

## Unfinished Designs: Petrarch, Pliny, and the Aesthetics of Rupture

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When Francesco Petrarch reflects on his philosophy of writing, he seeks advice not only in classical authors such as Seneca and Cicero, but also in the working habits of ancient artists, as his marginalia on book 35 of Pliny the Elder's (AD 23/24–79) *Natural History* shows.<sup>1</sup> Where Pliny writes that Pasiteles never began executing a work of art without fully designing it first, Petrarch reminds himself: "Nota tu." Similarly, where Protogenes is blamed for spoiling his paintings with too much diligence ("manum de tabula nesciret tollere"), Petrarch draws a pointing hand and clarifies that this also applies to writing: "At[tende], F[rancisce], dum scribis."<sup>2</sup> Petrarch's comments reflect his life-long anxiety over completing his own texts, a fear most expressly stated in his fictionalized dialogue with Saint Augustine, *My Secret Book*, where he states that he would rather burn his epic, *Africa*, than leave it unfinished to posterity.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the epic and many other texts remained unfinished in his study at his death in 1374, some of which he was in the process of expanding rather than finalizing. Whether Petrarch was unable or unwilling to finish these texts, his fragmented corpus poses a problem for his idea of humanism as a constructive project. Literary scholars have engaged the problem by pointing to the title of his vernacular poetry collection, *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, which invites the reader to interpret the songs and sonnets as fragments of a larger portrait of the self.<sup>4</sup> Looking at the authorized manuscript of the poems, philologists have further noted that Petrarch interjects an erratic intersection between parts of the sequence as if to complement the turmoil of the distraught lover.<sup>5</sup> However, such blank spaces between poems form a part of Petrarch's mimetic technique, as John Freccero argues, and they do not speak to the author's control over the text itself. Unfinished, interrupted, and abandoned texts that exceed and challenge Petrarch's authorial control do not fit into such a mimetic scheme.

It is well known that Petrarch labors under the Augustinian censure against writing for its own sake—authors being like travelers in alien territory, out of place until they arrive at home.<sup>6</sup> To design a fragment or to plan an infinite text, in the Augustinian framework, is tantamount to manufacturing one's own sin. Accordingly, Petrarch is inhibited from espousing the conceit that Pliny describes in the *Natural History*, of signing works with the imperfect *faciebat* ("was making") to indicate that no work is ever truly finished. In the Renaissance, Michelangelo takes up this conceit in his early career as a sculptor, and Giorgio Vasari frames the *non finito* of Leonardo da Vinci in similar terms, pitting the ever-active mind of the artist against the laboring hand that can never quite keep up. But even though Petrarch in many ways foreshadows such a wish to write an infinite text, he is hampered by its problematic spiritual aspect. Contending against this teleological approach is Petrarch's strong sense that a text is only truly authentic at the very moment of writing, when it is still locked in the continuing dialectic between the mercurial self and its concrete embodiment on the page.<sup>7</sup> As the book gets finished and leaves the author's desk, it begins to ossify and distance itself from the living self that it reflects. The finished form, therefore, both underpins and refutes Petrarch's understanding of authenticity.

Looking at three unfinished works, the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, the epic, *Africa*, and the *Letter to Posterity*, each unfinished in its own distinct and managed way, this essay argues that Petrarch applies a classicizing understanding of ancient fragments to curate an epistemology of the unfinished that enables him to forestall and continually postpone the moment of completion. To Petrarch, cracked stones, torn manuscripts, and other marks of the vicissitudes of time signal that ancient buildings, texts, or sculptures are finished works in an incomplete state. They are the vestiges of an integral design that once embodied the accomplished thoughts and intentions of an author or an artist. The classical fragment belongs to a whole that is neither platonically nor mystically unfinishable, and still less unfinishable by design. Instead, it forms part of an artifact that once was concretely and historically accomplished. Petrarch seeks to turn this temporal process of the fragment—its design, completion, and destruction—into a structural principle by embedding strategic erasures, lacunae, marginalia, and other philological markers in his own manuscripts. With strategic use of such markers, Petrarch frames texts that he finds unfinishable, either because they were overly ambitious or simply because he wanted to continue writing, in the manner of classical fragments that have already fulfilled their potentials. The text becomes an incomplete manifestation of a finished design, one that

respects both Saint Augustine and the authentic self, a tactic that frequently succeeds, as his reception history shows. Before the Romantics valorized literary fragments as symptoms of the modern consciousness, and before Michel de Montaigne valorized the epistemological value of the interrupted essay, Petrarch employed the tools of philology to manage, and effectively bypass, the moral and spiritual problems of the unfinished text. His understanding of the last touch, *suprema manus*, not as a problem of placing the last period but as one of lifting the hand off the page, thus plays a key role in his pervasive influence on the development of early modern humanism, lyric poetry, and philosophical approaches to the nature of the self.

### **The *tabula infecta***

After narrating the history of Greco-Roman art in his encyclopedic *Natural History*, Pliny reflects on the special status of artists' last works, in particular those left unfinished:

illud vero perquam rarum ac memoria dignum est, suprema opera artificum infectasque [*sic*] tabulas . . . in maiori [*sic*] admiratione esse quam perfecta, quippe in iis liniamenta reliqua ipsaeque cogitationes artificum spectantur, atque in lenocinio commendationis dolor est manus, cum id ageret, extinctae.

[It is also a very unusual and memorable fact that the last works of artists and their (unwrought) pictures . . . are more admired than those which they finished, because in them are seen the preliminary drawings left visible and the artists' actual thoughts, and in the midst of approval's beguilement we feel regret that the artist's hand while engaged in the work was removed by death].<sup>8</sup>

The painting that gets fragmented by the artist's death captures a combination of authenticity and a certain nonconclusiveness that answers to Petrarch's anxiety of finishing. Its connection to the lived experience of the artist that created it is immediate and, unlike the texts that have been fully polished and published, it can never become obsolete. Equally important is that it suggests the design of the artwork was already completed in the artist's mind and hence left essentially unfragmented as a design, even though the material execution was not finished. In her reading of the phenomenology of creation in this passage, Verity Platt points out that Pliny uses the unusual verb *ago* to render the evanescence of the artist's work ("cum id

ageret”), a verb that generally denotes “doing” or “working,” but not “making” (*facio*).<sup>9</sup> The action that is captured in the unfinished work is not only the physical movement of the hand, but also the ephemeral thoughts of the artist. What normally disappears when the work is finished is here made permanent, and the creative act hovers in “a suspended moment of becoming, when creative conception is made more visible . . . by the very fact of the body’s extinction.”<sup>10</sup> The creative action that Platt describes derives partly from Roman rhetoric, which is routinely described as a two-step process of conception and execution, where the design phase and the final materialization are never entirely the same action. One precedes the other, and a consummate artist, such as Timanthes, knows how to exploit this episodic quality: “in unius eius operibus plus semper intelligitur quam pingitur, et cum ars summa sit ingenium tamen ultra artem est” [in his works alone more is always implied than is depicted, and his execution, though consummate, is always surpassed by his genius].<sup>11</sup> What is suspended as the artist dies in the act is therefore not necessarily the process of designing the work, which is already present in the *liniamenta*, but the translation from design to materialization.

