
CHAPTER THREE

PETRARCH'S DAMNED POETRY AND THE POETICS OF EXCLUSION • *Rime disperse*

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Compared with other works, Petrarch's uncollected Italian poems, known as the *Rime disperse*, have received little critical attention. This is due no doubt in large part to the ambiguous canonical status of many of the poems. Countless poems, primarily sonnets, are attributed to Petrarch in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuscripts, and a large number of these attributions are suspect when not evidently erroneous. With good cause, scholars have therefore concentrated on the poems that we know for certain are Petrarch's, either those included in the *Canzoniere* or those select few that are extraneous to it but have survived in his autograph papers. This conservative approach runs the risk, however, of complicity in the reproduction of Petrarch's authorizing (and deauthorizing) strategies. In other words, what gets lost in the shuffle of unanthologized Petrarchan and pseudo-Petrarchan poems are the motives behind the poet's process of inclusion and exclusion, why he saved certain poems while condemning others to oblivion or at least to "dubious" canonical status. Yet an examination of various extant poems most likely written by Petrarch does reveal one conspicuous reason why he might have dispersed them: their overdetermined contexts. While the linguistic and narrative parameters of the *Canzoniere* aim at transcending any specific time and place, the *disperse* reveal Petrarch's inescapable historicity and the role of his works within a determined political and social arena.

We know from Petrarch's own letters and marginal notes that not all of his vernacular poetry was intended for inclusion in the final version of the *Canzoniere*, the autograph Vaticano Latino 3195. In a letter to Pandolfo Malatesta accompanying one of the public redactions of the *Canzoniere* (*Variae* 9 or version γ of *Seniles* 13.11), Petrarch discusses the process of revision and selection that informs the collection:

I still have here with me, written on ancient slips of paper, numerous other vernacular poems of this kind. Consumed with age, they can be read only with great difficulty. When I happen to have a day of leisure I draw forth from these old slips one component or another, almost as a diversion from work—but rarely. I therefore instructed that ample blank space be left at the end of both parts so that if this should happen, there would be enough space to accommodate these new compositions.¹

The remnants of this large personal archive of early vernacular poems provides an important source for what we currently refer to as the *disperse*, poems that for one reason or another are not currently included in Vaticano Latino 3195. In large part, exclusion from the *Canzoniere* no doubt depended on constraints of time and space. At a certain point and for a variety of reasons, Petrarch seems to have fixed the number of possible components at 366, although even as late as 1373 he substituted the madrigal “O vedi, Amor, che giovenetta donna” for the excised *ballata* “Donna mi vène spesso ne la mente,” thus creating one of the most important *disperse*.² And the reference to the importance of blank space mentioned in the letter to Malatesta suggests that a work we typically treat only in its crystallized and final form remained for many years a work-in-progress. In addition to the limits of the human life span and the formal, numerological confines of the *Canzoniere*, many poems seem to have remained archived based on stylistic concerns and questions of content. A marginal note to the sonnet “Voglia mi sprona, Amor mi guida et scorge” (*RVF* 211) in Petrarch’s autograph working papers, the so-called *codice degli abbozzi* (Vat. Lat. 3196, fig. 2), illustrates these conscious acts of inclusion and exclusion while suggestively evoking Christian salvation: “Friday, June 22, 1369, 11 at night: Amazing. Rereading by chance this crossed out and condemned poem, after many years, I immediately absolved and transcribed it in order, despite . . .” (here Petrarch inserts an oval intersected by two horizontal lines meeting at an acute angle, apparently the sign for exclusion from the anthology).³ This nonverbal mark of rejection (fig. 3), this intersected oval separating the damned from the saved, with Petrarch playing confessor to his own confessions, is crucial for understanding the place of the *disperse* among the poet’s works. As we shall see, when Petrarch decided to save certain poems or damn others, he automatically changed the function and significance of both.⁴

Besides Petrarch’s own guarded papers, another important source for the *disperse* are the poems that were copied, circulated, and anthologized within Petrarch’s own lifetime. In the letter sent to Pandolfo Malatesta

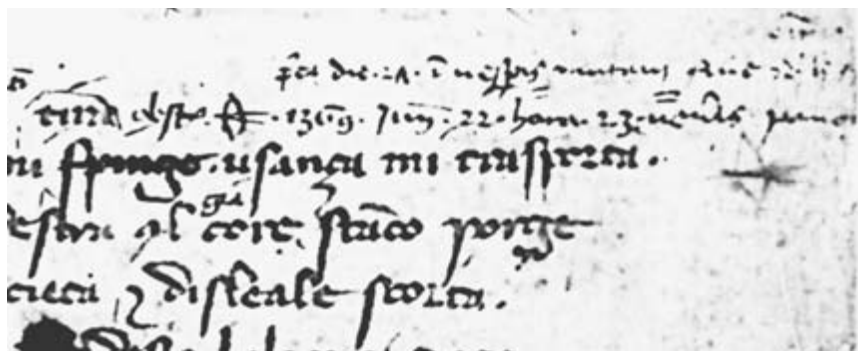


Fig. 3. Petrarch, *Codice degli abbrozzi* (detail). MS Vat. Lat. 3196, fol. 5r. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vatican City. Detail with Petrarch's symbol of exclusion in right margin of earlier version of "Amor mi sprona" and in an annotation (before date 1369) describing his decision not to reject the poem.

