THE POETICS OF FRAGMENTATION:

SHARED MODERNITY IN PETRARCH, ELIOT, AND POUND

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Petrarch, a poet who pioneered a lyric subjectivity that would heavily influence subsequent European literature and a scholar who sought to bridge the gap between the ancients and his own generation, has often been called the “first modern man.” In the early 20th century, a group of American and British poets including T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound began writing what would later be called “Modernist” literature. What serves to link these poets, so distant in time, place, and aesthetics? I argue that a central aspect of their shared modernity lies in a poetics of fragmentation. Relying on close readings of their works, principally the lyric poems of Petrarch’s *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* or *Canzoniere*, Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” and *The Waste Land*, and Pound’s *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* and the *Cantos*, I describe and analyze a fascination with the literary fragment, which includes their heavy reliance on allusion, their emphasis on repetition and the passage of time, their fascination with personae and masks, and their frequent images of internal rupture and dissolution.
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INTRODUCTION

In one of the cardinal stories of Egyptian mythology, the god Osiris is tricked by his jealous brother Set, who seals him in a coffin and throws him into the Nile. Isis, Osiris’ twin sister and wife, sets out in search of her husband’s body, worried that without the proper burial ceremonies her consort’s spirit will not be able to find peace. Set, however, finds the sarcophagus while out hunting and cuts his brother’s body into fourteen pieces, which he scatters throughout Egypt. After a long search, Isis dutifully recovers thirteen of the pieces, but unfortunately Osiris’ phallus has been consumed by a fish. Undeterred, she fashions a new one from gold, attaches it to the other thirteen fragments, and by means of a spell restores her husband to life. Osiris, fragmented and re-membered, living and dead, takes his place in the Egyptian pantheon as the god of renewal, the underworld, and the afterlife.

From the earliest written works to the post-modern fascination with mosaic and bricolage, the concept of fragmentation has played a vital role in literature. In Hindu mythology, the gods divide and reunite their own immortal essence through multiple incarnations as avatars, and the dissolution and division of self is not limited to the divine; as the Katha Upanishad advises:

When all the knots of
The heart are broken,
Mortal becomes immortal:
This is the teaching. (VI.15)
In the New Testament, Jesus blesses and distributes a few loaves and fishes which are miraculously augmented, and even after the multitude is fed, baskets of leftover pieces are gathered up. Just before his death, he institutes the sacrament of the Eucharist, the central Christian rite, by breaking bread and then referring to the resultant fragments as his body. Shakespeare’s Coriolanus cries, “Go, get you home, you fragments!” (I.i.230), while Macbeth wants a doctor who can “[p]luck from the memory a rooted sorrow, / Raze out the written troubles of the brain” (V.iii.41-2). Wordsworth considered “some fragment from his dream of human life” (“Ode: Intimations of Immortality” 92); Byron broke the idols in the temple of Baal; Shelley addressed the shattered remains of the statue of a once-great king. Stevens found thirteen different ways to look at a blackbird, while D.H. Lawrence noted how the body dies piecemeal, and e. e. cummings fractured and reformed language itself.

This dissertation serves as a specific sort of literary biography of the poetics of fragmentation, examining how and why the fragment has been used in European lyric poetry. The images of scattering and gathering, of re-membering and remembering, of the fragment and the ruin, appear in the poetry of numerous eras and language traditions, but in a few authors these themes and approaches take a prominent place. Consequently, I have posited a poetics of fragmentation that forms a crucial link between the poetry of two very disparate times and places, Early Modern Italy and early Modernist England, between Petrarch, often referred as the father of humanism and the first “modern” man, and Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, two of the most prominent exemplars of early Modernist poetry.
While the differences between the poets are significant, there are several reasons why I have chosen them. First, the concept of fragmentation doesn’t just show up in the poetry of those movements but is central to them; it informs and even shapes them. Second, the ways in which fragmentation is used show a certain continuity as well as significant differences, which lends itself to an interesting and valuable comparative approach. In doing this, I do not mean to suggest either that Eliot and Pound are the only important Modernist poets nor even that the poetry of these two men (and their approaches to it) are monolithic. There are, however, significant similarities that tie the two men together and make them a useful duo for this study. Naturally, references to them as “the Modernists” does not mean to imply that they were the only important Modernist poets; rather, I use it at times as a useful shorthand expression.

The first three chapters of this dissertation focus on the poetics of fragmentation in Petrarch. While I consider his entire oeuvre—the Trionfi, personal correspondence, even his Latin literary works—the focus is on his collected vernacular lyric poetry, variously called the Rime Sparse, the Canzoniere, or the Rerum vulgarium fragmenta. Chapter 1, “Tradition, Quotation, Composition,” examines Petrarch’s use of the literary past in his own works, how he incorporates into his poetry individual authorial fragments, both through allusion and quotation. Special attention is given to two principal sources of influence on Petrarch: the distant classical tradition and the much more immediate tradition of Italian vernacular poetry, particularly the overshadowing figure of his father’s contemporary and fellow citizen, Dante.

In Chapter 2, “The Petrarchan Poetic Fragment,” I study several specific forms in which the fragment occurs in Petrarch’s poetry. A pioneer of the poetic collection,
Petrarch spent decades carefully constructing his *Canzoniere*, sifting through his substantial poetic corpus and arranging the chosen poems with great care. In the end, he created a 366-poem collection of vernacular lyric poems, complete with a broadly conceived bipartite theme (the sorrows of unfulfilled love and the grief of losing his beloved) as well as a number of mini-cycles of verbally, thematically, or narratively linked poems. Memory also plays an important role here, as the principal metaphors for memory, re-membering and re-collection, involve the bringing together once again in the present individual fragments of the past. The prevalence of images of scattering and gathering—of flowers, of tears, of pages, of time—is also discussed. Finally, I study the use of repetition, a sort of emphasized self-referential form of quotation as individual words or phrases are repeated for rhetorical effect, and of the divisions of time, how Petrarch fragments, divides, and sub-divides time, sometimes to re-arrange the pieces and sometimes to arrest time in the contemplation of a single fragment.

Chapter 3, “‘Sparsa anime fragmenta’ – Personal Fragmentation in Petrarch,” moves from the poetic to the personal fragment, from the literary to the psychological. Images of dismembering, of the removal of individual body parts or the almost fetishistic obsession with them (e.g., eyes, hands), are closely related to Petrarch’s many images of the separation of body and soul, often as a metaphor (or part of a metaphor) for the reaction to emotional trauma. I then examine internal conflicts, the wars within the mind and soul of the narrator which the poet so often and so famously expresses in terms of opposites and oxymora, followed by Petrarch’s use of various personae as an expression of personal fragmentation, the assumption of varied roles in order to give voice to a particular thought or feeling. Finally, I discuss the themes of conversion and
reintegration, the ways in which the poet explores the possibilities of recollecting himself, of bringing back the scattered fragments of his soul into a spiritual whole.

The subsequent three chapters take a similar line of inquiry, examining prominent aspects of the poetics of fragmentation in early Modernist poetry, particularly that of Eliot and Pound. Because of poetic similarities as well as because of limitations of scope, I concentrate primarily on their earlier work, with Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922) and Pound’s *A Draft of XXX Cantos* (1930) generally forming the cut-off points. “Fragmented Modernism” begins by briefly tracing important areas of development in the poetics of fragmentation between Petrarch and Modernism, concentrating mainly on its appearance in British Romanticism and French Symbolism; I then discuss the influence of these movements (and others) on Pound and Eliot and on their early poetry. As with Petrarch, I examine their extensive use of allusion and their appropriation of the literary past, how they seek to create a space for themselves by ordering an unofficial canon that can culminate in their own works. I conclude with a study focusing on form, on how some of their own major poems exemplify a poetics of fragmentation as collections of or in fragments.

Chapter 5, “The Modernist Poetic Fragment,” parallels the second chapter in its examination of the individual piece or fragment in Pound’s and Eliot’s poetry. As in Petrarch, memory and re-collection/recollection are a major theme; the Modernists frequently juxtapose fragmented moments of the past with the continuously unfolding present. Divisions of time and repetition also play a key role once again. Petrarchan repetition is mirrored in some important ways in the poems of the later poets, who make frequent use of lists and catalogues.
In Chapter 6, “The Divided Self,” I examine the ways in which the fragmented Modernist narrator (and possibly the fragmented Modernist poet) deals with division. First to be discussed is the role of communication, or rather the role of failures of communication, in keeping individuals apart from each other: unspoken thoughts, interrupted speech, miscommunication. Related to this are the prominent themes of solitude and exile, situations in which the individual is removed, physically or emotionally, from the rest of a group. Of even greater interest to the Modernists, however, are internal divisions, ways in which the individual struggles with himself. Eliot’s and Pound’s poetry is full of internal monologues (and internal dialogues), second-guessing and dissociative episodes, liminal states veering between life and death. This culminates in an examination of their use of personae/masks, how the poets use a wide array of characters, narrators, and other poetic figures in order to give extra weight to a particular feeling or approach or to create objective space by distancing an idea from the poet himself.

Finally, in Chapter 7, “The Poetics of Fragmentation,” I bring back together the two threads of discussion, Petrarch and Pound’s and Eliot’s early Modernism, to examine specific points of overlap in their shared poetics of fragmentation: their approaches to form (including lyric verse), the heavy use of allusion, the prominence of memory, the use of narrative masks, the interest in psychological trauma, in the fragmentation of the self. After this, I briefly suggest some reasons why authors separated by such wide gulfs of time, place, and aesthetics might share a poetics of fragmentation.

“The works of the ancients,” wrote Schlegel in the aptly named Athenaeum fragment #324, “have become fragments; the works of moderns are fragments at their
inception.” In examining the role of the fragment and fragmentation in Petrarch, Eliot, and Pound, I hope to show how these poets drew on the fragments of the ancients while they were creating their own fragmented works—while they were making themselves modern.
CHAPTER 1:

TRADITION, QUOTATION, COMPOSITION

As he embarked in earnest on his writing career in the 1330s, Petrarch had a strong poetic tradition to draw upon—both the classical (particularly Roman) authors of antiquity and the more recent works in the vernacular of Dante and the stilnovisti. By studying, internalizing, and reusing these earlier works he formed the first principal aspect of literary fragmentation. By calling upon the poetic—specifically Latin and Italian—tradition, he was able to place himself in a position of both continuity with and separation from his predecessors. This use of tradition took place mostly in the form of quotation and allusion, the process of detaching a single fragment (i.e., a word, a sentence, an image) from its larger context and incorporating it into his own work. The evocation of past writers proclaimed Petrarch’s respect for literary greatness as well as his own erudition, while his appropriation and utilization of their writings showed his creativity and his genius by manipulating or even subverting the original texts. The first major aspect of Petrarch’s poetics of fragmentation is thus textual and consists of this approach of pulling apart previous texts and then incorporating the appropriate fragments into his own poetry.
1.1 Petrarchan Classicism

The son, grandson, and great-grandson of notaries (Wilkins 1, Bishop 14), Petrarch as a youth received a solid education, first studying Latin grammar and rhetoric with his schoolmaster Convenevole da Prato and then the rudiments of civil law at the University of Montpellier. He developed early in his life a love for classical authors; at one point his father found his hidden cache of Latin literature and threw the books into the fireplace, though his son’s cries softened his heart, and he fished out of the fire singed copies of Vergil and of Cicero’s *Rhetoric* (Wilkins 5). In 1320 he returned to Italy to continue his legal studies at the already venerable University of Bologna, where eminent scholars such as Giovanni d’Andrea, Filippo Formaglini, and Cino da Pistoia taught. During this period he also traveled through northern Italy, which almost certainly exposed him to the early humanist studies of scholars such as Lovato Lovati and Albertino Mussato in Padova. By the end of his formal education in 1326, Petrarch had developed not only a solid knowledge and appreciation of classical literature but an excellent Latin style of his own.

Throughout his literary career, Petrarch wrote extensively in Latin and in fact seemed to wish to be thought of as principally a Latin author and scholar. Needing a suitable public name—“Francesco di Ser Petracco” or even “Franciscus Petracchi” simply wouldn’t do for a great man of letters—he undertook to change the patronymic into the Latinate surname “Petrarca,” which Wilkins suggests was also “more euphonious, and more distinctive” (24, and cf. Ceserani and Suitner). Petrarch’s reception of the laurel crown in Rome in 1341, his most significant public accomplishment, was due to his reputation as a scholar and poet of Latin, especially his (never completed) epic
poem *Africa*. In his long career, the *Canzoniere* and the *Trionfi* stand as his only major works in Italian. Even the notes he jotted down in the drafts of his vernacular poems were in Latin.

As much as he loved antiquity, Petrarch was keenly aware of the burgeoning differences between his own times and the ancients’, and the tension between continuity and change is prominent in his writings. The enduring literary impact of the classical authors on Petrarch constitutes the first major aspect of fragmentation in the *Canzoniere*: the restoration of, appeal to, and appropriation of the poetic tradition by allusion and quotation.

The image that propelled the humanist Renaissance and that still determines our perception of it, was the archaeological, necromantic metaphor of *disinterment*, a digging up that was also a resuscitation or a reincarnation or a rebirth….Petrarch found it natural to use the term *ruinae* for the lost or fragmentary literary remains of antiquity… (Greene 92)

By incorporating names, ideas, and even small excerpts—individual pieces, literary building blocks—from his predecessors’ works into his own poetry, Petrarch sought to bolster his own reputation, to intertwine his words with the words of those who were already recognized as great.

At the most basic level, this inclusion of the past appears in Petrarch’s use of individual tropes, ideas, or figures which he has sifted from classical history and literature. Appearing in the *Canzoniere* are historical heroes and villains such as Xerxes, Darius, and the 300 Spartans of Thermopylae (28) as well as the singular figure of Alexander the Great (187, 232). Figures and episodes from Roman history are even more prominent. Julius Caesar is evoked in 44, and the Scipios, Brutus, and Fabricius are part of the historical narrative in 54. *RVF* 102-104 form a triad of Roman-influenced sonnets.
In 102, Caesar’s disingenuous weeping is contrasted with Hannibal’s bitter laughter, and Hannibal appears again in 103 as an example of a leader who did not know how to take advantage of his victories and good fortune. Caesar meanwhile returns in 104 as the first in a short list of generals who owed their fame not only to their own prowess but to their chroniclers and poets.

Mythological figures from the Greco-Roman tradition in the *Canzoniere* are also numerous and include: Romulus (*RVF* 28), Narcissus (45), Aeneas and Agamemnon (186), Procne and Philomela (310), Diana and Acteon (52), Paris and Jason (225), and naturally the Muses and their home (7, 166). Notable women of antiquity—Helen of Troy, Lucretia, Polyxena, Hypsipyle, Argia—are compared to Laura in 260 and are, not surprisingly, found wanting.

Images from the works of Vergil (*RVF* 90), Horace (145), and Pliny (135) all appear, but the classical poet with the broadest influence is Ovid. Not only does his *Metamorphoses* provide the source material for many of the mythological figures and stories, but he furnishes the myth that forms one of the central images of the *Canzoniere*: the story of Apollo and Daphne (*Met*. I.452-567). The archer god Apollo, who had disdained the bow and arrows of Eros, was punished by his little colleague, who used his weapons to make Apollo fall in love with the nymph Daphne even as he made her abhor her suitor. Just before her amorous pursuer catches her, she pleads for help from her father, the river god Peneus, who Saves her from Apollo’s insistent attentions by transforming her into a laurel tree. Apollo accepts defeat and adopts the tree as his symbol.
In addition to serving as an explanation for the use of bay laurel leaves to crown poets (one of a number of groups that enjoyed Apollo’s patronage), the story provides Petrarch with several related themes and images. It allows him to remind his readers of his own reception of the poet’s laurel crown in Rome in 1341. It is an excellent example of passionate love that, unrequited, unrequitable, and unconsummated, is diverted and redirected, much like his own passion for Laura is re-channeled into poetry. And it provides Petrarch with his most important set of puns: “il lauro” and “Laura,” which are also accompanied by “l’aurora” (“dawn”), “l’aura” (“breeze”), or “l’oro” (“gold”).

Ovid’s influence is not restricted to this story, however; the general theme of metamorphosis is prominent in the Canzoniere and frequently evokes Ovid’s masterpiece. Petrarch makes use of the trope of the poet turning into stone. In RVF 51, the narrator obliquely evokes the Daphne myth (“come vide lei cangiar Thesaglia,” “just as Thessaly saw her change,” 3), then states that if the light from his beloved’s eyes had come any closer he would have been transformed into a stone, just as the head of Medusa transformed Atlas (13-14), and Laura’s power is again compared to the gorgon’s in 179. She makes use of this power in RVF 23.78-80:

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ed ella ne l’usata sua figura
tosto tornando, fecemi, oimè lasso,
d’un quasi vivo et sbigottito sasso.
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and she, to her accustomed form quickly returning, made me, alas!, an almost living and dismayed stone.