For Petrarch, there is an additional antagonism to Pliny’s description, one that is seen when we examine a textual variant introduced into Petrarch’s own manuscript of the *History*. Reliable manuscripts and subsequent critical editions read *imperfectas tabulas*, meaning “unfinished,” “incomplete,” or “imperfect” panels.<sup>12</sup> BnF Lat. 6802 reads *infectas*, a relatively rare word that denotes something that is “unmade,” “undone,” “unwrought”.<sup>13</sup> Instead of a stage in a process, *infectum* describes the frustrated results of an encounter. If a mission is described as *res infecta*, that is not because it is yet to be carried out but because it was foiled. Its primary sense is found in Plautus’s *Amphitryon*: “utinam di faxint infecta dicta re eueniant tua” [May the gods take care that your words are rendered null and void by reality].<sup>14</sup> Petrarch would know the term from Livy, who routinely uses it to denote failure to effect peace (“*infecta pace*”) and in Cicero’s legalistic phrase “*pro infecto habere*” [be regarded as not done]. Finally, he encounters the word a few pages down in Pliny’s *History*, where *damni infecti* refers to anticipated calamities.<sup>15</sup> I am not aware whether this particular artistic application, as a work designed but unwrought, scaled back to *infectum*, is ever used by Pliny or any other extant Roman source.

The Plinian unwrought masterpiece complements a reflection in early Imperial Rome on the unfinishedness of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, one of the most important influences on Petrarch’s poetic vision. The poem’s compo-

sition history is first documented by Suetonius, writing a generation after Pliny and about a century after Virgil's death, where the narrative centers on Virgil's deathbed. He demands that his scrolls be brought so he might burn the poem, but he is disobeyed and the text is published mostly as he left it, peppered with numerous half-lines that belie the sites where the author's mind was located when death cut him short. Suetonius explains these half-lines as temporary props, *tibicines*, that Virgil inserted into the text in order to preserve the creative flow, with the intention of revising them during the final polishing process. They are like the *liniamenta*, disposable preparatory outlines that nevertheless hint at the author's final design. As James O'Hara argues, it is debatable which, if any, of Virgil's lines were truly meant to be disposable props.<sup>16</sup> The endeavors of scholars to locate such lines and even alter them confers a peculiar nature on the poem, where its good qualities are attributed to Virgil, while unsatisfactory lines or strange passages are excusable as placeholders that are not entirely Virgilian. The ambiguous unfinishedness of the poem enables each reader to speculate on Virgil's intentions and thus theoretically to create as many ideal versions of the *Aeneid* as there are readers.

Petrarch engages the question directly by referring to another place in Suetonius, where erasures, marginalia, and corrections that crowd the writer's pages are evaluated as tools to authenticate letters: "sed plane quasi a cogitante atque generante exaratos; ita multa et deleta et inducta et superscripta inerant" [it was perfectly evident that they were not copied or taken down from dictation, but worked out exactly as one writes when thinking and creating; so many instances were there of words erased or struck through and written above the lines].<sup>17</sup> Citing Suetonius, Petrarch explains in a letter to his friend Donato Albanzani that these imperfections testify to authorial decisions that are made as the sentences take shape. He compares the text to an artifact crudely hammered out on an anvil and wrapped in deceptively beautiful packaging. Friends will forgive such trickery, he says, because they take it as a display of endearment, implying that what is poorly veiled yields more intimacy than what is not veiled at all. Petrarch then synthesizes this covering gesture with the philological cues to form an epistemology of authenticity:

tibi non idcirco vilior fuerit quod lituris et additionibus plurimis intertextus et pleno undique margine circumfertus est; etsi enim oculis demptum aliquid sit decoris, animo tamen tantundem gratie additum videri debet. . . . sic scribam ut additiones ac lituras

ceu totidem signa familiaritatis ac pignora dilectionis aspicias nec preterea dubitare possis meum esse. . . . quasi de industria tot cicatricibus deformatus.

[(it) will be no cheaper in your eyes because it is interwoven with ever so many erasures and additions, and loaded with a full margin on all sides. For if the eyes have been cheated of any beauty, still it ought to be clear that just as much charm has been added for the mind. . . . I write thus for you to view the additions and erasures as so many tokens of friendship and pledges of love. . . . (it) comes to you disfigured, as if purposely, by so many scars].<sup>18</sup>

Like the *liniamenta* of Pliny's artist, the philological markers are ephemeral signs of intimacy—"signa familiaritatis" that embody the action of the mind at work. They are on the way to being covered up, evincing a certain sense of privacy and voyeurism. In the process, Petrarch makes a key observation: those philological cues can also be inserted into manuscripts on purpose, *de industria*. As such, they may serve an aesthetic purpose in and of themselves, giving the text a temporal dimension, a sense of fictional creative progress that contrasts the rough text with an ideal version of itself. This way the letter activates a classicizing reflection on the nature of what is absent in the work, akin to what Leonard Barkan describes in his study of ancient sculpture in the Renaissance. Barkan observes that ancient sculptural fragments conjured up the idea of a completed artifact in the minds of early modern spectators. Whether the fragment was restored, imitated, or simply admired as a fragment, the spectator was always conscious that it once belonged to a complete sculpture.<sup>19</sup> As Andrew Hui further argues, the unfinished, the complete, and the ruin are different modalities in the work's "time graph," and they intersect in the fragment.<sup>20</sup> Without clear information to the contrary, no Renaissance spectator would presume an ancient fragment to be of an unfinished artwork. This notion is dramatized in Petrarch's *Epistolarum familiares* 6.2, where he describes his mental reconstruction of the city's absent grandeur, conjured up by the ruins.<sup>21</sup> He is enthralled by the logic of the synecdoche, as the crumbled walls signal to him the glorious buildings that they must have once been, and they confirm to him the ingenious minds that designed it.

As a consequence of this mental tendency to correct for perfection, Petrarch's reconstruction of Roman culture necessarily endows the absent

material with a measure of ideological “surplus.” Whatever the extant pieces require, in order to add up to a perfect picture, is attributed to the missing portion. In its capacity as unwrought, *infecta*, rather than not-yet-made, this absent part of the text or artwork is ideologically capacious. As long as it does not materialize, it can support all of Petrarch’s dreams of Roman virtue, and it can subsume structural problems in whatever is fragmented, be it text, art, buildings, or the entire ancient Roman culture. According to this line of thinking, Rome is repeatable because its fall was due not to an inherent structural problem in the state’s constitution, but to accidents that can be remedied, such as barbarian invasions and a failure to uphold a high standard of learning. The work is in this sense greater if it is almost, but not quite, fully realized, foiled by some extraneous and contingent event. As in the letter to Albanzani, the philological evidence in the fragments, the random cracks in the marble or absent body parts, as well as the jumbled phrases and absent pages in manuscripts produce such a conceptual surplus. The randomness of the fragmentation is in itself one of many generic indicators that show the spectator where the design extends further than the actual document. They are promises to the reader or spectator that something positive is absent. Like a curtain on the middle of a wall in an art gallery, the mere presence of the cover indicates that something is behind it, independently of whether there really is something there or not.

