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"Love's sweetest part, variety":
Petrarch and the Curious Frame of the Renaissance Sonnet Sequence

Germaine Warkentin

My verse is the true image of my mind,
Ever in motion, still desiring change;
And as thus to varietie inclin'd,
So in all humours sportively I range.

Michael Drayton¹

"Shakespeare's sonnets," writes Stephen Booth, "are hard to think about. They are hard to think about individually and they are hard to think about collectively."² Certainly Shakespeare's book of lyrics is as intractable from a structural point of view as any other of its kind. Indeed, it is more so; composed of 154 14-line poems in unrelieved succession, containing a number of thematic subgroups of varying size, it has no obvious ending, nor any obvious beginning, except for the first grave utterance of that sonorous voice:

From fairest creatures we desire increase,
That thereby beauty's rose might never die.

(1, 1-2)

Yet floating suspended in the lucid medium of Shakespeare's visions of time, beauty, and betrayal, one finds it difficult to agree with Booth; Shakespeare's comprehensiveness, and the infinite modulations of vision it presents to us, is anything but puzzling. It is, on the contrary, benign but demanding, requiring that we become immediately more vast ourselves to move within the possibilities set out before us.

Setting aside the problems of individual sonnets, which we solve as we are able from time to time, what can we say about the "collectivity" of this great sequence that will help to resolve such difficulties? For though we may feel that we are trying to come to grips with "a monster in no certain shape attir'd,"³ we persist in struggling with the problem of the frame of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*—indeed, with the structural problems of every such collection we read, explain, or teach. Why, we ask wretchedly, do these poems insist on sticking to each other so, and for no assignable reason? We delight in a single Shakespeare sonnet, yet in extracting it for study, we know that we are dismembering no casual anthology, but that the poem's context is a poem itself. In different ways, this is true of every Renaissance sonnet sequence from the fourteenth-century *Canzoniere* of Petrarch onward.

Some sense of the orchestral fabric in which such collections are woven together is suggested by the Elizabethan critic Puttenham, in describing "In what forme of Poesie the amorous affections and allurements were uttered:"

And because love is of all other humane affections the most pussiant and passionate, and most generall to all sortes and ages of men and women . . . it requireth a forme of Poesie variable, inconstant, affected, curious, and most witty of any others, whereof the ioyes were to be uttered in one sorte, the sorrowes in an other, and by the many formes of Poesie, the many moodes and pangs of lovers, throughly to be discovered: the poore soules sometimes praying, beseeching, sometime honouring, avancing, praising: an other while railing, reviling, and

cursing: then sorrowing, weeping, lamenting: in the end laughing, rejoicing, & solacing the beloved again, with a thousand delicate devices, odes, songs, elegies, ballads, sonnets, and other ditties, moving one way and another to great compassion.⁴

Puttenham is describing a kind of poetry that takes on a variety of forms by the very nature of its subject matter, yet where the poems seem to move together in schools, like fish, and in patterns related to the shape of some design: "then," he writes, and "in the end." But his statement does not constitute a theory of what we would call the "sonnet sequence." That term was used only once before the nineteenth century, by George Gascoigne in 1575, to describe some small groups of sonnets joined by rhyme-link.⁵ In fact nowhere in the critical literature of the Renaissance—or indeed of our own day—can we find a useful description of the sonnet sequence or *canzoniere* (for we must use both names if we are to move freely among examples from different places).⁶ The reason for this failure is not far to seek: it lies in the central problem of form that bedevils such collections. Writing ca. 1463-7 the scholar Landino used the term *il poema* to describe the collectivity of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*,⁷ and it is the symphonic quality of a large structure implied by this term that despite their many differences links the fourteenth-century masterpieces of Dante and Petrarch with those by Ronsard, Sidney, Spenser and Shakespeare, and by poets of our own time such as Rilke and Auden. Yet struggling with that sense of the *poema* that makes us think of sonnet sequences as "works" rather than anthologies, is the fragmentation consequent upon an apparent absence of the expected linking devices, especially those of plot and narrative, that might give such works coherence. Each collection is composed of separate units that assert their independence fiercely, and have often had a public existence prior to the compilation of the *canzoniere* itself. The relation between fragment and whole has always been so difficult to handle critically that one alternative has been simply to abandon the search for form altogether. This was the approach taken by Natalino Sapegno in some remarks he made on the unity of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, a work which has always been taken as the archetype of the sonnet sequence. Though the *Canzoniere* may seem very carefully structured in contrast with Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, there have in fact been many theories as to the nature of its unity. Surveying them, Sapegno concluded,