In 129.50-52, the poet both sees the face of his beloved in stones (28-29) and compares himself to one:

```
. . . pur li medesmo assido
me freddo, pietra morta in pietra viva,
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in guisa d’uom che pensi et pianga et scriva.

and right there, cold,
I sit myself down, dead stone on living stone,
like a man who thinks and weeps and writes.

Here is also a glimpse of Petrarch’s relationship with Dante’s poetry, discussed in more
detail below, as Dante’s own rime petrose, “stony rhymes,” add their own weight to the
Ovidian influence on Petrarch’s lapidary imagery.¹

Petrarch creates a connection to the classical poets and their works by taking
individual pieces of language or theme and incorporating them into his own poetry; he
does so to identify himself with them, to place himself in the same poetic tradition. In
Mazzotta’s words,

The incessant repetition and variation of what has already been said is
certainly a way of gathering the scraps of the past and passing them on in
new and unpredictable combinations….But this repetition is to be
understood both as the desire to begin anew and as the discovery that one
is inexorably part of a shared language preexisting oneself. (94)

One aspect of this shared language is his use of the myth of Orpheus, the great poet and
singer who lost his beloved wife Eurydice to a snakebite, descended into the underworld
to recover her, and lost her again when he was unable to heed his instructions not to turn
around and look at her until they had both returned to the land of the living. Petrarch
finds a great deal of value in this myth, not only because of the fitting image of the artist
who turns romantic loss into art but because by identifying himself with Orpheus he is
subtly equating himself to the mythical paragon of love poetry, as in RVF 187, in which
he calls Laura “most worthy of Homer and of Orpheus” (“d’Omero dignissima et
d’Orphee,” 9). In the canzone RVF 323, the narrator recounts a series of six brief visions

¹ Cf. Martina Lauster’s “Stone Imagery and the Sonnet Form: Petrarch, Michelangelo, Baudelaire,
Rilke.”
of beauty falling to death or destruction. The final vision is of a beautiful lady; the language and images Petrarch uses clearly indicate that it is his beloved Laura: she moves thoughtfully amid the flowers (“per entro i fiori… / pensosa,” 61-62), is graceful and beautiful (“leggiadra et bella,” 62), and makes the speaker burn and tremble (“arda et treme,” 63) at the thought of her. As she passes, however, she is bitten in the heel by a snake (“Punta poi nel tallon d’un picciol angue,” 69) and dies, leaving the narrator to conclude that “nothing in the world lasts but weeping” (“ahi nulla altro che pianto al mondo dura!” 72). Migraine-George also notes Petrarch’s tendency to present Laura as a shadow, a present absence, very similar to Eurydice’s mythical role (228-29). In equating Laura with Eurydice, Petrarch casts himself in the role of Orpheus: grieving husband as well as supreme poet, since the tragic scene that Petrarch is viewing took place at the wedding of Orpheus and Eurydice.

In another late poem, the double sestina RVF 332, Petrarch again takes up the topic of death and again uses the myth of Orpheus:

Or avess’ io un si pietoso stile  
che Laura mia potesse torre a Morte  
come Euridice Orfeo sua senza rime,  
ch’i’ viverei ancor piú che mai lieto!  
S’ esser non po, qualcuna d’este notti  
Chiuda omai queste due fonti di pianto.

Now would that I had such a sorrowful style  
that I could reclaim my Laura from Death  
as Orpheus without rhymes reclaimed his Eurydice,  
then I would live happier than ever!  
If that is not possible, may one of these nights  
now close these two fountains of tears. (49-54)

Here Petrarch explicitly compares himself and Laura to Orpheus and Eurydice. Although he seems to recognize Orpheus’ primacy—the Thracian, after all, had the power to recall
his beloved from death without even the benefit of rhyming verse—Petrarch leaves unspoken but understood the fact that Orpheus was ultimately unsuccessful in his venture, and in any case Petrarch seems to leave the door open with regard to his own powers, as he doesn’t definitively state that reclaiming Laura is impossible but simply “if that is not possible…”

Beyond Orpheus, Petrarch several times compares himself, if implicitly, with the great poets of old. In *RVF* 166, he ostensibly bemoans his lack of inspiration and ability and the fate that has kept him from becoming one of the great poets of Italy. As is often the case, Petrarch employs the rhetorical move of claiming that he is not someone great while suggesting that he may be by poetically placing himself with those who are. In this case, those poets are those of “Verona et Mantoa et Arunca” (4), presumably Catullus, Vergil, and Juvenal. He makes a similar move in *RVF* 186, in which he muses that if Homer and Vergil had known Petrarch’s own source of inspiration, they would have written of her instead, mixing their styles inelegantly and upsetting their actual subjects (Aeneas, Achilles, Ulysses, Augustus, and Agamemnon are named). In this rather playful way, Petrarch draws a parallel between his Laura and the kings and warriors of Homer and Vergil, obliquely creating a parallel between himself and the paramount poets of Greek and Latin poetry. In *RVF* 247, Petrarch worries about his treatment of his subject, Laura, not that he might be arrogant in praising her too much but that he is remiss in not praising her to the extent that she deserves. He consoles himself by pointing out that trying to fully praise Laura would exhaust even “Atene, Arpino, / Mantova et Smirna, et l’una et l’altra lira” (“Athens, Arpino / Mantua and Smyrna, both the one and the other
lyre,” 10-11); here he adds the orators Demosthenes and Cicero to the poets Homer and Vergil, two Greeks and two Romans symbolizing the extent of classical eloquence.

Petrarch seeks to improve his own stature by playing with a similar interchange of artistic subjects and their famous creators in other ways. In two sonnets, *RVF* 77 and 78, he again brings the ancients and moderns together, this time in the medium of visual art. The first poem reflects on a portrait of Laura (Contini suggests a miniature or perhaps a watercolor, 121) drawn by Petrarch’s friend, the noted painter Simone Martini. Earlier artists—including the great Polyclitus—could never have done what Martini has, not just because they lived and died long before Laura but because even their great skill could not have done justice to the subject as Martini has done. In the second sonnet Petrarch begins by again praising Martini’s portrait, but he also wishes that the artist had the power to bring the drawing to life. The poet rhapsodizes on the painted face of Laura, wishing that she could move and respond. The episode clearly refers to the story of Pygmalion, the artist whose beautiful statue Galatea was brought to life, and he makes the reference clear in the final tercet:

Pigmalìòn, quanto lodar ti dei  
de l’imagine tua, se mille volte  
n’avesti quel ch’ i’ sol una vorrei!

Pygmalion, how much you should rejoice  
in your statue if you had a thousand times  
what I would have even once! (12-14)

By the end of the poem Petrarch has subtly replaced Martini as the artist, the creator; he is the one addressing Pygmalion as an equal, hoping to enjoy his “imagine” just as the

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2 Although it is possible that the thing which Petrarch desires just once may be just a touch (or even a kiss), it is worth noting that Pygmalion not only touches and kisses his newly-living Galatea but that Ovid’s story ends with the birth of their child: “Venus attended the marriage she had wrought, / and when nine times the curved horns of the moon / became a circle, Galatea bore / Paphos, from whom the island takes its name” (X.294-97).
mythological sculptor enjoyed his. The senese may have physically drawn the portrait of Laura, but it is the poet who inspired him (the idea came to Simone “a mio nome,” “in my name” or “on my behalf,” 2) and who initially gave Laura artistic existence through his poetry. Yet even this artistic triumph is limited in its own way, as his ekphrasis is fragmented by the nature of the verbal medium; words alone can never hope to reproduce (pace Robert Browning) the fullness of Laura’s physical beauty. In fact, the poem that describes her is now three steps removed, mimetically speaking, from platonic Beauty—first Laura herself, then a painting of her, then a poem about the painting.

In addition to the number of allusions to classical authors, figures, and stories Petrarch makes a number of references to the Bible—and for much the same reason. As much as the poet wants to be seen as part of the classical tradition, to create a space for himself on the literary timeline, he is also intent on showing his Christian background, beliefs, and learning in order to establish his religious credentials. Biblical allusions allow Petrarch not only to express genuine religious feeling but also to bolster his image as a thoughtful and faithful Christian and churchman. From the Old Testament, he includes figures and stories such as Adam (RVF 354), David, Saul, Goliath, and Absalom (44); Rachel, Leah, and Elijah (206), Pharaoh and the Exodus (206); he also uses poetic images from the Psalms in poems such as RVF 30 and 226.

Language and ideas from the New Testament are also represented. In the final poem of the Canzoniere, Petrarch makes a reference to the parable of the Foolish Virgins (366.14-16) from the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew. The opening line of RVF 235, “Lasso, Amor mi trasporta ov’io non voglio” (“Alas, Love carries me where I do not wish”) strongly evokes Jesus’ words to St. Peter in John 21:18 (KJV): “... but when thou
shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee
whither thou wouldest not.” Because in the biblical passage Jesus is foretelling Peter’s
ultimate fate—death by crucifixion—Petrarch is essentially equating his own suffering at
the hands of Love to Peter’s (and, indirectly, Christ’s) at the hands of his executioners.
Another important Johannine echo occurs in the lines 12-13 of RVF 338: “Non la
conobbe il mondo mentre l’ebbe: / conobbi’io, ch’a pianger qui rimasi” (“The world did
not know her while it had her: / I, who remained here to weep, knew her”). The language
here comes from the first chapter of John, verse 10: “He was in the world, and the world
was made by him, and the world knew him not.” In both cases, the comparisons are quite
striking: the poet is compared to St. Peter, and Laura to Jesus.

Allusion provided a useful but limited initial base for the poet who was seeking to
associate his own writings with those of the ancients; for a firmer foundation, Petrarch
also appropriated the actual language of his predecessors. These often appear in the form
of sententiae, pithy maxims built as carefully constructed phrases or sentences that could
be easily removed from one text (and context) and inserted into another. From the
classical tradition comes the final tercet of RVF 56:

    Et or di quel ch’i’ ò lecto mi sovene,
    che ’nanzi al di de l’ultima partita
    huom beato chiamar non si convene.

    And now what I have read comes to mind,
    that before the day of his final departure
    a man must not call himself fortunate. (12-14)

This is a version of one of the most famous classical sententiae, a passage from
Herodotus’s Histories 1.32 in which the wise king Solon admonishes Croesus that no
man should consider himself fortunate before the day of his death. Santagata notes that
while Petrarch had probably read the story in several different authors and used the trope in a number of places in his writing, Ovid is the likely source (Met. III.135-37) of the wording used here (Canzoniere 300n).

The classical trope of the brevity of life (e.g., Seneca’s “vitam brevem esse, longam artem,” “life is short, art long,” De Brev. Vitae I.1) appears in several variations. In RVF 71 it is invoked at the start of a canzone to indicate the speaker’s fear of not being able to fully express himself: “Perché la vita è breve, / et l’ingegno paventa a l’alta impresa” (“Because life is short and wit at its great task,” 1-2). Petrarch uses the image again at the beginning of RVF 88, a sonnet: “Poi che mia speme è lunga a venir troppo, / et de la vita il trappassar sì corto” (“Because my hope has been too long in coming, and the passing of my life too short,” 1-2).

Petrarch has recourse to the actual language of the Bible as well. The final line of RVF 208, a sonnet addressed to the Rhone, asks the river to apologize to the poet’s beloved for his tardiness: “Lo spirto è pronto, ma la carne è stanca” (The spirit is ready, but the flesh is tired”), a phrase that comes almost directly from Mark 14:38, “Spiritus quidem promptus, caro vero infirma” (“The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak”). In RVF 81, Jesus speaks to humanity: “O voi che travagliate, ecco ’l cammino; / venite a me…” (“Oh you who are afflicted, behold the way; come to me”). The line combines two important sayings of Jesus: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28) and “I am the way, the truth, and the life…” (John 14:6).

1.2 Petrarch and Dante

For all his familiarity with and love for the ancients, Petrarch’s most immediate, most over-arching, and most potentially problematic influence was Dante. Even before
his death in 1321, Dante was famous. His literary renown and influence, which (with ebbs and flows) would eventually achieve proportions unheard of since the ancients, was already growing. That same year Petrarch was studying at the University of Bologna, one of the centers of European intellectual life. “As a matter of fact,” Mazzotta notes:

Petrarch entered the cultural scene at a time when something like a cult of Dante was in place. Immediately after the latter’s death, as we know, Dante was hailed as nothing less than a classic, and his poetry became the object of several distinguished commentaries. (“Petrarch’s Dialogue” 177)

Before Petrarch was out of his teens, Dante towered uniquely over contemporary Italian vernacular verse, his poetic accomplishments and their fame contributing to his “overwhelming contemporary auctoritas” (Barański 56). For a young man in the 1320s with literary ambitions, especially in Italian or Latin, Dante was inescapable.

But even if Dante had found only modest success as a regional poet, Petrarch would have been familiar with him for several reasons and on several levels. On a personal level, Petrarch’s father and Dante were contemporaries and acquaintances in Florence, and both were exiled from their native city after the 1301 victory of the Black Guelfs. Petrarch himself may have met Dante in his childhood (Wilkins 2, Santagata “Chronologia” 1). In 1321, Petrarch and a few friends took advantage of a general strike at the university to travel to Rimini and then (presumably up the coast through Ravenna) to Venice (Wilkins 6); Dante’s death that September came after contracting an illness while returning to Ravenna from a diplomatic mission to Venice. Even though they never met up, Petrarch was quite literally walking the same roads and visiting the same cities as Dante. The younger man would have encountered both the poetry and the renown of the older.
On a literary level, as the adolescent and young adult Petrarch grew and began writing his own lyric Florentine poetry, he showed a ready familiarity with his stilnovisti predecessors: Guido Cavalcanti, Lapo Gianni, Cino da Pistoia (with whom Petrarch would exchange letters), and, of course, Dante. In a letter to Boccaccio (Fam. XXI.15), Petrarch says that in his youth he didn’t own a copy of Dante’s poetry, though such a book was “new and easily available” at the time. Despite (or partly because of) these close personal and literary connections, explicit mentions of Dante in Petrarch’s writings are rare; in fact, he shows up only twice in Petrarch’s poetic oeuvre: in RVF 287, a sonnet marking the death of Petrarch’s close friend and fellow poet Sennuccio del Bene in 1349, and in the fourth book of the Triumphus Cupidinis, the “Triumph of Love.”

Barański notes that is it well known that “Petrarch’s relationship to Dante was, to say the least, complicated and ambiguous” (50), as could be expected for two poets writing at nearly the same time and in the same language(s) and tradition(s). In the search to create his own poetic identity, largely ignoring Dante was a viable strategy and certainly one that Petrarch used. Beyond the two passing appearances of Dante in his poetry, Petrarch mentions (or even just alludes to) Dante only briefly in his voluminous collection of personal correspondence.

But relative silence can only help so much; not only is it a passive (and therefore limited) strategy, it is a deeply unsatisfying one that exposes the practitioner to accusations of ignorance, incompetence, or jealousy. Consequently, Petrarch teamed his strategy of silence with one of fragmentation. On those rare occasions when he shows up, Dante-the-legend is humanized, picked apart, broken down into the much more manageable Dante-the-poet. In his brief appearances in Petrarch’s poetry mentioned
above, he never appears in a prominent role or even, indeed, by himself. In RVF 287.9-11 Petrarch makes a request of his departed friend:

Ma ben ti prego che ’n la terza spera
Guitton saluti, et messer Cino, et Dante,
Franceschin nostro, et tutto quella schiera.

But I pray that in the third sphere
you greet Guittone, and Master Cino, and Dante,
our Franceschino, and all that band.

For the only mention of Dante in the Canzoniere, it’s hardly a remarkable one; Dante is (with Guittone d’Arezzo, Cino da Pistoia, and Franceschino degli Albizzi) one of four poets that Petrarch asks his recently departed friend to greet for him. In fact, those named are merely representative members of “tutto quella schiera,” “all that crowd” of Tuscan love poets. Petrarch notes that Sennuccio will encounter those poets, fittingly enough, in “la terza spera,” the sphere of Venus.

In the other explicit mention of Dante, found in the fourth book of the Triumphus Cupidinis, the narrator watches a group of ancient love poets (including Pindar, Ovid, and Sappho) followed by a similar parade of more recent poets who are speaking in Italian about love (“pur d’amor volgarmente ragionando” 30):

Ecco Dante e Beatrice, ecco Selvaggia,
ecco Cin da Pistoia, Guitton d’Arezzo,
chi di non esser primo par ch’ira aggia;
ecco i duo Guidi, che già fur in prezzo,
Onesto bolognese, e i ciciliani,
che fur già primi, e quivi eran da sezzo;
Sennuccio e Franceschin, che fur si umani
come ogni uom vide;

Behold Dante and Beatrice, behold Selvaggia,
behold Cino da Pistoia, Guittone d’Arezzo
who seems to be moved by anger at not being first;
behold the two Guidos, long held in high regard,
the bolognese Onesto, and the Sicilians
who were the first, and then became the last; Sennuccio and Franceschino, who were so good, as all men saw. . . (IV. 31-38)

Initially, at least, Dante seems to be given a more prominent place in the TC than in the passage from the Canzoniere; he is the first of the poets to be mentioned and one of only two (with Cino da Pistoia) who appears with his beloved. However, just as in RVF 287, Dante shows up as part of a schiera, a list of notable Italian love poets. In stressing those two qualifiers—Italian and love—Petrarch engages, and thus defines, Dante primarily as a writer of vernacular love poetry. If all we knew of Dante came from Petrarch’s poetry, we would assume that he was a writer neither of Latin verse nor serious, epic, religious Italian poetry (which, of course, he was) but was rather just one of a number of accomplished Florentine love poets—albeit, perhaps, a sort of primus inter pares.

For the exceptionally talented and ambitious Petrarch to be able to create a literary space for himself, Dante couldn’t be avoided but had to be controlled. Consequently, he fragmented his great predecessor: Dante’s literary and social presence was so pervasive, so monolithic, that Petrarch could survive its weight only by consciously ignoring it or by chipping away at that Dantean monolith and re-ordering its fragments with a new narrative supplied by Petrarch himself.

Beyond mentions of (or broad allusions to) Dante in his written works, there is the less explicit but perhaps more significant matter of the impact of Dante’s poetry on Petrarch’s. Despite Petrarch’s own protestations that he didn’t read Dante because he was afraid of becoming an imitator, a number of scholars have shown that, essentially, he did, and he was. A number of Petrarch’s motifs, tropes, and even words draw heavily on

3 Particularly Marco Santagata, in his “Presenza di Dante ‘comico’ nel ‘Canzoniere’” (1969) and in his edition of the Canzoniere.
Dante. Steinberg notes that his *rime disperse* were heavily influenced by Dante, who is “ubiquitous in Petrarch’s unanthologized poetry” (264). Clearly, Petrarch drew inspiration not only from Dante’s lyric poems but from the *Commedia* as well. The *Trionfi*, for example, are written in *terza rima*, include the figure of a guide leading the poet-narrator, and take the form of a “poema-visione” (Giunta 411).

“When a poet experiences incarnation *qua* poet,” Bloom writes, “he experiences anxiety necessarily towards any danger that might end him as a poet” (58). Dante represented such a danger, and several avenues towards engaging him in a way that would help build a distinct and lasting fame and literary persona were available: ignoring him, co-opting him, and misreading or re-interpreting him. Petrarch availed himself of all three. We have seen his tactic of silence: just two mentions of Dante, one in the *Canzoniere* and one in the *TC*; only two discussions of him (in both places unnamed) in his voluminous collections of letters; and a single mention in his many Latin works (a brief section of the *Rerum memorandarum libri* II.83). We’ve also seen indications of the strategy of co-option in Petrarch’s use of Dantean language and allusions in his vernacular poetry. Two salient examples will serve to illustrate this: Petrarch’s use of the story of Ulysses (particularly in *RVF* 189) and his *canzone* “Lasso me, ch’i’ non so in qual parte pieghi” (*RVF* 70).

The dangerous sea voyage constantly threatened by shipwreck and drowning is “[p]erhaps the most pervasive image in all of Petrarch’s work…” (Moevs 249), and the figure of Ulysses, particularly in his role as the storm-tossed hero braving danger to return home, inspired poets from pre-classical Greece to medieval Italy, so when Petrarch appealed to the trope, he was joining a long poetic tradition. However, because Dante had
made such recent and such distinctive use of the story, Petrarch’s treatment necessarily had to confront his in particular. Dante’s most complete representation of Ulysses occurs in *Inferno* XVI, where the narrator encounters the Greek hero among the fraudulent of the Eighth Circle. Through Virgil’s intercession, Dante hears the story of Ulysses’ death: how after finally returning home he eventually grew restless and set out again on a final voyage of exploration, exhorting his men with the famous lines (118-120):

> Considerate la vostra semenza:
> fatti non foste a viver come bruti
> ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza.

Consider your births:
you were not made to live as brutes
but to follow virtue and knowledge.

This laudable appeal to human courage and curiosity, however, ends badly; Ulysses and his entire crew are drowned when their ship encounters a terrible storm and sinks. The poet’s admiration for Ulysses’ thirst for knowledge is tempered by his recognition of hubris in the hero’s desire to go beyond the bounds of what is appropriate (and safe) for mankind.

One of Petrarch’s most important and explicit treatments of the myth of Ulysses is *RVF* 189. The sonnet begins with the quatrain:

> Passa la nave mia colma d’oblio
> per aspro mare, a mezza notte il verno,
> enfra Scilla e Caribdi; et al governo
> siede ’l signore, anzi ’l nemico mio.

My ship, weighed down with forgetfulness, passes through a rough sea, at midnight in winter, between Scylla and Charybdis; and at the helm sits my lord, or rather my enemy. (1-4)
From the beginning, Petrarch evokes Ulysses’ journey by the image of forgetfulness, which suggests the results of both eating the lotus and of hearing the Sirens’ song, and then the explicit mention of Scylla and Charybdis, the monster-and-whirlpool pair of dangers from Book XII of the *Odyssey*. The rest of the poem stresses the narrator’s danger, with sighs, hopes, and desire tearing the sails (7-8), while a rain of tears and a fog of disdain (“Pioggia di lagrimar, nebbia di sdegni,” 9) threaten the ship, causing him to despair of reaching port safely (14). Petrarch’s metaphorical treatment of the Ulysses myth parallels Dante’s more literal one in that both travelers risk destruction and death because of their reliance on their own powers to save them; hence Petrarch’s narrator’s assertion that reason and skill are dead among the waves (“morta fra l’onde è la ragion et l’arte,” 13) because he lacks the usual light and grace of his beloved’s eyes (stylized as his “two accustomed signs,” 12) that would serve him as orienting stars.

This treatment of Ulysses, Dante, and Dante’s Ulysses has been examined by a number of scholars; Santagata has shown lexical similarities with, among other things, Cantos V and XIV of the *Inferno* (“Presenza di Dante”). More recently, Fenzi (“Tra Dante e Petrarca”) has discussed how Petrarch borrows from and builds on Dante’s representation of Ulysses from *Inf.* XVI, while Cachey (“From Shipwreck to Port”) has shown how *RVF* 189, as the final poem in the first section of the *forma Chigi* version of the *Canzoniere*, serves as a kind of culmination of the themes of voyage and shipwreck. And as Moevs directly asserts, “The Petrarchan narrator is Dante’s Ulysses, gripped by the idea that if he learns or experiences one more thing, writes one more book, takes one more trip, he will somehow find the stability, understanding, and virtue that he seeks, even in his last days” (250).
Petrarch evokes Dante’s poetry in another, more explicit way in *RVF* 70. This *canzone* is unique among his poems in that the final lines of each of the five stanzas is a quotation of the opening line of another poem; in a chronological progression, poems by Arnaut Daniel, Guido Cavalcanti, Dante, and Cino da Pistoia are the sources for the last lines of the first four stanzas. These quotations are integrated through rhyme with the preceding line, so that each stanza finishes with a rhyming couplet. In the Dantean stanza, Petrarch draws heavily on Dante’s “Rime Petrose,” the name given to a set of four poems in which Dante includes “stony” imagery to produce a rough tone and hard style. Petrarch picks up this imagery, noting his lady’s heart of stone (“cor di smalto,” 23) and finishing the stanza with the couplet, “onde, come nel cor m’induro e ’inaspro, / così nel mio parlar voglio esser aspro” (“so that, as I become hardened and embittered in my heart, / so in my speech I wish to be harsh,” 29-30), the final line being Dante’s.

These two poems, *RVF* 189 and 70, indicate Petrarch’s familiarity with the *Commedia* as well as Dante’s lyric poetry and show how he drew on his precursor’s work in creating his own. But they also show how Petrarch used these evocations of—and even homages to—Dante as part of his third strategy for crafting a separate poetic persona: mis-reading or re-interpretin Dante. In this most successful approach to dealing with poetic influence, Petrarch uses Dantine allusions to (re-)define and (re-)frame Dante’s poetry and Dante himself. In *RVF* 189, for example, Petrarch picks up Dante’s spin on the voyage of Ulysses but places himself (or at least his narrator) in the starring role, shifting a humanistic and hubristic voyage of exploration to a metaphorical voyage of frustrated love. And in light of the Dantine echoes, lines 3-4 (“et al governo / siede ’l signore, anzi ’l nemico mio”) take on an interesting possibility. While the “lord” spoken
of is almost certainly Love, whom Petrarch often invokes in such terms of ambiguous respect, we should consider the possibility that there could be a secondary allusion to Dante himself, who is, as Petrarch’s poetic father and rival for literary greatness, both signore and nemico.

Petrarch also takes care in how he frames Dante and his poetry in RVF 70. While he honors Dante by including him as one of the four poets quoted, he carefully restricts that honor by indicating that Dante is no more than one of those great vernacular poets. He is given the same amount of attention and space as the other three poets—no more, no less. Most importantly, the fifth and final stanza of the canzone ends with the line, “nel dolce tempo de la prima etade” (50): the first line of one of Petrarch’s own previous canzoni, RVF 23. In doing so, Petrarch effectively relegates Dante to the status of a notable but not necessarily exceptional love poet; more importantly, he makes Dante just another chronological stop on a literary progression that finds its culmination in Petrarch himself. And just as in Canto IV of the Inferno Dante (with Virgil) encounters Homer, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan and is invited to join them, so that he becomes “sesto tra cotanto senno” (102), in RVF 70 Petrarch places himself on a par with—and even superior to—Arnaut Daniel, Guido Cavalcanti, Dante, and Cino da Pistoia.

Rico explains Petrarch’s interest in classical philology and its practical results in his poetics:

Classical philology—the understanding of a text in its complex cultural framework, the understanding of the culture from a reading of the text—was a rule of life, art and thought for Petrarch. The scrupulous effort of collation and conjecture gave him unusual stylistic sensitivity, and the search for sources, analogues and antecedents of other writers’ works gave rise to a habit that was to have enormous repercussions on his own works. (49)
Petrarch was obviously not the first to use allusion and quotation from previous sources—Dante’s constant mixing of the mythological/historical and the sacred is an immediate and important model—but he was unique in the design and scope of that use. His *Canzoniere*, as opposed to a single extended piece of poetry such as the *Commedia*, is the first extensive collection of lyric poetry in the vernacular conceived of and executed as a discrete and self-contained whole. Including allusions to and incorporating quotations from important earlier literary sources helps Petrarch accomplish two related tasks. First, it helps him in creating his own authorial ethos by indicating his scholarship, devotion to poetry, and piety. Second, it serves as a unifying element that helps to give such a large group of poems a common thread, a sense of cohesion. As we shall see, it is just one of several methods Petrarch uses to bring together a collection of poems written over the course of more than three decades.
CHAPTER 2:
THE PETRARCHAN POETIC FRAGMENT

In his poetry, particularly his Italian lyric poetry, Petrarch makes extensive and varied use of the idea of the fragment, starting from the very title of his collection: *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, “Fragments of vernacular items,” a physical collection of the individual poems themselves. The fragment plays an important role in his approach to memory and the images of memory and re-collection as well as in his ubiquitous metaphors of scattering and gathering. Fragmentation is central to his use of repetition and reiteration, how things are ordered, re-ordered, and repeated. Finally, it informs his approach to the passage of time and its division into discrete units.

2.1 The *Canzoniere* as Collection

Petrarch was not the first to produce a collection of his individual lyric poems—the anthologies of troubadour poetry and Dante’s *Vita Nuova* provided near-contemporary examples (cf. Holmes 3 and Barolini 4-5)—but he was exceptional in the level of care and attention he devoted to the arrangement and presentation of his poetry. The *Canzoniere* was not simply an anthology; it was a collection with (at least) a double purpose: to reclaim, reauthorize, and in some cases reinterpret the many lyric poems he had written and distributed in his career and to order those poems in such a way that they would suggest a larger thematic structure. Within this general framework, the poet also
plays with smaller patterns, placing poems with a similar theme or with similar language next to each other to create mini-collections within the meta-collection. The decisions regarding choice and placement were made carefully; not every poem Petrarch had written found its way into the *Canzoniere*.

In this way, each poem is an individual work but also part of a whole, for “if the radical incompleteness of any one short poem as an act of vision renders it essentially a ‘fragment,’ Petrarch implies that such fragments can be gathered and assimilated into the multiplicity comprising the collection as a whole” (Fraistat 12). The act of collection also allows Petrarch to turn a certain kind of single-author intertextuality, in which he compares and contrasts themes or language in poems initially composed at different times and for different purposes, into a form of intratextuality. Picking up on the imagery of Orpheus (the ultimate poet) and Pygmalion (the ultimate craftsman), Migraine-George notes the effect the collection and presentation of fragments has on the reader:

> Just as Petrarch can be metaphorically seen as gathering the scattered parts of Orpheus’ dismembered body and, Pygmalion-like, re-shaping them into his own Orphic alter-ego, the reader has to develop a synthetic, syncretic gaze in order to re-assemble and fully grasp the kaleidoscopic intertextual fragments scattered in the *Rime sparse*. . . (246)

The intended literary effect of the *Canzoniere* is thus more than that of a simple collection, more than the sum of its parts. Assembled and reordered, the individual “fragment” pieces still convey their original meaning(s) but also work cooperatively and contextually to contribute to a broader theme.

A central aspect of this larger idea is Petrarch’s creation of a sense of narrative and, therefore, of historical progression. I stress that this is only a “sense,” because the poet never attempts to impose an explicit, continuous storyline on his collection. In the
more tightly controlled presentation of the *Trionfi*, Petrarch uses the conceit of a triumphant procession to provide temporality and order—a beginning, middle, and end—and a sense of linear progression (Mazzotta, *Worlds* 99). In contrast, the *RVF* was never—or at least not originally—conceived of nor executed as a single long poem, so the poet creates hints of continuity or progression primarily through his choice of which poems to include and, more significantly, how to order those chosen poems. But those hints of temporality and progress are kept purely notional. In his influential article on Petrarch’s poetics, Freccero writes:

> In order to remove from the poems all traces of temporality and contingency, poetic instants are strung together like pearls on an invisible strand….The arrangement of these *rime sparse*, whatever its rationale, may be thought of as an attempt to spatialize time and so introduce a narrative element in a way that does not threaten to exceed the carefully delimited confines of the text. (39)

If the individual poems are indeed pearls, then the “invisible strand” that connects them consists of the poet’s editorial rather than linguistic or literary efforts. Any sense of a story-line comes less from the content of the individual fragments and more from the manner in which they are assembled.

This idea of a collection of poems that was also, in a sense, a long (even epic) poem composed of shorter constituent parts was to have a lasting influence on subsequent poetry (cf. Fraistat 6), from the sonnet cycles of the European Renaissance to Pound’s decades-long work on the *Cantos*. And here we can see a final important aspect of the *Canzoniere* as collection of fragments imbued with a sense of narrative: incompletion. Petrarch spent decades choosing, ordering, and re-ordering his poems and was successful in evoking narrative elements—youthful indiscretions, long voyages, tortured love, deep loss, repentance and reconciliation—but the natural limitations of the “invisible strand”
meant that he could not make any “story” explicit and therefore finite. There are
beginnings and ends (and gaps) rather than a beginning and an end. However much his
collection became a single entity, it never ceased to be a number of fragments. Holmes
suggests:

Petrarch’s continual editing and correcting of his vernacular poems throughout his lifetime can also be seen as reflected in the speaker’s
repeated recognition of his inability to achieve cohesion and finality (see, for instance, sonnets 95 and 293), as well as the inclusion of the term
‘fragmenta’ in the title, and in the high frequency of occurrence of words that refer to fragmentation and dispersion in the _Canzoniere_ as a whole. (171)

2.2 Collection and Recollection

The centrality of memory in the _Canzoniere_ has been widely discussed. For the
purposes of fragmentation, the most pertinent aspect of this theme is the poet’s use of the
ideas of collection and remembering—recollection as re-collection. On a larger level, this
applies to the entire text of the _Canzoniere_, a hymnal of memory that brings together
(collects) and thus gives additional external meaning to the poems, which are themselves
individual literary productions of memory, reproductions of a previous feeling or thought
or event. In some ways Petrarch is following Dante, as the _Vita Nuova_ also presents itself
literarily in terms of memory, beginning with Dante’s “libro de la mia memoria” (I.1).
Dante, however, described his work in terms of a transcription of memory, while
Petrarch’s is a recollection. As Santagata notes, “…questa idea di canzoniere si afferma
decisamente solo con i _Fragmenta_ e con la scoperta petrarchesca della memoria” (_Dal
sonetto_ 128). When we superimpose upon this the complex history of the composition(s)

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4 E.g., Santagata’s _Dal sonetto al Canzoniere_, Chapter One of Mazzotta’s _The Worlds of Petrarch_, Vickers’ “Re-membering Dante: Petrarch’s ‘Chiare, fresche et dolci acque.’”
of the *Canzoniere*, the entire work, then, takes the form of a (re-)collection of recollections. We can see some of these inter-related ideas of composition and creation early in the *RVF*, when the poet speaks for example of joining one truth to another (“l’un coll’altro vero accoppio,” 40.4) or describes the process of writing and ordering love poetry as seeking to enclose feelings in verse in the same way they are enclosed in the heart (95.1-4).

The recollection of poetry, as both the impetus for a particular poem and its subsequent use as part of a larger whole, provides the poet with the safety of comparative objectivity, a therapeutic sense of distance and control.

> Fugge al vostro apparire angoscia et noia  
> et nel vostro partir tornano insieme.  
> Ma perché la memoria innamorata  
> chiude lor poi l’entrata,  
> di là non vanno da le parti extreme;

> At your appearance anguish and troubles flee  
> and at your departure they both return.  
> But because loving memory  
> blocks their entrance,  
> they do not go beyond the external parts. (71.97-101)

The key phrase here, “la memoria innamorata,” is difficult to translate precisely; “my memory, which is in love” or even “the memory of love” may be closer. In any case, the general meaning is clear: the sorrows that flee when the speaker’s beloved is present return when she is gone, but even without her physical presence he is able to keep them at bay simply by the power of memory, a memory in (and of) love. The recollection of his love, either initially as purely mental/emotional process or subsequently in the more controlled and formal guise of a poem, has a talismanic property that protects the poet.
In RVF 126 and 127 the poet makes an extended appeal to the power of the remembered image of his beloved. In 126 memory has a protective and even regenerative function, for although the speaker is at one point “carco d’oblio” (“burdened with forgetfulness,” 56), it is memory (e.g., lines 5 and 41) that allows him to end up in an earthly paradise. As Vickers has pointed out, the canzone makes notable use of Dante (particularly Purgatorio XXX-XXXI) in a way that conflates Beatrice and Laura (8); thus Petrarch re-members Dante even as he remembers Laura. In 127, after noting the generally therapeutic virtue of poetry (“…perché i sospiri / parlando àn tregua et al dolor soccorro,” 10-11), he remarks specifically on Laura’s ability to collect his scattered and sorrowful thoughts:

Dico che perch’ io miri
mille cose diverse attento et fiso,
sol una donna veggo e ’l suo bel viso

I say that though I look intent and fixed upon a thousand different things,
I see only a woman and her beautiful face. (12-14)

In the following stanza, however, he notes that his circumstances often take him far from his beloved and the calming, centering power of her appearance, and for this there is only one solution: “Amor col rimembrar sol me mantene” (“Love maintains me with memory alone,” 18).

Not only is memory again the solution to the speaker’s troubles, the use of the verb “rimembrar” (“to re-member”) indicates the reintegrating power of memory. The remembered image of Laura “re-members” him, puts him back together again. Only because she is “always present” (95) through memory can he retain his faculties and remain himself. Nicholls, speaking of Les Fleurs du Mal, makes a valuable observation:
“It is in memory that we may secure that moment of full presence which the actual present never seems to yield. ‘History,’ in contrast, appears as an unrelieved temporality which frustrates any metaphysical connection between visible and invisible” (21). It is such a metaphysical connection between the visible image of Laura and the invisible emotions associated with her, such a moment of “full presence,” that comforts, restores, and re-integrates the poet.

Love and thoughts of the beloved are not the only aspects of poetry that can serve to re-member the poet; the poems themselves can achieve a lasting fame. This version of the immortality boast is closely tied to, but not completely dependent on, the beauty and virtue of the woman that the poetry lauds. In RVF 327, the poet concludes a lament for his beloved by contrasting her process of becoming immortal—joining her soul to its Creator—with his earthly endeavor:

\begin{verbatim}
et se mie rime alcuna cosa ponno
consecrata fra i nobili intelletti
fia del nome tuo qui memoria eternal
\end{verbatim}

and if my rhymes have any power
may the eternal memory of your name
be consecrated here among noble intellects. (12-14)

The comparison serves several rhetorical purposes; it provides the poet with an opportunity to praise his beloved, it allows him to hope for fame (nobly, because of his noble subject matter), and most importantly it links divine powers with his own poetic powers. This link is strongly reinforced by the rhyme that closes the tercets: “s’interna / eterna.” Similarly, in RVF 71, the speaker’s beloved provides inspiration but his own faculties insure a lasting fame:

\begin{verbatim}
onde parole et opre
escon di me si fatte allor ch’i’ spero
\end{verbatim}
farmi immortal, perché la carne moia.

whence words and deeds
come from me, made in such a way that I hope
to make myself immortal, though the flesh die. (94-96)

The poet will achieve his fame—persist in memory—because of Laura but also because of his own poetic abilities.

Petrarch makes the link between collection, recollection, and memory even more explicit in a late poem, RVF 360. In a canzone that takes the form of a debate, Reason listens to the arguments of the speaker and of his cruel lord, Love. After listening to the poet’s reproaches, Love presents his own case, arguing that he has done great things for his servant.

Si l’avea sotto l’ali mie condutto
ch’ a donne et cavalier piacea il suo dire;
et si alto salire
il feci che tra’ caldi ingegni ferve
il suo nome, et de’ suoi detti conserve
si fanno con diletto in alcun loco.

I have borne him under my wing such that
his speech has pleased ladies and knights;
and I have made him rise
so high that his name burns
among shining wits, and with delight
in some places they make collections of his words. (110-115)

In addition to making the poet well-known among high society, Love has inspired his poetry, so that in some places men are making collections of his writings. These collections serve as recollection, a bringing together of the poet’s individual works that helps create a lasting fame—memory as reputation.

And in the end, memory is all the poet has left. Once he fed his heart with (“il cor pascendo,” 331.6), kept himself alive by, hope and memory. With his beloved gone, he is
bereft of the former, and only the latter remains to nourish his failing, frail, and starving soul (12). Only by reassembling the individual memories of Laura (and their physical manifestations, his poems) is he able to confront and survive his grief. “Sol memoria m’avanza” (10) he writes; after all of his love, his desire, even his fame, only memory remains to him.

2.3 Scattering and Gathering

Within the broader issue of memory and recollection and closely related to it is one of Petrarch’s most common and evocative images, that of scattering and gathering. Individual fragments—of things, of poems, even of thoughts—are strewn or scattered, often (though not always) with the hope or expectation of being gathered together again. “Spargere” is the verb that occurs over and over in these contexts, “to scatter,” “to spread,” even (as in the Vulgate) “to sprinkle;” various forms of the word appear 31 times in the text. Petrarch introduces us to the word and the concept from the very beginning: “Voi ch’ ascoltate in rime sparse…” (“You who hear in scattered rhymes…”). In the first line of the first poem of his collection the poet presents his poems as scattered pieces that he has brought together to form a whole.

Petrarch will pick up this trope of scattered or dispersed language throughout the Canzoniere. In the uncollected sonnet “Ingegno usato a le question profonde,” the poet writes that his rhymes “have strayed elsewhere, behind her for whom I grow pale” (“son desviate altronde / dietro a colei per cui mi discoloro,” 5-6), showing that even in the poems he did not ultimately choose for his collection, he was still influenced by the theme. His poems may be scattered, but they are also “diffusi” (203.10), spread out and famous enough to perhaps inflame a thousand listeners (“ne porian infiammar fors’ ancor
mille,” 11). In a moving passage recording Laura’s death, he notes the joy and hope that he felt when he last saw her alive, but in the end “‘l vento ne portava le parole” (267.14), the wind carried away the words of their final conversation. That same destructive and scattering wind carries away the hopes he had expressed (329.8). Poems are not the only words the poet disperses. “If there is no one listening to me with pity,” he asks somewhat forlornly, “why scatter such frequent prayers to the heavens?” (70.3-4).

Not all the poet’s words of hope and love are in vain; in RVF 61, his scattered words appear in a list of things he declares blessed:

Benedette le voci tante ch’io
chiamando il nome de mia donna ò sparte,
e i sospiri et le lagrime e ’l desio.

Blessed the many words that I
have scattered while calling on the name of my lady,
and the sighs and the tears and the desire. (9-11)

Specifically, his words are “blessed” because of their subject matter, because he threw them out to the world calling on his lady’s name. In this case, the poem is a prayer, sanctified by its subject matter.

Other poems pick up this extension of “scattering” imagery to include tears and sighs as well as words. Frustration, fear, and sorrow cause the poet to weep, and he sheds his tears often and widely, “per lagrime ch’ i’ spargo a mille a mille” (“through tears that I scatter by the thousands” (55.7). In the final tercet of RVF 42, the poet praises his beloved:

Stelle noiose fuggon d’ogni parte,
disperse dal bel viso inamorato
per cui lagrime molte son già sparte.

Hurtful planets flee on every side
dispersed by that fair, beloved face
for which so many tears have already been shed. (12-14)

Here the stars and their harmful fates are scattered by Laura’s appearance, which in itself has been the cause for many scattered tears—including, but not necessarily limited to, those shed by the poet himself. Such tears are often accompanied by sighs that also “vanno sparsi” (117.7).

The *sestina RVF* 239 brings together several of these elements of scattering. The general feeling is one of quiet sorrow and loss, of disappointment that the poet’s works have been unable to move his beloved (“I catch the wind with a net and gather flowers in ice,” 37). One phrase in particular shows the close relationship between words and emotions: “Quante lagrime, lasso, et quanti versi / ò già sparti al mio tempo…” (How many tears, alas, and how many verses / I have scattered in my time,” 13-14). Here Petrarch associates the literal shedding of tears and the figurative scattering (or diffusion) of his poems as a way of binding his sadness to his art. The move is strongly reminiscent of Dante’s in *Inferno* XIII, in which the souls of the suicides, trapped in trees, are only able to speak when their branches are snapped and “blood and words came out together” (“usciva insieme / parole e sangue,” 43-44).

A final common image of scattering in the *Canzoniere* involves leaves. In several poems, the image suggests death or the passage of time; thus the poet speaks of a time “when the leaves are scattered on the earth” (“quando a terra son sparte le frondi,” 142.23, and cf. 323.56). When, after Laura’s death, Petrarch orders him poems to seek out her resting place, he gives them this instruction:

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Ditele ch’ i’ son già di viver lasso,
del navigar per queste orribili onde,
ma ricogliendo le sue sparte fronde
dietro le vo pur così passo passo.
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Tell her that I am already weary of living,  
of sailing these terrible waves,  
but gathering up her scattered leaves  
I go behind her, step by step. (333.5-8)

Here the leaves that the poet is gathering have multiple metaphorical values. On the one hand, they might include physical objects or possessions left behind by Laura, but they also invoke the actual pieces of paper on which Petrarch has written his poems about her. In this way, though words, tears, and sighs all belong to the poet while leaves are external, they are still closely related to Laura and to his own literary representations of her and of his feelings for her.