The *tabula infecta* allows Petrarch to activate such a reconstructive reception for works that he has not yet finished. The imagined whole is not something that belongs to the past, but something latent in the work as an unrealized possibility. The artist’s fragmented painting that elicits comparison with the sound, but randomly foiled, design stimulates a classically informed “reconstruction” of the future. As such, the philological cues in the *tabula infecta* are ways of interpreting failure as a purely contingent occurrence, not as the consequence of any potential error in the work’s thesis, argument, or structure. They indicate to Petrarch’s readers that they are peering at integrity and wholeness behind the fragment.

The unfinished epic *Africa* may well be Petrarch’s most forthright instantiation of such a *tabula infecta*. The now largely neglected epic that Petrarch routinely refers to as *Africa illa* (the famous *Africa*) tells of Scipio Africanus’s conquest of Carthage and it is overtly modeled on Virgil’s *Aeneid*.<sup>22</sup> It was long slated to revive the classical epic tradition and to lead the way “back to Parnassus.” The poem garnered much anticipation in the fourteenth-century literary world, and excerpts were eagerly sought in pirated editions while the poem was still a work in progress. On April 8,

1341, Petrarch received a laurel crown in Rome on the strength of the unfinished poem. The fragment that he showed King Robert of Naples projected a majestic poem that was preemptively canonized by the bestowal of the laurel crown. At that moment, the *Africa* became inseparable from the promise of the humanist project. As Petrarch expounded on his cultural vision in his acceptance speech, the Coronation Oration, he loaded his unwritten text with ideal promises that he was arguably unable to fulfill. For this reason, the question begins to loom over the text whether it is even finishable at all, or whether such an epic as Petrarch proposes to write is inherently unfinishable.

Despite the illustrious precedent set by Virgil, Petrarch deems the unfinished epic unacceptable. In *My Secret Book*, he remembers a moment of severe sickness when he feared for his life, writing that nothing worried him as much as the thought of leaving an unfinished poem: “nichil in eo statu sentiens molestius quam quod *Africam* ipsam semiexplicitam linquebam. Itaque, alienam dedignatus limam, ignibus eam propriis manibus mandare decreveram” [nothing caused me greater anxiety in that state than the thought that I might leave the *Africa* unfinished. Rejecting the idea that others might put the finishing touches to it for me, I had therefore decided to cast it into the fire with my own hands].<sup>23</sup> His friends were well aware of this anxiety, and they reminded him of the danger when they wanted to pressure him into publishing the poem.<sup>24</sup> One of them, Barbato da Sulmona, had already let a portion of the text slip into circulation against Petrarch’s wishes, which caused the author no small anxiety, most likely because the excerpt was met with something less than universal critical acclaim. The symbolic meaning of the poem precedes it with standards of measurement that predetermine the text as a failure.

Instead of abandoning the poem or acknowledging that he cannot finish it, Petrarch doubles down and insists that it is already completed, preparing his readership to receive the extant text not as something interrupted during the composition phase, like the *Aeneid* was, but as an *infectum*, a kind of textual “ruins.” His claims have the desired effect of casting doubt on the text’s status. In Boccaccio’s *Life of Petrarch*, written in the 1340s, Boccaccio lists the *Africa* among Petrarch’s finished works, and after he later gets a privileged look at the text, he affirms to his correspondents that he knows the poem well and that it is indeed as splendid as expected: “Scipio miris ornatus splendoribus (vidi quidem) emitteretur in publicum” [Scipio will be sent off to the public with marvelous splendor (for I indeed saw him)]. However, as Boccaccio later proposed that Petrarch abandoned the work because



he was disappointed with the outcome, it is evident that he never saw the finished poem.<sup>25</sup>

The general readership comes to the text in a similar way after reading its composition history in the *Letter to Posterity*, a text that Petrarch was still editing a few years before his death. A large portion of the letter is dedicated to correcting inaccuracies about his biographical details found in other texts and toning down some of the bolder convictions of the Coronation Oration. Included in this effort to set the record straight is a triumphant account of the *Africa's* completion: “Parmam rediens et repostam ac tranquillam nactus domum . . . tanto ardore opus illud non magno in tempore ad exitum deduxi, ut ipse quoque nunc stupeam” [returning to Parma, and finding a quiet, secluded house . . . I brought that work to completion with such an ardour, in a relatively short time, that I myself am still amazed].<sup>26</sup> Whether Petrarch was amazed by the speed or the quality of the outcome, the accomplishment is described with uncharacteristic bravado. In the margin next to this passage, however, Petrarch writes an alternative ending that adds a significant layer to the story:

Raro unquam pater aliquis tam mestus filium unicum in rogam  
 misit, ut ego librum illum, quem multo labore mihi genueram.  
 Et si scias, quisquis haec legis, quanto id fecerim dolore, et—  
 heu—omnes labores meos eo in opere perditos acriter tecum vol-  
 vas, vix ipse lacrimas contineas.

[Hardly ever was there a father, who had his only son taken to the funeral pile, so sad as I was when I did the same with this book which I had brought forth with much labour. And if anyone who reads this, would know with how much pain I did this, and—ah—would deeply reflect upon all my efforts spent in this undertaking, he would hardly be able to hold his tears.] (276–77)

This passage is preserved in Pier Paolo Vergerio’s first edition of the poem, which is prefaced by a paraphrase of Petrarch’s *Letter to Posterity*. Vergerio, the only person known to have studied Petrarch’s autograph directly, is uncertain whether the passage was intended to become part of the text, or whether Petrarch kept it in the margin as an alternative history, akin to two different news headlines, in case he would burn the draft and claim that he burned a perfected manuscript. Seeing that many passages of the letter are written in the margins, it is not clear that this passage ought to be excised from the text, but Vergerio assumes that, since the poem was not

burned, the passage should be read as superfluous and it did not become part of the tradition.<sup>27</sup> In this brief lament, Petrarch dramatizes a Virgilian death scene, where the text escapes the flames against the author's will. In so doing, he revisits a topos that he previously used to describe the beginning of his literary studies, when his father burned young Petrarch's books, allowing him to save only two singed copies from the pile, Virgil and Cicero, who symbolically regenerate the rest of the library. The important difference here is that whereas Virgil wanted to burn the text because it was not finished, Petrarch tells us that he, close to a second Abraham, or Sarah perhaps, first "gave birth" to it and then burned the finished book. While the unfinished *Aeneid* rehearses the myth of Rome as arising out of the ruins of Troy, an occasion to build anew, the *Africa* is artificially mapped on Hui's time graph and given a false perfect past. Thus, the Abrahamic allusion, the sacrifice of the miracle-child, only begotten and the single chance of continuing the line, overtakes the Virgilian subtext.