È chiaro che cotali ricerche, per quanto non inutili, rimangono tutte estranee alla considerazione poetica del *canzoniere*, e non solo quelle fondate su ragioni cronologiche, o di allegoria, o di estrinseca varietà, sì ancora quelle costruite su fondamenti psicologici . . . rimane sempre certo che l'ordinamento fu, in ogni caso, un fatto posteriore e sopraggiunto, inetto a trasformare la sostanza lirica delle singole composizioni, ciascuna delle quali vuol essere considerata esteticamente per sè.⁸

It is this contention, representative of many modern views of the problem of the aesthetic structures of sonnet sequences, to which I wish to offer an alternative here. I propose to argue that a *canzoniere* is not an anthology of separate poems, but involves a formal aesthetic program of considerable interest. The decision to place individual poems together, even if posterior to the act of writing each separately, nevertheless establishes for them a special and aesthetically very remarkable frame of reference, the use of which we can trace in many examples of the mode from Petrarch onward throughout the

Renaissance. This structuring principle is the concept of *variatio*, variety. As a concept *variatio* is, first of all, an acknowledged aesthetic resource drawn from classical practice. Second, it is not extrinsic to the effect of the separate lyrics, but an essential aspect of their most characteristic subject, the love of the poet for a highly idealized woman who disdains his suit.

* * *

The most notable modern example of the organized lyric collection before Petrarch, Dante's *Vita Nuova*, is both very dissimilar, and in the Renaissance, was much less well-known. As a result, the few ideas we have about such works have usually been extrapolated from the sole example of Petrarch. It is in the opening sonnet of the *Canzoniere* that Petrarch begins to shape for us the structural expectations he means us to assume as we read the work:

Voi ch'ascoltate in rime sparse il suono
di quei sospiri ond'io nudriva 'l core
in sul mio primo giovenile errore
quand'era in parte altr'uom da quel ch'i' sono,

del vario stile in ch'io piango et ragiono
fra le vane speranze e 'l van dolore,
ove sia chi per prova intenda amore,
spero trovar pietà, non che perdono.

Ma ben veggio or sí come al popol tutto
favola fui gran tempo, onde sovente
di me medesmo meco mi vergogno;

et del mio vaneggiar vergogna è 'l frutto,
e 'l pentersi, e 'l conoscer chiaramente
che quanto piace al mondo è breve sogno.⁹

In "*Voi ch'ascoltate*," the poet's life is boldly imagined as a fable, as a tale in the true and literary sense of something separate and unified that can be objectively examined, and the poem openly invites the reader to enter into the fable by seeking an understanding of the *vario stile*, the varied style in which the poet reasons and laments about his condition. Expressed in *rime sparse*, the separate poems here assembled, these various ways of approaching the poet's tale suggest that the phases of his experience each have their suitable expression. Yet the experience of which the poems treat is presented as one whole and complete, though its expression is shifting and various, and the symbol of its completeness is the reflective posture of the opening poem itself, which can encompass and express both its variety and its unity.