The same passage also includes the reverse of the image of scattering—that of gathering, bringing together, or regrouping. The language of gathering (usually a form of *accogliere* or *raccogliere*) most often deals with images or scenes of nature; the poet speaks, for example, of “whatever grass or flower I gather” (125.69). However, he often harkens back to the literary nature of “scattering” by giving these natural images of garden-like gathering a verbal or literary weight. Thus in *RVF* 114:

Qui mi sto solo, et come Amora m’invita  
orime et versi, or colgo erbette et fiori,  
seco parlando et a tempi migliori,  
sempre pensando, et questo sol m’aita.

Here I am alone, and as Love prompts me  
I gather now rhymes and verses, now grasses and flowers,  
speaking with him and thinking always  
of better times, and this alone assists me. (5-8)

Just as leaves were implicitly compared to poems in the imagery of “scattering,” here Petrarch juxtaposes the gathering of flowers and grasses with the bringing together of his poetry. And just as memory/re-collection was key to reintegrating the poet, making him
whole and secure, so here gathering his (and others’) poems together allows him to comfort and sustain himself. The very etymology of “anthology” itself—a flower collection (anthos and legein)—bears out this imagery.

Laura herself is also closely involved with images of the gathering of flowers and of poetry. The poet remembers that when he first met her, he ran to gather flowers (“a coglier fiori,” 325.14) to give her; strengthening the tie to his romantic-poetic relationship with her, he reminisces that this occurred in “the April of the year and of my age” (13). 

RVF 359 is a conversation with Laura’s spirit in which she presents him with two branches, one of palm and one of laurel, and says that he should strive to follow her example, “if it is true that you love me so much, / by gathering at last one of these branches” (“s’ è ver che tanto m’ami, / cogliendo omai qualcun di questi rami,” 43-44).

Wind and poetry, the scattered and the gathered, are brought together in RVF 264:

Ma se ’l latino e ’l greco
parlan di me dopo la morte, è un vento;
ond’ io, perché pavento
adunar sempre quel ch’ un’ ora sgombre,
vorre’ ’l ver abbracciar, lassando l’ombre.

But if the Latin and the Greek
speak of me after my death, it is wind;
so that, because I fear
to bring always together that which an hour destroys,
I wish to embrace the true, leaving the shadows behind. (68-72)

In this penitential and pensive canzone, the poet struggles with himself, torn between the two knots (“due nodi,” 83) of love and fame on the one hand and the path of humility and virtue on the other. Seeking the nobler course, he decides that literary and historical praise, the renown among “the Latin and the Greek,” is but “vento,” a wind that scatters without leaving any meaningful trace. And because he fears to collect the temporal
things—items, poems, even earthly loves—that an hour can scatter and destroy, he
determines to reject them for eternal truths. What is gathered on earth can be just as
easily scattered: better to build up treasures in heaven.

Laura herself also frequently accompanies the trope of scattering or spreading, not
only in the metaphorical-literary way mentioned above but in a more literal description of
her person. This imagery is used most often to describe her hair; one poem speaks of “the
blonde tresses loosened (sciolti) about her neck” (127.77) and remembers “the first day
that I saw her golden hair spread out (sparsi) by the breeze” (83). Elsewhere the breeze
“scatters that sweet gold / and then gathers it and recurls it beautiful knots” (227.3-4).

Scattering and gathering come together again in RVF 159:

Qual ninfa in fonti, in selve mai qual dea
chiome d'or si fino a l’aura sciolse?
quando un cor tante in sé vertuti accolse?

What nymph in her fountains, what goddess in her woods
ever loosed hair of such fine gold to the wind?
When did a heart contain so many virtues? (5-7).

Here the poet plays with a centripetal image of her physical appearance (loosened
hair/sciogliere) and the centrifugal collection of internal characteristics
(virtues/accogliere). This trope of Laura as a single meeting place of many virtues will be
repeated elsewhere (e.g., RVF 215).

The most extended treatment of Laura and her loosened hair is RVF 196. The
sonnet begins with “L’aura serena,” “the serene breeze” that strikes the poet’s brow and
brings up memories of his beloved. These memories include “her hair, now bound up
(avolte) in pearls and gems, / then loosed (sciolti) which “she scattered (spargea) so
sweetly / and gathered up (raccogliea) with such charming movements…” (7-10). This
chiastic double image—bound up/loosed, scattered/gathered up—emphasizes the aesthetic and therefore romantic (and possibly erotic—the very memory makes his mind “tremble,” 11) nature of her hair in the poet’s eyes, something that is held close and then given, given and then withdrawn. The final tercet of the sonnet metaphorizes and completes the image:

Torsele il tempo poi in più saldi nodi  
et strinse ’l cor d’un laccio sì possente  
che Morte sola fia ch’ indi lo snodi

Time twisted them then into stronger knots  
and bound my heart with such a powerful cord  
that only Death will be able to untie it. (12-14)

And in fact, a final common appearance of the “scattering” motif is a kind of usage in malo, scattering or separating as death. In RVF 331 Death has scattered (sparte) all the poet’s hopes (46-47), while elsewhere it is the related concept of Fortune that looks to disperse (disperga) every good that the poet has (12). Often, the scattering or destruction has a more physical aspect. The image of binding and loosing knots previously connected to Laura’s hair is invoked again in a more somber sense when Petrarch reproaches Death: “spirto più acceso di vertuti ardentì / del più leggiadro et più bel nodo ài sciolto” (“You have loosened the spirit brightest with shining virtues / from the most charming, most beautiful knot,” 283.3-4). The physical destruction of the body—in this case, the poet’s—is also invoked in RVF 349, where Petrarch speaks of the time when he will “leave broken and scattered (sparta) / this heavy, weak, and mortal garment” (10-11).

Sometimes the poet combines the physical aspect of dissolution at death with a metaphorical aspect. So in RVF 297 the speaker complains that Beauty and Chastity,
once brought together against their own natures in the person of Laura, have been scattered and unfastened by Death: “Et or per Morte son sparse et disgiunte” (5). In 317 he utilizes a new verb to communicate a related idea: “Ahi, Morte ria, come a schiantar se’ presta / il frutto de molt’anni in si poche ore!” (“Ah, evil Death, how you are so quick to shatter / the fruits of many years in so few hours!” 7-8). Death breaks apart not only the physical processes of life but also the hopes, dreams, and even accomplishments of the dead. The sonnet RVF 320, a somber tempus fugit meditation, mourns Laura’s death (and Laura dead) and ends with a telling metaphor:

O servito a signor crudele et scarso: 
ch’arsi quanto ’l mio foco ebbi davante, 
or vo piangendo il suo cenere sparso

I have served a cruel and weak lord: 
for I burned while I had my fire before me, 
and now I go weeping for its scattered ashes. (12-14)

Here the ashes that have been scattered indicate the remnants of the poet’s once-burning love but also hint at the physical remains of Laura (and, ultimately, himself—cf. 294.12, “Veramente siam noi polvere et ombra…”). Death has brought an end to love, an end to Laura, and scattered the very remnants of both.

2.4 Repetition and Divisions of Time

The Canzoniere is, in addition to being a collection, a series—a linear one in that its calendrical 366 poems suggest the passage of time and a cyclical one in that those 366 days would include the full circuit of a year plus a return to the starting point.\(^5\) Each poem about love, death, honor, and Laura is a new and individual work but is also a

\(^5\) Further examinations of this idea can be found in Roche, “The Calendrical Structure of Petrarch’s Canzoniere.”
reshaping of a common theme. As Riffaterre points out, a “text's true significance lies in its consistent formal reference to and repetition of what it is about, despite continuous variations in the way it goes about saying it” (76). As such, each poem stands as a separate artistic whole but also represents a specific point in time and communicates a variation on a constant theme. These are the final two elements of the Petrarchan poetic fragment: the repetition of the individual idea/word/theme and the division of time into distinct, sequential elements.

Repetition functions several ways in the Canzoniere. As the poet himself points out near the end of the collection, “Esser non si po più d’una volta” (361.10); but although things (and people) cannot exist more than once—they have a beginning and an end—their meaning can be stressed and magnified through repetition. They cannot live forever, but they can live repeatedly. One of the most common (and simplest) examples of this is Petrarch’s use of “a thousand” or “thousands” as an intensifier, a way to express the constancy or near-infinite nature of a topic. So Love has set a thousand snares for the lover (200.5), who has himself offered his heart to his lady with a thousand breaths (21.1). Her eyes, in turn, have made the sun envious a thousand times (156.6).

In a darker move, the repeated sorrows and frustrations of the poet have also led him to spiritual and emotional death, not once but many times. “Mi vedete straziare a mille morti,” he complains to his lady, “né lagrima però discese ancora / da’ be’ vostr’occhi, ma disdegno et ira” (“You see me torn apart by a thousand deaths / and not a single tear has come / from your eyes but only disdain and anger,” 44.12-14). Elsewhere, he determines to withstand her cruelty and rejection even if it should kill him “a thousand times a day” (172.12).
Repetition also takes the form of lists, a method of organized fragmentation in which the poet creates a series of distinct but related concepts in order to evoke progression or intensify description. As Mazzotta remarks, “The catalogue, which is an epic device, is a rhetorical strategy that seeks to represent the elusive totality of experience: it is a synecdoche for that totality and unveils the fragmentary constitution of the totality” (*Worlds* 101). In *RVF* 303 the poet invokes “flowers, leaves, grasses, shadows, caves, waves, soft breezes, / closed valleys, high hills, and wide slopes” (5-6). The first quatrain of the sonnet 148 consists almost entirely of the names of famous rivers, while the fifth line is simply a list of trees. These lists of nouns, given without any narrative structure, indicate the speaker’s disconnected, wandering sense and inspire the reader to piece them together in a geographical or logical whole. Often the lists come in an intense apostrophe, such as in 321 (“O day, o hour, o final moment, / o stars sworn to make me poor…” 1-2) and 298 (“O my Star, o Fortune, o Fate, o Death…” 12).

The poet’s own repetitions move beyond the simple anaphora of “O.” In *RVF* 206 Petrarch hammers repeatedly the opening phrase, “S’ i’ l dissi mai” (“If I ever said it”) before changing it slightly to address his own question: e.g., “Ma s’ io nol dissi” (37) and “I’ nol dissi giamai” (46). Similarly, he writes, “Io amai sempre, et amo forte ancora, / et son per amar più di giorno in giorno” (“I have always loved, and I still love strongly, / and I will continue to love more day by day,” 85.1-2), making the repetition more subtle through polyptoton—changing the forms of the word: “amai,” “amo,” “son per amar.” These repetitions with variations, either of context or form, give a sense of the speaker’s own fragmented internal state, a topic discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.
Petrarch also makes reference to his own repeated words and poems. *RVF* 61 begins with an apostrophic list like those above; one of the last “blessed” things listed is “tutte le carte / ov’io fama l’acquisto” (12-13), all the many pages that the poet has written to bring fame to Laura. In 309 he combines the “thousands” trope with an indication of how Love has prompted his many repeated poems: “poi mille volte indarno a l’opra volse / ingegno, tempo, penne, carte, enchiostri” (“then a thousand times he has fruitlessly put to work / wit, time, pens, papers, inks” 7-8). He employs the same image in 74.13, where he speaks directly to his lady of the papers he’s “filled with you.” In these cases the poet stresses the repetition of his poetic endeavors, the pages and pages he has filled with thoughts of Laura, the many poems he has written that are simply varied approaches to the same material.

Closely related to figures of repetition is the division of time. Just as repetition consists of the reiteration or reduplication of a specific poetic fragment (a word, an idea, etc.), the division of time into discrete moments results in the creation of temporal fragments which contain a particular feeling, thought, or experience and which can be either reassembled chronologically or kept and explored as individual pieces. This kind of fragmentation presents both an opportunity and a challenge. Greene speaks of Petrarch’s “obsessive fear of time and mutability:”

>The production of spoken or written words is an act irremediably trapped in temporality, contaminated with the mutable, incapable of that simultaneity which is denied all mortal discourse….The act of speech betrays its contingency and its incompleteness in its inescapable subservience to succession; poetry remains a time art. (125-6)

In his approach to this “time art,” Petrarch often lists the divisions of time themselves not only to indicate the length of time passed but to emphasize the numerous constituent
moments that make up those divisions—a fragmenting of time. So he speaks, for example, of “the years and the days and the hours” of his sufferings (12.11). Elsewhere the multiple units of time are given to specify a particular moment; in the following poem he praises the “place and the time and the hour” (13.5) when he first saw Laura just as he blesses “the day and the month and the year” (61.1).

This impulse to divide and measure expresses itself physically in the *congedo* of *RVF* 72:

Canzon, l’una sorella è poco inanzi
et l’altra sento in quel medesmo albergo
apparecchiarsi, ond’io più carte vergo.

Song, one of your sisters is a little before you
and I feel the other readying herself in the same lodging
because of which I line more pages. (76-78)

Three distinct moments of past-present-future are brought together here: one poem has gone out, one is being completed, and another is ready to be written. Most importantly, the poet is preparing to measure off more sheets of paper for his next lines of poetry, a physical act which divides the paper physically but connects the poetry to its predecessors temporally (cf. Barolini 22). In *RVF* 35 the poet uses another physical action to measure and therefore divide: “Solo et pensoso i più deserti campi / vo mesurando a passi tardi et lenti…” (“Alone and thoughtful I go measuring the most deserted fields / with hesitant and slow footsteps…” 1-2). Like a physical metronome, Petrarch measures the fields with his footsteps, though the fact that they are “hesitant” may indicate some irregularity, such as exists in the different meters of music and poetry. In any case, the fact that the fields are “deserted” suggests that the image deals with the
poet’s internal world of emotions and verses, traversed, divided up, and considered singly in his mind.

Petrarch also reflects on the way that equal periods of time can feel so different in different circumstances—the subjective experiences of an objectively consistent process. He addresses it directly and bemoans its negative effects (RVF 355.1), while elsewhere he mentions that a single day feels like a thousand years while he waits to follow his lady (357.1), a subtle appropriation of St. Peter’s comment that a day is like a thousand years for God (2 Pet. 3:8). He also wishes time to stop completely:

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cosi vedess’io fiso
come Amor dolcemente gli governa
sol un giorno da presso
senza volger giamaì rota superna,
né pensasse d’altrui né di me stesso,
e ’l batter gli occhi miei non fosse spesso!
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so would I fix my gaze
on how Love sweetly governs them,
close up, just for a day
without any heavenly wheel turning—
thinking neither of others or of myself,
with even my eyes unblinking! (73.70-75)
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Only the suspension of time will permit the poet to gaze into his beloved’s eyes as long as he would like. To exist in this timeless state, physical indications of the passage of time—the movements of the sun and moon, unrelated thoughts, even the regular (and therefore measuring) blinking of his eyes—must cease. Any measurement of time means a division and therefore the destruction of his moment plucked out of time and considered as a single unmoving experience. As he says more simply in 22.33, “…et mai non fosse l’alba” (“and may morning never come”).

50
Perhaps the most explicit and extensive treatment of marking the passage of time is the series of “anniversary poems,” poems that mark the passing of a certain number of years since Petrarch’s first encounter with Laura, e.g., “If I do not err in my counting today makes seven years / that I go sighing…” (30.29-30) and “Now turns, my Lord, the eleventh year / that I have been subject to the merciless yoke…” (62.9-10). RVF 101, which marks 14 years, is an anniversary poem that also speaks of the incremental and continuous passage of time discussed above: “So come i di, come i momenti et l’ore / ne portan gli anni…” (“I know how the days, how the moments, and the hours / carry away our years…” 9-10). In this poem centered on a celebration of Laura and the beginning of his infatuation—a single moment in the past—the poet also reflects on the inevitable and eternal progress of time, a series of moments, days, and years that constantly carry him farther from his original defining instant; this forms part of what Barolini describes as his “keen awareness of the relation between narrative and time” (16).

Interspersed throughout the Canzoniere, the anniversary poems provide temporal points of reference that help give the collection a sense of continuity and direction, but their irregular placement also means that their contribution to a fixed and definable chronology is limited. They serve, instead, as general wayposts, reminding the reader that the poet experienced a personal and poetic progression without insisting upon a clear and consistent narrative linking every poem to the next; and though each anniversary poem celebrates another milestone, another marker of linear time forward, they all also look back to the same single event in the past. In this they complement the two times (Dutschke 84) in the collection when an entire date is given: RVF 211 (April 6, 1327) and
366 (April 6, 1348), the twin cardinal points which commemorate Petrarch’s first glimpse of Laura and the moment of her death.

“In Petrarch’s poetry,” Mazzotta writes in *The Worlds of Petrarch*, his immensely useful examination of Petrarchan fragmentation, “time’s ruptured dimensions (past, fleeting present, and expectation of the future) are internalized within the self, and they are even identified as the constitutive, broken pieces of oneself” (4). As we have seen, this rupture, this fragmentation, provides an exceptional poetic impetus. The three aspects of past/present/future are all contained within the *Canzoniere* and are therefore set up to interact, contrast, and even conflict with each other. In addition, in their role as the “constitutive, broken pieces” of the poet, they point the way to the final major aspect of the Petrarchan poetic fragment: the fragmentation of the self.
CHAPTER 3:

“SPARSE ANIME FRAGMENTA” — PERSONAL FRAGMENTATION IN PETRARCH

“The uniqueness of Petrarch’s insight into the self,” Mazzotta argues:

…is that the self is not a unified whole; rather, it is made up of displaced, independent parts…and no real distinction can be drawn between the complications of the interior dimensions of self and the various external worlds where the subject finds itself. (85)

The fragmentation of the self (literary, personal, or psychological) complements the utilization of literary tradition and the poetic fragment to form the third major category of a Petrarchan poetics of fragmentation. At times this personal fragmentation takes a literal turn, as the body (of those poet or of Laura) is metaphorically dismembered and an individual part of it is examined, discussed, or praised; at others, the separation becomes more psychological, as the poet examines his feelings of sorrow, solitude, and detachment, which he often expresses as a division, a rupture, between body and soul. In a similar psychological vein, Petrarch struggles extensively with contradictory feelings, which he describes in terms of internal conflict and separation. And in some cases, the poet resorts to “persona” — masks — to indicate the fluidity of personal identity or to distance himself from difficult emotions.

3.1 Dismembering

The most immediately apparent form of personal fragmentation in the Canzoniere consists of a division of the physical body into its constituent parts, some of which are
then considered individually. Not surprisingly, the two bodies so considered are
Petrarch’s and Laura’s, though the poet’s treatment of the two is quite different. In
dealing with himself, he tends to address—exhort, even—his own body parts. He speaks
most commonly to his eyes, e.g., “my wearied eyes” (RVF 14.1) and “eyes, weep” (84.1); in 49.14, sight is singled out as the only faculty that does not keep quiet about his love. In the same poem, he addresses his “ungrateful tongue” (3), while elsewhere he speaks more charitably to his “tired, faint heart” (“o stanco mio cor vago,” 242.1). Petrarch takes this image further in places like RVF 275, in which he invokes his eyes, ears, and feet (“occhi miei,” “orecchie mie,” “pie’ miei,” 1, 5, 7). By mentioning multiple body parts in a single poem, he shows that he has dismembered the body (making fragments), then re-creates or re-members the body (restoring the fragments) by bringing together several of the individual parts in the space of a few lines.

Laura’s body is also reduced to constituent parts, though these are usually examined and praised individually. Her “beautiful eyes” are invoked so many time in the Canzoniere that they become a cliché, losing almost all sensual or aesthetic impact. As seen in the discussion of gathering and loosening, Petrarch also shows a great deal of interest in her hair; he asks, “Where, from what mine did Love take the gold / to make two blond tresses?” (RVF 220.1-2) and speaks fondly of “that sweet gold” (227.3). He evinces a more-than-philosophical interest in her “fair foot” (“candido pie’,” 165.1) and in her slim white hands and noble arms (“le man bianche sottili / et le braccia gentili,” 37.98-99); at one point, he even addresses Laura’s white glove as a “beautiful hand that grips my heart” (199.1). While the poet generally mentions his own body parts to exort or console them, parts of Laura’s body are praised as fragments—indeed, almost as
fetishes—with no necessity of being re-incorporated. She may be more than the sum of her parts, but those parts are worthy of individual consideration and praise.

Two poems (RVF 292 and 348) written after Laura’s death treat her physical beauty in a more metaphysical and integrative way. In the latter, the poet catalogues her attributes: eyes, face, hair, speech, smile, hands and arms, feet (1-7), presenting in roughly descending anatomical order the characteristics that made her beautiful. This combination of elements of earthly beauty is, in fact, more than the sum of its parts; it is a figure “made in paradise” (“la persona fatta in paradiso,” 8). Fittingly, it is to paradise that her beauty, which on earth gave life to the poet’s spirits (9), has returned, to delight the heavenly king (“il Re celeste,” 10). Laura’s individual parts have been reunited in their initial and ultimate form. RVF 292 includes a similar catalogue but with a less optimistic resolution. Here the individual parts listed are her eyes, arms and hands, feet, face, hair, and smile, and again the poet uses celestial imagery: an “angelic smile” (6) that made a “paradise on earth” (7). This Eden has fallen, however, and there is no mention of subsequent renewal or restoration; all of these beautiful features are now simply a little dust that feels nothing ("poca polvere son che nulla sente,” 8). The octave, with its evocation of body parts and grim conclusion, is followed by a sestet that immediately contrasts Laura’s departure with the speaker’s unhappy survivial: “Et io pur vivo” (“And yet I still live,” 9). The beauty of Laura’s body now physically loosened and destroyed exists in this world only as a product of the poet’s own faculties: his mental ability to re-member her and his physical ability to speak and record those memories.
3.2 Separation of Body and Soul

Personal fragmentation includes not just the separation and consideration of the physical body but aspects of internal, psychological division. Petrarch explores the idea of soul/body separation, a rupture that often results from a single traumatic experience such as leaving Laura or—the ultimate parting—Laura’s death. In a number of poems narrating a departure from his beloved’s presence, the poet describes the event as leaving a part of himself behind when he leaves. In several poems this part is his heart, which either he left with his lady (249.2-3) or which chose of its own accord to stay with her (242.12-14).

Elsewhere the dichotomization of self is more dramatic, more definitive. Laura’s beauty has the power to actually make souls “wanderers from their bodies” (246.3-4), and in *RVF* 209 the speaker begins the poem by invoking “i dolci colli ov’io lasciai me stesso,” (“the sweet hills where I left myself,” 1). The split is pronounced and definitive in 113, where the poet describes himself at his current location away from Laura as “dove mezzo son” (“where I am half,” 1). It is this sense of division into two constituent parts—body and heart, body and spirit—that moves the poet to ask, “come posson queste membra / da lo spirito lor viver lontane?” (“how can these members / live far from their spirit?” 15.10-11). Sometimes this imagery includes the troubling aspect of the soul leaving the body of its own volition—or least not that of its owner. Freed by love, the soul leaves the poet’s heart (17.13); driven off by death, it departs from him (256.9-10). *RVF* 180 is an entire meditation on the different paths of body and spirit that ends with the reflection that the Po carries the speaker’s physical body (“mio mortal,” 12) while the
“other part” (“l’altro,” 13) grows wings and flies back to his “sweet dwelling place”
(“suo dolce soggiorno,” 14), Laura.

What are the consequences of this separation of spirit and body? For one thing, the poet is left senseless. Like Medusa, Laura has the power to petrify, although her ability comes from beauty rather than ugliness. So the poet becomes “stone without a heart” (243.13), while in RVF 39 he describes Laura as one “chi miei sensi disperga /
lassando, come suol, me freddo smalto” (“who disperses my senses, / leaving me, as she often does, cold stone” 7-8). Not only can his beloved turn men to stone with her eyes (213.9), she can actually “take souls from their bodies and give them to others” (11). Her eyes can, in fact, penetrate to the poet’s very heart and remove all other images (94.1-2); when this happens, the strength with which the soul imbues the body fails, leaving its members a “quasi immobîl pondo” (“almost unmovable weight,” 4). Laura’s numbing or petrifying power is similar to that of Love itself, which can also steal away the poet’s self and leave him just a shell (“la scorza,” 23.20).

As senseless stone or an empty shell, the poet is in a liminal state—between life and death. In a rhetorical move evocative of Hamlet, he in RVF 36 sees himself as someone who has been mortally wounded but is not yet dead; he considers suicide but dismisses it, half-remaining at the abyss of death and half-crossing it (“mezzo rimango,
lasso, et mezzo il varco,” 8). In 331 Petrarch laments:

Bello et dolce morir era allor quando
morend’io, non moria mia vita inseme,
anzi vivea di me l’ottima parte;
or mie speranze sparte
à Morte, et poca terra il mio ben preme,
et vivo, et mai nol penso ch’ i’ non treme.

Beautiful and sweet it would have been to die then
when, though I died, my life didn’t die with me; rather, the best part of me lived on. Now Death has scattered my hopes, and a little earth presses down on my good, and I live and never think of it without trembling. (43-48)

The poet speaks wistfully of the possibility of an earlier death which, though entailing the end of his physical body, would have kept him from remaining to witness the death of his “best part,” his beloved. While death can occur contemporaneously with the trauma, at times it becomes a process that only begins with the trauma and may not find full and final expression for many years: Ahab’s first encounter with the white whale only claimed his leg physically but took from him the things—happiness, hope, love—that give life meaning, pushing him into a pathological obsession with finding the whale again and, ultimately, consummating the process of his death. So the trauma of Laura’s death pulls constantly at Petrarch who, unable (in Freudian terms) to work through it, is doomed to repeat it—in his case, poetically. He lives between dichotomies (168.7): yes and no, love and hate, life and death.

For a Christian, the most basic definition of death is the separation of spirit and body, and this idea of love as a form of living death continues in the *Canzoniere*. Under the influence of Love, who causes him to be not half himself (“non son già mezzo,” 79.7), the speaker finds his strength failing each day (9) toward a final dichotomous point:

I can barely keep my soul here,  
nor do I know how long its stay with me will be,  
for death approaches and living flees. (12-14)

With his self divided, the speaker lives a dual existence, half living and half dead, able neither to take advantage of the physical pleasures of life nor enjoy the contentments of
the world to come. This state of living death comes, of course, from Laura, specifically her own death, the initial tragedy:

D’allor inanzi un di non vissi mai;  
seco fui in via, et seco al fin son giunto,  
et mia giornata ò co’ suoi pie’ fornita.

From then on I never lived a day;  
I was with her on the journey and with her have reached the end, and I have prepared my day with her footsteps. (358.12-14)

The poet’s life ended with his beloved’s death, and the period of time between it and the death of his own body is experienced as a single dual state, fragmented but intimately bound together, two sides of a coin, death-in-life.

An important corollary to Petrarch’s themes of soul/body separation is his examination of solitude. Here the personal fragmentation is not internal but external; the poet is not separated from himself but separated from all others and confined solely to himself. Sometimes this is a purely voluntary exercise (or so at least the poet would have us believe). In 259 he proclaims his desire to seek a solitary life (“Cercato ò sempre solitaria vita,” 1), wearied and distressed as he is by the lesser beings who populate cities in general and Avignon specifically, the place where his lady exists as “a beautiful treasure in mud” (“nel fango il bel tesoro mio,” 11). And yet the poet also feels deeply alone when he is far away from her. Building on a turn of phrase from the Psalms, he compares himself, far distant from Laura, to a lonely sparrow on a rooftop (“Passer mai solitario in alcun tetto / non fu quant’io, 226.1-2). Petrarch connects the two poles of loneliness, merges the apparent contradiction of feeling alone both among crowds and by oneself; it would be a true paradox, he seems to suggest, only for one who has never been in love.
In dire circumstances, the one kind of loneliness can drive the poet to brave the other. In *RVF* 234, he apostrophizes his little room and little bed, where he weeps for Laura by himself, and is finally moved to flee, not just from them but from “me stesso e ’l mio pensero” (“myself and my thought,” 9). He is so anxious, in fact, to escape his constant, repetitive thoughts that he actively seeks what he has always claimed to despise:

\[
e 'l vulgo a me nemico et odioso  
(chi 'l pensò mai?) per mio refugio chero,  
tal paura ò di ritrovarmi solo.  
\]

and the crowds so inimical and hateful to me  
(who ever thought it?) I look to as a refuge,  
such fear I have to find myself alone (12-14).

The unrelenting sorrowful thoughts of Laura and the sharp awareness of his loneliness that they always bring drive the poet to seek out the much maligned “vulgo,” the common mob, simply to try and find in the experience of closeness to many others a sense of relief from being alone. The attempt is, presumably, a failure, as metaphysical loneliness is hardly assuaged by physical proximity; but the fact that he tries it shows the desperation of his situation.

A final form of solitude that plays a role in Petrarch’s life and works is the loneliness and separation that come from exile. For Dante this had been a more important, or at least more obvious, theme; the figure of the poet forever banished from Florence, condemned to wander through Italy, composing his most famous works as a political exile, is a crucial part of the myth of Dante. It also lent an important pathos to the parallel of Dante the poet, exiled from his beloved home, with Dante the pilgrim, separated like all mankind from his heavenly home in the presence of God. Petrarch, with a different biographical connection to Florence, could not use the exact Dantinean motif of
actual political exile, yet he did avail himself of several tangential approaches that helped tie him to Dante (and other literary exiles like Ovid). While his father, like Dante, had been forced to leave Florence, Petrarch was under no such ban, and indeed later in life he received numerous overtures from Florentines who asked him to “come home” to Florence. The city itself had never been a home for Petrarch, and despite his numerous peregrinations he never did live there, yet all his life he used the Florentine dialect, the language of his childhood, as the principal (vernacular) language of his poetry. In this, and in claiming Florence as his ancestral home but never actually living there, he was able to draw a rough parallel with Dante. He also found a good use for the imagery of exile in his descriptions of his partings from Laura. In Mazzotta’s words, “Petrarch, as we know, gives thematic weight to the question of exile: the lover is always distant, always somewhere else, forever seeking the time and space of his encounter with Laura” (Worlds 66). Separations from Florence and from Laura, neither one of them a true home for him in any meaningful sense, were nevertheless poetically valuable as they allowed him to reflect on the feelings of absence and solitude, on the loneliness of not being where one belongs—or the even deeper loneliness of not truly belonging anywhere.

3.3 Internal Conflicts

Beyond the traumatic ruptures of soul/body separation, Petrarch’s poetics also deal extensively with aspects of internal separation and conflict. Just as he fragmented and then addressed individual parts of his (and Laura’s) body, so he divides his internal psycho-spiritual world and speaks directly to his soul. So RVF 204 begins, “Anima che diverse cose tante / vedi, odi et leggi, et parli et scrivi et pensi” (“Soul, you who see and hear and read and speak and write and think so many things,” 1), giving a list of the
cognitive and communicative powers of the spirit. In the subsequent poem, he gives more explicit and solemn orders: “Alma, non ti lagnar ma soffri e taci” (“Soul, do not complain, but suffer and be silent,” 205.4). While the metaphysics of the statement are not without potential problems—what faculty independent of the speaker’s soul is able to give it commands?—the move works poetically and shows a division of the internal world of the poet.

Such a division is necessary for poems in which Petrarch sets up internal conversations, intra-personal dialogues. Individual thoughts are personified and appear almost as agents, characters, e.g.: “L’un pensier parla co la mente, et dice” (“The one thought speaks with my mind and says,” 264.19). The sonnet RVF 68 makes extensive use of this trope:

L’aspetto sacro de la terra vostra  
mi fa del mal passato tragger guai  
gridando: “Sta’ su, misero, che fai?”  
et la via del salir al ciel mi mostra.  
Ma con questo pensier un altro giostra  
et dice a me: “Perché fuggendo vai?  
Se ti rimembra, il tempo passa omai  
di tornar a veder la donna nostra.”  
I’ che ’l suo ragionar intendo, allora  
m’agghiaccio dentro in guisa  
di un ch’ ascolta novella che di subito l’accora;  
poi torna il primo et questo dà la volta.  
Qual vincerà non so, ma ’infin ad ora  
combattuto ànno et non pur una volta.

The holy appearance of your land  
makes me sorrow for my evil past,  
crying: “Stop, wretch, what are you doing?”  
and shows me the way to ascend to heaven.  
But with this thought another jousts  
and says to me: “Why go fleeing?  
If you remember, the time is already passing  
to return to see our lady.”  
I, hearing his reasoning, then
turn to ice inside, looking like a man who hears
news that immediately disheartens him;
then the first returns and the second turns away.
Which will win, I don’t know, but up to now
they have fought and not just once.

Here the speaker’s approach to Rome is interrupted by one thought (advising spiritual
development) that is soon refuted by a second jousting thought (suggesting a return to
Laura), while the poet presents himself as a third character who listens to the
conversation of the first two. Despite his seemingly objective existence, he is also
inextricably tied to and identified with the two thoughts; the second, in fact, seems to
stress its closeness to the poet, as he counsels him to remember (ri-membra) that he
should visit Laura, whom he refers to as “our” lady. The narrator, caught between the two
propositions, freezes up, unable to make a definitive decision, and the final image
suggests only a continuation of the battle rather than any kind of resolution.

Petrarch carries the logic of these internal conversations through to his poetics in
the language and themes of opposition, contrariness, and internal opposition. The
Petrarchan paradox, one of the poet’s best known and most distinctive motifs, brings to
the fore the fragmented will or psyche and expresses through a pair (or multiple
consecutive pairs) of contrary images its inability to reintegrate. In RVF 132, this
unstable state is powerfully introduced by the series of back-and-forth questions, seven of
them in the opening eight lines, as well as actual oxymora such as “viva morte” and
“dilettoso male” (7). Utilizing a favorite trope (discussed in more detail below), the poet
compares himself to a tillerless boat in a storm, tossed about by contrary winds, helpless
against powers greater than his own. Images of psychological equidistance between
opposing forces are formal as well as verbal, as with the chiasmus of “si lieve di saver,
d’error si carca” (“so light of wisdom, with error so weighed down,” 12). The same culprit for the speaker’s internal conflict appears in 178, though the contradictions are introduced through declarative pairs rather than questions. Here Love

reassures and frightens, burns and freezes, speaks kindly and disdainfully, calls me to him and casts me away, now keeps me in hope and now in sorrow. (2-4)

Like RVF 132, the sonnet 134 looks inward, an examination of the speaker’s tortured and divided internal state:

Peace I do not find, and I have nothing with which to wage war, and I fear and hope, and I burn and I am ice, and I fly above the heavens and lie on the earth, and I grasp at nothing and embrace the whole world. He keeps me caged who neither opens nor closes, neither keeps me for his nor lifts the latch, and Love does not kill me and does not liberate me, neither wants me alive nor pulls me from the tangle. I see without eyes, and I have no tongue and cry out, and I desire to perish, and I ask for aid, and I hate myself and love another. I feed on sorrow, laugh weeping; life and death displease me equally. I am in this state, Lady, because of you.

Here, however, rather than pose questions, the initial eight lines present a series of contrary emotions (or metaphors for emotional reactions), introduced by an overarching war-peace motif, a prime example of Petrarch’s “radical understanding of his existence as a tangle of conflicts, wars, and struggles” and his “clairvoyance into the permanent and fundamental experience of violence holding sway over one’s own self…” (Mazzotta 35). In the sestet, the use of series continues as the images become more physical, more individual, and more intense, culminating in the assertion that even life and death now seem equally unpleasant. In the final line, though, we learn that although Love (7) was the proximate cause for all these conflicting feelings and experiences, the ultimate cause
was Laura herself. Apparently eschewing any personal responsibility, the poet claims that it is not just love that divides him but the beloved herself.

Petrarch begins RVF 164 with another list, in which the speaker watches, thinks, burns, weeps (5)—a progressive series rather than a collection of opposites, though right away he refers to his “sweet pain” (“dolce pena,” 6) and uses one of his favorite metaphors of internal struggle, seen already 134: “guerra è ’l mio stato, d’ira e di duol piena, / et sol di lei pensando ò qualche pace” (“war is my state, full of anger and sorrow, and only thinking of her do I have any peace,” 7-8). The thought of her may be able to bring peace, but Laura is an equally damning and blessing figure. From her come both the sweet and the bitter (10), and hers is the single hand that both heals and wounds (11). She is again the source of the writer’s internal divisions in 152, moving him between laughter and tears, between fear and hope (3); his strength “burns, freezes, blushes, and pales” all in a single instant (11). He describes explicitly and creatively her power to divide himself/his selves, she who regularly “keeps me between two” (“tra due mi tene,” 6); in one of Petrarch’s most memorable turns of phrase, she is the one who “perhapses” (inforsa) his every state (4).

This idea of a fundamental internal division—or possibly several related types of division all with a similar result—caused by Laura haunts Petrarch’s poetry and can help explain the poet’s fear of being guilty of accidia, laziness or sloth. He describes this state well in 118:

Or qui son, lasso, et voglio esser altrove,
et vorrei più volere, et più non voglio,
et per più non poter fo quant’ io posso.

Now I am here, alas, and wish to be elsewhere, and I would want more, and more I do not want,
The constant repetition of “più” and forms of “volere” indicate verbally the internal sensation of being tossed to and fro by opposing forces, but here the insistent pulling from two sides provokes not a sensation of potential rupture but of motionlessness, of stasis. Like Buridan’s ass, the poet, caught between two equally powerful and equally harmful forces, is unable to make a meaningful move toward either of them.

In all of these passages, whether they evoke a strong emotional response or cause a sensation of motionless helplessness, the poet uses contrary and counter-balancing images to indicate his divided and conflicted psychological state. In a way, these paradoxes function as an approach toward self-identification. Petrarch utilizes pairs of contradictory impulses and images—fixed, well-known, and opposite points—as a way of triangulating the position of his soul.

3.4 Personae

Another method that indicates the fragmented psychological state of the poet is his use of *personae*, or masks. By dividing himself into his constituent parts and then putting on the guise of one of those roles—or indeed in some cases taking on a completely separate identity—Petrarch is able to explore a specific area of his internal world, with the added benefit of a degree of objectivity conferred by the poetic mask. The use of *personae* springs from his “conviction that one reaches the ‘self’ deviously, that a detour through another’s consciousness is a way to one’s own desires” (Mazzotta 149). Animals make up one of the most common divisions of these masks. In the RVF the poet takes the part of, or closely links himself to, a hart (209), a lamb (207), a prey animal (216), a butterfly (141), and a horse (152). He shows a particular partiality to birds, such
as an “augel notturno” (165.14), and two poems, 139 and 181, contain extended
metaphors in which the poet is presented as a bird caught in a net (181.12) or stuck in
birdlime, unable to spread his wings and join his “flock of friends” (139.2). Elsewhere he
is simply an unspecified wild animal, lonely as a “beast in the forest” (226.2) or aimless
as “a woodland creature” (305.5). Inanimate objects are less common but include a
fortress (274), an archery butt (87, 241), a fire (175), a laurel tree (23), and a garden
(228).

The most interesting and satisfying roles that Petrarch plays, however, occur
when he takes the part of another human being. At times these are actual historical
figures. As Dante compared himself to St. Paul and Aeneas, Petrarch identifies himself
with Caesar and Hannibal (102) and Jacob (206). In two later poems he associates
himself closely with Christian apostles. Like St. Peter, who was to be carried whither he
would not (John 21:18), the poet is “transported” by Love where he does not want to go
(235.1), while the closing tercet of 338 uses the language of St. John’s words on the
incarnation of Jesus in its description of Petrarch’s experience of Laura. Again like
Dante, he chooses figures from classical antiquity, from among the Hebrew prophets, and
from Christian tradition.

Most frequently, though, Petrarch picks general roles rather than specific
individuals. He is at various times a hunter (190), a prisoner (121), and a blind man
(“vommene in guisa d’orbo, senza luce,” 18.7). He often presents himself, either
implicitly or explicitly, as a traveler or pilgrim, as in 129 and 331 (“fuggo per più non
esser pellegrino,” 23). He is also a soldier, though not a particularly successful one: he is
vanquished (96.1-2) and flees the field of battle, wounded (88.4-6). In another passage that reads strikingly like the description of a troubling recurring dream, he writes:

Qual mio destin, qual forza or qual inganno
mi riconduce disarmato al campo,
là `ve sempre son vinto?

What destiny of mine, or what power or what trick leads me back unarmed to the battlefield, where I am always defeated? (221.1-3)

Two roles in particular are prominent: prophet and sailor. Petrarch situates himself within the literary tradition of the poet as vates, a writer who is both bard and prophet and whose writings consequently carry the weight of both divine and literary import. In RVF 323, the poet, like an Old Testament prophet, sees and then relates a series of visions. A similar echo opens 93: “Più volte Amor m’avea già detto: Scrivi, / scrivi quel che vedesti in lettere d’oro” (“Many times Love had said to me: Write, / write what you have seen in letters of gold,” 1-2). Here the poet adapts the biblical tradition of introducing prophecy with God’s command to his prophets to write what they have seen, as in Jeremiah 30:2: “Haec dicit Dominus Deus Israel, dicens: Scribe tibi omnia verba, quae locutus sum ad te, in libro” (“Thus says the Lord God of Israel, saying: Write for yourself in a book all the words which I have spoken unto you”). Naturally, in Petrarch’s sonnet, the Christian god is replaced by Amor. The poet also takes a distinctly patriarchal turn with the three sonnets 136-38, a trio of ringing jeremiads delivered against Avignon.

As much as Petrarch prizes his prophetic capacity, no role plays a more important part in the Canzoniere than that of sailor. Alive, Laura was the source of the storms of love that shook the poet’s little boat. A harried helmsman, he has to keep his “weak bark” (“la mia debile barca,” 235.7) safe not only from the blows of her hard pride (8) but from
the rain of his tears and the winds of his sighs (9-10). His state is uncertain, as the storms have destroyed his sails and tiller (14), leaving him powerless and adrift, not in Dante’s *gran mar de l’essere* but in a vast, internal ocean. Petrarch elaborates on these themes in the odyssean *RVF* 189, one of the most famous and extended uses of the sailor’s mask:

Passa la nave mia colma d’oblio
per aspro mare a mezza notte il verno
enfra Scylla et Caribdi, et al governo,
siede ’l signore anzi ’l nemico mio;
à ciascun remo un penser pronto et rio
che la tempesta e ’l fin par ch’ abbi a scherno;
là vela rompe un vento umido eterno
di sospir, di speranze et di desio;
pioggia di lagrimar, nebbia di sdegni
bagna et rallenta le già stanche
arte che son d’error con ignoranzia attorto.
Celansi i duo mei dolci usati segni,
morta fra l’onde è la ragion et l’arte
tal ch’ i ’ncomincio a desperar del porto.

My ship weighed down by forgetfulness passes through rough seas at midnight in winter between Scylla and Charybdis, and at the helm sits my lord, or rather my enemy; at each oar is a ready and evil thought that seems to hold the storm and the end in scorn; the sail is torn by a wet, eternal wind of sighs, of hopes and of desire; a rain of tears, a fog of disdains bathes and slows the already tired lines twisted already with error and ignorance. My two sweet familiar guides are hidden; reason and art are dead amidst the waves so that I begin to despair of reaching the port.

Here the poet dedicates an entire sonnet to an extended metaphor in which he takes the role of a sailor in danger of imminent destruction. Tellingly, while the speaker describes the ship as his (“la nave mia”), he is not the captain, not in control of the boat, which is steered by his lord/enemy, while the oars are moved by “thoughts” that the poet does not
even explicitly name as his own. He is a sailor but a powerless one, a follower, completely at the mercy of the whims of nature and the actions of others.