cited above, revised for inclusion in the *Seniles*, the poet adds the following revealing comments about the material public reception of his texts:

At this age, I confess, I observe with reluctance the youthful trifles that I would like to be unknown to all, including me, if it were possible. For while the talent of that age may emerge in any style whatsoever, still the subject matter does not become the gravity of old age. But what can I do? Now they have all circulated among the multitude, and are being read more willingly than what I later wrote in earnest for sounder minds. How then could I deny you, so great a man and so kind to me and pressing for them with such eagerness, what the multitude possesses and mangles against my wishes.⁵

What is especially striking about this passage is that the formation of the *Canzoniere* at this late date is justified implicitly by the *disperse* themselves, understood broadly as poems circulating in forms that the author would himself reject. It is better to collect and selectively publish these "youthful trifles" (*iuveniles ineptias*) if only to counter their unregulated dissemination and corrupt reproduction. Petrarch's anxiety about the public possession and mishandling of his *rime*—"vulgus habet et lacerat"—is in fact a commonplace in his correspondence. With his peer Boccaccio, he notes in horror in *Familiare* 22.15 how Dante's texts have been corrupted and torn

apart by an oral transmission, “scripta eius pronuntiando lacerant atque corrumpunt”⁶ while in *Seniles* 5.2 he even cedes authorial rites to those short poems dispersed (“sparsa”) among the crowds (“non mea amplius sed vulgi potius facta essent,” they are no longer my property but rather belong to the masses). And as is clear from a letter to Giovanni d’Arezzo (*Seniles* 13.4),⁷ Petrarch was also well aware of and worried about the written transmission and collection of his texts—especially those unauthorized anthologies of unrevised poems that competed with, and, I would argue, informed his authentic self-anthology. Yet these unauthorized anthologies also created an important tradition of *disperse*, most notably the so-called “raccolta veneta” originating, according to Annarosa Cavedon, in a collection put together by one of Petrarch’s most important correspondents, Antonio da Ferrara.⁸

Many of the questions and problems surrounding Petrarch’s uncollected poems can be articulated as the tension between these two poles, these two typologies of *disperse*: on the one hand, poems deriving from Petrarch’s private archive and autograph papers; on the other, poems attributed to Petrarch in the vast manuscript tradition, a tradition built around a core corpus of authentic poems which circulated in the poet’s own lifetime.⁹ The problems raised by this division of Petrarch’s uncollected rhymes are first and foremost philological and textual, as evident in the standard editions. Angelo Solerti’s seminal edition of the *Disperse*, first published in 1909, collects 214 possible compositions. The most recent authoritative edition, by Laura Paulino, includes only twenty-one *Rime estravaganti*. Between these two violently contrasting canons, between Solerti’s *Disperse* and Paulino’s *Estravaganti*, what is a scholar to do? Although the contributors to this volume have been asked to answer the question, What is it? in relation to Petrarch’s work, this cannot be answered without simultaneously asking the very difficult question, Which is it? Textual criticism and literary interpretation are inseparable here as elsewhere.¹⁰

The all-inclusive nature of Solerti’s editorial project in *Rime disperse di Francesco Petrarca* is clear from its subtitle: “o a lui attribuite” (or attributed to him). In fact, the six sections of the edition move from greatest certainty of Petrarchan authorship under the heading “Rime disperse from autographs or apographs” to the least in the last section, “poems by other authors sometimes attributed to Petrarch.” Without a more philologically rigorous apparatus, without any sort of manuscript tree, the scholar maneuvers in this sea of often distinctly mediocre poems at his or her own risk. And the various attempts at distinguishing Petrarch from pseudo-Petrarch based on internal evidence have suffered from inconsistencies and

arbitrariness.¹¹ Yet Solerti's edition remains an invaluable resource because it illustrates the omnipresence of Petrarch in fourteenth and fifteenth-century Italy and the power of his name alone to legitimize a poem or collection of poems.