The organization of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* takes shape from the elements we have just discerned in the opening sonnet. The poet calls on us to take part in a single experience, but one which despite this singleness has a dimension in time, for the man who tells, or is, the tale knows that it began "*quand'era in parte altr'uom da quel ch'i' sono*." But though there is a strong emphasis on chronology in the *Canzoniere*, the sense of narrative it creates is deceptive. Petrarch dates the fatal day and hour of his meeting with Laura. He counts the anniversaries as they pass by, and having fallen in love in youth, he still loves when old

age comes upon him. But the lover's experience cannot be stretched upon the procrustean bed of plot, for the poems remain "scattered rhymes," dwelling in various styles on separate facets of the poet's tale. This experience is recounted not for its value as a developing narrative, but for its moral order. At the beginning, Petrarch had welcomed love, but by the end, he knows he must leave it behind. Time in the *Canzoniere* is thus as much a moral theme as a technical shaping device, a theme which Petrarch uses to interpret the continuous judgement of his own feelings. As we read, we share not the events which teach him these lessons, but his experience of learning it. We never move beyond that experience (as we do in the *Vita Nuova*) to view it complete. The coherence of the *Canzoniere* really comes from the singleness of the *Canzoniere's* subject, the mind and embattled soul of Petrarch himself.

Yet there are a number of poems in the *Canzoniere* which do not deal with Petrarch's love for Laura, or which treat it as a background theme. The most noted, of course is the famous canzone "*Italia mia*," but there are many others, such as the tributes to Sennuccio del Bene and Cino da Pistoia, sonnets exchanged with friends, and poems lauding his patrons the Colonna. In the Renaissance canzonieri, Petrarch's non-love poems were often emulated, and this has accounted for much of our difficulty in treating such collections as unified wholes, for if they are regarded solely as collections of love-poems, these lyrics of a different character must be extraneous. But as Aldo Bernardo has shown,¹⁰ they should not be considered intrusions among the love poems, but rather as testimonies to the range and variety of Petrarch's spirit, carefully disposed to give richness and substance to the portrait of a single life which the *Canzoniere* constitutes.

The origin of this aesthetic conception poses an interesting problem. What models would Petrarch have had for the assembling of what might, in its initial stages, have seemed no more than a definitive anthology? Certainly the nearest to his hand were the multiplying Italian and Provençal lyric collections which constituted the contemporary poetry of his own day. He would have known these in a number of forms. As well as being acquainted with individual manuscript books made up by his friends (in which, Wilkins tells us the poems were likely to be grouped according to their form¹¹), Petrarch must certainly have known some of the great anthologies of Provençal amorous verse in which the lyrics of a particular poet were collected together under that poet's name, with expository prose materials—*vidas* and *razos*—relating the biographies of the poets and the circumstances in which the poems were composed.

Nearest to Petrarch of all would have been the *Vita Nuova* of Dante, the derivation of which from the Provençal *chansonniers* has been recognized for some years.¹² Dante's collection is both like Petrarch's and unlike it. Concerned as is the *Canzoniere* with the poet's love for a beautiful woman who disdains him, and likewise divided in the middle by the death of the lady, the *Vita Nuova* is unified in two ways we do not see in Petrarch. First, like its Provençal ancestors (and more Renaissance canzonieri than one would expect), it contains important prose elements which give the *cagioni* or circumstances in which the poems were composed. Second, it has a clear narrative line which takes the poet-protagonist through a revelatory experience of love from beginning to end. Third, the individual poetic forms are arranged in a symmetrical pattern, rather than either being grouped, or arranged irregularly.

Where the *Vita Nuova* reveals its Provençal heritage in containing prose, the *Canzoniere* has none at all. Where the *Vita Nuova* has a narrative line, the *Canzoniere* has nothing we

can identify as such. Where Dante has balanced his sonnets and canzoni in a cunning pattern, Petrarch alternates his irregularly. The result is the creation of an aesthetic effect of considerable originality, in which the motive force of the great Provençal themes of love and poetry is given a brilliantly flexible and classically elegant setting. The idea for this innovation came to Petrarch, I believe, from classical sources, as they were particularly embodied in a manuscript of the elegies of Propertius which he went to some effort to obtain when he was in France in 1333, and which he kept with him all his life.¹³