Reception of the poem after Petrarch's death, when humanists and dignitaries vie for his manuscripts, partly bears out his intentions. Like the *liniamenta* described by Pliny, early manuscripts such as Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 33.35 copy out Petrarch's *tibicines*, the marginalia, curtailed lines, and passages that he intended to revise. Possessing the singularity of the Plinian unfinished painting, these *signa familiaritatis* are appreciated as parts of the artifact itself, a layer of composition that exchanges formal completeness for authenticity. They replicate and pass into circulation the ephemera of the repository copy, erasing the boundaries between the private and the public, allowing the *tabula infecta* to propagate and multiply.

The vernacular poems, *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, occupy a very different place in Petrarch's oeuvre. Falsely described as juvenilia by their author, the songs and sonnets in Italian are not discussed as part of the humanist project, and he doubts whether they will uphold his name after his day. Even though the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* does not share *Africa*'s ideological baggage, it nevertheless has strong ties to an Augustinian sense of personal fulfillment that is acquired through spiritual conversion. As Marco Santagata argues, Petrarch's objective in the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* is to gather up the fragments of his soul and to rewrite himself, "riscrivere se stesso," into a coherent and a complete subject.<sup>28</sup> In Petrarch's desire to synthesize classical virtues with Christian revelation, the Augustinian conversion is a figure of the conclusion of such a development. In a way that echoes his discussion of the *Africa*, Petrarch both claims that he has achieved this

moment of self-realization, and at the same time he presents himself as a work in progress. As a consequence, strategic ruptures in his last authorized manuscript of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*—Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 3195—both affirm and negate the definitive ending of the collection that morally underpins it, to the effect that any edition of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* is a well-choreographed reconstruction.

Since the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*'s early print history, scholars have changed their understanding of the scope of Petrarch's authorial control over the material design of the manuscript considerably. Some early printers doubted the authenticity of Vat. Lat. 3195 because the manuscript is unusually organized: poems of different genres are lumped together, which was unheard of at the time, and the organizing principle of the book, the story of the speaker's desire for Laura, is not always followed very strictly. That is, many of the poems are about something different altogether, such as politics or the papacy, and, strangest of all, the division of the work into two parts occurs two poems before Laura's death, causing a glaring misalignment between the dominant erotic theme and the work's overall structure.

Due to Petrarch's known obsession with fixing every minutia of his text for posterity, some early editors see the manuscript as a repository copy that Petrarch would later use to fix his ultimate book of poems. Thus, three popular early print editions vie with one another about recreating Petrarch's ultimate version: Pietro Bembo prints the text in 1501 following Vat. Lat. 3195, followed by Aldo Manuzio's 1514 edition that moves the division of the book so that the second part may begin with Laura's death, and finally Alessandro Vellutello takes the most extreme step and culls all poems out of the collection that are not about Laura and moves them to a new third section. In their reorganizations, Manuzio and Vellutello respond to the work's asymptotic structure and attempt to assimilate the book's form with its dominant erotic theme. It is taken for granted that Petrarch, had he been able to finalize the text himself, would have resolved this tension between the apparent design and the realized outcome, and the editors merely help him with the final push. Paleography has since established beyond doubt that this unusual structural tension is indeed an integral part of Petrarch's authorized composition. Knowing that, scholars have noticed how this tension contributes to the work's overall oscillation between narrative movement and lyrical stasis, unity of focus and hesitation, for example.<sup>29</sup> This means that Manuzio and Vellutello, when engaging the text as philologists, are responding to Petrarch's fiction of the struggling author who has almost, but not quite, finished recording the story of his unrequited love.

The two humanists are not to blame for doubting the layout of the text, because the structural hesitation built into the manuscript blends almost seamlessly with Petrarch's real erasures, additions and marginalia that direct the hand of a future editor. Studying the visual poetics of the manuscript, H. Wayne Storey shows that Vat. Lat. 3195 is simultaneously a fair copy and a repository copy. That is, the text begins in the uniform and polished script of Malpighini, Petrarch's amanuensis, but at folio 26r, out of a total of seventy-two folia, a decisive rupture in the uniformity occurs as Petrarch erases the poem "Donna mi vene," changes the capital "D" into an "O" and inserts the poem "Or vedi Amor."<sup>30</sup> Further erasures and apertures follow, as well as rearrangement of poems. For example, Petrarch numbers the last thirty-one poems with Arabic numerals to indicate their correct order in a future redaction, changing the place of all except the first and the last poems in this thirty-one-poem sequence. As Storey finds, Vat. Lat. 3195 turns from being a "final" version into being merely the "last" version of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*.<sup>31</sup>

While the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* becomes to a certain extent nonconclusive, a final version is nevertheless discernible in the marginalia, to be assembled by a future copyist. Not unlike the letter to Albanzani, the manuscript is prepared so that even though Petrarch is not able to transcribe it in full himself, it includes his last thoughts that will direct the making of the definitive product. In this sense, it is practically finished at any given moment during its composition, yet at the same time it is able to accommodate more text. While locked in this state of approximate finality, the manuscript's most conspicuous feature, a seven-page gap (fols. 49v–52v) that separates parts one and two of the book, haunts the work, as Storey further notes, with the possibility that something more was going to be written into the composition.<sup>32</sup> Seven full pages of parchment might contain a good number of poems, up to twenty-eight sonnets, following the system of arranging four sonnets per page. Along with the annotations and the marginalia, the empty pages are the conceptual extremity of the work, wedged in between the completed design and the interrupted execution, creating the sense of being on the cusp of completion. As long as the pages remain in place, the book is de facto an infinite work that may be enlarged as long as the author lives, while still hinging its moral justification on the notion that the author/speaker writes from the point of view of the changed man. At the moment that Petrarch eventually stops working, it turns into this almost-complete *tabula infecta*.

## Planting vestiges for the future

The humanistic interests of the *Africa* and the personal erotics of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* converge in the *Letter to Posterity* (1371–72), a masterpiece of the *tabula infecta* aesthetics. For a text that is set to correct Petrarch's biography, the letter is surprisingly inaccurate. Petrarch "misremembers" the composition history of the *Africa*, and he miscalculates his own age. He moves the composition of most of his works earlier in time, from the 1350s to the 1340s, and he prematurely eulogizes Stefano Colonna, patriarch of his longtime family of patrons. When those misaligned facts are placed in connection with the two sizable lacunae in the text, one that leaves out a portion of the 1340s and another that would cover much of the 1350s and perhaps beyond, a pattern emerges that explains Petrarch's "errors." Significant events are methodically relocated outside of the information gaps that real lacunae would otherwise inflict on the text, while less comfortable episodes of Petrarch's life, as well as ideologically significant moments in his career, are hidden by this fig-leaf of what I argue are fictional lacunae, endowing the text with the classicist fragmentary surplus of the *tabula infecta*. The text is methodically warped around the lacunae, showing that they are not haphazard accidents of transmission but something staged by Petrarch to serve an important aesthetic function.

