	1	1	2	1	2	0
34	3	2	2	3	3	0
35	4	1	6	2	3	0
36	2	4	9	2	3	0
37	5	21	45	15	29	0
38	4	5	6	2	2	0
39	0	4	7	2	2	0
40	0	4	5	1	1	1

41	1	3	1	4	3	0
42	1	1	0	3	2	0
43	1	3	3	3	4	1
44	1	1	1	1	2	0
45	3	3	4	0	4	0
46	2	2	4	1	2	0
47	2	4	8	6	6	0
48	3	1	0	1	6	0
49	0	1	8	1	2	0
50	9	11	12	9	13	0
51	0	1	6	3	5	0
52	2	0	1	2	1	0
53	5	17	11	5	10	7
54	3	1	4	2	3	0
55	2	2	6	2	8	0
56	0	3	7	3	1	1
57	1	4	2	2	5	0
58	1	4	5	1	1	0
59	1	3	8	2	7	0
60	1	3	4	3	4	0
61	1	4	8	3	8	0
62	0	5	5	2	3	0
63	0	2	3	5	6	0
64	4	0	0	0	4	0
65	1	6	6	2	2	0
66	24	13	7	3	4	0
67	3	2	2	2	2	0
68	1	3	2	3	1	0
69	2	3	3	0	1	0
70	4	9	21	6	9	0
71	0	1	7	2	4	0
72	5	13	34	13	19	0
73	5	16	40	16	24	1
74	1	2	4	2	3	0
75	2	3	5	1	8	0
76	0	1	5	1	3	0
77	1	1	3	1	5	0
78	0	3	4	1	3	0
79	1	2	7	5	7	0
80	2	4	17	15	3	0
81	0	3	14	0	0	0
82	2	1	5	0	3	0
83	0	1	7	1	2	0
84	0	3	1	1	3	0
85	0	2	4	4	7	0
86	0	4	4	3	3	0

87	0	1	4	1	4	0
88	0	3	6	3	4	0
89	0	1	4	2	3	0
90	1	4	1	4	5	0
91	0	4	3	3	9	0
92	0	3	5	2	2	0
93	0	2	7	1	4	0
94	0	0	3	2	2	0
95	0	4	6	3	5	0
96	0	1	8	1	5	0
97	1	4	6	2	6	0
98	0	2	1	1	1	0
99	2	2	1	1	1	0
100	2	3	4	3	6	0
101	0	3	4	1	4	1
102	0	1	3	0	1	0
103	0	4	5	2	3	0
104	2	2	4	0	2	0
105	6	10	33	8	17	0
106	2	3	5	3	3	0
107	4	2	8	4	3	0
108	2	1	5	3	3	0
109	5	0	3	3	8	0
110	1	2	8	2	4	0
111	0	3	7	2	6	0
112	1	2	5	2	3	0
113	3	1	6	4	9	0
114	1	3	6	4	3	0
115	0	3	4	1	3	0
116	2	1	5	2	8	0
117	3	1	4	1	5	1
118	0	2	9	3	3	0
119	3	21	49	19	37	0
120	0	2	8	1	0	1
121	2	2	1	0	3	0
122	1	1	6	3	4	0
123	1	1	3	0	4	0
124	1	3	7	2	3	0
125	12	5	19	4	20	0
126	9	6	11	5	22	0
127	11	14	48	21	34	0
128	9	19	17	11	14	0
129	15	13	18	12	23	1
130	0	4	3	2	3	0
131	0	1	2	1	3	0
132	1	3	10	1	5	0