So far as we can tell, Petrarch was the first man of the Renaissance to take an interest in Propertius, whose poetry had been as severely neglected in the middle ages as that of the other classical elegists (except, of course, Ovid). Of all the elegists' collections, it is Propertius' which most calls to mind the Renaissance *canzoniere*. Indeed, though Petrarch drew heavily on Ovid for many devices in the *Canzoniere*, the specifically generic likenesses between his work and Propertius' were instantly sensed by his Renaissance emulators as soon as they absorbed Propertius fully themselves.¹⁴

In Propertius alone among the elegists Petrarch would have found a collection, entirely in verse form, of passionate love poems organized as the expression of a single personality, yet at the same time giving intense emphasis to the themes of poetry and eloquence which are among the strongest features of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. Secondly, many of Propertius' elegies move outside the grim embrace of his infatuation with Cynthia to consider the temptation of a civic role for the poet's eloquence, and it is the inclusion of non-love poems of this sort in Petrarch's *Canzoniere* that distinguishes it particularly from the *Vita Nuova*. A final point links the *Canzoniere* not only with Propertius, but with classical love-lyric in general. Petrarch's collection begins in the classical manner with a very carefully devised formal *excusatio*, the famous "*Voi ch'ascoltate*" to which I referred earlier. As Boucher describes the *excusatio* in his discussion of Propertius, such poems constitute "*... une préface symbolique qui nous présente le poète comme fixé dans un destin. . .*"¹⁵ Signature poems of this sort are common to all the elegists, and are one of the few important structural devices of their collections. The decision which led Petrarch to the innovation of opening a modern lyric collection with just such a prefatory poem seems to me of very great significance. If I am correct, the use of an *excusatio* established classical emulation as one of the primary modes among the many which the *Canzoniere* invokes for its readers.

Understanding the specific classicism of the aesthetic of the *Canzoniere* helps to make clear the ease with which Petrarch binds one single poem to another equally singular, even in those portions of the *Canzoniere* on which he had worked most carefully, and where other structuring devices (such as the numerological one recently proposed by Thomas P. Roche¹⁶) may be at work. The most important organizing device of classical elegaic collections after the *excusatio* is *πικιλία* or *variatio*, which Georg Luck tells us "applied to many . . . Hellenistic and Roman books of poetry."¹⁷ This principle dictated that poems on similar themes, or treated from different points of view, or initiated by the same moment of an experience, be separated from each other, often in different books of the same work. The result was to give the work a plastic quality much valued as a source of pleasure for the reader. Petrarch does not submit completely to the principle of *variatio*. Nevertheless, the jewel-like synchronic complexity which it creates is to be found as a constant aesthetic resource everywhere in the *Canzoniere*, creating a beautiful unifying rationale of its own distinct from, though never in conflict with, other considerations.

Yet the objection made by Sapegno still remains. Is organization in an attempt to create variety merely an extrinsic and essentially decorative effect? I think not, for in his *excusatio*, Petrarch points directly to *variatio* as an *intrinsic* aspect of the work as a whole. He does so in describing the oscillating fortunes of the lover, "*fra le vane speranze e 'l van dolore, / ove sia chi per prova intenda amore.*" The condition to which Petrarch is referring is, of course, erotic mania, a standard description of which prevailed in medical literature with remarkable consistency from the time of Galen until the late seventeenth century.¹⁸ For a typical account, we may, if we wish, consult an authority close to Petrarch's own experience. Here is the pathology of love, as described by Bernard of Gordon, the eminent medical man who taught at Montpellier not long before Petrarch became a student there.