Given the vast and often unreliable manuscript tradition and the ensuing uncertainty of identifying a Petrarch among countless imitators and impostors, most recent critics have limited their investigations to the conservative selection of texts represented in the Paolino edition. The edition relies primarily on two codices, the autograph Vaticano Latino 3196 (*codice degli abbozzi*) and the Casanatense 924, a fifteenth-century deluxe edition of the *Canzoniere* and *Trionfi* in which a sixteenth-century humanist, probably from Pietro Bembo's entourage, has added marginal notes and *disperse* culled from a no longer extant Petrarchan autograph.¹² Paolino's selective canon also includes some of Petrarch's better known correspondences along with a few poems universally attributed to him in early manuscripts, such as the *canzone* to Azzo da Correggio, "Quel ch'à nostra natura in sé più degno."

While the frequent calls for caution in establishing the corpus of uncollected poems are justified, it is important to recognize to what extent our current expectations of authenticity and autograph proof regarding the *disperse* result from the poet's own efforts and innovations. In his autograph pages Petrarch treats these "damned" poems with the same attention to textual and contextual detail as he does the "saved" ones, revising, recopying, cross-referencing, and annotating the date, time, place, and circumstances of their composition and revision. In this way, he turns the very labor of writing, the consecrated presence of the author's hand, into a guarantee of authenticity, and subsequent nonautograph manuscript collections of his work will often reproduce such paratextual elements in order to appear similarly legitimate. As we have seen, even today scholars are wary of accepting any work not stemming from Petrarch's autograph papers, any poem that was out of his direct material control, truly dispersed—a clear mark of Petrarch's success in asserting his vernacular authority.

The tension between private autograph and public manuscript tradition brings us back to the question of why Petrarch excluded certain poems from the *Canzoniere* in the first place, the motives behind that peculiar oval symbol accompanying an early version of "Voglia mi sprona." As I anticipated above, a primary reason for the damnation of the *disperse* seems to be their ineluctable historicity, in particular their occasional nature: the corpus of *disperse* includes a surprising number of sonnet exchanges or *tenzoni* with contemporary minor poets such as Sennuccio del Bene, Antonio

Beccari da Ferrara, Pietro Dietisalvi, and the count Ricciardo da Bagno. Indeed, a decisive eighteen of the twenty-one poems in the Paolino edition are written to or for others. Two sonnets, “Tal cavalier tutta una schiera atterra” and “Quella che gli animal’ del mondo atterra,” treating the theme of revenge, appear written at the behest of Petrarch’s patron Cardinal Giovanni Colonna (“responsio mea, domino iubente,” a reply of mine, the lord commanding, and “alia responsio mea, domino materiam dante e iubente,” another reply of mine, the lord providing subject matter and commanding, according to marginal notes). And three sonnets written expressly to fulfill the request of the musician Confortino confirm the poet’s contention in *Seniles* 5.2 that his vernacular pieces were sought after and highly marketable.¹³

Even a preliminary examination of the *disperse* reveals a Petrarch surprisingly involved in the exchanges, performances, and contingent and ephemeral functions of poetry that typify the northern courts of fourteenth-century Italy. In these poems, the social and communicative aspects of the poet’s lyrics still dominate; he corresponds in them with a poetic community and he appeases his patrons. If the Petrarch of the *Canzoniere* is truly, according to Bosco, “senza storia” (without history),¹⁴ his uncollected poems are undeniably in time, traveling across geographical space to specific intended readers. And the specific dates, locales, and circumstances annotated in the *codice degli abbozzi*—both for actual *disperse* and for those poems that will eventually be “absolved”—stand in sharp contrast with the diegetic and calendrical time of the *Canzoniere*. Indeed, considering the amount of criticism dedicated to the temporal structures of the *Rime sparse*, it is worth considering how the universalizing chronotopes of the *Canzoniere* potentially respond to the historicized time and place of the *disperse*. In the end, the formal and thematic obsession with time in the *Canzoniere* has the odd effect of removing the work from history, at least from the history of what the collection excludes.

At the same time, the border separating the *Canzoniere* from the *disperse* is not always intact. For example, at the time of the so-called Correggio redaction (roughly 1356–58), 38 of the 171 compositions are directed at interlocutors other than Laura, or roughly 23 percent of the entire collection.¹⁵ This form of the anthology is much more choral and communicative, engaged with contemporary historical figures and extratextual events. In a sense, the history of the *Canzoniere* as a book can be expressed as a gradual dilution of the epistolary and historical elements of the Correggio form, a movement away from the occasional nature that also informs the *disperse*. Indeed, if we omit the laments for the dead, of the nearly two hundred

poems added to later forms, only four are addressed to external historical figures. Yet despite this steady process of dehistoricization at the level of theme and content, physical redactions of the collection continued to circulate and enjoy a public reception throughout Petrarch's life; as Michele Feo reminds us, many more versions of the *Canzoniere* were published than we are currently aware of.¹⁶ If we only treat the *Canzoniere* as a private, never-changing work, we miss its purchase in time, the significance of its being sent to such important political figures as Pandolfo Malatesta, lord in the Marches, and Azzo da Correggio, lord of Parma. The *disperse* thus help us recover the occasional nature of the *Canzoniere* as well, its status as a contextualized verbal act. Just as Petrarch sent the *dispersa* "Quel ch' à nostra natura" in 1341 to Azzo da Correggio, in 1356 he sent him an early version of the *Canzoniere*.