133	4	7	6	8	13	0
134	2	5	11	4	4	0
135	12	23	28	26	24	0
136	2	3	0	1	1	0
137	1	5	7	2	2	1
138	0	1	1	0	0	1
139	2	3	4	0	2	0
140	0	1	4	0	3	0
141	0	3	6	5	6	0
142	24	14	5	28	8	0
143	1	0	8	1	9	0
144	2	4	3	2	5	0
145	7	1	3	3	1	0
146	0	4	4	3	7	0
147	1	1	2	1	5	0
148	6	3	2	2	4	0
149	0	3	4	2	5	0
150	2	0	5	0	10	1
151	1	2	7	2	5	0
152	0	0	10	2	6	0
153	2	5	3	4	4	0
154	3	3	0	5	5	0
155	0	3	4	0	2	0
156	5	5	3	4	3	0
157	1	1	1	2	4	0
158	0	3	2	3	8	0
159	3	2	3	2	13	0
160	2	1	3	3	6	0
161	2	2	4	1	6	0
162	8	3	2	4	8	0
163	0	3	9	5	5	0
164	3	7	10	4	7	0
165	3	4	3	5	7	0
166	2	2	3	1	1	0
167	1	4	7	4	7	0
168	0	2	13	2	5	0
169	0	1	4	1	7	0
170	1	2	14	3	6	0
171	1	0	11	0	4	0
172	0	3	10	3	5	0
173	1	1	1	0	3	0
174	1	2	6	3	7	0
175	1	8	9	6	7	0
176	6	4	6	3	5	0
177	1	3	4	3	3	0
178	1	5	6	3	3	0

179	0	2	4	3	6	0
180	4	2	1	5	2	0
181	2	2	0	2	5	0
182	2	2	2	5	5	1
183	1	3	5	3	8	0
184	2	1	2	2	7	0
185	3	2	1	2	5	0
186	1	3	6	3	2	0
187	0	2	2	2	4	0
188	4	10	5	5	9	0
189	3	1	3	2	2	0
190	4	3	4	4	4	0
191	2	2	3	2	7	0
192	4	1	1	3	5	0
193	1	4	2	2	5	0
194	3	3	6	4	4	0
195	3	3	6	5	8	0
196	2	2	0	3	7	0
197	3	3	4	3	11	0
198	1	2	4	5	5	0
199	1	6	4	3	3	0
200	0	2	1	2	6	0
201	0	2	6	2	3	0
202	2	3	7	3	7	0
203	1	1	11	1	11	0
204	0	2	3	2	3	0
205	0	2	6	1	18	0
206	3	7	15	6	18	0
207	8	13	38	19	19	0
208	6	4	1	4	7	0
209	0	1	8	0	3	0
210	1	3	2	3	4	0
211	1	0	8	0	6	0
212	3	5	2	8	6	0
213	0	2	0	0	4	0
214	3	4	13	11	6	0
215	2	0	1	4	4	0
216	3	7	7	6	3	0
217	3	2	7	3	7	0
218	8	6	3	5	6	0
219	2	1	3	5	2	0
220	2	4	3	2	7	0
221	0	2	8	1	5	0
222	0	4	3	4	8	0
223	5	3	4	11	7	0
224	2	1	2	0	5	0

225	0	4	2	3	1	0
226	2	6	5	5	5	0
227	1	1	5	3	3	0
228	3	2	1	0	5	0
229	0	1	5	1	4	0
230	3	6	4	4	4	0
231	1	9	7	3	2	0
232	0	1	0	2	1	0
233	1	4	8	2	5	0
234	0	1	7	2	1	0
235	4	1	6	1	1	0
236	1	4	7	0	7	0
237	25	5	10	23	10	2
238	1	1	1	11	3	0
239	18	11	13	11	24	0
240	0	1	10	2	4	0
241	1	13	1	1	5	0
242	1	4	6	3	6	0
243	3	3	3	0	5	0
244	0	11	7	1	4	0
245	0	2	0	2	4	1
246	2	6	3	5	9	0
247	1	1	3	1	4	0
248	2	6	4	4	8	0
249	0	1	5	2	3	0
250	1	1	3	1	4	0
251	1	3	3	4	4	0
252	1	4	5	3	4	0
253	0	2	6	3	6	0
254	1	4	16	4	5	0
255	3	2	1	3	0	0
256	1	1	6	2	8	0
257	2	3	2	3	4	0
258	1	1	3	1	3	0
259	4	2	10	2	5	1
260	1	2	2	1	5	0
261	0	5	4	0	6	0
262	0	3	3	4	5	0
263	0	2	3	1	4	0
264	3	29	39	22	23	0
265	2	4	3	4	4	0
266	2	3	15	2	7	0
267	0	4	4	3	7	1
268	4	12	30	12	28	0
269	2	3	7	3	6	0
270	11	22	33	20	35	0