Virtus . . . aestimativa, quae est altior inter sensibiles, precipit imaginativae, & imaginativa concupiscibili, & concupiscibilis irascibili, irascibilis virtuti motivae lacertorum, & tunc movetur totum corpus spreto ordine rationis, & currit de nocte & de die per viam & in via, spernendo calorem & frigus & omnia pericula cuiuscumque conditionis sint, cum iam amplius non potest quiescere corpus, sed concupiscentia non quiescit intantum . . . Signa autem sunt quando . . . habent cogitationes occultas profundas, cum suspiriis luctuosis. & si audiant cantilenas de separatione amoris, statim incipiunt flere & tristari: & si audiant de coniunctione amoris statim incipiunt ridere & cantare.¹⁹

That such a conventional description of erotic mania was known to Petrarch is made clear by the terms of St. Augustine's attack on the poet's love-melancholy in the third dialogue of the *Secretum*.²⁰ There, the frame of reference is primarily ethical. In the *Canzoniere*, it is no less ethical, but gives rise to another dimension as well. The traditional symptoms of the pathology of love are not merely adverted to in "*Voi ch'ascoltate*;" they also give rise to the art which shapes the whole work, the art of *rime sparse*. The scattered and various poems represent the very semblance of the poet's medical and spiritual condition, torn between opposing forces and incapable of establishing a stable centre out of which his "cure" can emerge. Lest we doubt this, let us remember that Petrarch himself said that such was the case. In the letter of 1373 to Pandolfo Malatesta which accompanied the gift of a manuscript of the *Canzoniere*, he wrote of

Nugellas meas vulgares . . . In primis opusculi varietatem instabilis furor amantium de quo statim in principio agitur.²¹

The unstable fury of lovers, then, explains the variety of these little works, as is disclosed right away at the beginning—that is, in Petrarch's *excusatio*, "*Voi ch'ascoltate.*" Robert M. Durling has already drawn attention to the way in which this statement supports the essentially provisional unity of the *Canzoniere*, and gives rise to "an artistic form expressive of the plight of natural man."²² We can carry this further, I think, by recognizing the strength with which the notion of *variatio* could be rooted in the morally conceived physiology of Petrarch's age, and that it not only leads directly to a concept of form, but is accompanied as well by an ideal of style appropriate to that form.

* * *

Petrarch thus left to posterity a simple but flexible structural concept: that of a work exhibiting the variety of the moods of a lover, set forth in *rime sparse* or separate lyrics,

and with a formal introductory poem constituting a proem or *excusatio*. The effect of variety in the work was further enhanced by the very rapid circulation of the *Canzoniere* in disordered and incomplete texts.²³ The consequences of this were two-fold. First, there was the *Canzoniere* itself: the structure evidently developed as Petrarch transformed the canzoniere evolved by Dante to produce a richly classicised portrait of a psychological and moral existence under the shadow of murdering time. In this respect, the *Canzoniere* constituted an essentially novel kind of fiction, perfected even in its first example, and accessible to those readers with a good manuscript, and to other perceptive minds as well. Second, there was the evident "variety" of the work in the manuscripts through which it was largely known, which enhanced the notion that the poems constituted an academy of literary style. Under the influence of vernacular humanism, the *Canzoniere* could thus be seen from another and by no means opposed point of view simply as an assemblage of beauteous literary models.²⁴

Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, as well as most of the collections of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—Giusto de' Conti's *La Bella Mano* (1440) the *Amores* of Boiardo (published 1499), Bembo's very influential *Rime* (before 1525), Scève's *Délie* (1544), the many collections of Ronsard (1552-78), Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* (1582), even Giordano Bruno's *Gli Eroi Furori* (1585)—can all be described in the terms we have developed here. They are each collections of separate lyrics, in which the author speaks in his own person of his varying fortunes in love. In another paper, I hope to describe some of the structuring devices (such as the *commiato* or farewell poem apparently devised by Giusto de' Conti²⁵) developed by poets in the two hundred years after Petrarch's death to cope with the problems raised by the aesthetic of *variatio*. That broad freedom to interpret the model existed even at the inception of the English sonnet sequence is manifest, if we take as contrasting examples Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* and Thomas Watson's *Hekatompathia*, the first formal English sonnet sequences, which both date from 1582. Sidney's collection bears a surface resemblance to Petrarch's: there is a formal opening poem, different lyric types are intermingled, and there are no prose sections. *Astrophil and Stella* is not, however, divided into two parts by the death of the poet's beloved, and it concludes not with a *canzone* but with a sonnet in which the poet meditates on the continuing meaning of his melancholy experience. The *Hekatompathia*, on the other hand, is composed of eighteen-line "passions," as the poet calls them. These *rime sparse* are preceded by brief prose analyses of their matter and technique, and the collection is divided into two parts. The division is caused not by the death of the beloved, but by the death of love itself. Tormented by his woeful passion, the poet announces at the eightieth poem "my love is dead," and elaborates on this "posie" until the end of the book. A prefatory note to another, and very late English sonnet sequence, suggests (as does the passage from Puttenham quoted earlier) that this freedom of interpretation took place within a continuing recognition of the intimate relationship between "variety" and the representation of the lover's state. "J.C.," author of the collection *Alcilia* writes,