In two poems composed shortly after Laura’s death, he again places himself in a storm-tossed ship; the language and metaphors are familiar but take on different shades of meaning:

veggio fortuna in porto, et stanco omai
il mio nocchier, et rotte arbore et sarte,
e i lumi bei che mirar soglio spenti.

I see my fate even in the port, and my already weary helmsman, and my planks and sails torn, and the fair lights that I used to watch extinguished. (272.12-14 and cf. 317.1-2)

Now it is not Laura’s rejection and his own internal conflicts that toss him mercilessly about but rather the hopelessness of his own emotional state now that his potential savior is not merely capricious but gone. The ferocity of the storm and the crumbling state of the poet’s boat lead to the inevitable, as he sees himself and Love shipwrecked together on the same reef (268.15-16). Only at the end of the *Canzoniere* will the poet work to reimagine his sailor’s role in *bono* as he prays to Christ for grace:

so that, if I have lived in war and in tempest,
I may die in peace and in port; and if my stay was in vain, may my parting, at least, be honorable.

si che, s’ io vissi in guerra et in tempesta,
mora in pace et in porto; et se la stanza fu vana, almen sia la partita onesta. (365.9-11)

As a consequence of his constant inner conflict and of the use of all of these masks, these *personae*, the poet risks his own identity. Looking out over the natural beauties of Vaucluse, the poet remarks that he recognizes them but not himself: “ben riconosco in voi l’usate forme, / non, lasso, in me…” (“I can easily recognize in you your
acustomed forms, / but not, alas, in myself…” 301.9-10). In 349.3-6 he expands on this theme of personal change to the point of unrecognizability:

so I continue changing within and without, and in not a few years I have been laid so low that I now barely recognize myself: I have banished all my accustomed life.

In addition to the physical (and natural) changes that have marked the passage of time and changed Petrarch’s appearance, there have been less visible but more alienating internal ones, changes hinted at since the first poem of the *Canzoniere* when the poet mentions a time when he was a different—or, more literally, another—man (*altr’uom*). A poet famous for his poetic subjectivity thus objectifies himself to a most extreme level: he is to himself a stranger, an exile, an other.

3.5 Conversion and Reintegration

The division of the body into its constituent parts, the trauma of soul-body separation, the fragmenting process of internal separation and conflict, and finally the recourse to masks, to assuming other faces (and existences)—all lead Petrarch to question who, in the end, he really is. But the poet does leave some hope for resolution, for reintegration. While his earthly love for Laura forcefully made him forget himself (23.19) and her beauty divided him from himself and isolated him from others (“che m’avean sì da me stesso diviso / et fatto singular da l’altra gente,” 292.3-4), the potentially healing prospect of divine love still exists. Not surprisingly, this hope is particularly notable in the final three poems of his collection. In 364, Petrarch writes,
e le mie parti estreme,
alto Dio, a te devotamente rendo
pentito et tristo de’ miei si spesi anni

and my final parts,
high God, I render devotedly to you
penitent and sorrowful for my years spent thus. (7-9)

After so many years of personal scattering and division, the poet is unable to present himself to God in a fully whole form, but what he still retains, his “parti estreme,” the last pieces of himself, he offers to his creator. The penitential mood continues in 365, discussed above, in which the poet asks for a safe final port and prays that the shortcomings of his soul, whatever he lacks, be filled (and fulfilled) by grace (7-8, cf. Santagata 1411).

Finally, in 366, Petrarch’s appeals to (and epithets for) the Virgin recall and reinforce a number of his most important words and themes of fragmentation: she knows how many tears the poet has shed (“sparte,” 79); she is the mother of the King who loosed (“sciolti,” 48) the bonds of mortals; she is the “star of this tempest-tossed sea, / the trusted guide of every faithful helmsman” (“di questo tempestoso mare stella, / d’ogni fedel nocchier fidata guida,” 67-68). And she is also the “Vergine pura, d’ogni parte intera” (27). Unlike the poet, the Virgin is neither scattered nor divided; whole in every part, she is able to intercede for Petrarch and his sparse anime fragmenta and, he hopes, restore or replace what was lost, using her own purity—her integrity or wholeness—to reintegrate him and make him ready for the divine presence. Greene argues that “the fundamental subject of the Canzoniere is not so much or not only the psychology of the speaker as the ontology of his selfhood, the struggle to discern a self or compose a self which could stand as a fixed and knowable substance. This struggle…is finally a
failure…” (124). For Petrarch, it may not have been a failure, but neither was it a complete success. In the end, all he could do was trust in God for the state of his soul and hope that, on the mortal plane, that struggle to compose a self—nearly five decades and hundreds of poems in the making—resulted in, if not absolute cohesion, at least a timeless and significant literary creation.
CHAPTER 4:

FRAGMENTED MODERNISM

4.1 Ruin, Fetish, and Sensation: The Fragment from Romanticism to Symbolism

The most important treatment of the literary fragment between Petrarchism and Modernism (and its immediate forbears) occurs in Romanticism; because of this, a brief examination of the Romantic use of fragmentation will be helpful. Despite differences in emphasis and approach, the Romantic aesthetic paralleled that of Petrarch in a few notable ways. First was the love of Nature and the natural world; like Petrarch, the Romantics not only celebrated the purity and beauty of nature but showed a concomitant dislike—even disdain—for the mundanities of urban life. For Petrarch, cities meant crowds, filth, and chaos. For the Romantics, cities meant crowds, filth, and a disconnect from the purity of Nature: the drudgery of Blake’s Satanic Mills. Cities were also full of unpleasant aesthetic extremes—the poor and ignorant who didn’t have the time or ability to understand art and the established elite who indulged in an overwrought, over-intellectualized kind of poetry. The note of longing in Romanticism found voice through the theme of exile, which Dante (a true exile) and Petrarch (a literary peripatetic) had developed. Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley in particular developed “the theme of exile, of the disinherited mind that cannot find a spiritual home in its native land and society or anywhere in the modern world” (Abrams and Greenblatt 15), a treatment that will continue to resonate with the Symbolists and Modernists.
With regard to literary form, the Romantics often turned to the short lyric poem, including sonnets (both English and Petrarchan), quatrains, and verses in terza rima. These formats drew largely on the broader European tradition of lyric poetry of which Petrarch was, in many ways, the main progenitor. These lyric poems also tended to be personal and introspective, written in the first person and presenting an apparent subjectivity. As Petrarch had taken external subjects (notably Laura) and used them as starting points for a literary examination of his internal thoughts and reactions, so Wordsworth, for example, located the source of a poem not in the outer world, but in the individual poet, and specified that the essential materials of a poem were not external people and events, but the inner feelings of the author, or external objects only after these have been transformed or irradiated by the author’s feelings. (Abrams and Greenblatt 7)

Beyond similarities of form and approach, there was a similar general feeling of renewal and renaissance. Just as Petrarch had famously seen himself standing between two worlds, the ancient and the modern, so Shelley claimed that poetry in his age had “arisen as it were from a new birth” (*A Defense of Poetry* 48).

At the same time, several broad approaches to literary fragmentation distinct from the Petrarchan or Modernist use are immediately apparent. As Levinson notes (5-6):

Although poetic fragments occur in periods other than the Romantic, criticism tacitly assigns them an unusually motivated and expressive condition within the early nineteenth century, or within that age’s dominant ideologies of reading and writing. The fragment…is felt not merely to reflect but to focus the sensibility of its original or associated epoch. It figures in our criticism as an exemplary Romantic expression.

One of the most prevalent treatments is the Romantic ruin. In a Romantic aesthetic deeply interested in the sublime, the tremendous, and the lost, physical ruins—of statues, of buildings, even of cities or civilizations—provided an evocative point of departure for
examinations of the passage of time and the nature of memory. Four poems will serve to indicate some of the ways in which Romantic poetry uses ruins: “Past Ruined Ilion Helen Lives,” “Ozymandias,” *The Ruined Cottage*, and “Lines Composed Above Tintern Abbey.”

Walter Savage Landor combines the imagery of the ruin with an approach to personal and poetic memory in “Past Ruined Ilion Helen Lives.” The central conceit of this short lyric is an extended treatment of the poetic immortality boast; here, the speaker claims that his beloved will—through his poetry—outlast the creations of the great and powerful around them. As evidence of the preserving and immortalizing power of poetry, Landor gives examples of women whose fame has fared better than the physical remains of their surroundings:

> Past ruined Ilion Helen lives,
>  Alcestis rises from the shades;
>  Verse calls them forth…(1-3)

In addition to keeping alive the memory of the sacrifice and reward of Alcestis, poetry preserves the name and fame of Helen, the epitome of feminine beauty. The opening image of the poem reminds us that Troy itself is long gone; destroyed centuries ago, it exists only in ruins, while Helen, the cause of the war in which the city was sacked, lives on. Landor ends the poem by repurposing this comparison: “One form shall rise above the wreck, / One name, Ianthe, shall not die” (11-12). His poetry will preserve the name of his own beloved. Long after modern cities have crumbled to ruins, Ianthe’s name will rise above the wreck of the creations of the current age. But the ruins are not just scenery; they form a necessary backdrop that helps give the persistence of Ianthe’s name meaning.
Built on this same theme, Percy Shelley’s sonnet “Ozymandias” provides one of the best expressions of the Romantic poetic use of physical ruin as fragmentation.

I met a traveler from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert…Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
“My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!”
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

Here Shelley’s central image is the broken statue of Ramesses II, significant not despite being in ruins but precisely because in ruins. The pharaoh, a prolific builder of (among other things) colossal statues of himself, intended this particular statue to stand forever as a tangible symbol of and testament to his greatness, something that would make even the mighty of the earth despair. In reality, the remains of the statue sit desolate and alone in the desert, indicating, signifying, and surrounded by nothing. Shelley emphasizes the centrality of the statue being in ruins, in pieces. Parts of the two legs rise from the sand, while the head lies half-buried nearby; the rest is gone. The language of fragmentation dominates: “trunkless” (2), “a shattered visage” (4), “decay” (12), “wreck” (13). The poet considers the ruined remains as they are, not as something to be rebuilt or scavenged for parts. The fragments are necessary as fragments for the poem to communicate its central message of memento mori.

In Wordsworth’s The Ruined Cottage, a 537-line blank verse narrative, the speaker recounts an experience that begins with happening upon the ruins of a small
cottage while out on a summer walk. Next to the “ruined house, four naked walls / That stared upon each other” (31-32), he meets an old peddler whom he had recently been traveling with. The peddler tells the narrator that the cottage had once been the home of a woman named Margaret and her husband and children. As the years passed, Margaret’s life had become increasingly difficult, even tragic; her husband became ill, and though he survived he never fully recovered. Eventually, unable to continue to provide for his family, he enlisted in the army and left, never to return. Each time the peddler came back, he found Margaret a little worse off than before. Eventually, she falls ill and dies, the “last human tenant of these ruined walls” (491).

Throughout the poem, the remains of the cottage provide a visual cue and a point of departure for the peddler, in whose story the increasing decay of the cottage mirrors Margaret’s own gradual physical and emotional decline. Like many literary ruins, these are haunted, and those haunting memories are what move the peddler to share his story: “I see around me here / Things which you cannot see,” (66-67) he tells the narrator. A little later, he explains how the experience and contemplation of these physical fragments move him to re-experience moments of grief and loss (115-118):

…You will forgive me, sir,
But often on this cottage do I muse
As on a picture, till my wiser mind
Sinks, yielding to the foolishness of grief.

Individual images of fragmentation litter the poem and contribute to the sense of destruction and ruin: “the broken wall” (59), “the useless fragment of a wooden bowl” (90), books that “now with straggling leaves / Lay scattered here and there, open or shut, / As they had chanced to fall” (406-08), “her tattered clothes” (484).
Yet even in ruin, not all is lost. “To conceive the fragment as that particle which survives the ravages of time is, perforce, to invest it with some saving virtue” (Levinson 30). The peddler, after seeing that he has moved the narrator to tears, ends on a hopeful note; though many sad things have happened here, the place is beautiful and at peace. The current beauty and tranquility of the ruined cottage have renewed his spirit, so that:

what we feel of sorrow and despair
from ruin and from change, and all the grief
the passing shows of being leave behind,
appeared an idle dream… (519-22)

The ruined cottage thus serves as a physical entity that provides a cathartic experience for the peddler (and, presumably, the narrator and the reader) by allowing him to relive and emotionally process the sad memories associated with the place.

Finally, the physical remnants of human creations serve to create a sharp contrast with the eternal character not only of poetry but of Nature, one of the paramount concerns of Romanticism. Wordsworth’s well-known “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour, July 13, 1798,” exemplifies this treatment. The final item in Lyrical Ballads, the poem begins as the speaker, overlooking the ruins of Tintern Abbey, uses his return to the spot to initiate his reflection on the passage of time: “Five years have passed; five summers with the length / Of five long winters!” (1-2). The ruins of the abbey below contrast with the constancy of nature for the speaker, who notes the springs, the cliffs, the trees around him, all of which also echo RVF 126 and Petrarch’s use of a physical landscape to evoke personal memories. Against this double backdrop of the natural world and the slow decay of human endeavor, the poet meditates on his own memories (“The picture of my mind revives again,” 61), on the changes in his character and circumstances after even a short
period. In all of this, he defines himself as a “lover of the meadows and the woods, / and mountains” (103-4) and a “worshiper of Nature” (152).

Closely related to the consideration of ruins and remnants is the Romantic interest in fragmentation expressed in the contemplation of the fragment itself, the single piece of a broken, ruined, or shattered whole. This treatment often reflects the Romantic interest in the sublime; in such cases, the object of contemplation can be either natural or man-made; one thinks of the castle “standing here sublime” (49) in Wordsworth’s “Elegiac Stanzas” or Shelley’s monolithic “jag of a mountain crag” (“The Cloud,” 35). But the intense interest in, and even fetishization of, the individual fragment can also be seen on a smaller scale, as exemplified by Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” a 50-line ekphrasis in which the speaker takes as his single object of study a Greek vase, a lone representative token of Classicism—the fragment as inherently meaningful but also as cultural synecdoche.

On a formal level, literary fragmentation finds Romantic expression in the distinctive fragment poem, “a partial whole—either a remnant of something once complete and now broken or decayed, or the beginning of something that remains unaccomplished. . .” (Janowitz 442). One of the foremost examples of this is Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan: Or, a vision in a dream. A Fragment.” In three stanzas of varying lengths, the poet gives a trio of related but separate descriptions of Kublai Khan’s Xanadu. The individual images within the poem are striking, but there is little sense of narrative or structure. The exact level of truth in the poet’s description of his process of composition—that he saw the material for the poem in a dream, then after waking and writing part of it down was interrupted and subsequently unable to remember all of the
original material—is much less important than the story itself. Both the text and context provided by Coleridge serve to reinforce the poem’s fragmentary nature.

“In many instances,” Thomas says of Romantic poetry, “ruin and fragmentation are themes rather than physical features of the work. They may be linked to the aspirations and limitations of the human condition” (508). A final major form of fragmentation in English Romantic poetry is psychological: a lingering sense of solitude and alienation, a feeling of division from others and even from society as a whole. Thus we have character sketches of lonely figures such as Wordsworth’s “The Solitary Reaper,” a young woman “single in the field” (1) who “sings a melancholy strain” (6) all by herself. Byron and Shelley sing their own types of melancholy strains in describing lost love, the rupture of a relationship. In “When We Two Parted,” Byron describes at length the moment of two lovers’ separation, and his lines are full of the imagery of fragmentation and loss: “Half broken-hearted / to sever for years” (3-4), “Thy vows are all broken” (13), “With silence and tears” (32). Shelley’s lament in “To Wordsworth” mourns the dissolution not of a romance but a relationship of respect; the older poet, who had once been “a rock-built refuge” standing “above the blind and battling multitude” (9-10) has become an establishment conservative. Shelley privileges his grief as singular, separate from more mundane sorrows: “These common woes I feel. One loss is mine” (5).

The Romantics also turn to lengthy meditations specifically dedicated to isolation and despair in poems such as Keats’ “Ode on Melancholy” and Coleridge’s “Dejection: An Ode.” In this latter work, the poet speak of his abiding, passionless sorrow “[w]hich finds no natural outlet, no relief / In word, or sigh, or tear—” (23-24); this inability to
express his grief to anyone else finalizes the sense of loneliness that his original dejection initiated. Finally, in Wordsworth’s “Elegiac Stanzas,” the speaker also examines physical and emotion separation from humanity, though he ends up decrying rather than promoting it:

Farewell, farewell the heart that lives alone
Housed in a dream, at distance from the Kind!
Such happiness, wherever it is known,
Is to be pitied; for ’tis surely blind. (53-56)

This tension between not wanting to be part of humanity and yet needing to be and the related sorrow of being separated from others while still desiring the closeness and empathy of human interaction both looks back to Petrarch (cf. RVF 234) and looks forward to Symbolism and Modernism.

The Symbolist Movement in literature came on the heels of and partially in reaction to Romanticism. French Symbolism is often thought of as beginning with Baudelaire’s Les Fleurs du Mal (1857) and lasting for roughly a half-century, with subsequent major poets including Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, and Arthur Rimbaud. In the words of one scholar, Symbolism dealt with “mimesis in crisis” (Abastado 85); while Romanticism looked to the natural world as a pure source of inspiration, Symbolism showed more interest in human reactions and effects. Thus the psychological aspect of literary fragmentation—separation, alienation, self-doubt—figured prominently in their poetry. Travers explains: “Underwriting the poetics of the Symbolist creed was the conviction that individual identity was a fragmented and discontinuous thing, the self a meeting place for conflicting desires and intellectual contradictions” (116). Like Petrarch, the Symbolists had a fascination with the
fragmented self, with internal conflict and contradiction, and this was one of the great immediate legacies of Symbolism.

A second was free verse. Symbolist poetry often broke free from the strictures of traditional rhymed and/or metered verse. This freedom had both aesthetic and philosophical ramifications. “Language,” Varda writes, “as esthetic expression, as the expression of the beautiful, was the poet’s autonomous creation; the Symbolist’s poetic language could not be fettered by the rules of centuries of poetic tradition…” (40). This visible linguistic rupture created a kind of formal fragmentation as poetic lines and even individual words could be truncated or moved according to the poetic plan. Both the interest in the fragmented self and the forays into vers libre would have a major impact on the Modernist poets of the following generation.

4.2 Pound, Eliot, and Early Anglo-American Modernism

Against this backdrop come literary Modernism and the two Modernists who will be the focus of this study: Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot. Their biographies and poetics include important similarities and striking differences. Both men were born in the U.S. to prosperous families; both moved to Europe early on and stayed there for most of their adult lives. Both had a major impact on 20th-century English letters, Pound as a poet, editor, and erstwhile political commentator, Eliot as a poet, playwright, and critic. Their personalities contrasted significantly. Pound was brash, extroverted, and bohemian, while Eliot was more measured and conventional; it is telling that the former ended up in a mental hospital while the latter held a day job for many years in a bank and subsequently a publishing house. This study will focus on the first half of both poets’ careers (roughly pre-1930), and the principal texts examined will be Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred
Ezra Loomis Pound was born in 1885 in Hailey, Idaho, where his father held a government job. Pound’s mother returned to the East Coast when Ezra was only 18 months old, and his father soon rejoined them. Pound was of establishment New England stock, Quaker on his father’s side, Puritan on his mother’s. In 1901 he began attending the University of Pennsylvania, where he studied poetry, got bad grades, and met Hilda Doolittle (H.D.); after a few years, he transferred to Hamilton College, then returned to the University of Pennsylvania for his Master’s Degree in Romance Languages (1906). Like many writers, some of immense and some of mediocre talents, he began a Ph.D. program but never completed the degree. He taught for a year at a small college in Indiana before moving to Europe in 1908. His first book of poetry, *A Lume Spento*, was published during a stay in Venice; shortly thereafter he moved to London, where he spent the next 12 years. There he met a number of important literary figures including W.B. Yeats, Wyndham Lewis, and Richard Aldington; published several more books of poetry and criticism; and married Dorothy Shakespear. He also met and mentored T.S. Eliot, three years his junior.

In the late 1910s, increasingly disillusioned by war and contemporary European society, Pound wrote *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920), a long poem made up of a number of individual shorter works. From 1921-1924 he lived in Paris, where he edited drafts of Eliot’s *The Waste Land* extensively, for which he earned the (repurposed) Dantean epithet of *il miglior fabbro*. He spent the next few decades in Italy, where he began work in earnest on the *Cantos*, a monumental and occasionally tedious serial epic in which
Pound sought over the course of more than 50 years to bring together his varied thoughts on literature, history, economics, culture, government, and society. He also became increasingly interested in Fascism, leading to his arrest for treason after World War II and subsequent commitment to a mental hospital in the U.S. Finally released in 1958, he returned to Italy, where he spent his final years. He died in 1972 at age 87.

Pound outlived his colleague and compatriot by seven years. Born in 1888 in St. Louis, Missouri, Thomas Stearns Eliot was a scion of the prominent Boston Eliots. A reserved boy with delicate health, he attended Smith Academy in St. Louis before moving to Massachusetts to attend Milton Academy and then Harvard University, where in three years of study he earned his bachelor’s degree in philosophy. In 1910 he spent a year in Paris, studying philosophy at the Sorbonne before going back to Harvard to pursue graduate work in philosophy and literature. In 1914 he returned to Europe, studying briefly at Oxford before settling in London, where he would live for most of the final 50 years of his life.

Between 1915 and 1920 Eliot taught the occasional class, married Vivienne Haigh-Wood, and began to work in earnest on his poetry, befriending figures like Bertrand Russell, Wyndham Lewis, and Pound. His first major collection, *Prufrock and Other Observations*, was published 1917. *The Waste Land* appeared in *Criterion* in 1922. Eliot continued to balance his employment—first at Lloyd’s Bank and then, from 1925, at the publishing firm Faber and Faber—with his literary work: poetry (such as *Ash-Wednesday* [1930] and *Four Quartets* [1936-42]), plays, and criticism. Though he became more conservative and religious in his later years, the changes were probably not so striking as some have suggested. As Brooker points out, his “interest in religion
(literally, a retying or rebinding, an attempt to reconnect fragments into a whole) did not appear suddenly in his thirty-ninth year. His awareness of fragmentation, his dissatisfaction with brokenness, had been evident in his earliest work” (123). Eliot died in London in 1965.

One of the first and most important points of contact between Pound and Eliot, their shared time in England from 1914-1921, witnessed vital early stages of their literary careers as well as the development of their aesthetics. In 1912, Pound, his former fiancée H.D., and her current fiancé Richard Aldington became the semi-official founders of Imagism, a poetic movement that sought among other things the “direct treatment of the thing” and insisted on composition “in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of the metronome” (“Imagisme” 94). Both of these ideas would influence the successive development of Modernism, as would the desire “to write in accordance with the best tradition” (ibid.). In 1915, Pound published the anthology *Des Imagistes*, which included poems not only by H.D. and Aldington but also by Ford Madox Ford, James Joyce, and William Carlos Williams.

Pound’s enthusiasm for Imagism waned as his enthusiasm for another new artistic movement, Vorticism, developed. Influenced by both the visual arts, particularly Cubism, and other literary movements, particularly Futurism, Vorticism (so named by Pound in 1913) had an influential if may-fly existence. Its central vehicle of expression was the literary magazine *BLAST* (1914-15), edited by the artist Wyndham Lewis and containing poems by Pound and Eliot. For his part, Eliot was generally less interested than Pound in founding and belonging to literary movements, though he contributed poetry to a number
of magazines and benefited from the general atmosphere of literary discussion and creativity in London.

One other figure deserves special mention. The English critic T.E. Hulme, despite being only a few years older than Pound and Eliot, had a significant philosophical impact on their early verse, Eliot’s in particular. Though his poetic output before his untimely death in 1917 was modest, he wrote a series of essays on philosophy and aesthetics that the young Modernists took to heart. One of his fundamental assertions was that art swings, broadly speaking, between two poles, Romanticism and Classicism, and that in their own time, the pendulum was set to swing completely back from the former toward the latter.

Here is the root of all romanticism: that man, the individual, is an infinite reservoir of possibilities….One can define the classical quite clearly as the exact opposite to this. Man is an extraordinarily fixed and limited animal whose nature is absolutely constant. It is only by tradition and organisation that anything decent can be got out of him. (116)

With this measured and somewhat pessimistic view of humanity Hulme sought to correct what he saw as the Romantic overindulgence in the many possibilities, the great potential, of mankind. Man is not a mighty creature that must be freed and celebrated but rather a “limited animal” that can only be civilized by “tradition and organisation.”

Hulme’s philosophical argument had a practical literary aspect as well: he described a good poem as “a poem which is all dry and hard, a properly classical poem” (128) and suggested that its composition requires “a holding back, a reservation” (ibid.). Eliot and Pound, both already interested in classical poetry and the nature of literary tradition,
would be deeply influenced by Hulme’s anti-Romantic philosophy as well as his interest in a poetics that favored dryness, hardness, and (in Eliot’s case, at least) a reservation.\(^6\)

4.3 Allusion and the Uses of Tradition

One of the shortest and perhaps the most lasting dictum for literary Modernism was Pound’s injunction, “Make it new.” At first reading, it seems to be a simple demand for novelty, for modernity. On reflection, however, it is clear that whatever is to be made “new” is already here and accessible; there is a pre-existing “it” that has to be considered and refashioned. Pound is not suggesting an \textit{ex nihilo} creation for modern poetry but rather a rearranging and recreation of existing literature in new ways. Janowitz, comparing Romantic fragment poems with Modernist poetry, writes that the Modernist fragment poem “does not allude to an invisible beyond, but instead generates new meanings out of visible and discrete remnants and ruins” (449). Both Pound and Eliot dip often and deeply into the well of tradition. “Surely the great poet,” Eliot wrote, “is, among other things, one who not merely restores a tradition which has been in abeyance, but one who in his poetry re-twines as many straying strands of tradition as possible” (“Use of Poetry” 85). In their efforts to restore and re-twine, both poets seek to claim knowledge of and a degree of control over their poetic forebears through a reinterpretative use of poetic forms and motifs and through their use of literary allusion.

On the larger-scale approach to “making it new,” the Modernists, rather than simply using pre-existing forms or creating completely novel ones, adapted traditional poetic forms and approaches. The epic is a salient case in point: Pound’s \textit{Cantos} is in

\(^{6}\) Cf. Chapter 6.1 for further discussion of Hulme’s influence on Eliot’s rather unforgiving view of humanity.
many ways a Modernist interpretation of the epic form. While they deviate from the classical epic in terms of specific genre-linked traits (e.g., regular epic meter, an invocation to the Muses, a central heroic figure) they evoke the epic tradition in terms of length and scope. Divided into discrete sections usually linked by a common theme or set of images, the 120 Cantos are a sprawling, epic poetic achievement and a fascinating, if not always successful, reinterpretation of the epic form. In this process of reinterpreting the epic Pound follows Dante, who also needed both to evoke the classical tradition and yet break with it enough to create space for his own genius. Pound’s classification of his individual segments as “cantos” reinforces this Dantean link. The obvious epic analogue in prose would be Joyce’s Ulysses, an attempt to take a single (not-so-heroic) protagonist and follow him through one of the days of his rather prosaic life using Homer’s Odyssey as a source of inspiration and as an organizing theme. And with its large cast of characters and wide-ranging philosophical and aesthetic interests, The Waste Land could be considered a type of mini-epic—a kind of Modernist epyllion. The composition of these varied Modernist epics showcase their poetics of fragmentation, as they “tended to treat historical experience as fragmentary, and often it is difficult to say whether their long poems are epics or merely collections of lyrics” (Lewis 146).

Beyond innovations and renovations of form, the Modernists connected their own poetry to the existing literary tradition both implicitly (through the extensive use of allusion in their poetry) and explicitly (in their critical writings). In both cases, Dante plays a central role. Like Petrarch, Pound and Eliot saw in Dante a central and defining literary figure; unlike Petrarch, the Modernists had the benefit of six centuries of intervening history and literary tradition. They were also unburdened by similarities of
geography and language, which bound Petrarch more tightly to Dante and thus required greater reaction, greater efforts to escape. Consequently, where Petrarch had been forced to ignore or, at best, move obliquely around Dante, Pound and Eliot appealed to him frequently and directly. In Casella’s words, “Dante’s influence on, and presence in, T.S. Eliot’s and Ezra Pound’s works is everywhere: in their critical essays, in the development of their personal poetics, and in their poetry (through direct inspiration, quotations and allusions, titles, and epigraphs)” (95).

For his part, Pound valued Dante’s own ability to make things new: “In Italy, around the year 1300, there were new values established, things said that had not been said in Greece, or in Rome or elsewhere” (How To Read 31). He also shared with the medieval poet an interest in politics, in the poetic use of everyday language, and in a “polyglot range of functional quotations from a number of relevant languages” (Cambon 176); this last characteristic in particular was shared by Eliot and, much earlier, Petrarch as well. As someone who loved the sound and movement of words and who became increasingly interested in political expression through poetry, Pound viewed Dante’s genius as consisting of philosophical as well as literary/linguistic greatness. Tytell (223) sees an unflattering parallel:

Dante’s cruel and often nasty obsession with justice was part of a tactlessness that led to his own exile. It was the reflection of an idealized devotion to a past that he had invented, just as Pound chooses to emphasize the glory in a Malatesta rather than the unscrupulousness that allows him to sell his services to the highest bidder.

“Cruel” and “nasty” may be a step too far, but in the admittedly tactless Dante Pound must have felt he had found something of a kindred spirit as well as a literary mentor, and it is certainly true that both poets demonstrated an “idealized devotion” to a past that they
had, if not invented, at least constructed in a comfortable way. For Pound, Dante was a crucial literary figure in that construction.

Eliot’s interest in Dante was, if anything, even more pronounced. He discussed his dedication to the great poet in two essays, “Dante” (1921) and “What Dante Means to Me” (1950). In the earlier work, he is particularly interested in Dante as a craftsman and praises Dante’s as “the most comprehensive, and the most ordered presentation of emotions that has ever been made” (13). In the latter, he reflects more on how Dante’s poetry affected him as a person and a poet. He is especially impressed with Dante’s mastery of language, and thus he speaks of memorizing passages of the *Commedia* as a young man despite not having enough Italian to make sense of it all (28) and concludes that “no poet convinces one more completely that the word he has used is the word he wanted, and that no other will do” (32). Ellmann makes an important note on Eliot’s appreciation of Dante’s language and on the possibilities of fragmentation in the poetry of both:

He argues that in Dante's language there is no interruption between the surface and the core, between the words and the sensations they disclose. It is only when a gap has opened in the language that the author needs to intervene, yet his intrusion exacerbates the fragmentation. (42)

This artistic lesson from Dante and the related discovery of “gaps” in the language of poetry which can be filled (but simultaneously widened) by the intervention of the author will be examined in more detail in Chapter 5.3.

A few prominent examples will indicate how Pound and Eliot, like Petrarch, utilized Dante’s poetry in their own works. Pound’s first collection of poetry, *A Lume Spento* (1908), takes its title from *Purg.* III.132. He goes to the *Purgatorio* again for a subtitle in Hugh Selwyn Mauberley (‘Siena mi e’; disfeci Maremma, “V.133), while
the echoes of Dante permeate the lengthy Cantos (cf. Fussell’s “Dante and Pound’s ‘Cantos’” and “Major Form in Pound’s Cantos”). Eliot’s debt to Dante is even more pronounced. The epigraph for “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” is a six-line excerpt from Inferno XVII.61-66 in which Guido da Montefeltro explains to Dante why he feels at ease in sharing his story. The passage not only begins the poem but introduces one of its central themes (cf. Chapter 6.2). Eliot also prepares the reader for a number of Dantean allusions early on in The Waste Land as in his dedication he refers to Pound as il miglior fabbro—“the better craftsman,” a phrase taken from Dante’s praise of Arnaut Daniel (Purg. XXVI.117). In his own notes to the poem Eliot cites the Commedia several times (e.g., lines 63-64 and 411). He also uses Dante to bracket the poem as a whole, returning to Purg. XXVI at the end with a direct quote in line 427: “Poi s’ascose nel foco che gli affina” (“Then he hid himself in the fire that refines him,” 148).

Before moving beyond Dante, two closely related points deserve mention. The first is that both Modernists (particularly Pound) also looked back before Dante to Guido Cavalcanti and the Provençal troubadours as a source of inspiration; the second is that they both resolutely refused to look just after Dante to Petrarch. Pound saw Cavalcanti as an exemplar of the more concrete and descriptive language that he considered a hallmark of medieval poetry (cf. How To Read 18); evidence of this early influence can be found in Pound’s Canzoni (1911) and, more obviously, his translations in Sonnets and ballate of Guido Cavalcanti (1912). Philosophically, the stilnovista serves as a balance to Dante in what one scholar terms the “Cavalcanti function,” which “works to deconstruct what Dante had built as absolute values. It does so essentially in two ways: by opposing Cavalcanti’s literal method to Dante’s allegory, and by pitting physics and time against
metaphysics and theology” (Ardizzone 139). So we have, for example, Cavalcanti invoked in the short lyric poem “Shop Girl” as well as in the Cantos, where in Canto XXXVI Pound incorporates significant parts of a translation of “Donna me prega.”

Petrarch, conversely, receives little attention from the Modernists, and what attention he does receive is largely negative. For Pound, Petrarch was the epitome of empty—if sometimes beautiful—ornamentation; thus “Chaucer’s culture was wider than Dante’s, Petrarch’s is immeasurably inferior to both” (ABC of Reading 103). In How to Read, Pound posits several groupings of authors, the fourth of which includes the “men who do more or less good work in the more or less good style of a period” (22-23). These writers:

add but some slight personal flavour, some minor variant of a mode, without affecting the main course of the story….When they are most prolific they produce dubious cases like Virgil and Petrarch, who probably pass, among the less exigeant, for colossi. (23)

But Pound’s most damning assessment of Petrarch the Dubious Case comes from 1910’s The Spirit of Romance: “The Renaissance is not a time, but a temperament. Petrarch and Boccaccio have it. To the art of poetry they bring nothing distinctive: Petrarch refines but deenergizes” (166). Age and experience apparently served only to strengthen his disdain for the Italian, as he added this footnote in the 1929 edition:

No, he doesn’t even refine, he oils and smooths over the idiom. As far as any question of actual fineness of emotion or cadence or perception he is miles behind Ventadorn or Arnaut Daniel. Petrarch systematizes a certain ease of verbal expression in Italian. An excellent author for an Italian law student seeking to improve his “delivery.”

For his part, Eliot shows his own scant regard for Petrarch not by slighting references but simply by silence.
While Dante was perhaps the single most important poet for Pound and Eliot, he was far from alone; their literary tastes were wide-ranging, and they were happy to bring in ideas or language from all the things they had read. Through extensive use of literary allusion, they sought not only to “assimilate the personal into the universal” (Schwarz 19) but also to create their own place in the literary tradition. Like Petrarch, they drew heavily on Dante, though as an immediate predecessor for Petrarch and a distant one for the Modernists he was more indirectly utilized by the former and more explicitly by the latter. Also like Petrarch, they delved deep into the Western literary tradition, evincing a knowledge of and admiration for classical literature which they then used to help create their own literary ethos. Pound’s early poetry, such as “The Coming of War: Actaeon” and “The Lake Isle,” are full of classical allusions. In Hugh Selwyn Mauberley (1920) his first major work, he follows up in the first constituent poem (“E.P. Ode Pour L’Election de son Sepulchre”) an opening epigraph from Nemesianus with allusions to (and in a few places direct quotations from) Aeschylus (8), Homer (9-15), Sappho (36), Heraclitus (43), Pindar (58), and Horace (71-2). Not surprisingly, the Cantos, a thickly allusive work, refers to classical subjects frequently, beginning with Canto I, itself a free translation of part of Book XI of the Odyssey. In Eliot’s early poetry, he includes allusions to Hesiod (“Prufrock” 29), Virgil (“La Figlia che piange,” epig.), Sophocles (“Sweeney Among the Nightingales” 37), and Homer (“Sweeney Erect” 10). The Waste Land, a work largely built around allusion, makes references to (among others) Classical figures and works such as Petronius (epig.), Virgil (93), Ovid (98-100, 218), Sappho (221), Homer (246), and the Perviglium Veneris (428).
Though Pound and Eliot grounded their allusions in the classical world they certainly did not restrict them to it. Indeed, precisely because they wanted to build up the idea of a continuous and continuing Western tradition (into which they could insert themselves), they sought inspiration from and alluded to works from a variety of authors, time periods, and language traditions in order to bolster their own work. Korn explains:

The criterion of usefulness, which Pound developed through his curricula and in much of his critical writing about past literatures, illuminates a progression in his poetry from the romantic enjoyment of the past to its renewal in the handling of historical documents. By translation and adaptation or imitation, Pound ‘makes-new’, or recontextualizes it, for the twentieth century. (30)

In addition to the classical writers in “Hugh Selwyn Mauberley” mentioned above, Pound recontextualizes Ronsard (in the title of “E.P. Ode Pour L’Election…”), Flaubert (13), Villon (18-19), Shakespeare (40); Ruskin, Swinburne and Rossetti (“Yeux Glauques” 2-4) and Fitzgerald (15); Dowson (“Siena mi fe’; disfecemi Maremma” 6), Johnson (7), and Cardinal Newman (12). The Cantos are in certain places almost pure allusion, with individual historical and literary references coming so thick and fast that explanatory notes for the poems are often more extensive than the text itself.

For Eliot, Shakespeare is the only author who seriously rivals Dante in terms of direct literary influence. In “Prufrock,” he evokes Twelfth Night (52) and reflects on Polonius and Hamlet (111-119). Imagery of shipwreck from The Tempest plays a central role in The Waste Land, as in lines 48 and 192. He reflects on Cleopatra’s throne from Antony and Cleopatra (77), repeats Ophelia’s words from Hamlet (172), and “revives for a moment a broken Coriolanus” (416). With its extensive references to Shakespeare (and to other Elizabethan playwrights), the poem itself is constructed on a certain level as a “Shakespearean rag” (128). Like Pound, however, Eliot does not restrict himself to a few
major authors. In “Prufrock” he alludes to Marvell (23), Donne (63), and the Bible (81, 94, and passim). Elsewhere he shows his knowledge of Laforgue (“La Figlia… 146) and Blake (“Gerontion” 20). In _The Waste Land_, Shakespeare is accompanied by Wagner (31-34, 42), John Webster (75), Baudelaire (76), Milton (98), Spenser (176), Verlaine (202), Oliver Goldsmith (253-56), Augustine (307), and the Buddha (308) as well as numerous biblical echoes.

Pound’s and Eliot’s extensive use of allusion makes up a critical aspect of a shared poetics of fragmentation. Like Petrarch, by including a wide variety of references, they created a literary canon; by creating and using a canon, they made a space for their own poetry; and by canonizing certain writers and works, they assert control and therefore grant themselves authority over literary history. The result is a kind of literary circular loop: alluding to a number of different authors helps create the idea of a canon, a line of poetic descent that passes from great writer to great writer, and that idea provides posts, contemporary slots, for the Modernists themselves to fill. To switch metaphors, the quotations or allusions used are individual bricks gathered together and then stacked to construct a building; the very act of gathering and stacking not only brings the disparate parts together but creates a house, an empty space made up of literary fragments that can then be inhabited by the allusory builders. For Petrarch, the bricks came from the classical and the Christian traditions, with a load of recent and contemporary vernacular poetry as well. Pound and Eliot also drew on Christian theology and the Classics, though they were less optimistic about the Christian fragments maintaining their original
meaning and relevance in the new house, and in addition they brought in a wider variety of bricks than Petrarch, a fact reflecting both by large gap between their time periods as well as the broader interests of the Modernists.

The nearly constant stream of allusion in some of the Modernist works lines up with and adapts a Petrarchan motif. As noted in Chapter 1.2, Petrarch’s *Trionfi* serve to create a verbal-visual procession of important figures including great writers of the past. Eliot makes a similar move in *The Waste Land*. Rather than present an explicit parade of authors, however, he creates a more notional assemblage by evoking their words and does so to such an extent that his authorial procession is perhaps even more overwhelming. As seen above, Petronius appears in quotation, Dante in allusion, before the poem proper even begins. Wagner, Shakespeare, Baudelaire, Dante, Ovid, Virgil, Milton, and Spencer appear among the writers whose influence touches the poem most profoundly and who weigh most heavily on the poet’s mind, but others such as Webster, Lyly, Verlaine, Sappho, Augustine, and Kyd make a notable appearance, not to mention the Bible, the Buddha, and the Upanishads. Eliot always had a powerful sense of the impact of the past on the present. “…[W]e shall often find,” he writes, “that not only the best, but the most individual parts of [the poet’s] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously” (“Tradition” 152).

Like Petrarch, Eliot invokes the spirit, and not infrequently the actual words, of some of those poets who have influenced him the most, who have become a part of his poetic consciousness and therefore a part of him.

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7 Eliot presents a bit of special case, given his later interest in Christianity. Though beyond the scope of this study in terms of chronology, his use of a poetics of fragmentation in the more explicitly Christian *Four Quartets* would be an interesting and useful area of examination.
Within this larger aspect of poetic fragmentation—the role of tradition—in which allusion plays a major part lies the sense of belatedness shared by our poets, a sense that led them to appropriate the past, re-interpret or re-cast it as necessary, and then integrate it as far as possible with their present. Greene explains:

The disquiet stemming from the historicity of the signifier adumbrates a pathos that is translinguistic, that embraces ‘mores et habitus,’ the historicity of culture. For Petrarch, a generation after Dante, the intuition of this pathos was no longer redeemable; it was tragic. It bespoke not only the impermanence but the solitude of history. This was a solitude which Petrarch lived out existentially, as estrangement from the ancients who were dearer to him—in the images he created of them—than all but a few of his contemporaries. (8)

Petrarch keenly felt the loneliness of a past that can be admired and appreciated but perhaps never fully experienced, and the fear that history was impermanent and unreclaimable motivated him to seek to reclaim it through his poetry. Eliot posited a similar, if more intellectualized and programmatic, understanding of tradition as something that needed to be fostered, even created, rather than just understood.