Even before it is written, the *Letter to Posterity* is framed by Petrarch as an impossible text, due to the two irreconcilable rhetorical tasks that it is to fulfill. On the one hand, it is announced as an apology for the author's life, presumably accounting for his much-criticized lodging with the Visconti dukes in Milan, and it is to offer a true and well-rounded portrait of his character.<sup>33</sup> While his other letters establish various levels of intimacy with his interlocutors, this literary self-portrait is to face outward and synthesize the private and public in a paradoxical new genre that no one has written before.<sup>34</sup> As Petrarch admits in *Familiare* 1.1, reaching for a sculptural metaphor, it is doubtful whether that is possible:

Illam vero non Phidie Minervam, ut ait Cicero, sed qualemcumque animi mei effigiem atque ingenii simulacrum multo michi studio dedolatum, si unquam supremam illi manum imposuero, cum ad te venerit, secure qualibet in arce constituito.

[That other work I have been polishing with great care, though not a Phidian Minerva, as Cicero asserts, but a true portrait and likeness such as it is of my talent if ever I shall be able to give it

the last touches, that work, I say, when it reaches you, you may set up without concern at the summit of whatever stronghold you please.]<sup>35</sup>

Effigies that are placed on strongholds are the icons of saints, protectors of cities and citadels, an image that compounds Petrarch's optimistic task.<sup>36</sup> The advertised results are just as charged with expectation as the *Africa* was. Describing his project in terms of bronze sculpture, Petrarch evokes the end-oriented structural challenge that awaits him. The Phidian Minerva alludes to Cicero's *De oratore*, where the highest rhetorical achievement is compared to bronze sculpting: "If any man shall . . . be able to produce a statue of Minerva, in the manner of Phidias, assuredly he will have no trouble in learning how to carry out the lesser details, as that same Master did, upon the shield."<sup>37</sup> As the sculptor goes through the various steps of sculpting in clay, then wax, then bronze, the viability of the design is only revealed in retrospect, when the outside mold is lifted from the hardened bronze and errors, if any, come to light. Petrarch's letter is charged with this all-or-nothing expectation that is simultaneously subversively doubted. A tension is set up that determines the text even before it is written, and the epistle, just like the *Africa*, becomes partly about the question of whether such a text can be written at all.

This hesitation, psychological as well as practical, is immediately reflected in the striking opening sentence of the *Letter to Posterity*: "Fuerit tibi forsan de me aliquid auditum—quamquam et hoc dubium sit: an exiguum et obscurum longe nomen seu locorum seu temporum peruenturum sit" [Possibly you will have heard something about me—although I am not sure whether my petty, obscure name will reach far into either space or time] (256–57). From the outset, Petrarch speaks as if from a fragmented corpus, from the other side of a catastrophe that separates himself and his readers, where he is privy to a measure of wholeness and integrity that will appear spotted to the reader. The letter announces itself as a gesture of reconstruction, of the filling in of information that is presumed to go missing in the long period of time that Petrarch places between himself and his reader.

The *Letter to Posterity* ends with an equally striking statement about its own precarious indeterminacy. Jacopo da Carrara the Younger treated Petrarch so dearly that he had hoped to find in Padua "the end of all my wanderings and journeys" (281), a spiritual safe haven no less than a geographical one. After Jacopo's premature death, despite being still well accommodated, Petrarch feels the wanderlust come over him: "redii rursus in Gallias, stare

nescius, non tam desiderio visa milies revidendi quam studio more egrorum, loci mutatione tediis consulendi” [I again returned to France, incapable of staying still, not so much by a yearning to see again what I had seen a thousand times, as by the desire to cope with weariness—as sick people do—by a shift of position] (280–81). The aimless wanderlust, the vicissitudes of politics, and the conclusion of self-writing all come together in this stability that momentarily appeared to be secured, but which was swept from under him at the last minute. The final sentence thus comments on its own nonconclusiveness in a way reminiscent of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*’s design, being at the cusp of completion when it is interrupted by the calamities caused by Jacopo’s death.

In light of the symbolic power of this final sentence, how it reflects the “fragmentary” rhetoric of the text and how it touches on the central problems in Petrarch’s thinking, the question arises whether this and other meaningful ruptures in the *Letter to Posterity* are similarly staged by Petrarch. In the absence of an autograph that might bring paleography to our aid, as in the case of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, the question instead hinges on whether the text itself shows any awareness of being fragmented, whether the information gap aligns with the gap in the narrative or whether Petrarch writes around the lacuna, so to speak.

The first gap in the narrative occurs after Petrarch writes that he has completed the *Africa*. Manuscripts of the *Letter to Posterity* known to editors prior to Karl A. E. Enenkel’s 1998 critical edition contain the following illogical sentence: “Inde reversus ad fontem Sorgie et ad solitudinem transalpinam redii, cum iam quartum et trigesimum etatis annum post terga relinquerem, diuque et Parme et Verone versatus” [From there I returned to the Source of the Sorgue and to my transalpine solitude, when I was already thirty-four years old, having stayed at Parma and Verona a long time].<sup>38</sup> The sentence is illogical because the return to Vaucluse at the beginning of the sentence occurs in 1342, but the pleasant sojourn in Parma and Verona begins only in 1348, prompting editors to break up the sentence and, sometimes, to mark the interval with an ellipsis. In his 1951 critical edition, Pier Giorgio Ricci voices the regret of many over losing here Petrarch’s personal account of the busy 1340s. He conjectures that the text must have been written in small letters on a large single folio, that this folio may have been folded over, and—having been a work in progress for almost two decades—that the bottom half may simply have broken off and gone missing. The text then picks up at the top of the other side of the fragment, and the letter consequently ends abruptly where the lacuna begins on that page, explain-

ing why the narrative breaks off just as Petrarch should begin discussing his sojourn at the Visconti court in Milan.<sup>39</sup> The splitting up of the sentence is validated by the example of Vergerio's paraphrase and by manuscripts discovered since Ricci's edition, subsequently included in Enenkel's edition, that interject a sentence after *redii*: "Et intra breve tempus extincta illa Columnensium gloriosa, sed heu nimium caduca familia iterum ad Italiam redii" [In a brief span of time, however, that famous but unfortunately declining Colonna family died out, and I returned to Italy] (278–79). This paratactic and repetitive sentence reduces the missing years to a short period of time in which nothing important happens.

During this "brief span," however, several significant events take place that reflect on Petrarch's political choices. He flees from Parma in 1345, from the aggression of the Visconti dukes, and he follows closely the revolution of Cola di Rienzo, who establishes a new, classically inspired republic in Rome. His revolution is fervently supported by Petrarch, even though his patrons and friends in the Colonna family are among its primary targets. The revolution initially succeeds, but it does not take long to peter out and turn into something of a fiasco. Petrarch reneges on his support for Rienzo in late 1347, who abdicates on December 15 that same year, just before the narrative of the *Letter to Posterity* picks up again in 1348.<sup>40</sup> A fierce critic of the political opportunism that he witnesses in Cicero, Petrarch has a good reason to want to forget this chapter of his life, and his affiliation with Rienzo is mainly to be looked for in letters to friends that Petrarch was unable to destroy.