The *canzone* to Azzo da Correggio is in fact one of the most revealing cases of Petrarch's *disperse*. Written during a period of intense and mutual exchange between the poet and what one historian has labeled "the worst bandit of his era,"¹⁷ the poem unabashedly celebrates Azzo's forceful takeover of Parma from Alberto and Mastino Della Scala in May 1341, depicting it as a republican victory over tyranny and comparing Azzo to Cato in his zeal for liberty. Petrarch's friendship with Azzo likely began in 1337 in Avignon, when, in the presence of Benedict XII and on behalf of Azzo, he defended the forced exile of the bishop of Parma Ugolino Rossi and the illegal seizure of his possessions. In 1341, the two friends and professional allies traveled together to see King Robert of Naples—Azzo to enlist the king's help in conquering Parma, Petrarch in search of the laurel wreath. According to Boccaccio, it was Azzo who facilitated the meeting between king and poet. Azzo accompanied Petrarch to his coronation in Rome, and the two returned to Parma, both victorious in their respective fields. Petrarch's success in this moment, his cherished laurel crown, is inevitably linked to Azzo, and he seems to acknowledge as much in the word play on the latter's name in the *canzone*, expressed as COR REGIO (regal heart), recalling the kind of paronomasia we are used to associating with the name of Laura.

Yet Petrarch excluded the *canzone* to Azzo da Correggio from the Correggio redaction and from all subsequent forms of the *Canzoniere*. Instead, he includes a *canzone* to Italy, "Italia mia" (*RVF* 128). Set in 1344–45, the topic of the poem is, once again, a violent battle for control of Parma among warring aristocratic families, including the Visconti, Este, Gonzaga, and Correggio factions. But in this Dantean lament against the evils of civil strife, Petrarch portrays himself as above the fray, politically neutral, *super partes*.¹⁸ He writes: "per ver dire, / non per odio d'altrui né per

disprezzo" (I am speaking to tell the truth, not from hatred or scorn of anyone [128.63–64]). The inclusion of "Italia mia" in the *Correggio* and the exclusion of "Quel ch' à nostra natura" are often reasonably explained by pointing to Petrarch's new patrons, the Visconti, with whom Azzo had a politically contentious relationship. Yet I would suggest that Petrarch's socially embedded position in the *dispersa*, regardless of its political content, necessitates its exclusion from the anthology. As part of an act of self-fashioning in the northern Italian courts, the *Canzoniere* cannot contradict the humanist trope of Petrarch's intellectual and political independence. Yet while Petrarch did not write "Quel ch' à nostra natura" at the behest of his lord ("domino iubente") strictly speaking, he does little to hide its propagandist elements; instead of originating in literary solitude, this *canzone* to Azzo explicitly boasts of being born away from books and in the midst of arms, "lunge da' libri nata in mezzo l'arme" (113).

Despite the different status, nature, and function of Petrarch's uncollected poems, scholars typically treat the *disperse* as the *Canzoniere*'s ugly little sister, searching for stylistic flaws to explain why the poems didn't make the cut. Certain *disperse* are studied more than others only because they are seen as influences on or early versions of perfected later forms found in the *Canzoniere*. No doubt many poems were further refined for inclusion in Vaticano Latino 3195, but a purely evolutionary perspective risks obfuscating the differentiated social roles of *rime sparse* and *rime disperse*, and why the former were deemed worthy of further refinement while the latter were eventually abandoned or condemned. Especially when they form part of correspondences or exchanges, the uncollected poems obey different rules, norms, and conventions and, as we shall see, are more concerned with participating in a literary conversation than with constructing an authorial lyric voice.¹⁹ The discrete social and generic constraints guiding the uncollected poems should also be taken into consideration when evaluating individual *disperse* for entry into Petrarch's official canon, in order to better understand what might or might not be Petrarch. With these stakes in mind, I will briefly discuss a group of poems that not only challenges the traditional hierarchy between the *disperse* and the *Canzoniere*, but even the potential directionality of influence between them.

The *disperse* "Si mi fan risentire a l'aura sparsi" and "Quella ghirlanda che la bella fronte" are both written for Sennuccio del Bene, Petrarch's most important poetic correspondent within and without the *Canzoniere*.