[Tradition] cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense…and the historical sense involves a perception not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. (“Tradition” 152)

In a poetics of fragmentation, the history of literature cannot be viewed only as history, or at least not as a history that is also (and merely) the past; it must be present, and that presence must be (or be made to be) relevant to contemporary literature. To use a grammatical metaphor, literary tradition must have a perfective rather than imperfective aspect; it is not simply something that happened or used to happen but is a past event.
with continuing present relevance. In Petrarchan as well as Modernist poetics, fragments, historical and literary, serve not just to look back to the past but to connect that past with the present.

For Petrarch as well as for Pound and Eliot, true literature could only be written and read in light of everything else that had been written and read. A purely personal, individual literature was not only undesirable but impossible. Genette discusses this idea of relational reading:

…the flavor of which, however perverse, may well be condensed in an adjective recently coined by Philippe Lejeune: a *palimpsestuous* reading. To put it differently, just for the fun of switching perversities, one who really loves texts must wish from time to time to love (at least) two together. (399)

Whatever our poets might have thought of these particular metaphors—I must think Pound, at least, would have found them entertaining—they help explain the density of allusion in a poetics of fragmentation, in which all texts are, to varying extents, palimpsests and in which full enjoyment sometimes comes from the pleasure of experiencing multiple texts/words/traditions at the same time.

4.4 Collections of/in Fragments

The re-interpretation of poetic forms such as the epic and the extensive use of literary allusion are both major aspects of the broader issue of Pound’s and Eliot’s poetry as collections of fragments and collections in fragments. Central to their Modernist poetics of fragmentation is the bringing together of bits and pieces to create a new whole in which, however, the individual parts are never fully merged or completely integrated.

A large part of the difficulty of early Modernist works and the aspect that caused much of the confusion among its early critics was the minimal sense of connection
between constituent parts of a work—or, in some cases, the absence of obvious connections altogether. “When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work,” Eliot wrote, “it is constantly amalgamating disparate experiences; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary” (SE 247). The Waste Land is Eliot’s most notable poetic expression of the desire to transcend ordinary chaotic and fragmentary existence through a literary amalgamation of disparate experiences. His process of amalgamation did not include explicit narrative links between ideas or sections; rather, he presented the individual parts side-by-side and required the reader to make the logical or philosophical connections needed to make the poem cohere as a whole. Consequently, such links as exist are not narrative or explanatory but thematic.

Religion is one of these linking themes. Allusion to specific literary works provided him with a way of gathering and utilizing aspects of literary tradition; similarly, the collection and strategic deployment of ideas from religious and philosophical traditions allows him to construct a modern reflection of belief. In keeping with the Modernist sense of disenchantment, Eliot doesn’t present religion as a vital power or even simple social construct that has the ability to bind, to redeem; in keeping with his sense of wistful belatedness, however, he looks back with some longing to a time when religion still had those capabilities. He does not try to resolve this tension, one of several major ones dealing with the central issue of “memory and desire,” but simply presents (and in some cases juxtaposes) fragments of religious belief and leaves it to the reader to infer the poet’s meaning or create her own.

 Appropriately, Eliot draws principally on several separate religious traditions: Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Of the five sub-divisions of The Waste Land,
three take their titles from these religions. The title of the first section, “The Burial of the Dead,” comes from the funeral service as spelled out in the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*. Section III, “The Fire Sermon,” takes its title from one of the Buddha’s most famous discourses; in his endnotes, Eliot says that it “corresponds in importance to the Sermon on the Mount.” The fifth and final part of the poem, “What the Thunder Said,” comes from the fable of the thunder as found in the Upanishads. Thus the beginning, the middle, and the end of the poem have a decidedly religious cast. If we interpret the division of the poem into five parts, each delineated with a Roman numeral, as evocative of Elizabethan drama and its standard five-act format, then the introduction of the drama, its central action, and its conclusion all involve religion. That they are three different religions is important; the bringing together of fragments here requires a diversity that precludes any simple answer as to the purpose or efficacy of religion. The order is also suggestive, as they appear in reverse chronological order: Christianity, the youngest of the three, comes first, then Buddhism, then Hinduism, the oldest. This makes sense for a poet who looks around at the contemporary world, finds it wanting, and begins to travel backwards in search of meaning and clarity. That the quest is ultimately futile—or at least never fully successful—adds to the pathos of the attempt.

Within the text of the individual parts themselves, religious imagery also plays an important role. Two important episodes from the New Testament appear. The first ten lines of “What the Thunder Said” evoke the final day of Jesus’ life: the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus was abandoned by his followers and arrested (“After the torchlight red on sweaty faces / After the frosty silence in the gardens / After the agony in stony places,” 322-24) and his subsequent execution (“The shouting the crying / Prison
and palace and reverberation,” 325-26). Shortly thereafter, Eliot presents a scene suggestive of the story of the road to Emmaus, in which the recently resurrected Jesus appears to two of his disciples who do not recognize him (359-65). Through all of these images, Eliot evokes the sorrow of Jesus’ loneliness and death and the possibility of resurrection while never fully committing to a sense of redemptive rebirth. The details and the emotions of Jesus’ story are still relevant and meaningful, but its transformative, salvific aspect can longer be relied on.

The Buddhist element of The Waste Land occurs principally at the end of “The Fire Sermon,” where the poet uses language from the section title’s namesake to contrast with allusions from Augustine:

To Carthage then I came

Burning burning burning burning
O Lord thou pluckest me out
O Lord thou pluckest

burning (307-11)

In the Fire Sermon from which this section takes its name, the Buddha uses the imagery of burning as a metaphor for the negative involvement of the senses in passion, attachment, etc. The concept fits well in a poem that explores the consequences of desire. Moreover, in juxtaposing the lines of the Buddha and Augustine without giving one precedence over the other he demonstrates an aspect of the Modernist approach to fragmentation: both religious traditions are historically important (and to Eliot history was always present), but he privileges neither as having inherent and meaningful truth value. He places the fragments together but leaves it to the reader to compare and contrast. The last lines of The Waste Land (410-33) use Hindu myth to collate and
explore several of the related themes of the poem. In the story, the god Prajapati causes thunder to sound three times; the resultant sound—“DA”—is interpreted three ways: “datta,” “dayadhvam,” “damyata,” (“give,” “empathize,” “control”). As Manganiello notes, “Even the final words of salvation are uttered enigmatically as a fragmented syllable, ‘Da’ in Sanskrit, another foreign language” (55). Eliot evokes the Upanishads again in the final line of the poem: “Shantih Shantih Shantih.”

A related fragmentary method of composition utilized extensively by both Pound and Eliot is the inclusion of words or even complete lines of poetry from other languages. This is part of but also goes beyond allusion; the poets collect not only the ideas and texts of previous writers but take and include them in their original languages. By neglecting to translate the passages, they are using a less refined, more fragmented approach, as the non-English passages create gaps in the reading. Even those who speak the languages in question are forced to pause mentally, to adjust even if only briefly the prism through which they are viewing the poem. So Pound, for example, gives phrases or even entire lines in Greek (“E.P. Ode” 9, 58, “Mauberley” 7), Italian (e.g., Canto VIII.21, 25; X.25, 28), Latin (X.59-70), Spanish (LXXXI 4-6), and medieval French (X.131). Eliot is more likely to leave the epigraphs untranslated (e.g. the Italian, Latin, and Greek respectively of “Prufrock,” “La Figlia che piange,” “Sweeney Among the Nightingales”), but he also has recourse in the main text of The Waste Land alone to German (31-34, 42), French (202, 430), Italian (427), Latin (428), and Sanskrit (432-33).

A final notable aspect of Pound’s and Eliot’s Modernism creating collections of and in fragments can be seen on the broader textual level; Pound’s Cantos provide an excellent example of this. Just as Eliot connected the separate (and often disparate)
scenes of *The Waste Land* thematically, Pound used a handful of recurrent themes to try to bind the *Cantos* together. If anything, his need was greater than Eliot’s. Rather than unifying the fragments of a single (if somewhat lengthy) poem, Pound needed to bring together a number of individual poems written over the space of many years and give them a unifying sense. His evocation of Dante and the epic tradition by identifying his constituent parts as Roman-numeralized “Cantos” is one attempt at unification. He “wrote of making a cosmos of his fragmented world, of somehow putting it all together into an ordered whole” (Moody 308). Pound also created smaller and often unofficial groupings within the larger collection, mini-cycles that touched on similar themes or historical periods: the Malatesta Cantos, the Pisan Cantos, etc.

It is striking to compare Pound’s life-long attempts to order and unify his fragmentary poems into a single work with Petrarch’s own life-long obsession with collecting and ordering his individual lyric poems into a meta-textual collection. In Pound’s case, he seemed to despair of being able impose order on the fragments. In the last complete canto, CXVI, he writes (26-29):

> But the beauty is not the madness  
> Tho’ my errors and wrecks lie about me.  
> And I am not a demigod,  
> I cannot make it cohere.

If Pound was not so successful as Petrarch—or did not feel so successful, at any rate—this is part of the differences in their modernities. Petrarch still thought it was possible to order and imbue fragments with meaning; Pound felt deeply this pull of tradition but without the faith in truly unifying elements, he was ultimately unable to make it cohere.

In Menand’s words:
Pound must have eventually felt himself...the prisoner of his own technique, and he may have found his poem unfinishable in part because by always saying so much with every fresh image he added to it, he could never manage to say finally only as much as he meant. (57-8)

Again like Petrarch’s creation of the *Canzoniere*, Pound’s work on the *Cantos* consisted of a continual reworking of the same ideas and many of the same images, always skirting around in circles but coming back to the starting point. Their method was revolving (revolutionary?) as opposed to linear or sequential—a compass making a circle (or series of circles) rather than a line drawn, however wandering, between two points.
CHAPTER 5:

THE MODERNIST POETIC FRAGMENT

5.1 Memory, Collection, and Re-Collection

The Modernist penchant for literary allusion and the desire to collect fragments both figure strongly in Modernism’s obsession with the past and, more specifically, with memory. “Modernity,” Smith writes, “resides in the recognition that the self lives in arrears, in a self-conscious relation to the clichés it endures” (50). For Eliot and Pound, part of the need to evoke the past, both cultural and personal, came from this discomfort of a sense of living “in arrears.” Like Petrarch, another poet keenly aware of his historical moment, they employed a poetics of fragmentation in which they were constantly looking to interpret (or create) current meaning by reassembling pieces of past memories.

This meaning is not always positive. In “Prufrock,” Eliot presents the inner monologue of a character caught between the failures of his past and his hopes for the future. That narrator, consequently, is immobilized in an eternal present; not called back toward the past so much as tethered to it. The immobilizing fear comes from the constant presence of his memories of failure. Prufrock summons up the past in three successive stanzas, each of which begins with a variation of the line, “For I have known them all already, known them all:” (49). He reflects on his experiences with futility (49-54), with the discomfort of being the focus of attention (55-61), and with his inability to communicate his feelings (62-69). Each of the stanzas ends with a variant of a line that
indicates the crippling effect of these memories: “So how should I presume?” (54). Knowledge from the past is not the only difficulty. Prufrock replays his failed decisions—or, more accurately, the moments in which he failed to make decisions. “Would it have been worth it, after all…” (87) he wonders, caught in the cycle of self-doubt. Prufrock’s overarching fear exists, like any fear, only because of memory; it is exceptional in scope, not in nature.

These past failures, consistently recollected and reassembled in the present, keep him from effecting any change that could improve his future. Like Hamlet, he is kept from action by thought. After all, he can’t be hurt or fail, as he has so often in the past, if he never makes an effort. Consequently, the future for Prufrock isn’t simply an expression for what will happen after the present; it is what will never happen. “There will be time,” he repeats over and over (23, 26, 28, 37, 39). The creation of a never-to-be-realized future is made possible—or necessary—by the constant recollection of the past. This also illuminates line 120: “I grow old…I grow old…”. Though his age is never given, Prufrock doesn’t seem to be an old man, chronologically speaking, but the memories and the hesitations that create his eternal present do not give him eternal youth. A Modernist Tithonus, he achieves a kind of immortality that does not, unfortunately, keep him from aging and decaying emotionally.

Eliot’s composition of “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” shows his careful attention to the concepts of collection and recollection. After an initial epigram from Dante’s Inferno, another place of an infinite moment, its despair caused by memory, the poem begins in the present, with the narrator addressing an unnamed (and otherwise unknown) interlocutor. From there he moves to considering the future, with the “there
will be time” stanzas, and then back to the past, with the “I have known them already” stanzas. He connects these with a short moment of his emotional present, caught between past and future:

Do I dare
Disturb the universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse. (45-48)

In the end, the narrator returns to the present, noting that he is more like the Fool than Hamlet and mentioning how he is growing old. After this general composition of present/potential future/past/present, Eliot brings them all together in the final lines.

I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.
I do not think that they will sing to me.
I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown. (135-131)

The poet brings together in two lines past (“I have heard”), present (“I do not think”), and future (“they will sing to me”). In the final image, the narrator reinforces the danger of recollection: the mermaids, which he has seen and heard in the past, function as sirens in the present, causing him to linger by the sea and eventually, when awakened by human voices, to drown. If there is ever a way for Prufrock to escape his present, escape himself, it is only when memory and the past, with their burden of disillusionment, will destroy him.

Memory, “a key metaphor for the process of gathering in Eliot’s work” (Manganiello 121), plays an even greater role in The Waste Land. The recollection of a
collective past takes place in Eliot’s use of allusion discussed above; the related issue of personal and poetic creation through internal, individual remembrance is more subtle but just as prevalent. In the first section of the poem, Eliot introduces the reader to this theme. April is, quite famously, the cruelest month, but precisely why it is cruel—and why the poet begins the way he does—is critical to an understanding of the poem.

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers. (1-6)

Like many poems, Eliot’s begins with spring, the season of hope and rebirth. For him the image is more complicated, however, as spring brings the promise but not always the reality of renewal. Summer is warm and sunny, winter cold and gloomy but predictable, constant. But April raises hopes even as it provides greater opportunities for disappointment and despair. The middle of these first three present participial phrases, “mixing memory and desire,” is key to the entire poem. Desire for the future can only be felt when the failures of the past are recalled, and the experience of that memory is inherently painful. Our roots may be dull, but that lack of sensation is also protective, and the spring rain that stirs them back to life also restores their ability to feel—and with it, the certainty of pain. Underground, during the winter, we were kept just warm enough to survive, a little life. The snow was protective precisely because it was “forgetful,” keeping the pains of the past at bay.

This idea of safely buried memories being disturbed and collected continues to inform “The Burial of the Dead” and give significance to its title. After a narrative
interlude comes the episode with Madame Sosostris, a fortune teller who uses her deck of Tarot cards to predict the future, a scene emphasizing the uncertainty of the future, of desire. In the final stanza of Part I, Eliot returns to the safety of burial and the inconvenience of rebirth.

There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying: “Stetson! “You who were with me at the ships at Mylae! “That corpse you planted last year in your garden, “Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year? “Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed? “Oh keep the Dog far hence, that’s friend to men, “Or with his nails he’ll dig it up again! “You! hypocrite lecteur! – mon semblable, –mon frère!” (69-76)

The narrator here brings together both cultural and personal memory, conflating a naval battle from the First Punic War with a character from his own past. The issue of the corpse in Stetson’s garden is complicated and includes multiple meanings—the poem’s emphasis on Jesus and the myth of the dying/descending/resurrecting vegetation god, for example, is certainly present here—but most obviously it reconnects with the imagery that opened the section. In order for there to be a rebirth, the corpse(s) of the past must be revived and experienced in the present. In an ideal situation, the corpse will sprout and bloom, the pain of its revival assuaged by the sense of renewal and progression. But the narrator doesn’t know if the corpse has sprouted; indeed, it seems that they have both been waiting for that event for some time in vain (“Will it bloom this year?”). Failing fruitful rebirth, the alternative seems to be a potentially painful recollection of the past with no sense of continuing purpose or restoration: the corpse of memory not resurrected but simply dug up, exhumed and exposed. The final line not only evokes cultural memory again (with a quotation from Baudelaire) but conflates narrator/reader (with direct address to the “lecteur”) and speaker/Stetson (since the line appears within the quotation.
marks). All of us—narrator, poet, and reader—are collapsed into a single entity that must confront the dangers of the recollection of the past in the present, of mixing memory and desire, of the burial of the dead.

While not explicitly presented in the same detail as in Part I, the dangers of memory are recalled in each subsequent section of the poem as well. In “A Game of Chess,” an unnamed interlocutor speaks with (or perhaps simply to) the narrator:

“What is that noise?”
The wind under the door.
“What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?”
Nothing again nothing.

“Do
“You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember
“Nothing?”
I remember
Those are pearls that were his eyes. (117-125)

The uneasy and somewhat histrionic speaker demands of the narrator information, what he knows, sees, and—significantly—remembers. The narrator in turn creates meaning through recollection of both a literary and personal memory by alluding to Shakespeare while at the same time evoking the recurrent character of the Drowned Man of which he himself is one expression. In “The Fire Sermon,” Eliot twice uses the same idiom to introduce frightening (or at least problematic) memories that continue to have current power. He ends a mournful description of London with, “But at my back in a cold blast I hear / The rattle of bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear” (185-86), while a few lines later he introduces the image of Mrs. Porter and her daughter: “But at my back from time to time I hear / The sound of horns and motors…” (196-97). Memories of the past, the sounds heard behind our backs, do not stay silent and passive but continue to weigh upon and inform the present.
The brief “Death by Water” gives a simple ten-line presentation of Phlebas the Phoenician, another example of the Drowned Man character. The description of the dead man is one of the more peaceful passages in the entire poem:

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
And the profit and loss. A current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers. (312-15)

As seen in “The Burial of the Dead,” the recalling of the past into the present, the mixing of memory and desire, is one of the cruel possibilities of spring. Things (and people) that are buried may not stay that way; they may be brought back to life, and therefore suffering, again. Phlebas, however, achieves a degree of peace because his death by (and burial in) water precludes resurrection and the sorrow of memory. Indeed, he is at peace precisely because he has the ability to forget both sensory (the cry of gulls, the deep sea swell) and mental (the profit and loss) memories. Finally, Eliot returns to memory again in the last section of the poem, “What the Thunder Said:”

The awful daring of a moment’s surrender
Which an age of prudence can never retract
By this, and this only, we have existed
Which is not to be found in our obituaries
Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider (403-06)

Here the poet seems to posit a hopeful existence, or at least a freedom of some sort, that is possible through the action and sensation of an instant without regard to its broader significance. The daring of a moment’s surrender stands against the fears (and wisdom) of the past and the roadblocks that those memories would put up, warning against the stifling retroactive influence of a future age of prudence.

Remembrance is a necessity in the poetics of fragmentation, though the natures of Petrarch’s and Eliot’s modernities create differences as well as similarities. In both cases,
the present can only be fully understood as a re-collection of the individual moments of the past, moments of both cultural and personal importance. Poetry serves as the locus in the present (and for the future) of these collected memories, and the way they are ordered and presented gives the poet a degree of interpretative power. As seen in 2.2, however, Petrarch saw this recollective power as positive and creative, something he could use to summon his beloved when she was absent or to console himself and keep himself together after her death. Lewis makes this observation about the Modernists:

Time, progress, history—all are forces that constantly transform our lives and that we cannot halt or even adequately represent. When we reach toward the future, we find ourselves already living in the past. When we turn back to try to make sense of the past, we are blown into the future. The modernist crisis of representation responded to this sense of a world moving too fast to be comprehended by traditional techniques. (32-33)

For the Modernists, memories of the cultural past continued to exercise their influence but had lost much of their normative aesthetic and ethical power, while personal memories for Eliot held the remnants of previous happiness but the seeds of present and future sorrow.

5.2 Divisions of Time and Repetition

Within a poetics of fragmentation, the role of memory is linked to the awareness of time and the measurement of its passing (and its resultant fragmentation). Petrarch’s fear of time and mutability (see Chapter 2.4) gave him an intense interest—obsession, perhaps—in dividing time into discrete units and measuring them out. The process provided the poet with a way to deal with his fear, to slow down (or seem to slow down) the passage of time in order to better express his feelings in any given moment. The Modernists also divided and measured time extensively, but their approach was less
sanguine; Eliot, in particular, examines the passage of time with images and metaphors that stress in some cases the triviality of human existence and in others a sort of helpless timelessness, being caught in an eternal and meaningless present.

In a description of London in *The Waste Land*, Eliot mentions the church of St. Mary Woolnoth but, as he often does, changes the setting slightly to create an eerie double, a *semblable*; in this case, the church bells as expected mark the division of time but keep “the hours / With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine” (67-68). This image contains two different, negative, and somewhat contradictory uses of time: in the church bells’ regularity is the inescapable and repetitive nature of time, while their unusual last peal, their dead sound, evokes an ultimate finality. Eliot revisits the image toward the end of the poem when describing the grim setting of the Chapel: “And upside down in air were towers / Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours” (382-83). Again, time is measured and marked but without a sense of normal temporal progression (the towers are upside down) and always with a view to the past (the bells are reminiscent).

A similarly dark view of the meaning of existence expressed through the measurement of time occurs in the conversation in “A Game of Chess.”

“....What shall we do tomorrow?
“What shall we ever do?”
The hot water at ten.
And if it rains, a closed car at four.
And we shall play a game of chess,
Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door. (133-38)

At the end of a one-sided conversation in which he is bombarded with a number of somewhat histrionic and trivial questions, the narrator finds himself having to confront larger issues: what will the couple do tomorrow, or ever? His only response is to stress the futility of their shared life by reducing it to several banal markers of time: the hot
water in the morning, the closed car in the afternoon, and the game of chess in the
evening. Like the image of St. Mary Woolnoth’s bells, this routine will either continue
with monotonous regularity or will be ended only by death, as with Phlebas:

A current under sea
picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool. (315-18)

Even after death, time is marked by the unprogressing back-and-forth of the current that
moves the body up and down and even briefly relives the individual stages of his life
before finally consigning him to oblivion.

Toward the end of the poem, Eliot simplifies the imagery of basic and
meaningless divisions of time after a passage dealing with dryness and water: “Drop drop
drip drop drop drop drop” (357). Time has been reduced to its most basic constituent
parts; existence is fractured, measured, and given (or rather denied) significance by the
meaningless repetition of dripping water—life reduced to the monotony of a clepsydra.
Eliot strikes a related note in one of his most memorable images of futility from
“Prufrock:”

For I have known them all already, known them all: -
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons; (49-51)

Prufrock bemoans his existence not only as repetitive but devoid of importance, of
meaningful relationships with people or ideas. Water at least has the distinction of being
inherently important, useful. Prufrock’s life is so devoid of meaning that its constituent
divisions of time can be separated and identified by the most mundane of instruments. In
a way, his dreary obsession with the passage of time indicates a close, if dysfunctional,
relationship with it. “Indeed,” Ellmann notes, “Prufrock addresses time so constantly, in
every tone of envy, rage, pain, impatience, longing, humour, flattery, seduction, that he can only really be in love with time” (79).

Eliot’s divisions of time go beyond simply noting the trivialities of human life to creating a sense of unprogressing motionlessness. As noted in the discussion of memory above, Prufrock lives in an eternally unchanging present partly made possible by his refusal to make decisions that will affect (and effect) a meaningful future. “There will be time,” he repeats, with minor variations, seven times in twelve lines (23-34). The burden of all potential action—to prepare a face (27), to murder and create (28), to accomplish the “works and days of hands” (29)—can be shifted forward to this never arriving future time. The narrator then summarizes this future:

Time for you and time for me,  
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,  
And for a hundred visions and revisions  
Before the taking of a toast and tea. (31-34)

Caught in eternal indecisiveness, Prufrock, to keep from having to make a future, divides and subdivides his present into a hundred indecisions, visions, and revisions. Like Petrarch’s standard “mille,” Eliot’s “hundreds” here indicate constancy and repetition, shot through with a sense of ultimate failure; Prufrock hasn’t even reached the quotidian goal of “the taking of a toast and tea,” much less achieved anything significant.

He reinforces his learned helplessness in the subsequent stanza:

And indeed there will be time  
To wonder, “Do I dare?” and, “Do I dare?”…  
In a minute there is time  
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse. (37-38, 47-48)

Unable to confront his potential daring now, Prufrock puts it off to the unspecified and never arriving future “time.” In his fragmentation of time, he pares it down to the very
minute, which he then subdivides into decisions and revisions. Then he deconstructs even these subdivisions by creating the possibility that a new minute may simply reverse the actions (or even intentions) of the previous one. Stuck in a never-ending series of present moments, Prufrock is unable to progress, to act, to dare. Pound evokes the same idea in *Mauberley*:

Scattered Moluccas
Not knowing, day to day,
The first day’s end, in the next noon;…

A consciousness disjunct,
Being but this overblotted
Series
Of intermittences; (IV.1-3, 14-17)

In their poetics of fragmentation, the breaking down of time into individual measurable portions (minutes, days, mornings, afternoons, etc.) often serves simply to illustrate the continuous recycling that can be mistaken for progress. They constitute the “series of intermittences” that characterize the fractured nature of the Modernist conception of time.

And at times, a single intermittence is taken from the series and examined by itself. In “A Game of Chess,” the scene for the central conversation is set with an extensive physical description that includes the walls of the room:

Above the antique mantel was displayed
As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene
The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale
Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
“Jug jug” to dirty ears.
And other withered stumps of time
Were told upon the walls; staring forms
Leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed. (97-107)
In this case a painting shows the story of Philomela, raped and mutilated by her sister’s husband and eventually changed by the gods into a nightingale. Although described “as though a window,” the picture is, like all paintings, a single, unmoving scene—even if, as is common in ekphrastic descriptions of visual art (cf. the shield of Achilles in the Odyssey, Keats’ Grecian urn, etc.), the level of detail and action given suggests more than a single static image. Eliot has chosen a single moment from mythical time and isolated it, and although the story itself can never continue or progress, its significance affects the present, as the world still pursues her and her song. Other paintings presumably line the walls as well, other individual moments counted out and cordoned off, the “withered stumps of time” whose dark influence hushes the room.

Closely related to the division and examination of time in Eliot’s and Pound’s poetics of fragmentation is repetition. In this the Modernists follow Petrarch closely both in the types of repetition they use and in their reasons for so doing. Verbal echoes of their own words serve rhetorical functions, such as to emphasize a point or link parts of a work together, and philosophical-aesthetic ones, such as to reinforce a sense of uncertainty or futility.

In The Waste Land, words or phrases are most often repeated in order to stress their importance—usually rhetorical but sometimes thematic or even auditory. In the conversation in “A Game of Chess,” repetition serves to show the agitated, emotional state of one of the speakers and contrast it with the calmer (more resigned?) state of the other.

“My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
“Speak to me. Why do you never speak? Speak.
“What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
“I never know what you are thinking. Think.”…

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“What is that noise?”
The wind under the door.
“What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?”
Nothing again nothing.
“Do
“You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember
“Nothing?” (111-14, 117-23)

The short, broken-off phrases of the narrator’s interlocutor and her constant questioning combine with her repetition of key words to show her unhappiness, discomfort, and fear. Eliot emphasizes the repetition by position as well as frequency; the repeated words or phrases appear very close to each other, usually in the same line and often separated by only a few (or no) words. Thus we have “bad…bad” (111), “speak…speak…speak” (112), “What…thinking…what…thinking…what” (113), and “nothing…nothing” (120). He also adds lexical variation, like Petrarch, through polyptoton, by giving the same word in different forms such as the indicative and the imperative (as with “speak” and “think”).

Similarly, a few lines later in the final scene of the same section, the monologue of Lil’s friend at the pub is interrupted—and punctuated—five times by the same line: “HURRY UP PLEASE IT’S TIME” (141, 152, 165, 168, 169). On a narrative level, the “last call” statement by the bartender helps to set the scene, and its appearance in all capital letters jars the reader and stresses its rupturing nature in the conversation; on a philosophical level, the line reminds the reader as well as the fictional patrons that time is running short, a sense of urgency reinforced by the way that it appears more and more frequently as the conversation (and the section of the poem) draws to a close. The first stanza of “What the Thunder Said” also gives a good example of repetition as emphasis:

After the torchlight red on sweaty faces
After the frosty silence in the gardens
After the agony in stony places…
He who was living is now dead
We who were living are now dying (322-24, 328-29)

The anaphora of the opening three lines visually links the images/places and verbally
stresses their importance, while the last two lines again have recourse to polyptoton: “He
who was living…We who were living,” “now dead…now dying.” Pound does something
very similar in section IV of “E.P. Ode:”

Some quick to arm,
some for adventure,
some from fear of weakness,
some from fear of censure,
some for love of slaughter, in imagination,
learning later . . .
some in fear, learning love of slaughter; (64-70)

The anaphora of “some” stresses the simultaneous multiplicity of the motivations for
those who went to war and, through repetition of the same word, the similarity and shared
experience of all of them. When they returned from war, they

came home, home to a lie,
home to many deceits,
home to old lies and new infamy; (75-77)

He also moves to the other end of the line and uses epistrophe; two of the first three lines
drop with “in any case,” while “as never before” ends three lines in close succession (80,
83, 84). Like Eliot, Pound uses the frequent and textually close repetition of key words
and short phrases to emphasize their message, to stress a salient philosophical or poetic
point.

A final form of repetition for emphasis is the simplest and most direct: palilologia,
the immediate repetition of words without any intervening material. Both Eliot and
Pound make use of this rhetorical figure, contained in a single line of poetry and usually
in groups of three. So in Pound’s “The River-Merchant’s Wife: A Letter,” the title
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narrator writes, “I desired my dust to be mingled with yours / Forever and forever and forever” (12-13); the poet stresses the poignancy of her emotions with the repeated word in a single line while simultaneously providing a double allusion to Macbeth (“Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow,” V.v.19) and Tennyson’s “Ulysses” (“that untraveled world whose margin fades / Forever and forever when I move,” 20-21). In The Waste Land we have “London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down” (426), which matches the language of a children’s nursery rhyme with a darker meaning on the current precarious state of Western civilization. Elsewhere, the immediacy of the Buddha’s sermon is stressed through an intense repetition followed, bracketed, and reinforced by a kind of secondary and descending repetition:

Burning burning burning burning
O Lord Thou pluckest me out
O Lord Thou pluckest
burning (308-11)

Eliot revisits this type of intense repetitive stress in the final line of the poem: “Shantih Shantih Shantih” (433). As the repetition of “burning” emphasized the urgency of the Buddha’s instructions to his disciples—and of Eliot’s message to his readers—so the final triple appearance of “peace,” the traditional ending to an Upanishad, gives a formal close to his work.

The Modernists also utilize repetition as a means of linking passages or sections of longer works. Eliot in particular found this method useful in the composition of The Waste Land, which is not only a lengthy poem but one that lacks many of the traditional explicit binding elements. Speaking of Eliot’s use of repetition, Schwarz explains:

Time and space are altered, brought together in impossible relationships in which events take place in an eternal simultaneity….Not only are different
historical events juxtaposed; often elements from various events or personages are fused into single ones. A prelogical space-time continuum underlies the entire structure of the poem… (35)

Eliot binds parts of his poem together by theme, and his verbal cues to his reader often take the form of words or imagery repeated from a previous scene or section. We have already seen two examples of this: one at a more local level within “The Fire Sermon” (“but at my back I hear,” 85, 196) and another that connects parts one and two (“Those are pearls that were his eyes,” 48, 124). In the final section of the poem, Eliot follows the myth of what the thunder said—the repeated “Da, da, da”—but makes a tripartite division, so that there are three lines that consist only of the word “DA” (400, 410, 417), each followed by a brief examination of how the syllable was interpreted differently by three groups. A final example is Eliot’s repetition of the simple adjective “violet” in contexts where the word describes sunset or dusk. In “The Fire Sermon” he writes of “the violet hour” (215, 220), “the evening hour that strives / Homeward” (220-21). He picks up the same imagery toward the end of the poem, when the idea of “violet” as dusk takes on the additional figurative significance of a liminal, in-between state: “Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air” (372) and “And bats with baby faces in the violet light / Whistled, and beat their wings” (379). All four cases are bound together by the use of “violet” to indicate a state somewhere between the light of day and the dark of night; the verbal echoes of “violent” or “violate” also apply to all four situations, a kind of paronomasia that Petrarch would have recognized and appreciated.

Two additional uses of repetition are closely related to each other. In “Prufrock,” Eliot shows his character’s vacillating and indecisive nature through a series of phrases to which Prufrock returns multiple times. The narrator worries extensively about having the
courage, the presumption, to speak about his feelings honestly and directly and sabotages himself at the end of three successive stanzas by returning to the same limiting self questioning: “So how should I presume?” (54); “And how should I presume?” (61); “And should I then presume? / And how should I begin?” (68-69). In each case there is slight lexical shift, but the changes should not be mistaken for progress, as Prufrock is never able to move himself past his uncertainty. Similarly, he holds himself back by continuously wondering if taking action would ultimately be worth the trouble, anyway. “Would it have been worth it, after all / …Would it have been worth while,” (87, 90) he asks himself plaintively and then repeats those same two lines shortly thereafter (99-100) before returning to the same question yet again in line 106. And in one of the better known passages in the poem, Prufrock thinks, “And indeed there will be time / To wonder, ‘Do I dare?’ and, ‘Do I dare?’” (37-38), leading up to his central self-directed rhetorical question: “Do I dare / Disturb the universe?” (45-46). In repeating these questions, Prufrock keeps himself trapped in his self-perpetuating prison of uncertainty. Unable to find the definitive answers to his questions—or even the motivation and courage to look for them—he simply recycles and relives his own anxious disquiet.

This sense of uncertainty is part of a larger process that shows Prufrock’s sense of hopelessness: repetition indicating futility. One of the most extensive examples (discussed above) is Prufrock’s constant return to the idea that there will be time in the future to accomplish what he wants to do. “There will be time,” he says over and over with only a few slight variations (23, 26, 28, 29, 31, 37, 39), but the very repetition of this idea belies its actual likelihood. He agonizes over the trivialities (cf. lists in Chapter 5.3) that he is familiar with: “For I have known them all already, known them all: -” (49); this
sentiment starts three consecutive stanzas (cf. 55, 62), indicating the circularity and ineffectiveness of his thoughts.

Twice in the poem (13-14, 35-36) comes a couplet set off from the surrounding stanzas: “In the room the women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo.” A single appearance would be enough to create a feeling of otherness on Prufrock’s part; the women are external to his own life and to some extent objectified and kept at a distance, as they have no interaction either with him or with the other parts of the poem. But by bringing the same passage back in the same way after twenty or so intervening lines, Eliot also makes the sentence speak to the hopelessness of Prufrock’s ability to communicate, particularly with women. He sits and thinks to himself, doing nothing while the women come and go around him. He partly explains his reticence later with another repeated sentence—he is held back, he says, by the fear that if he does try to explain himself, he will be dismissively rebuffed by the woman he is trying to talk to: “That is not what I meant at all. / That is not it, at all” (97-98, and cf. 109-110). The repetition of the potential rejecting statement stresses once more the constant fear of ultimate futility in Prufrock’s life.

The same sense of futility, slightly altered and broadened from a specific case to contemporary culture in general, continues in The Waste Land. In “What the Thunder Said,” a lengthy passage (331-358) describes a wasted land with extensive references to dry rock and the lack of water.

Here is no water but only rock
Rock and no water and the sandy road…
If there were water

And no rock
If there were rock
And also water
And water
A spring
A pool among the rock
If there were the sound of water only…
But there is no water (331-32, 346-51, 358)

The constant repetition of “rock” and “water” reinforces the images of sterility, of futility. Rock is present; water is not. Through repetition the poet stresses the dry abundance of the former and the bitter lack of the latter. Like a wanderer lost in the mountains, the reader can only move in circles, from rock to rock, hoping for water but finding only disappointment after every turn.

For a final example, we will return to the beginning. Five of the first six lines of *The Waste Land* end with a comma followed by a present participle: breeding, mixing, stirring, covering, feeding. This epistrophic introduction to the poem readies the reader for a continuing sense of action without fruition, as the participial endings pull the lines together but, with the constant repetition of form, ultimately lead nowhere. The participles are (in a visual if not grammatical sense) dangling—they leave the reader with a sense of circular rather than linear motion.

This is the ultimate purpose of Eliot’s and Pound’s repetition, this sense of an inability to progress. In their poetics of fragmentation, one part does not lead to another in natural progression but rather remains in its fragmented form and repeats itself. What occurs is a kind of aphasia, a feeling of failed continuity, repetition without consummation and finality; it is the image of a broken record. As such, it is an image of fragmentation, of starting and failing and re-starting again rather than continuing from start to finish in a singular, unbroken line or circle. Each repetition leads nowhere and thus becomes just another uncollected fragment of thought or intent.
5.3 Lists and A Heap of Broken Images

A third aspect of Pound’s and Eliot’s Modernist poetic fragment consists of the imagery of the fragment itself: a scattered, lost, or broken piece of history (personal or cultural). These pieces can be examined either in a list, a catalogue, or individually. In the latter presentation, they share certain characteristics of the lone, fetishized fragment of Romanticism, though the Modernists imbue them with either more or less meaning; in the former, they often follow a Petrarchan motif in which the list represents a desire to collect and combine scattered fragments or simply to note and assemble the disjunct parts in a new way. Those parts need not even always be fully comprehensible in their presentation, as “it is important for poems that break cultural artifacts into bits such as The Waste Land and Pound's Cantos that some of the shards be too small to identify” (Menand 27). The feeling or image created by the shard can be more immediately important than its clear identification.

Eliot stresses his theme of fragmentation structurally by privileging the list as an image of the multiplicity of individual parts. In “Prufrock,” the description of the fog’s movement over and around various urban landmarks (15-22) presages a more personal outburst by the narrator himself:

And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me

…And would it have been worth it, after all,
Would it have been worth while,
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor—
And this, and so much more?—
It is impossible to say just what I mean!” (87-89, 99-104).
Prufrock’s stumbling over a litany of mostly trivial items not only adds to the pathos of the passage but indicates his desire to express, even define, himself through a series of images, one after the other. The failure of each image in the series to make a logical or even emotional progression further fragments Prufrock’s thought. Ultimately he fails, as he always does, and has no recourse but the poet’s frustrated claim of ineffability.

In The Waste Land Eliot also evokes fruitless repetition through lists of trivialities. In a weary description of the Thames, he writes:

| The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers, |
| Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends |
| Or other testimony of summer nights. (177-9) |

In a depiction of the typist’s bland, minimalist flat, he notes that “[o]n the divan are piled (at night her bed), / Stockings, slippers, camisoles and stays” (226-7). By the end of the poem, the tone has become more intense and less controlled. In a passage appealing to an ideal if unknown and unknowable city, he conflates through asyndetous listing great cities of the past and present:

| What is the city over the mountains… |
| Jerusalem Athens Alexandria |
| Vienna London |
| Unreal (372, 375-7) |

In giving a list of these cities without any real syntactic or narrative link, Eliot stresses that while the final city on the list, London, has been in many ways the city that serves as the locus of his waste land, his setting is ultimately fictional, unreal, a purely mental cityscape that includes historical and philosophical aspects of all of those cities but is none of them.