Brushing over this period affects the structure of the text around it when it comes to discussing his patrons from the Colonna family who were caught up in the events from beginning to end. Petrarch informs the reader that Stefano Colonna, patriarch of the family, loved Petrarch as much as his own sons: "Qui viri excellentis amor et affectus usque ad vite eius extremum uno erga me semper tenore permansit, et in me nunc etiam vivit neque unquam desinet" [The love and affection of that excellent man for me always remained constant until the last day of his life; and even now it lives in me, and will never end] (*Letter to Posterity*, 268–69). This warm obituary-style memory of the old man is reminiscent of Petrarch's equally heartfelt words later in the letter for Jacopo da Carrara after his death. The implication is of course that there is nothing more to say about Stefano, that his story ends here. It is already apparent at this point that the letter will not narrate the events that are just around the corner, in which Stefano fights Rienzo's armies, in which he loses a son, a grandson, and other family members (at the Battle of Porta San Lorenzo, on November 20, 1347), and after which he



will himself soon die weighed down with grief, having buried his wife and all his sons. Petrarch's relationship with his former patrons never properly grows whole again after the revolution, but that is not the impression that the letter conveys. Petrarch's reminiscence of the old man's love is a sort of ellipsis that brushes over these events. The idea that the Colonna family suddenly declines into extinction would be both casuistic and self-damning if it were to follow fast on the heels of a long narration of the revolutionary years. The discussion of the Colonna family is thus conveniently arranged so as to obliquely offset the information gap that opens up when the lacuna is introduced.

The other lacuna in the *Letter to Posterity* conceals an equally challenging moral dilemma for Petrarch: his tenure at the Milanese court. The aggressive powermongers, archenemies of Florence, whose military once chased Petrarch out of Parma, now employ him as a court humanist and occasional ambassador, a compromise that draws much criticism from other humanists, especially Boccaccio. It is in response to one of Boccaccio's criticisms that Petrarch promises to write this very letter. Petrarch generally defends his sojourn with princes by reversing the hierarchy of power: "ita cum quibusdam fui, ut ipsi quodammodo mecum essent et eminentie eorum nullum tedium, commoda multa perceperim" [I stayed with some of them in such a way that they were in a sense my guests, and that I derived no annoyances, but many advantages from their eminence] (260–61). This line of defense does not automatically explain away the eight years spent in Milan (1353–61), because Petrarch indeed derived some annoyances from the dukes in the past, and he is openly dismissive about having to earn his keep by doing chores such as writing and performing orations for his patrons. The topic is a deep-seated moral pickle involving the relationship between politics and academic freedom that his fourteenth-century contemporaries and modern scholars alike would gladly see Petrarch solve.

The letter breaks off in 1351, however, when Petrarch had just lost his patron in Padua, depriving us of his account of Milan. What indicates that this rupture is staged, rather than the result of careless administration of Petrarch's papers, as is sometimes assumed, is that Petrarch takes care to inform the reader elsewhere about the intense literary activity we know was conducted at Milan, moving it to an ambiguous time in the 1340s in Vacluse. Most of Petrarch's major literary work is done when the Visconti dukes afford Petrarch the time and resources to make progress on his large projects. In Milan, he conceives and largely completes *De remediis utriusque fortunae*, his most popular Latin text until the age of print. It is there that

his massive epistolary project takes shape and develops into the form we now know. The earliest evidence of the *Triumphs* date to the Milan years as well as the earliest extant version of the vernacular poems, which he continues to write and revise throughout his life. He writes and rewrites invectives, works on the *Sine nomine* letters and the *Bucolicum carmen*, and he significantly revises earlier works he had previously drafted, including *De otio religioso*. Unmentioned are numerous minor works, such as orations and the *Itinerarium ad sepulchrum domini nostri Ihesu Christi*, and the steady flow of new epistles, both collected and “disperse.”<sup>41</sup> Most of those works undergo continuous revision and editing throughout the sixties and into the seventies. It was without question his most productive decade, where Petrarch as we now know him came into being and his true legacy took shape.

In the *Letter to Posterity*, Petrarch moves the composition of his works to Vaucluse, his secluded home by the symbolic source of the “king of springs,” as he calls the Sorgue: “Hec summa est: quod quicquid fere opusculorum michi excidit, ibi vel actum vel ceptum vel conceptum est. Que tam multa fuerunt, ut usque ad hanc etatem me exercent ac fatigent” [To be brief, almost all of the works I have let fall from my pen were either completed or begun or conceived there. They have been so many that even at this age they keep me at work and weary me] (270–71). This is where the three important moments of the works’ creative process take place: the initial conception in the mind, the beginning of writing, and the finishing of it, here denoted by the phenomenological Plinian verb, *ago*. These are the points in the works’ coming-into-being that give them their identity.

In this symbolically loaded identification of his literary corpus with Vaucluse, instead of Milan, the important thing to notice is that his works are considered finished even though they are not yet fully embodied on the page: “Fuit enim michi ut corpus sic ingenium: magis pollens dexteritate quam viribus. Itaque multa michi facilia cogitatu, que executione difficilia pretermisi” [For my mind, like my body, has been capable of versatility rather than strength. Therefore, I have left aside many things that were easy for me to think up but difficult to realize] (*Letter to Posterity*, 270–71). In terms of the Ciceronian artistic metaphor, he erects his Minervas in Vaucluse, and the shields—busywork that requires strength rather than talent—he chisels elsewhere. The texts thus embody at the same time the *liniamenta* of the Plinian last work and the half-finished overlaying painting that the artist could not complete. In a sense, Petrarch’s life-long revision process which the finished works undergo is akin to philological restoration, pushing the text toward not an ineffable ideal but the concrete design, the *liniamenta*,

that is imputed to exist in Petrarch's head. Like the *Africa*, which becomes a fragment of itself at the coronation, here Petrarch proposes that all of his works are in a sense a reconstruction of themselves, finished in the past and later filled in, like the Plinian last work.

Besides curating Petrarch's political reputation, the lacuna plays a vital role in constructing an image of the perfect humanist, one who uses classical learning to come into a saintly self-possession at the age of forty. Petrarch foreshadows such an image of himself early in the letter: "Mox vero ad quadragesimum etatis annum appropinquans, dum adhuc et caloris satis esset et virium, non solum factum illud obscenum, sed eius memoriam omnem sic abieci, quasi nunquam feminam aspexissem" [When I was approaching my fortieth year, still in possession of ardour and strength, I so completely rejected not only that obscene act, but the very recollection of it, that it seemed I had never looked at a woman] (*Letter to Posterity*, 258–61). This spiritual apotheosis is projected to take place in 1344, during the time covered by the lacuna, presumably in Vacluse.