Sennuccio's family were high-ranking members in Florence's powerful Calimala (woolworkers) guild, and documentary evidence shows that Sennuccio's father, a wealthy and politically influential merchant, knew and had used the services of Petrarch's father, the notary Ser Petracco.²⁰ When an exiled Sennuccio arrived in Avignon around 1313, the groundwork for his friendship with Petrarch would have already been laid by family ties and similar political fortunes.

More important for our purposes, Sennuccio was also an accomplished poet in Italian, writing in a late stilnovist vein, and his exchanges with Petrarch form the basis of a sophisticated literary friendship. At least six poems in the *Canzoniere* and three *disperse* are addressed to Sennuccio, and two of Sennuccio's extant poems are addressed to Petrarch.²¹ In these poems, Sennuccio emerges as the privileged and almost sole witness to Petrarch's love story, sharing the wondrous vision of Laura at a meeting among the three in "Quella ghirlanda che la bella fronte," asked to intervene with her on his friend's behalf in "Aventuroso più d'altro terreno" (*Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* 108), and asked to wake up Petrarch if he sees Laura first in "Sì come il padre del folle Fetonte." The poetic friendship is sealed by a literary signature distinguishing the poems exchanged between the two, the rare identification of Laura either as the dawn, *l'aurora*, or, even more strikingly, as simply "Laura," sans wordplay or homonym.²²

Although no response exists for the first *dispersa* in question, "Sì mi fan risentire a l'aura sparsi," the manuscript tradition universally identifies it as directed at Sennuccio:

Sì mi fan risentire a l'aura sparsi
i mille e dolci nodi in fin a l'arco,
che dormendo e vegghiando ora non varco
che la mia fantasia possa acquetarsi.

Or veggio lei di novi atti adornarsi,
cinger l'arco e 'l turcasso e farsi al varco
e sagittarmi, or vo d'amor sì carico
che 'l dolce peso non porria stimarsi.

Poi mi ricordo di Venus iddea,
qual Virgilio descrisse 'n sua figura,
e parmi Laura in quell'atto vedere
or pietosa ver' me, or farsi rea:
io vergognoso e 'n atto di paura
quasi smarrir per forza di piacere.

[So much do the thousands of sweet curls scattered to the horizon resound to me, that sleeping and watching, there is no way that my fantasy can quiet itself.

First I see her adorn herself with a new guise, donning the bow and quiver and moving to a place from which to shoot me with her arrow, then I go so full of love that its sweet burden cannot be measured.

Then I recall the image of Venus, the goddess as Virgil describes her, and I seem to see in her the figure of Laura.

First she shows pity for me, and then she seems cruel; and ashamed and afraid, I almost faint under the force of so much pleasure.]

The image of Laura in the quatrains is characteristic of Petrarch's poetic "grammar" and would not be unfamiliar to contemporaries; she is described as a huntress, with bow and arrow, her hair flowing in the breeze with characteristic wordplay on her name and the breeze, *l'aura*. This visual recollection torments Petrarch's imagination and subsequently triggers, in the *terzine*, a textual recollection of Venus disguised as a huntress as she appears to Aeneas (*Aeneid* 1.318–19). Several scholars have cited the explicitness of this Venus-Laura simile as evidence of the imperfection and immaturity of the poem.²⁵

In addition, the heavy-handedness and repetition of the *dispersa* are seen as contributing to its exclusion from the *Canzoniere* in lieu of the similar, but improved sonnet "Né così bello il sol già mai levarsi" (*Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* 144):

Né così bello il sol già mai levarsi
 quando 'l ciel fosse più de nebbia scarco,
 né dopo pioggia vidi 'l celeste arco
 per l'aere in color' tanti variarsi,
 in quanti fiammeggiando trasformarsi,
 nel dì ch'io presi l'amoroso incarco,
 quel viso al quale, et son del mio dir parco,
 nulla cosa mortal pote aguagliarsi.

I' vidi Amor che' begli occhi volgea
 soave sì, ch'ogni altra vista oscura
 da indi in qua m'incominciò apparere.

Sennuccio, i' 'l vidi, et l'arco che tendea,
 tal che mia vita poi non fu sicura,
 et è sì vaga anchor del rivedere.

[I never saw the sun rise so fair when the sky is most free of mist, nor after a rain the heavenly arc diversify itself through the air with so many colors, as on the day when I took on my burden of love, I saw her face flaming transform itself, which—and I am sparing of words—no mortal thing can equal. I saw Love moving her lovely eyes so gently that every other sight from then on began to seem dark to me, Sennuccio, I saw him and the bow he was drawing, so that afterward my life was no longer free of care and still yearns to see him again.]