Individual items or images also appear on their own, and this second category of fragmented images includes individual anatomical parts. Eliot, like Petrarch, has a tendency to fixate on specific parts of the body and return to them repeatedly in a single work. He is also interested in many of the same parts that interest Petrarch: eyes, hair, arms, etc. In “Prufrock,” these body parts are distinctly feminine and deal with the body of the woman Prufrock is specifically interested in or with a generalized, idealized “woman” that he has created in his mind—or both. He speaks about these physical foci of his fears:

For I have known the eyes already, known them all –
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase…

And I have known the arms already, known them all –
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
[But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!]…
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl. (55-56, 61-63, 67)

As a whole, a woman is too daunting for Prufrock to confront. By reducing her to her individual parts and then by considering those parts which he finds most attractive, he creates a certain safe objectivity. Women’s eyes and arms are beautiful and worthy of consideration, but they are things, and things cannot react or reject; and he is able to think about his past when women have rejected him by remembering not the women themselves but the separated and individualized parts of their bodies. Like Petrarch, who fixated on Laura’s eyes or hands, Prufrock concentrates on emblematic parts of the women he meets, and if Petrarch’s treatment was more overtly positive, both also reap a certain psychological benefit from the distance that comes from fetishizing and objectifying components of the women they can’t have. Ellmann describes how the female body:
…unravels into an inventory of its parts and its associated bric-à-brac: hands, faces, voices, eyes, arms, teacups, and the skirts that trail across the floor. Desire circumambulates through orts and fragments, eroding any bodily Gestalt: and Love is the unfamiliar name that “Prufrock” gives this skittish deconstruction. (78)

To be fair, Prufrock also reduces himself to his individual parts, perhaps reflecting the assumptions he has about how others see him: thus we have his worries about “the bald spot in the middle of my hair” (40) and how “[They will say: ‘But how his arms and legs are thin!’]” (44). Perhaps this is why he wishes he had been simply “a pair of ragged claws / Scuttling across the floors of silent seas” (73-74).

_The Waste Land_ also presents similar images of particular body parts, though as it is not a love poem (however idiosyncratic), its use of dismemberment and disembodiment tends to go beyond the objectification of potentially rejecting women and toward indicating the disintegration of the human being in modern society. Once again the eyes, as both traditional tropes of poetry and as the metaphors for understanding and the interaction between the interior and exterior worlds, figure prominently. As seen above, Shakespeare’s image of having pearls for eyes appears twice (48, 125). The narrator foresees his shared grim future as playing “a game of chess, / Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door” (137-38). In “The Fire Sermon,” the eyes and back are the parts of the body that are finally released from their labor at the end of the work day (215), an image that immediately precedes the scene of the typist and clerk—quite appropriately, as this scene is introduced and narrated by the Greek prophet Tiresias, famous for being able to foresee the future while lacking physical sight: “I Tiresias, though blind…can see” (218-19).
Eliot also follows Petrarch (and the lyric tradition) by assigning a particular significance to hair. He repeats the juxtaposed images of arms and hair already made in “Prufrock” (“Arms that are braceleted and white and bare / [But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!],” 63-64) early in the poem: “– Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth Garden, / Your arms full, and your hair wet…” (37-38). The poet makes two references to the hair of the unnamed interlocutor in “A Game of Chess,” first at the beginning of the conversation when:

…under the brush, her hair
Spread out in fiery points
Glowed into words, then would be savagely still. (108-10)

At the end of their discussion, she says, “‘I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street / With my hair down, so” (133-34). Finally, in “The Fire Sermon,” the young typist reacts to her unfulfilling sexual encounter (in a quatrain alluding to a poem by Goldsmith):

When lovely woman stoops to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,
She smooths her hair with automatic hand,
And put a record on the gramophone. (253-56)

It is suggestive that in all of these examples, the hair referred to belongs to a woman—Marie Larisch, the woman with bad nerves, and the typist—and in each case there is at least an implicit suggestion of a sexual or at least romantic relationship, one whose end is uncertain or unspecified and two that end badly. One might be tempted to speculate on whether or not Eliot himself found a woman’s hair to be a particular source of erotic feeling, but in any case it is clear that he uses hair as emblematic of women and their sexuality.

Another body part that receives particular attention and one that perhaps epitomizes the concept of corporeal dismemberment is bones. This image occurs five
different times in *The Waste Land*—another example of Eliot binding the larger work together thematically. Throughout the poem, bones indicate the passage of time after death, the physical remnants of existence that has long since ended. Like literary and religious allusion, bones remain as evidence of what once had life and meaning, even if the meaning itself is long gone; as is often the case, the image has significance on both personal and cultural levels. In “A Game of Chess,” the narrator responds to the repeated questioning about what he is thinking: “I think we are in rats’ alley / Where the dead men lost their bones” (115-16), an image of despair and defeat. Eliot picks up again the imagery of bones (and rats) in “The Fire Sermon:”

> But at my back in a cold blast I hear  
> The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear….

> And bones cast in a little low dry garret,  
> Rattled by the rat’s foot only, year to year. (185-86, 194-95).

Once more the bones indicate the haunting presence of the past, always a grim, dark, and forbidding place—previously an alley, here a garret—and accompanied by rats, the vermin that “rattle” the bones and stir up the memories. Even the largely peaceful Phlebas, quietly dead under the ocean, is troubled by a current that “picked his bones in whispers” (316). Only toward the end of the poem comes the possibility that the dark and haunting past can be, if not overcome, at least confronted with some degree of success: “Dry bones can harm no one” (390).

Physical features, divided from the body and considered as individual pieces, accompany another category of images of fragmentation: things that have been broken or destroyed. Eliot gives this category a memorable introduction early in *The Waste Land*:

> What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow  
> Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. (19-24)

The voice speaking to the reader—and perhaps to the narrator, as well—asserts that he
cannot fully understand the devastation around him because of his own limited, fractured
point of view. Part of the shared human condition, particularly the modern human
condition, involves the ability to see the fragmented state of society but not to
comprehend it in its entirety. Rather, we can comprehend only the fragments themselves,
the heap of broken images that is all we know. This is why, as Svarny notes, we “are
more inclined to see *The Waste Land* as an embodiment of, rather than an alternative to,
cultural fragmentation” (197). The echo *in malo* of Christian imagery—“Son of man,” the
dead tree—subtly reinforces the sense of rupture and the loss of a potentially unifying
vision.

Accordingly, our Modernists make frequent use of these images. In “Gerontion,”
the ancient title character describes the ultimate journey of the things around him out
beyond the stars “in fractured atoms” (70). In *The Waste Land*, the poet opens “The Fire
Sermon” by noting that “[t]he river’s tent is broken” (173) and later indicate the dry and
deserted nature of the final scene by mentioning the “doors of mudcracked houses” (345).
The “heap of broken images” introduced early in the poem is revisited and reinforced
again at the conclusion when Eliot quotes a cryptic but suggestive line from Nerval: “Le
Prince d’Aquitaine à la tour abolie” (“The prince of Aquitaine at the ruined tower,” 429).
Pound also uses the image of a broken or shattered object often in the *Cantos*, as in
LXXVI:

in Arezzo an altar fragment (Cortona, Angelico)
po'eri di'aoli
po'eri d'aoli sent to the slaughter
Knecht gegen Knecht
to the sound of the bumm drum, to eat remnants

The physical remains of an altar show the broken and only partially reconstructable scene of war, with the “poor devils” being sent off to kill and be killed, to “eat remnants.” This passage serves as a bridge between two types of brokenness, the physical and the metaphysical: things and ideas.

This more metaphorical sense of broken ideas or broken men often appears in conjunction with the physical in their verse. Thus in “What the Thunder Said,” only a few lines before the “Prince d’Aquitaine,” comes another distinctive figure: “Only at nightfall, aetherial rumours / Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus” (415-16). The brokenness that Eliot evokes here, that of a man unable to persist in betrayal and therefore condemned to be a part of neither community, fits in well with the theme of the poem. In the same section, the reference to London Bridge (426) suggests that the physical collapse and destruction of the nursery rhyme can also be seen in conjunction with a greater ethical or cultural collapse of Western civilization, of which London is a principal exponent. Pound is interested in the same theme and uses the same imagery in Canto LXXIV:

Le Paradis n'est pas artificiel
but spezzato apparently
it exists only in fragments. . .

Both the (putative) reality and the ideal of Heaven are ultimately inconceivable in the modern world, at least in an integrated way. Paradise is spezzato, “broken,” or more literally, “unpieced.” Only the fragments remain.
The Modernists are ambivalent at best about the possibility of reconstructing those fragments. Like Petrarch, they return often to images of scattering and gathering, but they are much less likely to view the fragments as gatherable, and even if they are, they cannot be used to reconstruct whatever existed before. In “La Figlia che piange,” Eliot pairs these elements with some very Petrarchan topics: a young woman, sunlight, and flowers.

Weave, weave the sunlight in your hair—
Clasp your flowers to you with a pained surprise—
Fling them to the ground…(3-5)

The tone is quite different from Petrarch, to be sure, but the image is very similar. The woman, a source of both happiness and regret for the speaker, now gathers an armful of flowers together, now scatters them around her. We see the same ideas with different metaphors in Prufrock’s tendency toward an inaction that exists in vacillating between two possible actions:

Would it have been worth while,
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball…(90-92)

Here the actions being considered are on the one hand an image of scattering/dividing (“to have bitten off the matter”) and on the other of gathering/bringing together (“to have squeezed the universe into a ball”).

Pound’s treatment of scattering and gathering often reflects his interest in (and fear of) the ruin of Western civilization. In “E.P. Ode,” he eulogizes the thousands who have died needlessly in the Great War, those who died “For two gross of broken statues, / For a few thousand battered books” (94-95). Here the physical broken objects (statues and books) stand metaphorically for the accomplishments of a culture that exists in the
present only as remnants of its more meaningful past. The fragments cannot be collected to reform the statues, and the books cannot be restored to the original state in which they could be read clearly and completely. One of his most developed passages on the topic comes in *Canto LXXVI*:

As a lone ant from a broken ant-hill from the wreckage of Europe, ego scriptor. The rain has fallen, the wind coming down out of the mountain Lucca, Forti dei Marmi, Berchthold after the other one… parts reassembled.

The whole, integral view of Western civilization is gone. Europe has been reduced to a wreck, and Pound sees himself (“ego scriptor”) as a contemporary *vates*, a poet/prophet who alone can attempt to collect the fragments. Even he is unable, however, to give them a full meaning—he can reassemble them but not recreate exactly what has been lost. Once the anthill has been kicked and the ants scattered, there is only so much that the lone ant can do.

In *The Waste Land*, the images of scattering are closely related to those of wind and dryness. Early in the poem, one of the narrative voices prepares the reader for an enduring sense of disconnection by warning, “I will show you fear in a handful of dust” (30). That fear comes from multiple sources: the wreckage of the past that the dust contains, the sense of dry sterility it symbolizes, and the likelihood of complete disintegration when that dust, sheltered only briefly and momentarily in a hand, is blown away and scattered. Over 300 lines later Eliot revisits this idea in the context of his “unreal” representative modern city, which “cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air / Falling towers” (372-73). As Yeats had noted simply in “The Second Coming,” published just two years earlier, “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold” (3). Eliot’s
city cracks and collapses under its own weight, attempts briefly to reform, and then bursts apart in the twilight of Europe’s power, its towers fallen.

The scattered nature of European culture and its contemporary mentality and Eliot’s despair of being able to gather it back together completely inform his use of the image of emptiness, most of which appear in the final section of the poem. The only voices heard are the echoes “singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells” (382). The chapel, which should house the grail, is instead “empty” (388). The “rooms” that we have lived in—our minds and hearts—are “empty” (410). Everything with meaning has been scattered and lost, leaving only empty spaces behind.

It is within these voids, both personal and cultural, that Eliot seeks to gather together what he can poetically. He is skeptical even in the process of attempting it:

“On Margate Sands.
I can connect
Nothing with nothing. (300-03)

The poet subtly inserts himself into the poem, having spent several months in 1921 at the beach in Margate to calm his nerves. The desire to make things connect on the grander level of European culture and on the immediate level of his own poem ultimately leaves him frustrated, but he is compelled to try. In one of the final, best known, and most emblematic lines of the poem, he writes, “These fragments I have shored against my ruins” (430). Levenson explains:

In the space of that line the poem becomes conscious of itself. What had been a series of fragments of consciousness has become a consciousness of fragmentation…. [T]o recognize fragments as fragments, to name them as fragments, is already to have transcended them—not to an harmonious or final unity but to a somewhat higher, somewhat more inclusive, somewhat more conscious point of view. Considered in this way, the poem does not achieve a resolved coherence, but neither does it remain in a chaos of fragmentation. Rather it displays a series of more or less stable
patterns, regions of coherence, temporary principles of order—the poem not as a stable unity but engaged in what Eliot calls ‘the painful task of unifying.’ (192)

With this line, the culmination of the Modernist fragment and possibly its most succinct explanation, Eliot brings to a close a poem that, by its nature, has no real ending, no satisfactory stopping point. The multiplicity of fragments in *The Waste Land*—allusion, memories and recollections, divisions of time and repetition, lists of and broken images—do not ultimately resolve themselves into a harmonious whole, and Eliot doesn’t try to force them to. Brooker notes that Eliot original conceived of the line as, “These fragments I have spelt into my ruins,” an allusion to the Cumean Sibyl spelling messages into palm leaves as part of her prophetic response (*Reading* 202). This would not only connect the end of the poem more directly with the epigraph that begins it, it would indicate that the fragments themselves are meant to communicate, to give their own individual meanings but also to create a new meaning by the way they have been “shored” or “spelt.” This meaning, however great or small, was what Eliot could summon up to confront the ruinous uncertainty of a personal life and a cultural milieu that had been reduced to fragments.

Finally, there is a critical concept that includes several aspects of Eliot’s poetics that have been discussed here: repetition, juxtaposition, allusion (Chapter 4.3), ellipses, etc. This concept, Eliot’s well-known if not fully explored “objective correlative,” comes from the 1921 essay “Hamlet and His Problems:”

> The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an ‘objective correlative’; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. (92)
In other words, for Eliot successful art entails something external to the character himself, something verbal, that explains and justifies the extent of an emotional response. Eliot does not, however, completely explain whether this evocation of the emotion is on the part of the character or the part of the reader or both. Is *Hamlet* an artistic failure because the character is unable to adequately justify his emotions (“It is thus a feeling which he cannot understand; he cannot objectify it, and it therefore remains to poison life and obstruct action,” 92-93)? Or because the author himself was unable to fully evoke those feelings in his audience through an appropriate objective correlative (“The artistic ‘inevitability’ lies in this complete adequacy of the external to the emotion,” 92)?

This question is important in our examination of Eliot’s poetics because it blurs the line between poet and narrator that Eliot’s perceived adherence to “impersonality” would suggest is always sharply defined; indeed, it suggests that he has much in common with the narrative “I” of Petrarchan (and subsequent) lyric poetry. Frank suggests that in this way, the objective correlative is meant not (or not only) to evoke a response in the reader but to allow the poet himself to understand a particular emotion of his own well enough to use it in poetry: “To objectify an emotion, according to the Hamlet essay, means to make it accessible to contemplation, understanding, knowledge” (314). When Eliot explains that “*Hamlet*, like the sonnets, is full of some stuff that the writer could not drag to light, contemplate, or manipulate into art. And when we search for this feeling, we find it, as in the sonnets, very difficult to localize” (“Hamlet” 91), he seems to be placing Shakespeare’s sonnets, his lyric poems most directly comparable to Petrarch’s, on a lower plane, as they are merely “some stuff” that the writer was not able to fashion into art in a fully successful way. And yet toward the end of the essay he writes this:
The levity of Hamlet, his repetition of phrase, his puns, are not part of a deliberate plan of dissimulation, but a form of emotional relief. In the character Hamlet it is the buffoonery of an emotion which can find no outlet in action; in the dramatist it is the buffoonery of an emotion which he cannot express in art. The intense feeling, ecstatic or terrible, without an object or exceeding its object, is something which every person of sensibility has known; it is doubtless a study to pathologists. (93)

The criticism that Eliot outlines here could easily be used to describe to some extent his own fragmentary poetic approach: as we have seen, he makes extensive use of repetition, verbal tics, literary allusion, even levity, yet for Prufrock or the characters in *The Waste Land* the fact that these things show their inability to adequately describe emotion is (as will be discussed in Chapter 6) part of the point. In any case, to whatever extent Eliot thought of the objective correlative as a constant necessity in poetic composition, many of the images and motifs that he uses to create “a skilful accumulation of imagined sensory impressions” leading to an “artistic ‘inevitability’” (92) are the same ones that play a vital role in his poetics of fragmentation.
CHAPTER 6:

THE DIVIDED SELF

Eliot’s and Pound’s Modernist fragmentation, which includes the philosophical ruptures of modern life and the poetics of allusion, memory, repetition, and images of scattering and of brokenness, finds its ultimate expression in its examination of the divided self. This is in many ways not only its most characteristic aspect but also one of its most Petrarchan. One of the aspects of “the modern” that Pound and Eliot shared with Petrarch was precisely this interest in the internal world, the ways in which the individual reacts to the people and situations around him, and this interest led them to similar considerations and examinations of how the self is estranged or cut off: by the difficulty of communication with others, by internal struggles and contradictions, and by the creation and use of philosophical or artistic masks. Brooker describes this estrangement in terms of loss:

…the characters and the episodes of the poem have in common an experience of loss. The Waste Land is, in a basic way, a lament for lost community. Its allusions are probes sent in search of that community in past traditions….But when the reader arrives at those biblical, Greek, Indic, Germanic, and English mythic sites, he will find in each of them a failure of communion and will discover no place better suited for communion than a public bar near Magnus Martyr. (Reading 210-11)

The experience of these internal and external losses, these failures of communication, forms a significant part of the Modernist poetics of fragmentation that Eliot and Pound create.
6.1 Communication, Solitude, and Exile

Modernist poetry often addresses the individual’s feeling of being cut off in some way from others, a sense of division from the society in which he lives but of which he never quite feels completely a part. One of the foremost causes of this division lies in the nature of interpersonal communication. Eliot and Pound present genuine and effective verbal communication as challenging to initiate, difficult to carry out, and often nearly impossible to carry through effectively. Intentions, meanings, fears, misunderstandings, and misrepresentations all complicate the process of successful conversation and the consequent reinforcement of personal relationships.

At times the very act of communication is aborted, ended before it can fully start because of subject matter—words or ideas—that are too difficult to communicate verbally. Not surprisingly, Prufrock, who in many ways serves as the epitome of communication difficulties, suffers from this crippling emotional aphasia. In a passage that evokes and subverts the image of the stilnovisti and of Petrarch (who hardly writes a poem with a mention of his lady’s *begli occhi*), he speaks of the eyes of women he has encountered:

> The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,  
> And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,  
> When I’m pinned and wriggling on the wall,  
> Then how should I begin  
> To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways? (56-60)

Faced with the direct attention and therefore possible scorn of and rejection by women, Prufrock cannot respond to their glances and words, and the “formulated phrases” coming from their eyes are strongly suggestive of the kinds of clichés that Petrarch’s “*begli occhi*” have become. He is pinned into inaction and struck dumb, unable even to
try to explain his own feelings and actions. The diction indicates the speaker’s desperation: he can’t even begin to “spit out” the realities of his internal world, rather pathetically described as the “butt-ends” of his days. This inability to speak reaches its climax at the end of a passage (lines 99-104) previously discussed in regards to lists (Chapter 5.3). After reciting a litany of items (sunsets, dooryards, streets, novels, teacups, skirts), he is reduced to helplessness and frustration: “And this, and so much more? – / It is impossible to say just what I mean!” (103-04). Ultimately, instead of attempting to communicate with a woman, he can only internally interrupt his own scattered thoughts with a declaration of his feelings’ ineffability.

The reader is introduced to the same concept early in *The Waste Land*, when the speaker poses and then answers a rhetorical question:

> What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
> Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
> You cannot say, or guess…(19-21)

Some of the ultimate realities of existence are unavailable conceptually to the Son of man being addressed, but the denial is expressed in terms of communication; he is unable to answer the question both because he doesn’t possess the necessary information or understanding but also because he is incapable of communicating a meaningful answer to a question of that magnitude.

Sometimes the thought or the emotion or the truth is simply too difficult to put into words; at others, there is an actual practical impediment to speech, something that disrupts communication before it can fully begin. In “Gerontion,” Eliot plays with several aspects of this inability to communicate, evoking the imagery of the *logos* from the Gospel of John: “The word within a word, unable to speak a word, / Swaddled with
darkness” (17-18). Here he suggests, among other things, the physical inability of an infant (*infans*, “non-speaking”) to talk—the irony being that God himself, the Word, became a wordless child. Prufrock, should he somehow summon up the courage and the opportunity to speak, would still find himself kept from communication by external occurrences: “Is it perfume from a dress / That makes me so digress?” (65-66). At the end of the poem, he mentions that he has heard the mermaids communicating among themselves—singing “each to each” (124)—but he is unable to communicate with them and doubts very much that they will sing to him (125).

The physical inability to communicate is also a theme in *The Waste Land*. In “The Burial of the Dead,” after a young woman remembers being called “the hyacinth girl,” the narrator responds:

—Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth Garden,
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed… (37-39).

Here there seems to be a combination of both ineffability and physical inability; both the idea of the girl as well as the sight of her seem to strike the speaker dumb. It is “a lyrical dialogue wherein the participants, ironically, do not communicate” (Brady 32). The fact that his eyes, another central image of the poem, “fail” adds to the feeling of an inadequacy of physical facilities. This failure is much more explicit in the subsequent presentation of the story of Procne and Philomela in “A Game of Chess:”

    The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
    So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale
    Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
    And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
    “Jug Jug” to dirty ears. (99-103)
In the Ovidian version of the myth (to which Eliot makes reference in his notes),
Philomela was raped by her sister’s husband, who then ripped out her tongue to keep her from exposing his crime. Here Eliot recalls a vivid and troubling example\(^8\) of a literal inability to communicate; eventually turned into a nightingale, she is able to sing but never regains the ability to speak—a poor exchange at best. The passage also reinforces the poem’s dim view of sexuality, as the only thing that Philomela is able to communicate, her song (“jug jug”), is also an Elizabethan euphemism for intercourse. The victim of a violent sexual attack, in the end her only form of communication is an archaic slang term for sex, which the contemporary world still pursues with “dirty ears.”

Even if we are able to get past the difficulties of the ineffable and of physical or emotional disabilities and engage in communication, we run into the next difficulty: miscommunication. Prufrock constantly worries about the reception that his words or actions may elicit. In the closest he gets to actual conversation, he suspects (in bracketed insertions) that “they will say” how he is losing his hair, how thin his arms and legs are (41, 44). As he deliberates on how he might respond, he thinks:

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Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows?...
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(70-73)

Prufrock considers what he could say, what image he could use to communicate his overwhelming sense of loneliness and isolation. Ultimately it is only a deliberation, however. Confident that whatever he ends up saying will be misconstrued or misunderstood, he says nothing.

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\(^8\) The “withered stumps of time” that appear just after the passage quoted (line 104) are likely meant to echo Ovid’s very disturbing image of Philomela’s severed tongue writhing on the ground.
Prufrock’s reticence is understandable given the fact that when he makes the effort to interpret communication, the message is misunderstood, lost somehow in the translations of thought to language to thought. In the post-positional protases of his previously discussed questioning of “would it have been worth it, after all” (87, 90, 99-100, 106) he brings himself up short by imagining the response of the woman he is trying to communicate with:

If one, settling a pillow by her head
    Should say: “That is not what I meant at all.
    That is not it, at all”….

If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
And turning toward the window, should say:
    “That is not it all,
    That is not what I meant, at all.” (96-98, 107-110)

Fear once again controls Prufrock, in this case the fear that his reaction to her words and her wishes will be met not with approval and appreciation but with a negating rejection, that he has simply not understood what she wanted; and that fear will destroy the moment of potential understanding as she moves her attention away from him, “settling a pillow” or “turning toward the window.” The specter of potential miscommunication keeps the speaker from attempting to engage with the woman and cuts off the possibility of communication before it has even begun.

A similar scene of frustrated and fruitless communication between a man and woman takes place in The Waste Land’s “A Game of Chess.” There is no narrative or description in the scene (lines 111-138), which is made up entirely of a pseudo-dialogue in which the unnamed woman’s words are presented as actual statements, complete with quotation marks, while the unnamed man takes the part of the narrator; the reader is left unsure if his responses are spoken or merely thought. Despite the narrative limitations,
Eliot creates two very striking characters: a high-strung, unsure, upset woman and a taciturn, weary man. The uncertainty of how much of the dialogue is actually spoken aloud strengthens the sense of miscommunication between the two. They are speaking past each other, she with insistent, rapid-fire questions and he with his low-key, philosophical (and possibly silent) responses. The lasting impression of the scene is of an exhausted relationship that is doomed to failure, as the two involved are unable to interact, to communicate, despite their physical proximity and (for her, at least) spoken words.

At times miscommunication takes the form of meaningless communication, in which words are spoken, even exchanged, but without any real meaning. So Mr. Eugenides in *The Waste Land* addresses the narrator in his “demotic French” (212), extending what seems to be a rehearsed or unenthusiastic invitation “to luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel / Followed by a weekend at the Metropole” (213-14), two standard, conventional social activities, which the narrator does not even dignify with a response. Instead, the poem moves immediately to another, more extended example of meaningless communication: the episode of the typist and the clerk. This scene works formally in an almost opposite way from the conversation in “A Game of Chess,” as it is comprised wholly of narrative without any direct conversation between the two characters. In quatrains of iambic pentameter, Eliot (through the narrator of Tiresias) describes the interaction between the two, both verbal and physical. The clerk arrives at her house (231), and they share a meal (236); certainly there would be some conversation between the two, but their relationship is so tenuous, so unimportant, that Eliot doesn’t even bother to record any words they might have shared. After supper, the clerk makes his
sexual advance (237), which the typist neither welcomes nor rejects. Again, no conversation between the two during their sexual encounter is recounted, and even afterwards the clerk says nothing (or nothing worth recording), only “bestows one final patronising kiss, / And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit…” (247). In an episode meant to show senseless, unsensuous sexuality, Eliot consciously avoids giving any actual dialogue. Both the social situation and the sexual act presented are meaningless, and he stresses this lack of meaning in refraining from including the meaningless words that would have been spoken.

These two scenes of problematic romantic interaction, the man and woman in “A Game of Chess” and the typist and clerk, show how Eliot sought to work through his complicated and conflicted feelings on the nature of love. Schwarz writes:

> Innermost to Eliot, as a devolution of the wider spiritual dilemma to more personal circumstances, was the solipsistic problem expressed in terms of the difficulty, if not impossibility, of communication between individuals….If one cannot communicate neither can one love, even though one must do both….Love in _The Waste Land_ seems to offer a kind of redemption, being the closest supposed rapprochement between individuals, the actuality of which solipsism denies. Yet it is necessary as part of the struggle to discover or create meaning. (58-59)

Eliot’s characters often seem to flirt with and sometimes sink completely into solipsism—Prufrock comes to mind—but Schwarz rightly points out that accepting the supremacy of solipsism would essentially render all communication meaningless. This would include art. So just as the characters in his poems continue to struggle, albeit with rare success, to achieve genuine and meaningful communication, so Eliot must accept at least the possibility of a “rapprochement between individuals,” whether they be mismatched and unhappy characters in a poem or that poem’s author and reader.
The pub in “A Game of Chess” provides a final example of meaningless communication, principally in the words of the main speaker, Lil’s unnamed friend. In what is essentially a monologue, she describes a recent conversation with Lil, stressing largely quotidian, even banal topics (or important topics in banal ways): Lil’s appearance, her husband’s potential cheating, the effects of childbirth and contraception on her health. Not only does the speaker’s approach to the discussion stress her petty nature, the language itself is both common and conversational—in the negative senses of both words. She even gives a short verbatim report from her conversation with Lil that showcases this:

He’s been in the army four years, he wants a good time
And if you don’t give it him, there’s others will, I said.
Oh is there, she said. Something o’ that, I said.
Then I’ll know who to thank, she said, and give me a straight look. (148-51)

The repetitions of “she said” and “I said,” the filler phrases like “something o’ that,” the basic mistakes of grammar and syntax that denote their working-class background: all contribute to the sense of ultimate unimportance and insignificance in the passage. Eliot stresses this in the final line of the section, in which he juxtaposes the friends’ “goonight”s with Ophelia’s words from Hamlet: “Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night” (172).

Finally, words can contribute to inter-personal fragmentation by creating distance. Prufrock, in assuming the character of Polonius, also assumes his attributes, which include hiding behind language: “Politic, cautious, and meticulous; / Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse” (116-17). Throughout the poem, Prufrock both consciously and unconsciously uses language to keep himself apart from others (particularly women),
to sabotage his chances of genuine communication. The poet may be showing a bit of himself here as well, as Eliot was also known to be meticulous and occasionally a bit obtuse—perhaps part of his own attempt to keep a safe, objective distance from others.

Words can also create rupture through untruth, a (mis)use of language to which Pound is particularly sensitive. In “E. P. Ode,” he lampoons current aesthetic and poetic tastes:

Not, not certainly, the obscure reveries
Of the inward gaze;
Better mendacities
Than the classics in paraphrase! (25-28)

Thus for Pound, a major shortcoming of contemporary poetic practice is the tendency to prefer pleasant mendacities to the hard but time-tested truths of the poetic tradition.

Moving from aesthetics to ethics, he returns to the damaging nature of lies later in the same work. In Section IV, a stark evaluation of Europe, and particularly Britain, during and after the War, he writes:

Died some, pro patria,
non “dulce” non “et decor” …
walked eye-deep in hell
believing in old men’s lies, then unbelieving
came home, home to a lie,
home to many deceits,
home to old lies and new infamy; (71-77)

Once again it is lies that create distance between people, in this case between the younger generation that fought in the war and the older generation that oversaw it and remains in power after it. Language that separates people, both individually and collectively, serves as a disruptive and fragmenting force.

The inability to communicate—or to do so effectively—can lead to a separated, monolithic existence. Solitude thus joins communication and its failures as both a cause and effect of division. Fear is one of the principal catalysts of solitude, and once again
Prufrock serves as the major example. All of the self-doubt, the back-and-forth internal questioning that paralyzes him and keeps him from meaningful communication stems from his deep fears of failure and rejection. Prufrock’s fear, broadly discussed above in its more general appearances, is also addressed explicitly in the poem:

Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,  
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?  
But though I’ve wept and fasted, wept and prayed,  
Though I’ve seen my head [grown slightly bald] brought in upon a platter,  
I am no prophet – and here’s no great matter;  
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,  
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker;  
And in short, I was afraid. (79-86)

The various related fears that keep Prufrock alone come together here. First, he worries that he might lack the strength of will to translate his desires into action. In a self-objectifying move, he identifies himself with John the Baptist, and when he sees his own head on a platter he can only reflect on its aging deficiencies. Unlike John, he proclaims a truth that is pedestrian rather than prophetic: he fears that any potential for greatness that he might have had in his life has passed by him, and ahead lies only the snickering specter of death. Fears have held him back in the past and continue to keep him from achieving anything in the present or future. In short, he sadly convokes and concludes, he was afraid, and that fear has kept him apart and alone. Eliot hints at a similar fear of solitude that causes solitude in *The Waste Land.*

*Dayadhvam*: I have heard the key  
Turn in the door once and turn once only  
We think of the key, each in his prison  
Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison (411-14)

The Dantine image of the single turn of the key gives the passage its macabre cast. In Eliot’s rendering, however, the locked door is largely an invention of the prisoner’s own
mind. It is fear that leads us to “confirm” our own prisons—fear, I suggest, of the solitude of solipsism that chooses to be alone in order to avoid the danger of a rejection that will effect being alone. That Eliot has this type of fear in mind is suggested by the specific way he collectively refers to “we” who are thinking of the key and creating our own prisons. These prisons are what prevent us from empathizing, from sharing the emotions and therefore lives of others (hence the Upanishadic command to empathize, “dayadhvam,” that introduces the passage); they are what keep us both alone and lonely.

Even if we are able to face our fears, however, there is still the possibility of experiencing solitude near and even with other people. Prufrock’s daily existence entails a high degree of loneliness in the presence of others. He refers often to the people— principally women—around him: the unspecified “they” (41, 44) and “them” (55, 62) and “one” (96, 107). Even the presumably figurative (or metaphorized) mermaids are seen from a distance rather than directly interacted with. The repeated couplet “In the room the women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo” (13-14, 35-36) encapsulates the underlying solitude of Prufrock’s life; he sits motionless and silent as women converse and move about around him. Women’s voices continue to haunt him: “I know the voices dying with a dying fall / Beneath the music from a farther room” (52-53). The lasting presence of their words only serves to accentuate his silence. His loneliness is not diminished by his proximity to women but rather intensified because of it.

The Modernist sense of solitude exists not only near other people but sometimes during and despite actual interactions with them. The typist’s tryst with the clerk provides the best example. As previously discussed, the episode contains no quotation, no dialogue, which gives the whole scene a sad sense of distance and disengagement. The
sexual act itself, the whole reason for the clerk’s visit (and, presumably, for the episode’s inclusion in the poem) is also passed over in silence as the passage focuses more on the typist before and then after “the event:”

She turns and looks a moment in the glass,
Hardly aware of her departed lover;
Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:
“Well now that’s done: and I’m glad it’s over.” (249-52)

The young woman’s sexual disinterest had been previously indicated by the fact that she makes no effort to welcome or counter her lover’s “unreproved if undesired” (238) advances, offering “no defense” (240). This is emphasized now by the fact that she glances at herself in the mirror and is “hardly aware” that her lover is gone. As Eliot shows, even in the most emotionally and physically connective of acts—sex—the individual can remain alone and detached from humanity as well as from the sexual partner.

The feeling of personal isolation and solitude that can occur near or with other people, even in the most intimate of situations, finds a kind of corollary in a general sense of disillusionment. The typist’s lonely, dissociative experience that exemplifies a kind of disenchantment with sex mirrors a broader Modernist feeling of disenchantment. In the opening lines of “The Fire Sermon,” Eliot gives a lengthy and foreboding description of London; it is a dark, windy, deserted place in which the detritus of civilization is mentioned but actual human beings are not. “By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept…” (182) the narrator says sadly, evoking the dispirited language of Psalm 137:1: “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.” Eliot interjects himself into this mournful memory of loss, as he had spent six weeks in a
sanitarium on the shores of Lake Geneva (or Leman) while working on the poem (Rainey 130). Centering this description of London on the Thames, he writes:

….The wind
Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed.
Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.
The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed. (174-79)

In his presentation of a stark, empty city, Eliot uses and then repeats a simple metaphor: the nymphs are departed. Any sense of historical greatness or creative wonder, of personal fulfillment or a connection with the transcendent, that London or Europe might once have had has vanished. There is no room in the modern—and hence the Modernist—world for them. In utilizing the nymphs, Eliot repurposes a metaphor developed at the end of “Prufrock.”

I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.
I do not think that they will sing to me.
I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black
We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown. (125-131)

It is not a coincidence that both mythical creatures are female and conspicuous for their beauty and sexuality. And like the nymphs, the mermaids represent a sense of wonder, of delight, of possibility that has gone out of the world or at least to which the speaker doesn’t have access. Prufrock has the emotional capacity to sense and understand his surroundings but not the ability to interact with them. This is why he feels so keenly the gradual disenchantment of the world around him; his internal inhibitions against
approaching the mermaids will soon be compounded by external pressures. The mermaids, like the nymphs, will soon be departed, and he will have recourse only to the practical, all-too-human world around him.

In all of this, we can hear once again an echo of Hulme. A natural outgrowth of his distaste for explicit emotion and his approval of emotional distance was a sort of wide-ranging *contemptus mundi*. A critic who espoused a classical ideal that regarded man as “a very finite and fixed creature” (117), Hulme argued that “[a] literature of wonder must have an end” (140). “The classical poet,” he taught, “never forgets this finiteness, this limit of man. He remembers always that he is mixed up with earth. He may jump, but he always returns back” (119). All of this can be seen in the sense of hollowness that pervades so much of the interpersonal relationships in Eliot’s and Pound’s poetry. The ultimate failures of meaningful communication, the inconsequential and unfulfilling nature of sex⁹—in these aspects the early poetry of the Modernists shows a strong debt to Hulme’s understanding not only of art but of the human nature that inspires and creates it.

A final form of separation and fragmentation from society that haunts Modernist poetry is exile. At times this theme is expressed in a way closely related to disenchantment: belatedness. Here the “separateness” of the individual comes from a sense that he belongs to a bygone epoch, that the current age has passed him by. In the “nymphs” passage of *The Waste Land* cited above, the introductory allusion to Psalm 137 provides Eliot with an opportunity to include biographically relevant material, but it is also an image of (in this case collective) sorrow for a time and place long past: it is the

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⁹ “The pathetic search for the *different*. Where shall they find it? Never found in sex. All explored sex is the same” (231).
current situation near the “rivers of Babylon” that makes the memories of their lost Zion so acute. The Babylonian Exile is a fitting evocation for the Modernist “exile” of belatedness, just as it provided Petrarch and his contemporaries with a useful metaphor for the 14th-century transfer of the papacy to Avignon.

Pound is particularly sensitive to the disengaging, even ostracizing feeling of living in the wrong age. It is in fact the starting point of Hugh Selwyn Mauberley; in the first lines of “E.P. Ode,” which takes the form of an elegy for a writer who happens to have the same initials as Pound, the poet writes:

For three years, out of key with his time,  
He strove to resuscitate the dead art  
Of poetry…

No, hardly, but seeing he had been born  
In a half-savage country, out of date; (1-3, 5-6)

The difficulty—and, it seems, the ultimate impossibility—of trying to bridge old and new, to carry the vitality of the literary tradition into the contemporary idiom weighed heavily on the writer. The narrator ascribes E.P.’s eventual failure to reconcile them as being symptomatic of his sense of not belonging, either to his time (“out of date”) or his place (“born in a half-savage country”). The individual, here as an artist, is separated from society by his identification with a past social and intellectual milieu and his inability to feel a connection to his current one. Indeed, it would be hard to identify with a contemporary culture that one eventually comes to describe as “an old bitch gone in the teeth / …a botched civilization” (90-91). The final section of the poem, “The Age Demanded,” takes its title from an early line in the poem and transforms it into a recapitulation of E.P.’s inability to engage with his surroundings. That the process of
disengagement is mutual, that a sense of belatedness can be a conscious choice as well as a natural phenomenon, is indicated by an awareness of what helped to cause the rift:

Non-esteem of self-styled “his betters”
Leading, as he well knew,
To his final
Exclusion from the world of letters. (58-61).

Eliot also examines the solitary pathos of exile, either explicit or metaphorized, in *The Waste Land*. In addition to the use of Old Testament images of exile mentioned above, he includes characters like Countess Marie Larisch, an acquaintance of the Habsburgs who knew Crown Prince Rudolf well (“And when we were children, staying at the archduke’s / My cousin’s, he took me out on a sled,” 13-14). Later, this relationship proved to be her undoing; she facilitated the affair between Rudolf and his mistress and, after the former killed the latter and then himself, she lost her position and began a steady social and economic decline that ended in her death in a poorhouse in Germany: an exile of society and manners rather than politics, but an exile just the same.