Modeling himself on Saint Augustine's conversion in the *Confessions*, he conquers desire and brings to a close the problem of desire, which he has long seen as the central spiritual problem. Dramatizing this uprooting of desire offstage, so to speak, Petrarch vindicates the failed spiritual epiphany that he describes in *Familiars* 4.1, on top of Mount Ventoux.<sup>42</sup> In both letters, Petrarch's dating is artistically directed, a component in his construction of the humanist ideal. Hans Baron has shown that Petrarch keeps a diary of his "cohabitations" at least until the year 1350, disproving the narrative in the *Letter to Posterity*, and other scholars have further shown how Petrarch revises historical dates in order to restructure his biographical trajectory in his letters, judging the age of forty as an ideal age for self-mastery.<sup>43</sup> Claiming to live as if he had never even seen a woman, he places himself back in an Edenic condition, and in so doing he makes a distinction between his own humanist view of the self and that of Saint Augustine that informs the medieval notion of the self as inherently split. In Saint Augustine's *City of God* (the first book Petrarch is known to have bought), the separation of desire and will is described as the punishment for the humans' will to transgress, which is present in the human heart even before God's command is breached. Implicit in his statement is the notion that Petrarch has, as a part of his course of studies and the application of what he reads, reached point zero of the human condition. He may not have overcome it altogether, but he has traced his spiritual steps back to a moment before the effects of the original sin begin to emerge.

This is where the logic of the letter's shadowy apotheosis intersects with the heart of the humanist project, because Petrarch writes as if desire can be reverse-engineered, not merely repressed. He seems to suggest that an undivided self is within reach of humans, even though he can only represent it as a half-told story in fragmented form, just like ancient texts and cultural institutions. This may be the most scandalous kernel of Petrarch's humanism, because the self-control that it grants the individual paves the way for an understanding of art and beauty as expressions of human creativity, rather than as conveyors of God's divine "attributes" as Thomas Aquinas might describe it. Contrast this with Dante's view of the afterlife, whose experiences result from moral and spiritual choices, never from accidents. He meets no one in *Inferno* that ought to be in *Paradiso*. In this sense, Dante brings together the individual and the cosmic senses of history as described by Saint Augustine, where spiritual and historical changes are measured as events of the soul's journey toward God, and the world's evolution through divine history. Saint Augustine seeks to deny the importance of contingent events, such as the sack of Rome in 410, in the true history of the world, which is located in the spiritual realm, while Petrarch finds contingency, or the vicissitudes of time, meaningful because they are the vestiges that lead back to the ancient secular city on which he strives to map his ideal.

Petrarch locates his spiritually significant moment in the years "covered" by the lacuna and thus frames it as a historical fact whose documentation is lost and can only be reconstructed by circumstantial evidence. The plot of his text helps adumbrate what happens during the years of the lacuna, when he writes his literary oeuvre and solves the problem of desire, and thus the plot serves the role of the *liniamenta* of the Plinian last painting, indicating where the design extends beyond the finalized product. Never mind that Petrarch does not really undergo any radical change after this supposed conversion, for it belongs to the ideal space-time, where he met Laura, where he wrote his works, and where he forgot all about sexual desire. He first saw Laura on Good Friday, April 6, 1327, a day in history that does not exist, in the Church of Saint Clare, a place that did not yet exist at that time.<sup>44</sup> He says that he is thirty-four years old when he finishes the *Africa*, but that is his age when he conceives of writing the poem, also on Good Friday. His mental changes and the beginning and end of his literary projects are rooted in an ideal calendar that is centered in the lacuna. Almost as if evoking the alternative early Renaissance term for the textual gap, *fenestra*, the lacuna here opens a window into an alternate realm where Petrarch's humanist comedy plays out, ending not in a marriage but in a learned and saintly celibacy. The

fact that it is not spelled out but only broadly reconstructed, like Roman ruins, allows Petrarch to arrogate a measure of the ideological surplus that is afforded by the fragment of an unwrought whole and project a larger-than-life image of himself lying behind, and visible only through, the fragment. In the *Letter to Posterity*, the *tabula infecta* is thus not only a way to salvage a text that appears to be inherently unwritable in the way Petrarch conceives it. It has also become an aesthetic device in its own right, a way to express ambiguities and conflicting desires in ways that cannot be posited directly in language.

At the start of his career, Petrarch is already occupied with describing the humanist. Of a text that may well be his very first publication, the comedy *Philologia*, only a single line is preserved: “Maior pars hominum expectando moritur” [The greater part of man dies waiting for something].<sup>45</sup> The discarded *Philologia* is the primal scene of Petrarch’s agon with formal stability, and its specter haunts him throughout his career. In his quest for an authentic representation of the inner workings of the mind, Pliny’s *cogitationes artificum*, Petrarch keeps anticipating Nietzsche and discovering that “the things we have words for are also the things we have already left behind.”<sup>46</sup> In his encounter with fragmented classics, Petrarch finds that texts, like paintings, may be more admirable when unfinished, and if the finished product turns out to be something less than hoped for, he has the option of folding these failures into the authorial corpus in a positive way. The *tabula infecta*, first described by Pliny and developed by Petrarch into an aesthetic device, helps him catch the words as living thoughts, an action of the mind, before the text entombs them forever. Like the gypsum statues at Pompeii that capture the victims of Vesuvius in their last moments precisely by way of pure negation of embodiment, the *tabula infecta* leaves a hollow space in the text that allows the reader to trace the meanderings of the mind at work. The text assumes an integral authorial intention that in practice never needs to be fulfilled. The staged ruptures in Petrarch’s texts serve as closing devices for works that are in practice infinite texts, bounded only by the artist’s own lifetime, theoretically turning all of them into “last works.”



## Notes

- 1 Pliny the Elder, *Historia naturalis libri triginta septem: praemittitur Plinii vita è Tranquilli catalogo virorum illustrium*, with commentary by Francesco Petrarch, in

- Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Lat. 6802, available at *Gallica*, gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b90679875.
- 2 Petrarch in BNF Lat. 6802, fol. 259v, and fol. 256v: “Be mindful of this, Francesco, when you write.” Translations of sources throughout are my own unless otherwise indicated.
  - 3 Francesco Petrarch, *My Secret Book*, ed. and trans. Nicholas Mann (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2016), 228–29.
  - 4 See, for example, John Freccero, “The Fig Tree and the Laurel: Petrarch’s Poetics,” *Diacritics* 5, no. 1 (1975): 34–40; and Marco Santagata, *I frammenti dell’anima: Storia e racconto nel Canzoniere di Petrarca* (1992; repr. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011), 41–99.
  - 5 Teodolinda Barolini, “The Making of a Lyric Sequence: Time and Narrative in Petrarch’s *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*,” *MLN* 104, no. 1 (1989): 1–38. By creating an erratic intersection between the two parts of the book, Petrarch aligns himself with early Renaissance artists who perceive aesthetic merit in imitating technical faults and anachronisms of prior artistic periods; see Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010).
  - 6 Saint Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, ed. and trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 14–17.
  - 7 See in particular Albert Russell Ascoli, “Petrarch’s Middle Age: Memory, Imagination, History, and the ‘Ascent of Mount Ventoux,’” chap. 1 of *A Local Habitation and a Name: Imagining Histories in the Italian Renaissance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 21–58; and Rocco Rubini, “*Primi* and *Ultimi*: Petrarch’s Corpus,” chap. 1 of *Posterity: Inventing Tradition from Petrarch to Gramsci* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022), 29–79.
  - 8 Pliny the Elder, BNF Lat. 6802, fol. 259r; *Natural History, Volume IX, Books 33–35*, ed. and trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), 367. I modify Rackham’s translation to reflect differences in the manuscript. Note that although *lineamentum* is the more common form of the word, the variant form *liniammentum* is hereafter used to reflect Pliny’s and Petrarch’s spelling.
  - 9 Verity Platt, “Orphaned Objects: The Phenomenology of the Incomplete in Pliny’s *Natural History*,” *Art History* 41, no. 3 (2018): 492–517, at 496.
  - 10 Platt, 494.
  - 11 Pliny the Elder, BNF Lat. 6802, fol. 256r; *Natural History*, ed. and trans. Rackham, 9:317.
  - 12 *A Latin Dictionary: Lewis and Short*, rev. Charleton T. Lewis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), s.v. *imperfectus* (*inp-*), adj. 1.
  - 13 *Lewis and Short*, s.v. *infectus*, adj. 1.
  - 14 *Amphitryon* 2.1.632, in Plautus, *Amphitryon; The Comedy of Asses; The Pot of Gold; The Two Bacchises; The Captives*, ed. and trans. Wolfgang de Melo (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 72–73, at *Loeb Classical Library*, DOI:10.4159/DLCL.plautus-amphitryon.2011.
  - 15 Cicero, *On Invention; The Best Kind of Orator; Topics*, ed. and trans. H. M. Hubbell (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014), 246–47, at *Loeb Classical Library*, DOI:10.4159/DLCL.marcus\_tullius\_cicero-de\_inventione.1949. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History, Volume X, Books 36–37*, ed. and trans. D. E. Eichholz