These Sonnets following, were written by the Authour (who giveth himself this fained name of *Philoparthen*, as his accidentall attribute) at divers times, and upon divers occasions, and therefore in the forme and matter they differ, and sometimes are quite contrary to one another, considering the nature and qualitie of LOVE, which is a Passion full of varietie, and contrariety in it selfe.²⁶

The canzonieri of the sixteenth century, with certain important exceptions such as Spenser's *Amoretti*, were *variatio* collections in a far purer sense than any contemplated by Petrarch. Persistently to the forefront of the development of the new genre was the idea that a poet's adoption of the amatory mode involved him not only in a certain body of materials, but the assumption as well of a specific attitude towards his art. The essentials of this attitude were the ambition that led it to attempt a new brilliance of style, and the belief that this would arise from the poet's struggle to speak perfectly of his perfecting in love. In an important sense the amatory matter of many canzonieri was merely the vehicle for the true purpose of the poems, which was to demonstrate the poet's artistic achievement. For example, when French poets took up the canzoniere in the middle of the sixteenth century, it was perhaps its function as a discipline for the achievement of eloquence that drew them to it more than anything else. Though the suffering poet is still at the centre of these collections, his trial never leads him beyond the enclosed world in which fame is the only spur. In few of the French sonnet sequences of the 1550's is any moral value asserted more persistently than the prerogative of art; everywhere the poets confirm the primacy of fame in their endeavours. The French canzonieri are thus *variatio* collections *par excellence*. Adopting the conventionalized design of the Italian canzonieri, they go further and carry the *variatio* of the Petrarchan original to its extreme limit. There is no reason why they could not be arranged with the different lyric forms in different groups, as several were, for no other unity was required of them than the poet's display of his art. It is this aspect of Petrarch's example of which Gabriel Harvey speaks, when in *Pierces Supererogation* he honours the Italian poet as

the harmony of heaven; the lyfe of Poetry; the grace of Arte; a precious tablet of rare conceits, & a curious frame of exquisite workmanship, nothing but neate wit, and refined Eloquence.²⁷

The "eloquent" canzonieri with their curious frames represent a stage in the election of the vernacular poet to full equality with the classical. From them, the poet could develop in many directions, explaining his psychological and moral position, fanning the flame of eloquence by praising others, polishing his craft in the emulation of Petrarch, but best of all creating a solid intensely personal world, rich in thought and art, of which the collection of *rime sparse* was the expression. It is such a structure which is revealed to us in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, a collection which depends not on the builder's scaffolding of *excusatio* and central division, but on some fundamental experience which the scaffolding once made possible, though for this poet it is no longer needed. Here, the plastic quality which is the canzoniere's special contribution to the history of literary forms is thought upon, used, and transcended, for the poems themselves are made to turn upon a continuous dialogue between variation, change, time, and the perfect constancy of art:

O fearful meditation! where, alack,
Shall Time's best jewel from Time's chest lie hid?
Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?
Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?
O, none, unless this miracle have might,
That in black ink my love may still shine bright.
(65: 9-14)

Between the rage of time and change and the constancy of perfect beauty only the poems—love shining in black ink—can mediate. In this sense, Shakespeare's *Sonnets* compose, as a collectivity, a "fearful meditation" on the very subject that has made their art possible.