But beyond the poems, the theme of exile is especially striking in the biographies of the poets themselves. Neither Pound nor Eliot were actual exiles, but both left the country of their birth in early adulthood and spent the majority of their lives abroad, Eliot in London, Pound in England, France, and Italy. Theirs was a voluntary exile; unlike Dante, cast out from his beloved and reviled Florence for the last two decades of his life, they chose to create lives far from their native land. In this way, they were more like Petrarch: peripatetics rather than true exiles, writers who often looked back to their origins for poetic inspiration but never felt the desire to actually live there again, just as Petrarch, writing for decades in the Florentine vernacular of his father’s native city, never lived in Florence nor even, after his early childhood, in Tuscany. In this Pound and Eliot
were part of a Modernist trend—one thinks, for example, of Joyce, Loy, Tzara, etc.—toward self-exile, a response to a sense of not belonging, of being outside, being other. Brooker notes how the Modernist sense of social alienation reflects back on previous times and conditions:

[The Waste Land’s] central subject, then, is loss, displacement, deprivation. In a profound way, the loss it evokes is not just a twentieth-century urban condition. The poem’s references reveal that this sense of loss has been pervasive throughout history….Although the twentieth-century waste land is a place of intense awareness of disunity, it is only a recent version of a constantly recurring condition. Eliot’s nostalgia is for a community that he knows has not existed in history. (Reading 211)

The fact that an ideal time and condition of “community” does not exist and never has somewhat paradoxically makes this nostalgia sadder, more haunting; this sadness and longing exist as another link between Petrarchan modernity and Modernism.

6.2 Internal Divisions

Speaking of Dostoyevsky’s Notes from Underground (1864), Nicholls writes in Modernisms:

The sense of personal difference, coupled with that of speaking ‘a special language’, now complicated the Romantic concept of uniqueness by locating the trauma of division and separation within subjectivity rather than in the external relation of self to other. (18)

So in the Modernist poetics of Eliot and Pound, the separation of the self occurs not only in its marginalization and exclusion from (and in) the company of others, its detachment from the rest of society, but also in the traumatic divisions of its internal world. The internally fragmented self plays a major role in Modernist poetry, particularly in Eliot. This fragmentation finds several related avenues of expression. At the most basic level, it occurs, as in Petrarch, in the uncertainties of a speaker or narrator caught between
conflicting emotions which divide his will, even his psyche. At other times it shows up narratively, in the form of internal monologues that sometimes more closely resemble internal dialogues: the self divided and speaking to itself. Perhaps most frequently, internal conflict and division are expressed through liminal states in which the speaker is suspended, emotionally or intellectually, between two opposing realities: life and death, male and female.

As we have seen, Prufrock holds a privileged place as an exemplar of internal conflict. Desire for love on the one hand and fear of rejection on the other divide him, and he is unable to reconcile the two parts, so that he foresees “time yet for a hundred indecisions, / And for a hundred visions and revisions” (32-33). Because of this he is constantly questioning, even second-guessing himself. “Do I dare?”, he repeats (38), “Do I dare / Disturb the universe?” (45-46). This internal struggle not only divides him but paralyzes him; unable to choose one side or the other, he ends up being able to choose nothing. A similar sense of struggle occurs for the speaker near the end of *The Waste Land*:

_Datta_: what have we given?
My friend, the awful daring of a moment’s surrender
Which an age of prudence can never retract
By this, and this only, we have existed (401-04)

An optimistic reading of the passage might suggest a feeling of contentment at the courage felt and followed at key times in the speaker’s life, while the pessimist might point out the somewhat sorrowful sense of loss, the abandonment of good sense. Whatever the case, the speaker indicates that his whole existence, good or bad (or both),
has been heavily marked—determined, even—by the internal division caused by veering between daring and prudence.

In other situations, internal conflict leads not to paralyzed inactivity or possibly regretted action but to specific inaction, a defeat of the will. Eliot’s Gerontion suffers from this; having wished for eternal life without eternal youth, he exists indefinitely, watching himself grow older and older, his youthful vigor warring with and finally losing to the nihilism of extreme age\(^\text{10}\). Still deathless, divided he falls.

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{I that was near your heart was removed therefrom} \\
&\text{To lose beauty in terror, terror in inquisition.} \\
&\text{I have lost my passion: why should I need to keep it} \\
&\text{Since what is kept must be adulterated? (56-59)}
\end{align*}
\]

The result of the internal battle is that Gerontion has lost his passion, leaving him living but with no sense of feeling alive. The winning division in the conflict—weakness, detachment, resignation—remains, while the loser—youth, hope, engagement—has been driven out, no longer a part of the speaker’s internal world. A similar fate befalls the typist in *The Waste Land*. Eliot presents her as a character defeated by the monotony and poverty, both economic and emotional, of her life. Her small flat is dirty and cluttered: remnants of her breakfast remain in the evening (222), and clothes are piled up on her divan (226). Her internal conflict, her rupture, seems to have resulted in a kind of dissociation. When the clerk makes his advances she has no response, either positive or negative; she is “bored and tired” (236) and responds merely with “indifference” (242),

\[^{10}\text{There is an interesting parallel here to the character of Tithonus in two of Petrarch’s poems, RVF 219 and 291. In both places, he appears in a supporting role; his wife, Aurora (the dawn) is the more important figure, associated as she is with Laura. That association, though, casts Petrarch in the role of Tithonus, and he takes advantage of the comparison to complain that the mythological character, for all his sorrows, can at least look forward to seeing his beloved once again every morning. Petrarch’s only path to Laura is his own death (“ché se ’l vo’ riveder, conven ch’ io mora,” 291.8).}\]
and afterwards she hardly notices when he is gone (251-52). An internal break has occurred, one that has established this dissociative response to her surroundings.

A subtler sign of internal conflict and division is conversational. Speeches or conversations in Eliot and Pound sometimes veer between monologues and dialogues, leaving the reader uncertain as to whether the speaker actually has a separate interlocutor or is instead conversing with another aspect of himself. Most of Pound’s *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, for example, is recounted with a very distinct, conversational voice, but is it meant to be instructive? Expositional? Dialogical? Introspective? *The Waste Land* plays extensively with conversation and dialogical expectations. The dialogue between the man and woman in “A Game of Chess,” in which her statements are put in quotation marks and his are not, challenges the reader to construct the actual scene: are both people physically present? Is he listening to her words but responding only internally? Is she alone and talking aloud to herself? The last portion of “The Fire Sermon” comprises a monologue from an unnamed speaker to an unspecified audience:

“Trams and dusty trees.
Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew
Undid me. By Richmond I raised my knees
Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe.”

“My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart
Under my feet. After the event
He wept. He promised a ‘new start.’
I made no comment. What should I resent?” (292-99)

The speaker is presumably a woman—her comments seem to hint at a negative personal interaction with a man, and the allusion to Dante’s La Pia (*Purg. V.*130-36) supports that conclusion. But otherwise her identity and that of her interlocutor are uncertain. She could, like La Pia, be sharing her experiences in response to a questioner, but she could
also be re-telling her story to herself, responding to a psychologically traumatic experience by trying to work through it in her own mind.

One of the most obvious and most extensive Modernist treatments of an internal dialogue is in “Prufrock.” In the epigram to the poem, taken from Inferno XXVII, Guido da Montefeltro, suffering in the circle of the false counselors, tells Dante the pilgrim that he feels free to share his story because he does not believe that anything he says will become known to those on earth. In the context of “Prufrock,” however, this passage from a Dantean dialogue in which the “you” and “I,” Dante and Guido, are clearly defined and separate (“Senza tema d’infamia ti rispondo”), paves the way for the beginning of Eliot’s subtle reworking of the idea. “Let us go then, you and I,” (1) the poem begins, but as opposed to Dante’s scenario, the “you and I” of Eliot’s poem are not clearly delineated or even shown to be separate. Dante’s dramatic dialogue has become Prufrock’s internal dialogue in which the “you and I” are both fragmented parts of an individual self. Guido talks to Dante “without fear of infamy” because he believes that no one can return from Hell alive and share Guido’s words; Prufrock can be similarly confident because his interlocutor is his own self, and their conversation can be conducted in the privacy of their own personal hell.

As the poem continues, the “you” fades a bit, and the “I” of the speaking Prufrock dominates: “Do I dare?” (38, 45), “I have known” (49, 55), “How should I presume?” (61), “I grow old” (120), etc. In the final tercet of the poem, however, the “you” returns and is subsumed with the “I” into a “we:”

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown. (129-131)
The fragmentation of self into “you and I” introduced in the Dantean epigram and first line of the poem does not become resolved into a “we” until the very end, and that resolution occurs only in time for both to be destroyed.

The most prominent form of internal division in Eliot’s and Pound’s poetry is expressed in terms of liminal states—a sense of opposing, overlapping, or even contradictory senses or impulses which exist simultaneously in the psyche. Pulled by contrary forces, the individual often finds himself in an emotional or social no-man’s-land, an in-between space where he is fully neither one of his constituent parts nor the sum of them. *The Waste Land*’s famous opening lines introduce this tension, reminding us that “April is the cruellest month” (1) because it mixes “memory and desire” (3); in other words, it evokes within us two strong but opposing forces. In that opposition there is uncertainty and tension, but there is also, Eliot and Pound discovered, great creative possibility.

Perhaps the most prominent liminal state in Modernist poetry is that which explores the boundaries between two of the most basic forces of human existence: life and death. Eliot revisits the constant presence of death for the living in multiple poems. The specter of death punctuates the grim, lonely description of the Thames in “The Fire Sermon:” “But at my back in a cold blast I hear / The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear” (185-86). This appearance of mortality as a haunting, disembodied voice continues an anthropomorphized image of death from “Prufrock:” “And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker, / And in short, I was afraid” (85-86). In both cases Death is personified and given a voice, but that voice is not used for speech. Instead, we hear Death “chuckle” and “snicker.” Life, for Eliot’s
characters, is never far from death, and more importantly, they are never allowed to forget that it is always near. No words are necessary. The simple, ominous sounds of sinister mirth keep life from ever straying too far from death.

Elsewhere death moves beyond a constant presence as characters begin to experience their existence as a kind of limbo, a stasis between life and death. Eliot uses knowledge, the reasoning faculty, as an indication of life; its failure presages a space between life and death. So we see in a portion of the conversation in “A Game of Chess:”

Nothing again nothing.
“Do
“You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember
“Nothing?”
I remember
Those are pearls that were his eyes.
“Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?” (120-26)

In the context of a dysfunctional or dying relationship, Eliot creates an image of a blank liminal state characterized by nothingness. When prodded by his interlocutor to respond to her in some active, vital way—to know, to see, to remember—the narrator responds only with a line from Ariel’s song, an allusion of death. She, in turn, upset either by his answer (if he in fact spoke aloud) or by his silence, brings the question of existence between life and death to the fore with her exasperated question: “Are you alive, or not?”

The same idea of nothingness and life/death liminality occurs in the monologue near the end of “The Fire Sermon.”

“On Margate Sands.
I can connect
Nothing with nothing. (300-02)

Once more Eliot’s speaker—and possibly Eliot himself, as he had stayed in Margate in 1921 to “rest his nerves” (Rainey 135 ft. 72)—creates a divided internal space between
living and dying, defines it through the metaphor of disconnection, and describes it with the image of “nothing.”

Eliot’s imagery is even more immediate, more profound, when he moves from describing a state between life and death to evoking a situation in which an individual is simultaneously living and dead—or, in some cases, neither living nor dead. The narrator’s conversation with Stetson in “The Burial of the Dead” gives a clear example of the general motif:

“You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed? (70-73)

The planted corpse, a final image in a section whose title it reinforces, functions as a symbol of the simultaneously living and dead—a dead body that nevertheless has some sort of vital potentiality, given that it has been “planted” (not just “buried”) and expected to sprout and bloom (weather permitting, of course).

Eliot frequently places paired images near the beginning and near the end of the poem, and he does so with the imagery and language of living death. In Section I, “The Burial of the Dead,” the narrator responds to the words of the “hyacinth girl:”

…I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.
Öd’ und leer das Meer. (38-42)

Face to face with the woman he loves, her arms full and her hair wet after their visit to the Hyacinth Garden (37-38), he is overcome with the emotion of the encounter, of her closeness. There is also a sense of loss and distance, as if the speaker is narrating these events from the past through the prism of subsequent sad experience. The sum of all this
is a stricken state of division and suspension, recounted with the familiar details of loss of physical faculties (speech, sight) and mental ability and memory (“I knew nothing”). He can say, like Petrarch, “From then on I never lived a day” (358.12).

The same image is revisited in the final section of the poem, “What the Thunder Said.” In its opening stanza, the speaker creates through a series of broken images the final hours of the Passion of Jesus: Gethsemane (“After the frosty silence in the gardens / After the agony in stony places,” 323-24), Jesus’ trial (“The shouting and crying / Prison and palace…,” 325-26), and the crucifixion (“reverberation / Of thunder of spring over distant mountains,” 326-27). The stanza concludes with the following lines:

He who was living is now dead
We who were living are now dying
With a little patience (328-30)

The speaker, taking the part of one of Jesus’s disciples, expresses the sorrow the small community feels after the death of their leader. The point in time that Eliot has captured, after the crucifixion but before the resurrection (cf. Luke 24:5: “Why seek ye the living among the dead?”), underscores the supreme moment of loss, the threshold time between death and renewed life, and then compares it conversely to the lives of those left behind (“We who were living are now dying”), who are still physically alive but have suffered a mortal spiritual blow with the departure of Jesus. Both this scene and the dialogue with the hyacinth girl convey a sense of religious vision, of rapture, albeit one—appropriately enough—that is unconsummated, unfulfilled. The earlier narrator reaches his divided state of neither life nor death by gazing into his beloved and eventually through her, “looking into the heart of light, the silence” (41); in the latter narrator’s experience, the
subject of contemplation—Jesus—is the orthodox one, but it leads to a living death without even a hint of transcendence.

Several specific characters in *The Waste Land* exemplify the divided state of being both living and dead. One of the most prominent is Phlebas the Phoenician, the description of whom constitutes the entirety of the brief fourth section of the poem, “Death by Water.”

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead
Forgot the cry of the gulls, and the deep sea swell
And the profit and loss.

A current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool.

Gentile or Jew,
O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,
Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you. (312-21)

The section follows Eliot’s extended pattern of ocean or water imagery to indicate the vagaries (and intersections) of life and death: discussed above, for example, is “Those are pearls that were his eyes” (125), which in *The Tempest* is part of a song sung by Ariel about the putative drowning death of Ferdinand’s father (who is, it turns out, still alive). And the living/dead episode with the hyacinth girl ends with a quote from *Tristan and Isolde*: “Ôd’ und leer das Meer” (“desolate and empty the sea”). Here Phlebas, presumably the victim of a shipwreck, lies on the ocean floor, and though obviously a corpse (“a fortnight dead”), he is described with active verbs—forget, rise, fall, pass, enter—as if he were still a living being capable of movement and intention. He shows simultaneously the qualities of both the living and dead. Eliot linguistically and poetically emphasizes Phlebas’s liminal state—between life and death—by the use of a number of other opposing pairs: “profit and loss,” “rose and fell,” “age and youth,” “Gentile or
Jew.” The result is a profound feeling of intermediacy, like that experienced by Petrarch’s conflicted narrator of RVF 132 and 134, in which something is either both A and B or neither A nor B.

Another character that exemplifies the Modernist interest in the tension between life and death appears before the poem proper even begins. The poem’s epigraph is a short passage from Petronius’s Satyricon: “Nam Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis meis vidi in ampulla pendere, et cum illi pueri dicerent: Σίβυλλα τί θέλεις; respondebat illa: ἀποθανεῖν θέλω” (“Indeed, I saw with my own eyes the Cumaean Sibyl hanging in a jar, and when the boys said, ‘Sibyl, what do you want?’ she responded, ‘I want to die.’”). According to Ovid’s version of the legend, the Sybil was granted an unusually long life-span by Apollo, who, however, did not grant her eternal youth, so that like Tithonus she continued to live (and age) century after century until she wasted away to little more than a voice that could be kept in a jar. In choosing this passage as the introduction to the poem at large, Eliot gives a certain mantic air to his work but also, more importantly, establishes the motif of living death. The Sibyl’s body, or whatever is left of her earthly existence, continues to live on long after her will to live has expired. Literally suspended, she is also figuratively suspended between a life she no longer wants and a death that is denied her.

The threshold between life and death is the most prominent but not the only liminal state explored by Pound’s and Eliot’s Modernist poems. Internal separations and points of intersection are often mirrored by external ones; one such recurrent theme is that of dusk, the liminal point when day is not quite finished and night has not quite

The typist’s tryst occurs

> At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
> Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,
> The typist home at teatime… (220-22)

At the climax of the poem, the destruction and possible transformation of the prototypical modern city occurs at the same time of day and with the same imagery: “What is the city over the mountains / Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air” (371-72). In both instances, it is the moment of twilight that ushers in a point of interaction between fragmented parts.

Dusk and subsequent nightfall are also associated with sleep—another liminal state significant for several reasons, not least its function as a type of living death. Thus when Eliot wants to indicate in “What the Thunder Said” an inability to take advantage of either the possibilities of life/action or the peace of death/sleep, he writes, “Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit” (340). Similarly, the epigraph from “Gerontion” appropriately introduces the image of an extremely old man caught between the movement of youth and the inaction of old age:

> Thou hast nor youth nor age
> But as it were an after dinner sleep
> Dreaming of both.

The quote, taken from Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* (III.i.32-34), reinforces the concept of sleep as a liminal human state and suggests that as the finality of death approaches (as for Shakespeare’s soon-to-be executed Claudio or Eliot’s ancient Gerontion), the inner world divides itself into constituent parts—in this case youth and age—that the individual cannot fully experience simultaneously.
Section II of Pound’s *Mauberley* describes a similar state, with his focus more on the conscious/unconscious dichotomy. The narrator says that Mauberley “drank ambrosia, / All passes…” (2-3) and that he

Drifted…drifted precipitate,  
Asking time to be rid of…  
Of his bewilderment

Drifted on  
To the final estrangement…

He had passed, inconscient, full gaze,  
The wide-bandied irides  
And botticellian sprays implied  
In their diastasis; (8-10, 14-15, 26-29)

Pound’s theme of the conscious mind “drifting” complements Eliot’s related imagery of water as a metaphorical vehicle for divided internal states. For Mauberley an internal division (which Pound stresses visually with his liberal use of ellipses) provokes, or at least marks, an external one; as his mind “drifts” and he moves “inconscient,” he is carried to his “final estrangement” from the social and literary establishment. In the end, he is reduced to contemplation in and of literary fragments of individuals, the diastasis (“separation”) of the poetic body parts: the now familiar eyes (“wide-banded irides”) and hair (“botticellian sprays”).

A final liminal or transitory state, that between the genders, occurs in *The Waste Land* and is exemplified in the character of Tiresias. Two particular aspects of the figure from Greek myth make him an appropriate narrator for the episode of the typist and the clerk: Tiresias, though blind, had the recompensing power of second sight, of prophecy, and he had also had the exceptional experience of having lived both as a man and as a woman. As he introduces himself and sets the scene he is about to narrate, he includes
once again the metaphor of the “violet hour,” indicating that his story will include themes of liminality and change:

At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
Like a taxi throbbing waiting,
I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives
Old man with wrinkled female breasts… (215-219)

In Ovid’s version of the story, Tiresias was instantly transformed into a woman after separating a pair of copulating serpents and, when he did the same thing seven years later, was changed back into a man. Eliot telescopes the experiences, making them concurrent rather than consecutive; Tiresias isn’t a man who became a woman but is instead both male and female at the same time, an “old man with wrinkled female breasts.” A few lines into his story, he reminds the reader of his unique experience with gender and of his prophetic powers: “I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs / Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest—” (228-29). Near the end of his account, he reinserts himself once again into the narrative, albeit parenthetically:

(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all
Enacted on this same divan or bed;
I who have sat at Thebes below the wall
And walked among the lowest of the dead.) (243-46)

Tiresias becomes in the end a kind of secular savior figure who can empathize with human’s experiences because he has condescended to experience them himself; indeed, in “forsuffering all” types of sexual interaction, he performs a kind of limited substitutionary atonement. Crucially, Eliot emphasizes the simultaneity of the character’s genders with a particularly memorable and meaningful phrase: “throbbing between two lives” (218). Tiresias stands as an embodiment of both male and female, someone in whom two opposing divisions exist, but also as a reminder of all kinds of internal
separations, all the ways in which the fragmented individual feels himself throbbing between two lives.

6.3 Personae and Labile Identity

An area of significant overlap between the poetics of Petrarch, Eliot, and Pound lies in the use of personae. As seen in Chapter 3.4, Petrarch makes liberal use of the persona—literally, in Latin, a mask— in his Canzoniere, and the Modernists take a similar approach for comparable reasons. Eliot in particular makes extensive use of multiple personae which allow him to express a variety of thoughts through theoretically authoritative voices, all the while maintaining the safety of emotional and poetic distance. The voice coming through a mask not only is the voice of another but is, crucially, not the voice of the poet—or at the very least is not necessarily his voice. “For Pound and Eliot,” Ellmann notes, “poetry becomes the workshop of the self, where personal identity is both constructed and dismantled” (ix). This juggling of identity/identities is crucial to the form and the content of Modernist poetry.11

While a number of Eliot’s poems—e.g., “Gerontion” and the Sweeney poems—make use of personas, “Prufrock” exemplifies the layers that use of personae can take. On the most general level, the poet has created a specific persona, J. Alfred Prufrock, to serve as narrator and subject for the entire poem. Everything is seen through his eyes and narrated through his voice. In this Eliot is not doing anything exceptionally unusual; one thinks of the various dialectical voices of Thomas Hardy’s lyric poems or the dramatic monologues of Robert Browning, who gives voice to artists, bishops, and dukes. Eliot,

11 Miller’s argument (103-04) that Eliot's interest in “masks” comes from Havelock Ellis’s reference to the “mask” of the homosexual is interesting if ultimately unconvincing.
however, takes the study of masks beyond this first step of creating a narrative title character; this character, in the wandering internal dialogue that comprises the poem, returns often to the theme of masks in his own (fictional) life: the persona ponders personae.

The most explicit recognition of this form of Prufrock’s internal fragmentation is this piece of self-advice: “There will be time, there will be time / To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet” (26-27). Each encounter with another person requires the use of another face, another mask, and the poet stresses this necessity with the barrage of images for the title character himself. Prufrock is (or is associated with) a variety of disparate characters: he is, to be sure, an indecisive would-be suitor (45-48), a tongue-tied lover (“It is impossible to say just what I mean!” 104), a detached flaneur (15-22), a self-conscious target of scorn (40-44), and an old fuddy-duddy (120-21). But he is also a mild social critic (“In the room the women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo,” 13-14), a poor and morally empty street person (4-9), an actor (27), a murderer and creator (28), a wistful voyeur (124-28). He is a crab (73-74), a bug pinned against the wall (57-58), but he is also Guido da Montefeltro (epi.), John the Baptist (“Though I have seen my head [grown slightly bald] brought in upon a platter,” 82), Lazarus (94-95), Polonius but not Hamlet (111-17), a Fool (119). Yet despite—or because of—the immense fragmentation of his self, Prufrock is unable to fully become any of these individual parts of himself and ultimately perishes.

Where “Prufrock” gives a sense of the fragmented identity of a single individual as told through his internal monologue, *The Waste Land* uses a multiplicity of narrative
voices to create a sense of personal fragmentation. “Its cast of characters,” Brooker writes:

can be seen as fragments of a whole population, but they can also be seen as unique, isolated persons. The reading process has instructed us in how to see them, and the primary instruction is that we are not to see them in any single way available to us. They are at once parts of a whole and wholes in themselves. (Reading 206)

Explicit narrators in the poem include (at least) Marie Larisch (8-18), the fortune-teller Madame Sosostris (43-59), the Dante-like questioner of Stetson (69-76), an unnamed woman possibly to be identified with Procrne/Philomela (111-34), Lil’s friend (139-70), the sailor associated with Shakespeare’s Prince Ferdinand (187-202), Tiresias (215-56), a woman associated with La Pia (292-305), and a disciple of Jesus on the road to Emmaus (359-76); and this is to say nothing of the possible implied narrators, such as the Buddha (308), Augustine (307), Ophelia (172), Ugolino (411-16), Eliot himself (182), and even God (20). As Ellmann explains, “The disembodied ‘I’ glides in and out of stolen texts, as if the speaking subject were merely the quotation of its antecedents. Indeed, this subject is the victim of a general collapse of boundaries” (92). The Waste Land has no single, individual narrator; rather, it has a single composite narrator made up of at least a dozen different voices working sometimes in melody, sometimes in subtle harmony or even cacophony, with each other, a Prufrockesque narrator who has prepared a number of faces to meet the faces he will meet.

This collective “I” of the poem, young and old, rich and poor, moral and dissolute, male and female, emerges in the final lines (400-34). The framing device here comes from a scene in the Upanishads (cf. Eliot’s note to line 400); Prajapati gives a single syllable of instruction, “DA,” to gods, men, and demons, and each group interprets
it in a different way: datta (“give”), dayadhvam (“sympathize”), damyata (“control”).

The narrative “I” empathizes with a “friend” (yet another aspect of himself?):

…what have we given?...
The awful daring of a moment’s surrender
Which an age of prudence can never retract
By this, and this only, we have existed (401-406)

The speaker then notes:

…I have heard the key
Turn in the door once and turn once only
We think of the key… (412-14)

Finally, in the last eleven lines the “we” shrinks back to—or is subsumed in—the individual but collective “I,” perhaps to be identified at least partially with the recurrent character of the sailor/Fisher King:

I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
Shall I at least set my lands in order? (423-25)

In the final lines of the poem, an “I” speaks three more times. This happens twice in the form of quotations, first from the Pervigilium Veneris: “Quando fiam ceu chelidon…” (“When shall I become like the swallow…” 428); subsequently comes a line from The Spanish Tragedy, “Why then Ile fit you” (431). The last time a narrator appears explicitly (or at least with an explicit pronoun) is one of the best known and most important lines of the poem: “These fragments I have shored against my ruins” (430). It is tempting to assign this final “I,” at least partially, to the poet himself—after 430 lines of dense, difficult poetry, after numerous characters, themes, and allusions, after an extended consideration of the past and present state(s) of Europe as well as the inner state of the modern individual, the poet proclaims the poem to be a collection of fragments—of society, of literature, of the self—that serve the purpose of self-preservation.
Pound’s use of personae is less extensive than Eliot’s, though in the ways he uses them *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* is similar to “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” and in the *Cantos* to *The Waste Land*. Many of his shorter early poems take the form of lyric monologues, either by his own choice or because of the nature of his translation/adaptation. “The Seafarer,” for example, reproduces the first-person narrative of the Anglo-Saxon original, though Pound, in choosing to translate it, removes it a further step from the original “I” and thus creates a persona; similar are his translations from Chinese such as “Song of the Bowmen of Shu,” “Poem by the Bridge at Ten-Shin,” and “The River-Merchant’s Wife: A Letter.” In the various sections of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, Pound creates and utilizes two specific personae as narrators and protagonists. The first is perhaps the most intriguing: identified simply as “E.P.,” he is obviously meant as a partial alter ego for Pound himself, though how partial is unclear, and the unclarity was certainly intentional on the part of the poet. The character shares some of Pound’s characteristics: born in “a half savage country” (6), a lover of Flaubert (13) and classicism (33-40) and a hater of “usury” (78). Pound also presents short sketches of several literary figures—some composite or obvious stand-ins—such as Monsieur Verog (“Siena me fe'; disfecemi Maremma,” 4), Brennbaum, and Mr. Nixon. While some of these function more as character sketches (not unlike the earlier “Portrait d’une Femme”), Pound occasionally has the characters themselves speak, creating secondary personas in the narrative about E.P. So for example his Mr. Nixon advises:

“I never mentioned a man but with the view
“Of selling my own works.
“The tip’s a good one, as for literature
“It gives no man a sinecure.

“And no one knows, at sight, a masterpiece.
“And give up verse, my boy,
“There’s nothing in it.” (14-20)

For Pound these figures allow him to present examples of the sorts of contemporary people and ideas that he found disturbing. For the most part he creates them primarily to respond against them rather than as direct mouthpieces for his own ideas. In the latter part of the poem, from *Mauberley* onward, the main character shifts from E.P. to the eponymous Hugh Selwyn Mauberley. The new persona is less obviously an analogue to Pound, though he is presented as a contemporary poet bewildered and troubled by his social milieu, and through him Pound is able to explore his own frustrations with the modern world and its literary establishment.

The narrative personas Pound adopts in the *Cantos* follow a pattern similar to that of *The Waste Land*, though as a much more extended work, both in terms of length and in terms of the time spent its composition, it tends to assign personas more distinctly and more extensively. The entire series begins with a persona as well-known to (and well-used by) Dante and Petrarch as to the Modernists: Ulysses. In Canto I, Pound presents a free translation of Book XI of the *Odyssey*, which includes Odysseus’s descent to the underworld and his conversations with the various shades he meets there. It is an appropriate beginning for a young poet who was fascinated with the Classics, with literary translation, and with Dante. However Pound originally conceived of the piece, once it became the first in his ever-lengthening series of Cantos, it took on an important function as an introduction to the entire collection; as Odysseus questioned the spirits of the departed, so Pound would choose a number of historical figures and take them up as personae for many of his own literary and political ideas.
In Canto II we are immediately introduced to Pound’s theme of responding to and grappling with the poetic past as well as to a new poetic persona:

> Hang it all, Robert Browning,
> There can be but the one “Sordello.”
> But Sordello, and my Sordello? (1-3)

Pound’s brief subsequent examination of different Sordellos—the historical troubadour, the subject of Browning’s poem, Pound’s own interpretation of the figure—indicates his interest in getting behind a character’s *persona*, not necessarily to unmask the “real” version but to use the mask for his own poetic purposes. In the next few Cantos Pound plays extensively with the various “I”s of the poem, including speakers such as El Cid (III), Ovid (IV, VII), Eleanor of Aquitaine (VII), and, throughout, Pound himself (though distinguishing precisely which “I”s are the poet is an appropriately thorny issue).

Cantos VIII-XI, called the “Malatesta Cantos,” take their informal name from the dominant figure: Sigismondo Malatesta, the Lord of Rimini (1417-68). Pound’s use of Malatesta hovers half-way between a character and a persona. An authorial voice provides occasional linking narrative for disparate parts rather than the Renaissance prince functioning as narrator. On the other hand, Pound relies heavily on Malatesta’s (and his contemporaries’) voice, often in the poet’s conversational language, such as the letter to Giovanni de’ Medici in Canto VIII, sometimes directly in the Italian or Latin of Pound’s historical sources. Similarly, in Canto XIII the character of Kung (Confucius) is presented narratively, but most of the space of the canto is dedicated to Kung’s own words (as determined, naturally, by Pound).

In Cantos XIV and XV Pound creates a composite narrator made up of himself and Dante. “Io venni in luogo d’ogni luce muto,” begins Canto XIV, and while the
speaker then switches to English for most of the subsequent two cantos, he clearly sees himself as a Dante figure, moving about the Hell of literary and social life peopled by figures both past and present. Their numbers include those who disliked “colloquial language,” politicians, liars, “slum-owners,” “pandars,” while their tortures mirror those of the Inferno and the Purgatorio, “[p]rofiteers drinking blood sweetened with shit” and “cowardly inciters to violence… / eaten by weevils” (XV). The identification with Dante to create a speaking voice not only gives the standard advantages of literary allusions but also imbues the speaker with the poetic/prophetic auctoritas of Dante. Like the great Florentine, the poet-as-pilgrim in XIV and XV can speak authoritatively of what he has seen.

Schwarz (36) makes note of what can be a useful lens for examining the overall effect of the Modernist use of multiple personas within the same work. In his discussion of the psychological concept of “condensation,” he quotes Horowitz’s Image Formation and Cognition:

> Condensation is the compression of several latent meanings into a single manifest image. The simplest form of condensation is omission of some ideational elements and allowing a part to stand for the whole. Usually, however, condensation includes an active process in which meanings fuse and form a composite. For example, the image of a face may be a composite, in which the eyes are derived from one person, the hair from another, and the overall facial expression from still a third. Or, in another common type of condensation, ideas related to several persons can be relegated to a single person. (87)

The idea of the condensation of persona is valuable because it allows for the fact that Modernist personas tend to be layered rather than sequential. At the beginning of The Waste Land, for example, Marie Larisch does not lead into or “become” Madame Sosostris in any meaningful way; rather, the individual personas are presented as
important parts by themselves, and it is left to the reader to then create composites based on similarities of theme and imagery. So we can create from the disparate narrators several meta-personas, such as the way the one-eyed merchant, Mr. Eugenides, Phlebas the Phoenician, and the Fisher King can combine (cf. Eliot’s own note on line 218). These meta-personas allow the poets to express a number of ideas, with all of which they may have varying degrees of agreement, without imposing the authorial voice. The Modernist mask is a work of depersonalization and distance, often crafted with the voices of the literary past, that works to evoke genuine-seeming emotional responses while creating a sense of objectivity.

“Uncertainty,” writes Louis Menand, “is the modernist’s literary capital; he cannot appear to have come by it cheaply, but he cannot do without it. This will seem a charge of dissimulation only if we assume adherence to the standard of sincerity to be unproblematic” (49). In their struggles with communication and solitude, in their examination of the mutable and uncertain nature of the human psyche, and with their extensive recourse to poetic masks, Eliot and Pound showed the value of uncertainty in the examination of the divided self, and if they found the standard of sincerity problematic, it did not negatively affect their poetry any more than Petrarch’s “contrary winds” and repeated oxymora had done centuries earlier.
CHAPTER 7:

THE POETICS OF FRAGMENTATION

7.1 Petrarchan Modernity and Early Modernism

If asked, T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, so willing to discuss the importance of the literary influences they felt the most, would likely have had little—and little good—to say about Petrarch. As seen in Chapter 4.3, neither poet considered him an important predecessor. In his essay “Arnaut Daniel,” Pound expounds on the virtues of Provençal lyric poetry, then adds, “By the time of Petrarch the analysis had come to an end, and only the vague decorations were left” (Make It New 50), a criticism that he explains in more detail in the subsequent “Cavalcanti:”

The difference between Guido and Petrarch is not a mere difference in degree, it is a difference in kind….Leave all question of any art save poetry. In that art the gulf between Petrarch’s capacity and Guido’s is the great gulf, not of degree, but of kind….In Petrarch it is ornament, the prettiest ornament he could find, but not an irreplaceable ornament, or one that he couldn't have used just about as well somewhere else. In fact he very often does use it, and them, somewhere, and nearly everywhere, else, all over the place. (ibid. 351)

For an artist who demanded precision, the criticism that a poet used mere ornamentation and, worse still, used it all over the place, was a damning one and helps explain why explicit references to Petrarch are almost completely absent in the Modernist oeuvre.

Eliot and Pound helped institute and then supported a schema of dual European poetic progression: on the one side the line of descent reached from the troubadours and
the *stilnovisti* to Dante, Donne and the Metaphysicals, the French Symbolists, and then to the Modernists themselves. Set apart from that was a subjective lyric tradition pioneered by Petrarch and his Renaissance imitators and peopled with writers such as Keats, Leopardi, and the Georgians. To a large extent this came about because of the Modernists’ desire to create a line of descent that included their favorite poets and extended to themselves, to create a tradition and locate themselves within it. To a certain extent, it was also a result of their misreading, possibly willful, of Petrarch’s poetry and their subsequent dismissal of it. As Montale explains, they

> imported modern poetry into America, while remaining extraneous to that poetry of Virgilian and Petrarchan origin which thanks to Leopardi and Baudelaire is still the core of the European lyric. Perhaps they misunderstood this tradition, which for them signified Swinburne whom they detested. (133-34)

Petrarch had no place in their literary world view because what they thought Petrarch represented had no place there, and what he represented grew out of their genuine personal evaluations of his poetry but also from their subsequent process of shutting the door on him once they had determined what he signified. He became less a poet and more a reference point, one to distance themselves from even as they tried to keep others, notably Dante, close by. In psychological terms, one can’t help but see at work here a version of reaction formation, in which Eliot and Pound feel so much anxiety that they may, in fact, have a certain literary debt to Petrarch that they overcompensate with either aggressive criticism or passive aggressive silence.

Yet several important factors link them with Petrarch, who has famously been called “the first modern man” since at least the time of Henri de Nolhac; for most who use it, the term seems to stress the psychological and interior preoccupations of his
poetry. Pound and Eliot were two of the foremost Modernist poets, a term that officially appears as early as Graves’ and Riding’s 1927 study but which is certainly used earlier (Pound’s famous remark that the young Eliot had “modernized himself” is a useful example). Different generations are modern in different ways (or, if Latour is correct, have never been modern in different ways), but there is an important link between the “modernity” of Petrarch and that of the Anglo-British Modernists. That link consists of the poetics of fragmentation that characterizes their writings.

The first point of contact between these poets is formal, and while the similarity is not the most prominent one, it is still notable. Pound and Eliot, for all their experimentations with free verse, fragmented narrative, and poetic objectivity, started their careers deeply rooted in the lyrical tradition and never completely left it behind. While they traced this tradition back to Cavalcanti and Dante, it was Petrarch who served as the principal vehicle for the diffusion of his predecessors’ lyric forms. Eliot’s early poetry (1907-10) published in *The Harvard Advocate* closely follows traditional lyric models; all of the poems have regular stanzas, meters, and rhyme schemes, and there is even a Shakespearean sonnet (“On a Portrait”) as well as a Petrarchan one (“Nocturne”). His first great poem, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” begins to eschew—or at least challenge—traditional forms, yet it still retains a lyrical sense of rhyme and rhythm; it is a “song” that uses “rime, profuse and haphazard, yet melodic” (Brady 13). Brady’s study of Eliot’s lyricism suggests that the lyric qualities of Eliot’s verse were in fact a necessary companion to his intellectualized approach:

In a century when poetry has become highly cerebral, and the sound-structures which convey the meaning of that poetry consequently more complex, it is significant that one of the most overtly intellectual poets of
the age would turn to the most uncerebral form in literary history to find body for his ideas. Perhaps it is the only way. (100)

Even *The Waste Land*, that sprawling collection of fragmentated thoughts and images, there are extended passages in traditional lyric forms, such as the episode of the typist and clerk (224-56), which is recounted in alternately rhyming lines (ABAB) of iambic pentameter.

Pound’s early poetry was also strongly grounded in the lyric tradition. His earliest collections of poetry, *A Lume Spento* (1908) and *Personae* (1909), prominently feature traditional forms, even if his rhymes are sometimes already Pound-like in their idiosyncrasy (e.g. “mesmerizer/early riser” and “swadelin’s/Odd’s bodykins” in “Mesmerism,” 1-4), while “idyls,” “villonauds,” and “songs” are all present. Rhyming quatrains form the bulk of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920). And if Pound did not always follow regular, established norms of meter and rhyme, he still paid close attention to matters of form, which were not infrequently informed by traditional or even explicitly Petrarchan ideas. W.B. Yeats visited Pound and spoke with him about the conception and composition of the *Cantos*: “He has shown me upon the wall a photograph of a Cosimo Tura decoration in three compartments, in the upper the *Triumph of Love* and the *Triumph of Chastity*, in the middle Zodiacal signs, and in the lower certain events in Cosimo Tura’s day” (5).

One of the abiding formal correspondences between Petrarch’s vernacular poems and Modernist poetry is the concept of the collection: a longer work created by bringing together, recollecting, smaller scattered fragments. In *The Origins of Modernism*, Smith explains the centrality of this idea:
...one of the major achievements of Modernism was to bring the
dialogical mode into the ambit of poetry—not by transforming the epic or
by writing novels in verse, but by creating a new form, a semi-narrative
sequence composed of disjunctive episodes, working by the accretion of
fragmented lyric moments which gesture towards a narrative cohesion
never realised, perpetually deferred to some moment beyond the poem.
*The Waste Land*, with its absent centre in the heart of the light, the silence,
is the epitome of this; but sequences like “Meditations in Time of Civil
War”, *Hugh Selwyn Mauberly, Homage to Sextius Propertius*…all belong
to the same mode. (59-60)

As we have seen, however, the Modernists did not “create” this new form but rather
adapted and re-worked an existing form of which Petrarch was a central example and the
primary progenitor. Indeed, what is the *Canzoniere* if not “a semi-narrative sequence
composed of disjunctive episodes” in which the constituent parts, poems written
individually for specific occasions, are assembled into a new, non-chronological
sequence that gives them a non-explicit but recognizable overarching narrative quality?
In this sense, the Modernists’ “major achievement” was not to create this “new form” *ex
nihilo* but to adapt it to their own poetic preferences and aesthetic sensibilities. Their
linguistic, literary, and narrative pieces were more fragmented than the full poems that
made up Petrarch’s collection, and consequently their “move towards a narrative