The two compositions are linked by shared rhymes, the placement of verb infinitives as verse endings, and the repeated use of *arco* both in rhyme position and within the verse. As in the *dispersa*, the main theme in “Né così bello il sol” is the continuing power of an initial vision of Laura. But in the *Canzoniere* poem the memorial image is pushed farther into the past, emphasized by the perfect verb tenses, especially the thrice-repeated “vidi, vidi, vidi” (I saw, I saw, I saw; [lines 3, 9, 12]). The supernatural nature of Laura, moreover, “nulla cosa mortal” (no mortal thing; [l. 8]) is left to speak for itself, without the explicit comparison to Virgil’s Venus.

If this were all, the two poems could serve, as they often have, as an interesting example of *variantistica* (the study of textual variants). When viewed in these terms, “Si mi fan risentire” would at best lose the stylistic prize to *Rerum vulgariarum fragmenta* 144; at worst it could be reasonably excluded from Petrarch’s canon as an inferior, even slavish, appropriation of some of the most well-known Petrarchan images and phrases.²⁴ The relationship is complicated, however, when we examine both poems in light of “Erano i capei d’oro a l’aura sparsi” (90):

Erano i capei d’oro a l’aura sparsi
 che ’n mille dolci nodi gli avolgea,
 e ’l vago lume oltra misura ardea
 di quei begli occhi ch’or ne son sì scarsi;
 e ’l viso di pietosi color’ farsi,
 non so se vero o falso, mi pareo:
 i’ che l’ésca amorosa al petto avea,
 qual meraviglia se di sùbito arsi?
 Non era l’andar suo cosa mortale,
 ma d’angelica forma, et le parole

sonavan altro, che pur voce humana:
 uno spirto celeste, un vivo sole
 fu quel ch' i' vidi; et se non fosse or tale,
 piagha per allentar d'arco non sana.

[Her golden hair was loosed to the breeze, which turned it in a thousand sweet knots, and the lovely light burned without measure in her eyes, which are now so stingy of it; and it seemed to me (I know not whether truly or falsely) her face took on the color of pity: I, who had the tinder of love in my breast, what wonder is it if I suddenly caught fire? Her walk was not that of a mortal thing but of some angelic form, and her words sounded different from merely human voice: a celestial spirit, a living sun was what I saw, and if she were not such now, a wound is not healed by the loosening of the bow.]

In many ways this sonnet has more points in common with either of the previous poems than they have with each other. Most obviously, “*Sì mi fan risentire*” and *Rerum vulgariū fragmenta* 90 seem deliberately linked by the shared phrasing in the opening lines of each, both referring to the sweet knots (“*i mille e dolci nodi*”) of Laura’s wind-blown hair (“*a l’aura sparsi*”). Also of note are the shared *arsi/ea* rhymes for all three poems; the image of the beloved as archer-huntress; “*color farsi*” (90.5) and “*color tanti variarsi*” (144.4); and “*nulla cosa mortal*” (144.8) and “*non era l’andar suo cosa mortale*” (90.9). In addition, the imperfect tenses in *Rerum vulgariū fragmenta* 90 reproduce the durative “or . . . or” syntax of “*Sì mi fan risentire a l’aura sparsi*” while the single perfect “*vidi*” in line 13 creates the same haunting distance from the memorial image as the repeated perfect verbs of poem 144. Finally and most importantly, in poem 90 the apparition of Laura-deity returns as an unforgettable memorial image, but now the Venus-huntress simile is fleshed out with all of its implications and distributed throughout the entire sonnet.

So what is it? Or rather, which is it? Is “*Sì mi fan risentire a l’aura sparsi*” the imperfect original source material for *Rerum vulgariū fragmenta* 144 or 90? Or 144, 90, 143 (as has also been claimed), and who knows how many other poems?²⁵ What if the relation between the *disperse* and the *Canzoniere* were not simply one of variants and stylistic evolution? If we take a step back, for a moment, and recognize the status of “*Sì mi fan risentire*” as part of a historicized literary exchange and not just a private moment of lyric experimentation, is it not possible that one or more of the

poems collected in the *Canzoniere* influenced the *dispersa* and not the other way around?²⁶ Specifically, could “Sì mi fan risentire a l’aura sparsi” be a self-reflexive gloss on “Erano i capei d’or a l’aura sparsi” played out for the literary relationship of Petrarch-Sennuccio?