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Notes

- 1 This paper is a shortened version of one given before the Toronto Renaissance and Reformation Colloquium on December 7, 1973. The title is taken from Donne's poem "The Indifferent," and the epigraph is from the prefatory sonnet to Drayton's sequence *Idea* (1619).
- 2 Stephen Booth, *An Essay on Shakespeare's Sonnets* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), p. 1.
- 3 From "Variety" (1. 51), once ascribed to Donne, but now included among his *dubia*; John Donne, *The Elegies and Songs and Sonnets*, ed. Helen Gardner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. xliii-xliv, 104-7.
- 4 George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, ed. Gladys D. Willcock and Alice Walker (1936; rptd. Cambridge: the University Press, 1970), p. 45.
- 5 On Gascoigne's use of the term "sonnet sequence" in *The Adventures of Master F.J.*, and "sonnets in sequence" in *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowers*, see William T. Going, "Gascoigne and the term 'Sonnet Sequence,'" *Notes and Queries* 199 (1954), 189-91, and Lawrence A. Sasek, "Gascoigne and the Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences," *Notes and Queries* 201 (1956), 143-4. In "The Term 'Sonnet Sequence,'" *Modern Language Notes* 62 (1947), 400-02, Going argues that Rossetti seems to have invented the term in a letter to Hall Caine, but this letter, quoted in T. Hall Caine, *Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1883), p. 244, cannot be earlier than 1877 (see Caine, *Recollections*, p. vi, on the date of his earliest correspondence with Rossetti), and Swinburne had already used the term "sonnet sequence" in an essay of 1875, "The Poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti," *Works*, ed. Sir Edmund Gosse and T.J. Wise (London: William Heinemann, 1926), XV, p. 8.
- 6 The *canzoniere*, or sonnet sequence, is a mediaeval literary form in origin, and has a varied and fascinating history that stretches from the thirteenth century to the early seventeenth, with a further period of revival in the last century. In English we call it the sonnet sequence because most examples in our tongue are restricted to that form. But continental *canzonieri* embrace many different lyric types, although the sonnet certainly predominates in almost all collections. In this paper the unitalicised term "*canzoniere*" will be used to refer to continental collections, and "sonnet sequence" to refer to those in English. *Canzoniere*, in italics, is the most customary Italian title of the collection which Petrarch himself termed his *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*.
- 7 Cristoforo Landino, *Orazione fatta per Cristofano da Pratovecchio quando cominciò a leggere in Studio i Sonetti di messere Francesco Petrarca*, ed. Roberto Cardini, "Cristoforo Landino e l'umanesimo volgare," *Rassegna della letteratura italiana* 72 (1968), 267-296 (see p. 292).
- 8 Natalino Sapegno, *Il Trecento* (Milano: Vallardi, 1942), p. 241.
- 9 Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, ed. Gianfranco Contini, 3rd ed. (Turin: Einaudi, 1968), I.
- 10 Aldo S. Bernardo, "The Importance of the Non-Love Poems of Petrarch's 'Canzoniere,'" *Italica* 27 (1950), 302-311.
- 11 Ernest H. Wilkins, *The Making of the "Canzoniere" and other Petrarchan Studies* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1951), pp. 265-6, and *A History of Italian Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 97.
- 12 Pio Rajna, *Lo Schema della Vita Nuova*, reprinted from *Biblioteca della Scuole Italiane*, II, 1 (Verona: Donato Tedeschi, 1890), pp. 7-9.
- 13 On the singularity of Petrarch's interest in Propertius and the probable history of his manuscript, see B.L. Ullman, "The Manuscripts of Propertius," *Classical Philology* 6 (1911), 282-301.
- 14 The Petrarchan and classical strains eventually became so intertwined that as John Sparrow irritably remarks, the neo-Latin love-elegists