- (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014), 6–7, at *Loeb Classical Library*, DOI:10.4159/DLCL.pliny\_elder-natural\_history.1938.
- 16 James J. O'Hara, "The Unfinished Aeneid?" in *A Companion to Vergil's "Aeneid" and Its Tradition*, ed. Joseph Farrell and Michael C. J. Putnam (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 96–106.
  - 17 Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson, trans. J. C. Rolfe (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014), 176–77, at *Loeb Classical Library*, DOI:10.4159/DLCL.suetonius-lives\_caesars\_book\_vi\_nero.1914.
  - 18 Francesco Petrararch, *Res seniles: Libri 13–17*, ed. Silvia Rizzo (Firenze: Le lettere, 2017), 48; Francis Petrarch, *Letters of Old Age, Volume Two: Books X–XVIII*, trans. Aldo S. Bernardo (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 487.
  - 19 Leonard Barkan, *Unearthing the Past: Archeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999), esp. 65–118.
  - 20 Andrew Hui, *The Poetics of Ruins in Renaissance Literature* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 7.
  - 21 See Petrarch, *Familiars* 6.2, in *Le familiari*, ed. Vittorio Rossi and Umberto Bosco, 4 vols. (Firenze: G. C. Sansoni, 1933–42), 2:56–58; *Rerum familiarium libri, I–VIII*, trans. Aldo S. Bernardo (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), 291–94.
  - 22 On the poem's symbolic importance for Petrarch, see Aldo S. Bernardo, *Petrarch, Scipio, and the "Africa": The Birth of Humanism's Dream* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962).
  - 23 Petrarch, *My Secret Book*, 228–29.
  - 24 Nicola Festa, introduction to *L'Africa*, by Francesco Petrarch (Firenze: Sansoni, 1926), xxxv–xxxvii. For the letter, see Marco Vattasso, ed., *Del Petrarca e di alcuni suoi amici* (Roma: Tipografia Vaticana, 1904).
  - 25 Festa, introduction, xl.
  - 26 Francesco Petrarch, "A Critical Edition of Petrarch's *Epistola posteritati*," ed. and trans. Karl Enekel, in *Modelling the Individual: Biography and Portrait in the Renaissance, with a Critical Edition of Petrarch's "Letter to Posterity"*, ed. Karl Enekel, Betsy de Jong-Crane, and Peter Liebrechts (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), 243–81, at 276–77. Subsequent citations from the letter are given parenthetically in the text.
  - 27 Pier Paolo Vergerio, "Petrarcae vita," in *Le vite di Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccio: Scritte fino al secolo decimosesto*, ed. Angelo Solerti (Milano: Dottor Francesco Vallardi, 1904), 300.
  - 28 Santagata, *I frammenti dell'anima*, 44.
  - 29 For a reading of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta's* structural aesthetics, see Barolini, "The Making of a Lyric Sequence."
  - 30 H. Wayne Storey, *Transcription and Visual Poetics in the Early Italian Lyric* (New York: Garland, 1993), 377.
  - 31 Storey, 377.
  - 32 Storey, 396.
  - 33 Ernest H. Wilkins, "On the Evolution of Petrarch's 'Letter to Posterity,'" *Speculum* 39, no. 2 (1964): 304–8.
  - 34 Wilkins, 305.
  - 35 Petrarch, *Le familiari*, 1.1, ed. Rossi, 1:11; *Rerum familiarium libri*, trans. Bernardo, 11.

- 36 On the public role of icons before the Renaissance, see Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
- 37 Cicero, *De oratore*, ed. and trans. E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014), 252, at *Loeb Classical Library*, DOI:10.4159/DLCL.marcus\_tullius\_cicero-de\_oratore.1942: “In his operibus si quis illam artem comprehendit, ut tanquam Phidias Minervae signum efficere possit, non sane, quemadmodum ut in clipeo idem artifex minora illa opera facere discat, laborabit.”
- 38 P. G. Ricci, “Sul testo della Posteritati,” *Studi petrarcheschi* 6 (1956): 5–21, at 17. The translation is based on Enenkel but modified to reflect the manuscripts discussed by Ricci.
- 39 Ricci, 16–21.
- 40 See Victoria Kirkham and Armando Maggi, eds., “Chronology of Petrarch’s Life and Works,” in *Petrarch: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), xv–xxii.
- 41 For a broad overview of Petrarch’s writing chronology, see Kirkham and Maggi, “Chronology,” xv–xxi.
- 42 See Petrarch, *Le familiari*, 4.1, ed. Rossi, 1:156–59; *Rerum familiarium libri*, trans. Bernardo, 175–78.
- 43 Hans Baron, *Petrarch’s “Secretum”: Its Making and Its Meaning* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1985), 23–26. On Petrarch’s manipulation of historical dates in his letters, see Santagata, *I frammenti dell’anima*. On the importance of the age forty, see Ronald Witt, “Petrarch, Creator of the Christian Humanist,” in *Petrarch and Boccaccio: The Unity of Knowledge in the Pre-Modern World*, ed. Igor Candido (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 65–77.
- 44 Rodney J. Lokaj, *Petrarch’s Ascent of Mount Ventoux: The “Familiaris” IV, I* (Roma: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 2006), 62.
- 45 Petrarch, *Le familiari*, 2.7, ed. Rossi, 1:86; *Rerum familiarium libri*, trans. Bernardo, 93.
- 46 Friedrich Nietzsche, “*The Anti-Christ*,” “*Ecce Homo*,” “*Twilight of the Idols*,” and *Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley, Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 205.