This would explain the explicitness of the allusions in “Sì mi fan risentire,” perfectly appropriate within the metaliterary conventions of the *tenzone*, in which poets also often appropriate the content and style of their interlocutors. In this case, Petrarch’s citation of Virgil’s text (“Poi mi ricordo di Venus iddea,/ qual Virgilio descrisse ’n sua figura” [lines 9–10]) in “Sì mi fan risentire” would match Sennuccio’s evocation of Ovid (“Chè mai Ovidio o altri non discrisse/ valor di donna tanto affigurata” [lines 9–10]) in the sonnet “Non si potria compiutamente dire.” These sorts of direct citations are not uncommon in Sennuccio, who liberally quotes the works of others, including contemporaries Boccaccio and Dante.²⁷ In fact, critics note that both “Sì mi fan risentire” and “Sennuccio, i’ vo’ che sapi in qual manera” (*Rerum vulgariarum fragmenta* 112) contain strikingly similar passages in Boccaccio and suggest that Sennuccio played a mediating role in either introducing the Italian works of Petrarch to Boccaccio or—more provocatively—those of Boccaccio to Petrarch.²⁸ While leaving aside the issue of who influenced whom first, it seems clear that Sennuccio does more than mediate; rather, together with his exiled compatriot, he self-consciously reflects upon *auctores* old and new. Petrarch celebrates this literary conversation with Sennuccio in the opening lines of the sonnet that follows “Senuccio, i’ vo’ che sapi” in the *Canzoniere* (*Rerum vulgariarum fragmenta* 113): “Qui dove mezzo son, Sennuccio mio / (così foss’io intero, et voi contento)” (Here where I only half am, my Sennuccio / [would I were here entirely, and you happy]). These lines echo both Horace’s description of Virgil as “animae dimidium meae” (half of my soul [*Carmen* 1.3.8]) as well as the choral atmosphere of Dante’s “Guido, i’ vorrei che tu e Lapo ed io.”²⁹ Horace and Virgil and Dante and Cavalcanti are not only precedents for Petrarch and Sennuccio’s literary friendship, their texts (and the ability to recognize allusions to their texts) form the fabric of the latter’s poetic exchanges.

This proposed literary conversation/commentary can shed light on the relationship between the *disperse* and the poems eventually finding a place within the *Canzoniere*, a complex relationship in which the former are much more than a prehistory of the latter. In the case of “Sì mi fan risentire,” Petrarch appears to be recalling his own poem about the source of his attraction for Laura, the sonnet “Erano i capei d’or a l’aura sparsi,” and then citing Virgil as the source of that source. Or, even more drawn out but hardly less suggestive, the typically Petrarchan image in the *dispersa* of

Laura-huntress with her hair in the breeze would set off a chain of intertextual recollections—including the mediation of “Erano i capei d’or”—and culminate in a return to their source in Virgil in order to contemplate the relationship between the two representations of Venus—Petrarch’s Venus versus Virgil’s Venus. As we know from his own gloss on the Virgilian Venus in *Seniles* 4.5, Petrarch was perfectly capable of moving fluidly between a passage of his own poetry and literary criticism and even allegoresis.³⁰

The potential metaliterary nature of “Sì mi fan risentire” is bolstered by another *dispersa*, “Quella ghirlanda che la bella fronte,” also addressed to Sennuccio:

Quella ghirlanda che la bella fronte
cingeva di color tra perle e grana,
Sennuccio mio, pàrveti cosa umana
o d’angeliche forme al mondo gionte?
Vedestù l’atto e quelle chiome conte,
che spesso il cor mi morde e mi risana?
vedustù quel piacer che m’allontana
d’ogni vile pensier ch’al cor mi monte?
Udistù ’l suon delle dolci parole?
Mirastù quell’andar leggiadro altero
dietro a chi ò disviati i pensier’ miei?
Soffristù ’l sguardo invidioso al sole?
Or sai per ch’io ardo vivo e spero,
ma non so dimandar quel ch’io vorrei.

[That garland that encircled her beautiful brow with a color between pearl and pale yellow, my friend Sennuccio, did it seem to you a human thing? Or an angelic form come into the world? Did you see her face and her adorned locks that often gnaw at my heart and then heal it again? Did you see the beauty that keeps away every unpleasant thought that afflicts my heart? Did you hear the sound of her sweet voice? Did you watch those noble and graceful movements that cause my thoughts to follow after them? Did you suffer from that glance that rivals the sun? Then you know why I live and die and hope, but do not dare ask for my desire.]

To my knowledge, the connection between this sonnet and *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* 90 in the *Canzoniere* has never been pointed out. Yet in addi-

tion to the shared rhyme words of *parole*, *umana*, *sole*, and *sana*, and near identical phrasing such as “cosa mortale/ ma d’angelica forma” (90.9–10) and “cosa umana o d’angeliche forme” (lines 3–4) of the *dispersa*, the poem to Sennuccio is clearly another attempt to involve his friend as an almost evangelical witness to Laura’s divinity. Did his friend see (*vedestù*), hear (*udistù*), admire (*mirastù*), and bear (*soffristù*) the superhuman vision as he did? If the *dispersa* “Sì mi fan risentire” teases out the Virgilian implications of poem 90, “Quella ghirlanda” plays on its roots in stilnovism, such as the miraculous effects of the *donna-angelo*, especially her gait, on others; not surprisingly, these traits, echoing Dante’s “Tanto gentile,” are also frequently found in Sennuccio’s poetry.⁵¹ Finally, the entire structure of “Quella ghirlanda” is built around the similar situation and syntax of “Se’ tu colui che hai trattato sovente,” an exchange between Dante and the ladies in the *Vita nuova* where they share the vision of a grieving Beatrice, evidence, once again, that Petrarch values Sennuccio as both an essential witness and subtle reader.