- repeated "*ad nauseam* the sentiments of Petrarch in the manner of Catullus and Propertius." (Sparrow, "Latin 'Petrarchism'", in *Italian Renaissance Studies*, ed. E.F. Jacob [London: Faber and Faber, 1960], p. 381.) The beginning of this development can be seen as early as the Latin collection of Giovanni Marrasio (*Angelinetum*, ca. 1429) in which Rossi suspects Petrarchan reminiscences (Vittorio Rossi, *Il Quattrocento* 8th ed. [Milano: F. Vallardi, 1964] p. 223).
- 15 Jean-Paul Boucher, *Etudes sur Properce: Problèmes d'inspiration et d'art* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1965), p. 401.
 - 16 In a paper, "The Calendrical Structure of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*"; given at the World Petrarch Congress, Washington, D.C., April 10, 1974, and forthcoming in *Studies in Philology*.
 - 17 Georg Luck, *The Latin Love Elegy* (London: Methuen, 1959), p. 149. See also Boucher, *op. cit.*, 369-70, where we are reminded of the deliberately "various" arrangement of the letters of Pliny the Younger. Quintilian takes almost for granted the desirability of variety in the oration (*Institutio Oratoria*, II, xii, 10); the ease and mobility it creates is stressed (II, xiii, 8-11), and he thinks it natural for structural variety to mirror variety of subject and intention: "*Tertia* [concerning the subject matter of the oration] *in sententiis ipsis, in quibus secundum res et adfectus variantur omnia*" (XI, iii, 152).
 - 18 See particularly John Livingston Lowes, "The Lover's Maladye of Hereos," *Modern Philology* II (1913-14), 491-546.
 - 19 Bern. Gordini *Opus Lilium Medicinae inscriptum . . .*, (Lyon: 1551), pp. 210-11.
 - 20 *Francisci Petrarcae Operum* (Basle, 1554. Rpt. Ridgewood, N.J.: Gregg Press, 1965) I, pp. 402-3.
 - 21 Petrarch, *Variae*, ix. A letter of 1360 to Francesco Nelli shows Petrarch replying gracefully to a compliment on his achievement of *varietas* (*Familiares*, XXII, 10).
 - 22 Robert M. Durling, *The Figure of the Poet in Renaissance Epic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1945), p. 86.
 - 23 Wilkins, *op. cit.*, shows in detail the development of the different manuscript traditions of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*.
 - 24 The aesthetic pleasure of variety was widely sought after in the Renaissance, as is shown by the many references collected in Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961). See especially the account of Giuseppe Malatesta's comparison of the *varietas* of Petrarch and Ariosto (II, 1065). The particular association of variety with lyric poetry is symbolised in Ripa's emblem for lyric poetry: *Donna Giovane, con la Lira nella sinistra mano, & la destra tengi il Plettro, farà vestita d'habito di varii colori, ma gratio, atillatto, & stretto, per manifestare, che sotto una sola cosa, più cose vi si contengono, haverà una cartella con motto che dica, Brevi complexor singula cantu. (Iconologia di Cesare Ripa Perugina [Venice, 1645], p. 493).*
 - 25 "*Va, testimon della mia debil vita,*" which completes the sonnets of Giusto de' Conti's *La Bella Mano* (ca. 1440, *editio princeps* Bologna, 1472) is the earliest example I have found of a type of poem which the later compilers of *canzonieri* found it very useful to imitate. Examples are innumerable, but in English see Sir Philip Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella*, 107 and 108, Samuel Daniel, *Delia*, 54, Edmund Spenser, *Amoretti*, 88, and a typical variation in William Smith's *Chloris*, 48 and 49.
 - 26 "J.C.," *Alcilia. Philoparthens loving folly* (London: 1613), B2f.
 - 27 Gabriel Harvey, *Pierce's Supererogation* (London: 1593; facsimile reprint, Scolar Press, 1970), pp. 46-7.