271	3	3	4	2	8	0
272	0	1	6	2	3	0
273	2	3	2	1	4	0
274	0	5	6	4	5	0
275	1	3	6	4	4	0
276	1	2	5	3	5	0
277	1	3	1	9	3	0
278	3	2	8	1	7	0
279	4	3	6	3	5	0
280	8	7	5	1	3	0
281	5	3	4	3	5	0
282	1	2	5	2	4	0
283	0	2	10	3	6	0
284	0	3	4	2	9	0
285	1	3	3	2	6	0
286	2	1	6	2	6	0
287	0	2	5	4	2	0
288	10	1	3	1	6	0
289	0	3	5	2	8	0
290	2	7	9	2	7	0
291	3	2	8	2	5	0
292	1	1	5	3	2	0
293	0	1	11	1	2	0
294	2	2	5	3	8	0
295	0	2	3	2	5	0
296	0	2	5	2	7	0
297	0	4	2	1	6	1
298	2	2	10	6	4	0
299	0	3	5	5	7	0
300	1	3	7	2	5	0
301	6	2	7	1	4	0
302	1	0	7	2	3	0
303	6	4	3	2	2	0
304	1	1	3	2	3	0
305	4	3	4	3	6	0
306	2	7	9	4	5	0
307	2	4	10	2	5	1
308	0	2	4	3	2	0
309	0	7	4	3	4	0
310	6	4	0	1	3	0
311	3	2	8	4	3	0
312	2	2	1	2	3	0
313	3	2	5	7	6	0
314	0	1	4	1	7	0
315	1	4	8	3	5	0
316	0	4	3	4	2	0

317	0	2	3	1	4	0
318	5	3	1	4	3	0
319	1	3	2	3	3	0
320	4	3	8	4	6	0
321	2	5	5	8	5	0
322	1	3	7	3	4	0
323	16	18	8	15	18	0
324	0	1	5	3	8	0
325	15	24	26	15	33	0
326	1	6	5	6	4	0
327	2	5	6	7	14	0
328	0	3	9	3	2	0
329	0	0	7	5	2	0
330	0	4	6	2	4	0
331	6	16	24	14	17	0
332	1	21	43	22	32	0
333	4	5	6	2	3	0
334	0	3	3	1	6	0
335	1	4	1	0	5	0
336	0	0	3	2	2	1
337	6	4	5	2	6	0
338	1	7	6	4	5	0
339	0	5	3	3	5	0
340	1	6	8	2	2	0
341	0	5	7	4	6	0
342	1	3	4	2	1	0
343	1	2	5	2	4	0
344	1	4	8	3	4	0
345	0	0	6	1	4	0
346	0	2	3	4	2	0
347	1	3	4	3	6	0
348	0	3	5	3	8	0
349	2	1	8	1	2	0
350	1	3	2	7	4	0
351	0	2	3	1	1	0
352	3	6	2	5	11	0
353	4	3	2	5	2	0
354	0	7	3	1	6	0
355	1	4	2	6	4	0
356	1	1	5	1	5	0
357	0	6	7	6	2	0
358	0	7	6	7	9	0
359	8	15	21	7	20	0
360	9	23	37	17	35	4
361	3	3	7	1	5	0
362	1	1	5	1	2	0

363	1	4	7	2	4	0
364	1	4	7	1	3	0
365	0	4	5	1	2	0
366	12	37	29	17	33	0
Total	848	1502	2433	1361	2253	42
Most	21	22	174	31	117	1

Appendix 3



Figure 8: Drawing



Details of fig. 8 with Petrarca's verses  
[Back to the text](#)