If *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* 144 is, after all this, deliberately reminiscent of “Sì mi fan risentire,” it is a reminiscence with quite a bit of personal and literary history behind it—and not a small amount of pathos as well. Rather than simply an improved version of the *dispersa*, this poem recalls “Sì mi fan risentire” because the latter poem was part of a formative literary conversation for Petrarch regarding his own poetry and that of his predecessors and influences. But by the time the sonnet was inserted into the *Canzoniere* (at the beginning of the Chigiano section),⁵² the original intended recipient of the poem had given way to the implied reader of the anthology. Sennuccio, Petrarch’s other half and faithful witness and participant in the younger poet’s amorous travails and poetic development, died soon after Laura in 1349. As demonstrated by Laura Paolino,⁵³ the two deaths are inextricably linked in the notes and drafts of Vaticano Latino 3196. While Sennuccio was the natural recipient of the first redaction of the lament for Laura’s death—“altri non v’è che intenda i miei danni” (there is no other who understands my pains)⁵⁴—Petrarch writes in a marginal note that the sonnet on the death of Sennuccio (*Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* 287) and the one on Dawn, *Aurora* (*Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* 291), were the stimulus necessary to finish a new version of the lament for Laura (“Che debb’io far? Che mi consigli, Amore” [*Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* 268]): “28 November 1349, between 6 and 9 in the morning. I now feel in the right mind to finish this [i.e., canzone], on account of the sonnets on the Dawn and the death of Sennuccio, which I have composed in these days and which have elevated my spirits.”⁵⁵ In the sonnet mourning Sennuccio’s

death, “Sennuccio mio, benché doglioso et solo,” Petrarch imagines his literary conversation with his friend transplanted in the heavens, as he asks Sennuccio to greet Laura as well as the poets Guittone, Cino, Dante, and Franceschino degli Albizzi. It is especially telling that Petrarch links this poem for his dead friend with *Rerum vulgariū fragmenta* 291 (“Quand’io veggio del ciel scender l’Aurora”) because the sonnet marks the last time he refers to Laura by the pun “l’Aurora” and directly as “Laura” (l. 4)—an elegiac tribute sealing a collective poetic experience.

In some sense, the movement from the *disperse* to Sennuccio to the poems addressed to Sennuccio in the *Canzoniere* can be described as a movement from poetic community to isolation, from *tenzone* to ghostly lyric monologue. While the *codice degli abbozzi*, as it now stands, begins with a transcription of Sennuccio’s “Oltra l’usato modo si rigira,” no one responds in the *Canzoniere*. The contiguous placement of *Rerum vulgariū fragmenta* 143 and 144 at the beginning of the Chigiano extension—two of the last poems addressed to historical figures to be included in the *Canzoniere*—thus creates yet another level of distance and isolation. In poem 143 the visual-textual memorial chain behind the image of Laura is sparked by another poet’s words, “Quand’io v’odo parlar si dolcemente.” The poet who speaks so sweetly, “dolcemente,” to Petrarch has been identified as Sennuccio himself.³⁶ In this light, the perfect tenses in *Rerum vulgariū fragmenta* 144 that call forth the fateful image of Laura—an image that the author hopes in vain to see again—evoke the memory of both a complicated series of texts and a poetic friend (“Sennuccio mio”), with whom Petrarch once could recall this shared community of texts; it is, in other words, a memory about remembering.

The naming of and apostrophe to Sennuccio in both the *disperse* and the *Canzoniere* is one of the last extratextual links of the collection, resurrecting a historical moment of poetic experimentation and poetic collaboration. From this point on, Petrarch’s anthology will become increasingly a closed system, and this self-referentiality has been the subject of some of the most influential essays on the *Canzoniere*, as it is heralded as a mark of the poet’s striking modernity.³⁷ Yet it is worth noting that the strategies of exclusion necessary to construct this autonomous lyric self come at a cost, and, with respect to poems to and about Sennuccio, the loss of reference and escape from historicity involved seem more compensatory than liberating. The tone is instead one of mourning for a time when Petrarch was clearly writing to someone other than Posterity and “Laura” and “Sennuccio” were more than just a name.³⁸