cohesion,” as Smith puts it, is even less precise than Petrarch’s. But if there is silence and
uncertainty in Eliot’s and Pound’s “absent centre,” we should also remember that at the
heart of Petrarch’s narrative is a sense of loss and sorrow that religious devotion—his
assigned solution—could never completely assuage. The Italian may come closer, but
even in his works a narrative cohesion is never fully recognized.

Closely related to issues of form is that of allusion, another vitally important
aspect of the poetics of Petrarch, Eliot, and Pound and of their shared modernity. The
modern, indeed, can only be defined in terms of opposition to a recognized and mutually
184
agreed upon pre-modern (or “ancient”). Somewhat ironically, this focus on modernity, on what is contemporary and new, thus requires a concomitant interest in and attention to the past. “Most modernists,” Brooker notes, “seemed obsessed with the idea that the retrieval of antiquity begun at the dawn of the modern era needs to be resumed and completed. Most insisted that going forward involves going back, that securing the future means redeeming the past” (Dialectic 2). The “dawn of the modern era” that she refers to is the humanist tradition, kick-started by Petrarch, the famous stander between two worlds who discovered the problem that he would bequeath to the generations that followed him: the of problem how to write with integrity under the shadow of a prestigious cultural alternative. To be a humanist after Petrarch was not simply to be an archaeologist but to feel an imitative/emulative pressure from a lost source. (Greene 30)

Both Petrarch and Eliot and Pound, as literary archaeologists and creators, navigated the difficulties of influence and expressed the paired love of tradition/desire for novelty through literary allusion.

Allusion and quotation form the basis for the intertextuality that informs Petrarchan and Modernist poetics. As discussed in Chapter 4.3, Pound’s dictum “Make it new” combines novelty with tradition; in order to be renewed, “it” must already exist. In Genette’s “palimpsestuous” approach to reading and intertextuality, he explains:

Let me simply say that the art of ‘making new things out of old’ has the merit, at least, of generating more complex and more savory objects than those that are ‘made on purpose’; a new function is superimposed upon and interwoven with an older structure, and the dissonance between these two concurrent elements imparts its flavor to the resulting whole. (398)

All three of our authors took advantage of this function. Petrarch combined the significant weight of classical tradition—Virgil, Ovid, and Cicero in particular—and the
more recent influence of Italian vernacular poetry—chiefly Dante—with his own philosophical interests and creative genius. Eliot and Pound, having more to draw from, drew even more widely, going back like Petrarch to the Classics (Ovid and Sappho were two favorites) and continuing on, always with careful discrimination, to the works of their immediate predecessors and even their contemporaries. The resulting complexity not only helped situate the poets in the literary tradition, it added depth to their works, a tension (Genette’s “dissonance”) of creativity; the interweaving of old and new strengthened the fabric of their works in addition to giving it a layered profundity.

The connection between past and present that is created literarily through allusion contributes to a broader move that links Petrarchan and Modernist poetics: the persistence of memory. While literary allusion serves as the means of identifying and correlating cultural collective memories, the poetics of fragmentation also makes use of a more local, personal type of memory in which the lyric “I” engages in a form of self-creation by evoking the personal past and contrasting it with the present. The various pasts tend to be positive—sometimes idyllic, sometimes simply somewhat pleasant—standing in contrast to the darker emotional tones of the present and the predicted future. The poets bring forth a lyric self in the spaces created by these contrasts. Petrarch gives this self a fuller characterization and consequently one that is, rightly or wrongly, more completely identified with the poet himself. In Santagata’s words:


...[I]l canzoniere espunge la Storia dai suoi confini, ma nello stesso tempo costruisce una sua storia interna che coincide con la costruzione del personaggio. E tutto ciò senza rompere il cerchio, senza uscire dal territorio: la storia e il personaggio si costruiscono dall’interno grazie all’introduzione di un tempo soggettivo e (quindi) artificiale, il tempo della memoria....Il Canzoniere non è trascritto dal “libro della memoria” perché è esso stesso quel libro. (Dal sonetto 166)
Petrarchan memory includes recollection but also goes a step beyond the retelling of experiences, as in the *Vita nuova*, and makes the assemblage of images into a kind of functioning poetic memory that serves as creator/creation of the lyric “I.” Particular moments, past and present, are evoked in individual poems and by the over-arching collection of multiple ones. Idea, image, and text all combine in the poems of the *Canzoniere* to form the memory of Petrarch-as-poet.

For the Modernists, the allusive fragments of the literary past are not merely an important part of present personal identity but an integral one. On a purely verbal level, the “modern” individual is defined in terms of similarities and differences between the past and the present, and Eliot’s and Pound’s poetics sometimes played with one of those points of comparison, social or personal, and sometimes conflated the two, fully comfortable seeing memory (and identity) in terms of individuality as well as of the collective literary past. In both cases, a fulminating moment of particular meaning or strong emotion—love, loss, wit, novelty—can revisit in its fragmented form the individual mind. In their more subtle turns, moments that may have originally seemed little streams may only in retrospect be recognized as Rubicons, as more information becomes available and they accrue further meaning. It is precisely memory “that allows these apparently undistinguished moments to become ‘the sudden illumination’” (Sicari 149).

In “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” Eliot writes:

> The poet’s mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together….But the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show. (155,153)
We may find the idea of a “receptacle” too passive and its attendant image of memory too mechanical, but Eliot still provides a useful metaphor for his approach to memory, both personal and collective: individual pieces or “particles,” with or without portentous inherent meaning, gather in the poet’s mind, ready to be refashioned. I have specifically brought together two separate quotations from the essay both to pay homage to its principles in reversing the order—the earlier quotation is here given second—and to highlight the multiple and, I suggest, convergent meanings of “present.” The gathered parts ready to form a new compound are present in the mind, but they are also in the present; indeed, they form the present, they create it, as the present (like the modern) can only be ascertained through its relationship to a remembered past. Brooker explains the relationship between the fragments of the literary past, the fragments of the personal past, and the role of memory in the creation of the poetic present:

The poet assumes readers who are willing to take the fragments on the surface of his poem and re-collect them (both remember where they came from and gather them up again). Each reader of The Waste Land will construct a variant of Frazer’s monomyth, a variant that will be refined and changed with each reading. In this process of re-collection and re-construction, the reader becomes Eliot’s co-poet, and with Eliot, will say, “These fragments I have shored against my ruins.” (Dialectic 121)

As with Petrarch, memory is assembled from pieces of the past to create and define a meaningful present consciousness. For Eliot and Pound, however, that consciousness goes beyond the collected identity of a single lyric narrator to hint at the prototypical modern man, a reader who will follow the recollective/reconstructive processes of Modernist poetry, a co-poet who shores his own fragments against his own ruins.

By themselves, memories are not sufficient to create a lyric self (or selves), which requires a face, a persona. The use of masks, of multiple personas through which the poet
speaks and by which he constructs the various facets of his poetic identity, characterizes the poetics of Petrarch, Pound, and Eliot. In their shared poetics of fragmentation, *persona* work in several ways. First, they give the poet a safe space that comes from the objectivity of a mask that removes him from the immediacy of his literary pronouncements; they give him distance. Second, they allow the poet to stress a particular thought, emotion, or insight by pronouncing it through a mask specifically chosen for communicating that item, allowing him to tailor his speaker to fit his message. As McDonald writes of Pound, “Whether through the imitation of an admired poet’s style, through translation, or through prosopopoedia, to act as prophet, to be spoken through, is to be merged with the other. Masking is akin to metamorphosis” (19). Once again, with Petrarch the various masks typically serve to stress (or hide) particular aspects of the single created lyric speaker, while for the Modernists the various personae exist side-by-side, their multiplicity suggesting the impossibility of a perfectly unified self, poetic or otherwise.

Travers, however, goes too far when he suggests that Modernism took from Corbiere and LaForgue “the use of multiple personae, which allowed the poet to adopt masks and other guises in his work [and] a corresponding impersonality, which is the result of the abolition of the lyrical subject…” (137). Modernist personae are not the abolition from the lyrical subject but a multiplication of it. Just as anti-Petrarchanism is a form of Petrarchanism, so the Modernist contemporaneous assembly of multiple personae is a reaction to and a continuation of the use of multiple personae functioning as an expression of a single lyric “I,” a use largely introduced to the European lyric tradition in the *Rime Sparse*. Pound’s earliest work, much more obviously written in that tradition,
shows that fascination with personas: the poems “Masks” and “Histrion,” for example, and the 1909 collection titled simply Personae.

Finally, the dislocation of the poetic self into masks is a major part of the more general issue of psychological fragmentation that plays a critical role in the poetics of fragmentation. Again, Petrarch, Pound, and Eliot have approaches that both intersect and diverge. All of them were fascinated and troubled by the profound ruptures that occurred externally in the form of broad philosophical changes and personal physical movements or exiles, and internally in the form of traumatic personal experiences. Consequently, the images of liminality, of in-between states, of hovering between life and death (or being simultaneously dead and alive) occur often in their poetry. The chief difference lies in Petrarch’s more reconstructive approach; he believed that reintegration was at least theoretically possible, even if the perfect reassembly of the individual was unlikely. Still, it was worth trying. The Canzoniere serves as a poetic example of this effort, the Secretum as a religious one. Santagata, speaking more specifically about the latter work, nevertheless gives an important general insight into Petrarch’s understanding of an approach to internal personal fragmentation: “Il Secretum ci ha anche detto che persino l’anima può disintegrarsi in frammenti, tanto è vero che la conversione di Francesco consiste proprio nel raccoglierli, ricostituendo l’unità interiore” (Frammenti 108). Reintegration of religious and emotional aspects fueled Petrarch’s writing, the desire to become a whole Christian and a whole man. As both were necessary, he had to at least behave as if both were possible.

Pound and Eliot also felt the disintegrating pull of psychological forces, but sooner or later they despaired of the possibilities of reintegration. Pound’s late poetic
lament—“And I am not a demigod, / I cannot make it cohere.” (Cantos CXVI)—mirrors his own personal reflections later in life. At one point, “Pound apologized for the discontinuity of his thought, which he admitted could be compared to ‘an explosion in an art museum, you have to hunt around for the pieces’” (Tytell 326), and in a 1960 interview in Rome, he greeted Donald Hall with the simple phrase, “You—find me—in fragments” (ibid. 333). Perhaps this was to some extent a natural reaction to his own understanding of the “intellectual and emotional complex” that Korn describes as: “above all the formal manifestation of a psychological experience. It is the culmination, in Pound’s theory, of his old search for the Longinian sublime and its thunderbolt effect, it is the fragment which bursts suddenly upon the amazed perception” (83). Pound’s life and poetry were full of fragmenting thunderbolts bursting upon the imaginations of both the poet and his observers.

Eliot presented a generally more controlled affect than his friend, but even his internal world was marked by fragmentation and disjunction. “That's one way,” he remarked to the aforementioned Hall, “in which my mind does seem to have worked throughout the years poetically – doing things separately and then seeing the possibility of fusing them together, altering them, and making a kind of whole of them” (Hall 99). Brooker traces this search for lost unity to Eliot’s interest in Bradley’s philosophical ideas:

He believed that experience (knowledge) begins in unity, falls into fragments, and, of special importance for our study, he believed in the possibility of a recovery of unity, in the possibility of forming new wholes. In all of these areas and others as well, he provided Eliot with a philosophic statement of positions that were enormously useful for a poet living in a time of epistemological confusions. (Reading 39)
While such a broad interest cannot be traced to a single influence, and while I may be less sanguine about Eliot’s belief in the possibility of a full recovery of unity, at least in his early work—as we have seen, neither “Prufrock” nor *The Waste Land* offers particularly hopeful visions of such a recovery—Brooker’s exploration of the psychological nature of Eliot’s approaches is important. The observation that he was “living in a time of epistemological confusions” is particularly relevant. However autobiographical Eliot’s characters were (or weren’t), they were certainly influenced by the psychological forces at work in the poet’s cultural milieu, and the traumas and disjunctions that played out in it play out in them.

7.2 Disruption, Trauma, and Fragmentation

Thus far I have looked at Petrarch’s, Pound’s, and Eliot’s poetry and examined how the poetics of fragmentation inform each poet’s work. Here I will turn from the “how” to the “why” and offer some suggestions on what motivates the prominence of fragmentation in their works. Could those motivations be the same for such different poets? Eliot, for example, preached a strict detachment for the poet, famously describing poetry as “not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion” (“Tradition” 156), while Petrarch is known for giving voice to the feeling of the moment as well as writing about emotion recollected in tranquility. Their styles, topics, and purposes can be very different, but I suggest that there is a vital area of overlap—the poetics of fragmentation—and that this overlap is strongly influenced by the poets’ responses to major social changes, particularly in religion and literature, and by their personal experience and survival of both social and personal trauma.
The first notable similarity between the Early Modern period and the early Modernist era—between Europe in the 14th century and in the first few decades of the 20th—is the sense of disruption, a feeling of disillusionment with the status quo. Fourteenth-century peasant revolts in Flanders, France, England, and Italy indicate a quickly escalating social discontentment. This was, of course, exacerbated (or in some cases even caused) by the great plague of 1348, which eroded the old order by undermining the long-held sense of religious security; if the strict moral and social guidelines of the Church could not prevent unprecedented catastrophe, what was the point of the Church? As Larner writes, the Black Death was “not simply a factor in economic and social change. It was, for those who endured it, a profound human tragedy in which each individual from year to year was called upon to exercise his or her own courage and endurance” (265). There was a resultant lingering feeling of disenchantment with the existing power structures of religion and government, a disenchantment which is, for example, largely absent from Dante but which pervades the Decameron barely a generation later. The result of the plague on Petrarch and his poetry is undeniable. In Santagata’s words:

Petrarca concepì il progetto del Canzoniere sùbito dopo la peste del 1348, in un’epoca della sua vita segnata da lutti, da irrequietudine, da scontentezza del passato e incertezza del futuro. Ma quegli anni difficili furono, dal punto di vista letterario e culturale, particolarmente fecondi. (Frammenti 9)

This externally imposed reminder of mortality, of the limits of human power, shook Petrarch and his contemporaries, turned them sometimes further from and sometimes closer to religion, and gave them a powerful and lasting impetus to creative work.
For Pound and Eliot, the nascent social shifts from the Victorian Era to movements such as Symbolism and the Decadents exploded in the paradigm-changing cataclysm of World War I. The whole order of Europe shifted in a matter of a few years, and in England an entire generation was plunged into the lingering traumas of trench warfare and political upheaval. In these circumstances, poets produced works “full of deposed powers, in a Europe ravaged by a continental civil war turning to revolution, where all the icons of authority have been toppled” (Smith 126). With the icons of secular and spiritual authority toppled, or at least badly damaged, both Petrarch and the Modernists looked elsewhere for authority. Augustine, shaken by the fall of Rome and all it symbolized, had looked upward to an invisible city of the spirit; they looked outward (and backward) to the literary tradition to bolster them, and they looked inward to an examination of their own fragmented identities. In this vein, Brooker describes *The Waste Land*:

The poem’s central subject, then, is loss, displacement, deprivation. In a profound way, the loss it evokes is not just a twentieth-century urban condition. The poem’s references reveal that this sense of loss has been pervasive throughout history….Although the twentieth-century waste land is a place of intense awareness of disunity, it is only a recent version of a constantly recurring condition. Eliot’s nostalgia is for a community that he knows has not existed in history. (*Reading* 211)

Petrarch’s Europe was one of these times and places of extreme loss. Like the Modernists he had an “intense awareness” of the momentousness of his period and saw himself as a man standing between the ancient world of knowledge and a foreboding future world of intellectual darkness, looking forward and back at the same time (*Rerum Mem.* I.2). And with them he shared a melancholic longing for a real, if not factual, past. As “modern”
poets, they bemoaned their fractured societies even as they used them as fuel for their poetry. Pound gives voice to this sense of loss and displacement in the *Cantos*:

> the huntress in broken plaster keeps watch no longer
> tempora, tempora and as to mores
> by Babylonian wall (memorat Cheever)
> out of his bas relief, for that line
> we recall him
> and who’s dead, and who isn’t
> and will the world ever take up its course again?

Very confidentially I ask you: Will it? (LXXVI)

The external stresses brought about by the traumas of the Black Death and the Great War—among other, individual traumas—could not help but lead to internal fracture and division. Even if we accept conservative estimates, many of the cities and towns Petrarch had known in 1347 would have been reduced by half just a year later. The psychological impact of the Great War—with trench warfare and chemical weapons, with the dissolution and re-formation of Europe—is perhaps a bit more familiar if not necessarily more comprehensible. And while trying authoritatively to locate specific autobiographical references in particular poems or passages may well wander into the realms of the biographical fallacy, certainly the impact of disillusioned hopes and failed relationships, with their less visible but no less traumatic effects, informs the writings of our poets.

Trauma theory can shed some light on both cases. Although some trauma theorists might argue that trauma is a wholly post-modern phenomenon and therefore cannot be applied to pre-modern or Modernist writings, trauma theory can still help identify and explain some of the dynamics of the poetics of fragmentation. At the very
least, survivor guilt must have come into play for both men; “one’s bond with the dead, especially with dead intimates, may invest trauma with value and make its reliving a painful but necessary commemoration or memorial to which one remains dedicated or at least bound” (Lacapra 22-3). Rabaté, for example, sees in the character of Harry (from Eliot’s 1939 play *The Family Reunion*) “a survivor ‘wounded in a war of phantoms’ who will find peace only when he expiates a collective guilt and wanders in exile under the ‘judicial sun’ of the desert” (xiv).

The Freudian concept of working through trauma and of traumatic repetition is certainly an important point of contact with a poetics of fragmentation. Nicholls explains:

> Eliot’s evocation of April confusing memory and desire does therefore have an oblique relation to Freud’s account of trauma, since in each case it is the articulation of past and present together which promises release from a merely repetitive history and from a perpetual present lacking any hope of transformation. (253)

As we have seen, this is just one example (albeit a prominent one) of a common use of memory for Petrarch as well as the Modernists: the themes of memory and repetition combine as the poets, or at least their narrators, confront their sorrows and defeats in a serial, even cyclical way. In terms of psychological health, this is not good, as the repetition prevents actual acceptance and integration of the trauma; in artistic terms, it is a literary gold mine.

In a larger sense, the personal fragmentation resulting both directly and indirectly from the respective traumas affected the religious nature of the poets. “The hiddenness, death, or absence of a radically transcendent divinity or of absolute foundations makes of existence a fundamentally traumatic scene in which anxiety threatens to color, and perhaps confuse, all relations” (Lacapra 23). In the wake of the plague, the common
medieval worldview in which God’s hand was in all things must have started to become distinctly unsatisfactory, as it allowed for two broad conclusions—either the plague was a direct punishment from God or God had somehow lost control (or interest) in the affairs of men. A third conclusion, that the premise of the worldview itself was faulty, would have been if anything even more unsettling. Petrarch’s own struggles with religion certainly didn’t appear only in 1348, but the events of that year must have brought them into even greater focus; as a Christian he needed to make sense of the loss, and as a scholar he needed to do it in a way that would be acceptable to his intellectual and poetic sensibilities.

The *Trionfi* served as part of that answer. By assigning a narrative structure not only to the individual triumphs or processions but to the succession of the triumphs themselves—love to chastity to death to fame to time to eternity—he was able to create a narrative with progression and destination and therefore religious meaning. “Thus,” Barański writes, “when he absorbed the ‘fragmented’ lyric themes of his *Rime* into the carefully unitary structure of his epic…he was obviously underlining the *Trionfi*’s higher vision” (“Constraints” 74). He was able to collect the fragments of his religious life and, by assigning them a consecutive order, bring them back to some semblance of a whole in a way that the *Canzoniere* is not able to do. This greater attachment to order and to narrative comes, however, at a literary cost, as the poetry of the *Trionfi* never reaches the level of that found in the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*.

Eliot and Pound, moved by similar feelings of religious uncertainty, were less able to impose a meaning on them. Where the *Trionfi* are structured and plotted and the *Canzoniere* arranged by calendrical and other formal structures, the comparable “epics”
of the _Cantos_ and _The Waste Land_ are held together (at best) thematically rather than narratively. There are moments of hope, but they remain largely unfulfilling precisely because they do _not_ have a narrative; there is no sense of continuity, of progression, of validation through consummation. They remain mere moments, mere broken images. In their early works, our Modernists had the strength of belief to summon those fragmented sentiments but not to re-construct them.

In _The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry_, Thomas Greene writes:

> As individuals, we have to recreate our origins in our memories and imaginations. If we are to stay sane, we have to pattern images of our origins that simplify and distort them. But certain kinds of distortion, or excesses of distortion, turn out to be destructive. There has to be a healthy circular interplay between our patterning of our beginnings and our free action as we try to move out from them. The interplay is never free from the risk of a pathological turn. (19)

Several of the issues Greene raises here are pertinent to the idea of trauma in the poetics of fragmentation. We have examined the idea of the creation and recreation of memories by poets who, trying to stay sane, alter their memories or invest them with _ex post facto_ emotional or narrative significance. The “healthy circular interplay” of our poets includes the circumnavigating annual structure of Petrarch’s _Canzoniere_; Eliot’s mixing of memory and desire; Pound’s “Make it new;” and for all three, a deep and continuing appropriation of the historical and literary past in constructing a poetic present.

Collectively and individually experienced traumas may also have led at times to a pathological turn—one thinks of some of the later _Cantos_—but the distortions they caused (a kind of distortion related, perhaps, to Bloom’s misprision) were also fertile points of departure for poetry.
“Fragments,” sniffed Robert Adams, “do not constitute a recognized literary mode, nor often, for that matter, so much as an interesting accident” (13). This study has, I hoped, proven him wrong, both with regard to the literary importance of fragmentation and its level of interest. A critical part of the shared “modernness” of Petrarch, Pound, and Eliot lies in their use of a poetics of fragmentation. Petrarch has been called “the first modern man” so many times and with so many shades of meaning that the phrase may have lost some of its value. But if we accept him as such, part of his modernity must have consisted of his ability to look inward and examine the psychological self and see that part of that selfhood consists of innumerable fragments of emotion, memory, and thought. The *Canzoniere* exhibited and mourned the sense of loss that that fragmentation caused. Eliot and Pound, writing centuries later during the period of literary Modernism, felt and noted a similar sense of fragmentation in their early works, and if their treatments were less neatly synthesized than Petrarch’s, their self-expression and analyses were no less valuable. Whatever their literary differences, the first modern man and the two most prominent Modernist poets shared an understanding of the fragmentation of the psychological, emotional, and intellectual self, and all three formed from that understanding works of immense value that continue to influence the Western literary tradition.

7.3 The *Canzoniere*, “Prufrock,” and *The Waste Land*

A central argument of this study is that Petrarch’s, Pound’s, and Eliot’s shared sense of fragmentation was a result of similar poetic interests and psychological reactions to trauma rather than a conscious decision by the later poets to draw upon and appropriate Petrarch or, indeed, anything explicitly Petrarchan. Because of this, I have focused on
examining, describing, and comparing their approaches to literary fragmentation rather than trying to prove and catalogue direct links between passages of Petrarch’s and Eliot’s or Pound’s poetry. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to note some of the more prominent direct correlations between the poems of these very different writers. To this end, I will examine and compare the lyric poems of Petrarch’s Canzoniere and Eliot’s two early masterpieces, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” and The Waste Land.

As mentioned in Chapter 5.1, the overall structure of “Prufrock” mirrors that of the canzone RVF 126, mixing the time periods of its stanzas: present, future, past, and then back to the present. But the parallels are most striking in several specific categories of imagery that connect Petrarch’s narrator with Eliot’s; Prufrock, in many ways, is an essentially Petrarchan character. To begin with, he lives in his own mind, constantly questioning himself. If, as I have suggested, the opening “you and I” of the poem indicates an internal dialogue in which Prufrock essentially holds discourse with himself, he is following an expositional pattern used by Petrarch in poems such as RVF 150 (“Che fai, alma?” 1), 204-205 (“Anima…che parli e scrivi e pensi,” 204.1-2) and 273 (“anima sconsolata,” 3) in which the narrator addresses his own soul. A similar move occurs in RVF 264, a canzone in which the centrality of “thinking” (“I’ vo pensando,” 1) is underscored by the way the speaker personifies individual thoughts, treating them as if they were interlocutors: “L’un penser parla co la mente, et dice…. // Da l’altra parte un pensier dolce et agro,” (“One thought speaks to my mind and says…. // On the other side a sweet and bitter thought,” 19, 54). The canzone’s role as the initial poem of the second part of the Canzoniere, with its greater focus on Laura’s absence, is particularly

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12 Another notable similarity is found in the opening line of the first poem of the Canzoniere, though there Petrarch is addressing a more concrete “you”—the readers of his collected works.
appropriate in relation to “Prufrock,” another work that centers on the ultimate inability to experience and enjoy a romantic relationship.

Another defining characteristic of Prufrock, his inability to express himself, his struggle with ineffability, is shared by Petrarch’s narrator. “And should I then presume? / And how should I begin?” Prufrock asks (68-69), then subsequently concludes, “It is impossible to say just what I mean!” (104). Petrarch’s lyric speaker makes similar comments: he can’t recount what he feels (“I’ nol posso ridir,” 198.12) and describes his state as being one who has no tongue but shouts (134.9). Neither his own skill nor his tongue is capable of equaling the truth (221.14). Prufrock wishes for an external device that could show and explain his inner desires (“But as if a magic lantern the nerves in patterns on the screen,” 105); Petrarch laments a similar inability to express his thoughts, so clear in his own heart, in a direct and meaningful way through language (95.1-2). In RVF 125, he gives this frustration a longer treatment:

Come fanciul ch’ a pena
volge la lingua et snoda,
che dir non sa ma ’l più tacer gli è noia
cosi ’l desir mi mena
a dire, et vo’ che m’oda
la dolce mia nemica anzi ch’io moia.

Just as a child with difficulty
moves and untangles his tongue,
who doesn’t know how to speak but can’t stand to remain silent
so desire leads me
to speak, and I wish that
my sweet enemy hear me before I die. (40-45)

Here Petrarch, like Prufrock, feels the powerlessness of his inability to communicate so strongly that he experiences it as a kind of infantilization. He is reduced to a child-like state of frustration, moved by desire but held back by inability (cf. the discussion of
“Gerontion” in Chapter 6.1). His desperate wish to speak is ultimately unsuccessful, and in the final line he commands the poem not to fly to his mistress but to stay where it is.

One thing that makes communication especially difficult is that Prufrock and Petrarch both seem to view women as Other, as beings not quite like them and therefore nearly impossible to understand, much less address. Petrarch, anticipating Verdi by five centuries, shares his misogynistic thoughts:

\begin{verbatim}
  femina è cosa mobil per natura,  
ond’ io so ben ch’ un amoroso stato  
in cor di donna picciol tempo dura.

  woman is a changeable thing by nature,  
  and so I know that a loving state  
  lasts but a little time in a woman’s heart. (183.12-14)
\end{verbatim}

He shows the same frustration in \textit{RVF} 112, in which he spends an entire quatrain obsessing over her varied and contradictory characteristics: humble and proud, harsh and gentle, disdainful and fierce. Prufrock shows a similar inability to understand women, despite his apparent desire to do so: he imagines how they will criticize him (41, 44); he worries about them judging his presumption (69); and he observes their lack of profundity (35-36). Ultimately he is held back from expressing his feelings because of his own fear (86), a fear that is based in part on his concern that he cannot understand women and that they will not understand him (109-110).

\textit{RVF} 112 contains another important image that connects Petrarch and “Prufrock.” “[Q]ui co’ begli occhi mi trafisse il core,” he writes: “Here she transfixed my heart with her beautiful eyes” (11). In 313 he takes up the same image: “Passato è ’l viso sì leggiadro et santo, / ma passando i dolci occhi al cor m’è fissi” (“That delightful and holy face has passed, / but in passing its sweet eyes have pierced my heart,” 5-6). In both
cases, Petrarch describes his beloved’s eyes as penetrating or, more literally, “fixing” (“trafisse,” “fissi”) the poet’s heart. Prufrock experiences something similar and expresses it with the same language: “The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase” (56). While Eliot extends the metaphor to give it a verbal aspect, it is still the same basic image—a woman’s eyes transfixed the speaker—and diction that Petrarch had employed.

In the latter half of “Prufrock,” the narrator considers another area in which he considers himself deficient: his age. While Prufrock doesn’t seem very old—a sense perhaps bolstered by the fact that the poet himself was in his early twenties when he wrote the poem—he thinks of himself as an old man, less in years, perhaps, than in attitude and energy. He worries (41) about his hair growing thin (a concern, it must be admitted, not unique to old men); he is frightened of death (84-86); he compares himself to the absurd old Polonius (112-19). Finally, near the end of the poem he gives an explicit statement of his fear in a simple, two-line stanza: “I grow old…I grow old… / I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled” (120-21). Petrarch shows a similar worry about impending old age. As mentioned in Chapter 6.2, he makes implicit comparisons between himself and Tithonus, whom he describes in both RVF 219 and 291 as being white-haired. This is a recurring theme for the apparently vain poet, who often uses graying hair as a symbol of advancing age: “From day to day,” he writes, “I go about with my face and hair changing” (194.1, and cf. 277.14 and 83.1).

Fittingly enough, it is near the end of the Canzoniere as a whole that the poet makes one of his most extensive self-examinations:

Dicemi spesso il mio fidato speglio,
l’animo stanca, et la cangiata scorza
et la schemata mia destrezza et forza:
“Non ti nasconder più, tu se’ pur veglio;”

My faithful mirror, my weary mind,
and my changed body, and my failing
quickness and strength often say to me:
“Don’t fool yourself, you’re an old man;” (361.1-4)

Whenever it was actually written, whether in maturity or middle age or later, the poem
expresses a discomfort (again, depending on the date, either fear or regret) with the
various indignities of advanced age: mind and body fail, while the energy and strength of
youth diminish. Its position near the end of the collection is certainly also meant to
indicate a lasting change in Petrarch’s life and character, especially given the subsequent
poem, which deals with his internal changes. In the end, though, even if the poem (or its
placement) is meant to have a positive, encouraging aspect, it is also a *memento mori*: as
he himself says in line 10, “It is not possible to exist more than once” (“ch’ esser non si
po più d’una volta”). Whatever benefits advancing age brings, it is still—and always—a
reminder that one is constantly a little closer to death.

A final image from “Prufrock” also links it to the *Canzoniere*. The poem closes
with these lines:

I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combining the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown. (124-131)
In this last scene, Eliot condenses Prufrock’s fear of women and his fear of living without them into the image of the mermaid, another liminal creature, and he stresses its similarity in this instance to the siren, as these mermaids are not only swimming but singing. In Prufrock’s lonely world, unfortunately, he cannot even force the moment to its crisis by listening to the siren’s song and falling under its spell; they are singing not to him but only to each other. Ultimately he can only hear their songs from a distance, near (but not communicating with) the “sea-girls wreathed with seaweed,” and when their songs are finally replaced by human voices that wake him, even their distantly felt spell is broken, and he drowns.

Petrarch uses similar imagery in a similar way. In \textit{RVF} 207, he bemoans, though does not fully repent of, having been led astray by the siren’s song of his beloved’s beauty:

\begin{quote}
…che devea torcer li occhi
dal troppo lume, et di sirene al suono
chiuder li orecchi…

…for it would have been right to turn my eyes
from so much light, and to the sound of the siren
close my ears…(207.81-83)
\end{quote}

Subsequently, in the sestet of the sonnet \textit{RVF} 281, the poet revisits the theme in more detail:

\begin{quote}
Or in forma di ninfa o d’altra diva
che del più chiaro fondo di Sorga esca
et pongasi a sedere in su la riva,
or l’ò veduto su per l’erba fresca
calcare i fior com’ una donna viva,
mostrando in vista che di me le ’incresca.

Now in the form of a nymph or other goddess
that emerges from the clearest depths of the Sorgue
and sits herself down on the riverbank,
\end{quote}
now I have seen her upon the fresh grass
walking upon flowers like a living woman,
her face showing that she is sorry for me. (281.9-14)

Petrarch deals with his grief for his lost love by recreating her in his mind, envisioning
her in the guise of a “nymph or other goddess.” While he does not explicitly call her a
siren, it is clear that she is a water deity, as he associates her closely with the waters of
the Sorgue. Surrounded by flowers (another common and powerful image and one that
will be discussed in more detail below with regard to *The Waste Land*) and grass as
Eliot’s mermaid is wreathed with seaweed, she is beautiful but distant. Like Prufrock, he
can only watch from afar; instead of touching or even communicating with her, he can
only read the memory of his own sorrows and regrets in her face.

The last step in my discussion of the Petrarchan narrator as a kind of fore-runner
for Prufrock is an examination of *RVF* 167-170. These four consecutive sonnets form a
sort of *avant la lettre* Prufrockian mini-cycle in which emotions and images later to be
used by Eliot to describe Prufrock occur in close proximity in Petrarch’s poems. The first
sonnet introduces the Prufrockian element as it continues the imagery of the mermaid or
siren (both *sirena* in Italian) discussed above. In describing the alluring but potentially
fatal call of his beloved’s voice, the narrator combines the image of the siren with that of
the Fates, saying:

cosi mi vivo, et cosi avolge et spiega
lo stame de la vita che m’è data
questa sola fra noi del ciel sirena.

So I live, and so she coils and unfurls
the thread of the life that has been given me,
this heavenly siren, unique among us. (12-14)
Once more, the siren/mermaid, like Eliot’s, appears to the speaker from a distance, and like Eliot’s sea-girls she carries with her the fate, the life or death, of her beholder. The overwhelmed Prufrock-like figure continues to speak in the subsequent poem, vacillating between the hope and the despair that Love brings:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{non so s’ il creda, et vivomi intra due:} \\
&\text{né si né no nel cor mi sona intero.} \\
&\text{In questa passa ’l tempo…}
\end{align*}
\]

I don’t know if I should believe him, and I exist between two: neither yes nor no sounds whole in my heart. And meanwhile time passes… (168.7-8)

The constantly self-questioning Prufrock follows this same general line of thought:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{And indeed there will be time…} \\
&\text{Time for you and time for me,} \\
&\text{And time yet for a hundred indecisions,} \\
&\text{And for a hundred visions and revisions (24, 31-32)}
\end{align*}
\]

Like Petrarch, Prufrock is overwhelmed by the contrary pressures in his life and seems doomed to immobility and inaction. Crippled by uncertainty, both are held fast by internal struggles even as time (and the lives around them) continues on. “For I am not the only one who is growing old,” Petrarch notes (12), as Prufrock sighs, “I grow old…I grow old…” (120), and when the Italian concludes, “I certainly fear the short period of life that still remains,” (14) Prufrock echoes, “I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker, / And in short, I was afraid” (85-86).

The Petrarchan version of Prufrock continues in RVF 169. “[A]d or ad ora a me stesso m’involo,” (3) the narrator says, “And now and now I distance myself from myself.” Prufrock shares a similar sense of self-alienation, reducing himself to deficient constituent parts (41, 44), measuring his life with coffee spoons (51), and indeed
prompting him to carry on an internal dialogue with himself in which he veers back and forth between “I” and “we.” The temporal aspect of Petrarch’s line (“and now and now”) joins with this concept of self-distancing to create one of the poem’s memorable couplets: “There will be time, there will be time / To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet” (26-27). Petrarch closes the sonnet with the poet’s appeal to the ultimate ineffability of his thoughts and feelings: “tanto gli ò a dir che ’ncominciari non oso” (“I have so much to say that I do not dare to begin,” 14). Prufrock shares both this sense of frustrated inability to speak (“It is impossible to say just what I mean!” 104) and the ultimate failure of his own daring (“And indeed there will be time / To wonder, ‘Do I dare?’ and, ‘Do I dare?’” 37-38) to initiate sharing his romantic thoughts (“And should I then presume? / And how should I begin?” 68-69). *RVF* 170 concludes the Prufrockian mini-cycle with the same themes:

Ond’ io non pote’ mai formar parola
ch’ altro che da me stesso fosse intesa,
cosi m’à fatto Amor tremante et fioco.
Et veggi’ or ben che caritate accesa
lega la lingua altrui, gli spiriti invola:
chi po dir com’ egli arde è ’n picciol foco.

And so I was not ever able to form a word
that was comprehensible to anyone but myself,
thus Love made me trembling and mute.
And now I see well that burning love
renders you tongue-tied and steals your strength:
he who can describe how he burns is in but a little fire. (9-14)

As discussed in Chapter 6.1, Prufrock, like the speaker in Petrarch’s poems, suffers constantly from the same inability to communicate his feelings effectively. He, too, is trembling (58, 86) and mute (70-74, 87-110). Fittingly, this final Prufrockian sonnet ends where “Prufrock” begins. Petrarch, suffering from “burning” love, proclaims that
whoever can fully explain the nature of his burning cannot be in a very big fire; “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” begins with a epigraph from Dante in which Guido da Montefeltro speaks from the depths of his own infernal flame, willing, like Prufrock, to speak because he knows that his words will never escape to be heard by a wider audience. As a frustrated lover, as a watcher stymied by his inability to communicate, as a man tormented by self-doubts and contradictions, J. Alfred Prufrock is in many ways a Modernist version of Petrarch (or at least the lyric “I” of his poems). Even in the striking similarity of their very names—Petrarch and Prufrock—the poet and the character are bound together through the space of nearly six centuries.

In addition to the sometimes Prufrockian nature of Petrarch’s narrator, Petrarch employs a number of images or themes that correspond closely to those found in Eliot’s other early masterpiece, The Waste Land. One of the most important themes of the latter is introduced in the first lines of the poem:

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain. (1-4)

As examined in Chapter 5.1, the effects of mixing of memory and desire show up throughout the five parts of the poem, in issues of love, remorse, hope, failure, and the inexorable passage of time. The closely related sonnets RVF 61-62 explore this theme. The former gives a more optimistic outlook of the possibilities of mixing memory and desire, as the speaker thinks back with joy on the precise time and place when he met his beloved and praises the many virtues which he first encountered then and there. In the subsequent poem, however, he moves from the profane to the sacred and from happiness to sorrow. The memory of his love for Laura pains him because it has been the occasion
for sin, for neglecting God. Here he mixes the memories of his “lost nights” (1) spent pursuing his former (mortal) desire (“desio,” 3) with his current penitential desire to be reminded of the crucifixion (14).

Another pair of sonnets further explores this philosophical admixture. In RVF 156, the poet speaks of a past appearance of his beloved, an image so powerful that “di rimembrar mi giova et dole” (“to remember it helps and pains me,” 3). The following poem begins:

Quel sempre acerbo et onorato giorno
mandò sì al cor l’imagine sua viva
che ’ngegno o stil non fia mai che ’l descriva;
ma spesso a lui co la memoria torno.

That day, forever bitter and honored,
sent its living image to my heart such that
no craftsmanship or stile can describe it;
but often I return to it with memory. (157.1-4)

Again, Petrarch focuses on one day, a single point in the past, and returns to it again and again in order to try and relive its joy (which is, he claims, beyond description). But the fact that the day is in the past, that despite all his longing it can be visited only through memory and never fully experienced again, makes that joyful day a bitter one as well.

RVF 258 works much the same way: the sonnet opens with a quatrain describing a lost moment of Laura’s beauty, and in his desire the “very memory” (“pur il rimembrar,” 5) seems to consume him.

In RVF 67, Petrarch pairs the mixing of remembrance and passion—an intense memory of Laura’s hair and his own painful desire for her—with another image that Eliot will use in the same opening passage of The Waste Land:

Piacemi almen d’aver cangiato stile
da gli occhi a’ pie’, se del lor esser molli
gli altri asciugasse un più cortese aprile.

It pleases me, at least, to have changed my style from eyes to feet, if by the latter being wet a gentler April may dry the former. (12-14)

“April,” the first word of The Waste Land (and of one of the best known lines of 20th-century poetry), has an enormous significance in Petrarch’s poetry as well. He makes frequent use of the month as a metaphor for spring, rejuvenation, and renewal, as in the passage above where it stands for a period of internal change. He combines both literal and figurative meanings in 325.13: “ch’ era de l’anno et di mi’ etate aprile” (“for it was the April of the year and of my age”). Most importantly, April is the month in which he first met Laura (RVF 211.12-13) as well as the month in which she died (336.12-13). This cardinal date in Petrarch’s life forms a focal point for all of his joy and sadness, the highest point of his life as well as the lowest. While Petrarch might well have agreed with Eliot’s explanation of the frustrations of mixing memory and desire that come with the renewing presence of spring, he had particular reasons of his own for believing that April is the cruelest month.

Another prevalent theme of The Waste Land is that of shipwreck and drowning. As discussed in Chapter 6.2, the varied characters of Ferdinand, the drowned Phoenician sailor, and Phlebas the Phoenician (among others) combine to form a composite character whose ultimate fate is described in the title of the fourth section of the poem: “Death By Water.” As seen in Chapter 3.4, the image of imminent shipwreck occurs throughout the Canzoniere as well. In RVF 26, the poet compares himself to a man who has survived a storm and made it safely to land; more often, the comparison is with a sailor who is on the boat during a storm, in imminent danger of death. So in 151 he is an exhausted
helmsman fleeing the “dark and tempestuous waves” (1), while in 235 is seeking to be a “wise helmsman” (5) able to keep his ship safe from terrible storms, even though he finds himself in a “sea of terrible night and winter” (11), in which his little boat is “conquered by the waves, / disarmed of its sails and tiller” (“da l’onde vinta, / disarmata di vele et di governo,” 13-14). In 268, Petrarch speaks sadly with Love after the news of Laura’s death and says simply, “We have wrecked our ship on the same reef” (“perch’ ad uno scoglio / avem rotto la nave,” 15-16). A few poems later, he repeats the idea that Laura’s absence is now the ultimate source of danger; the speaker sees the port from his ship, but the mast and lines are broken, and the guiding stars, Laura’s eyes, are gone (272.11-14).

While a number of poems touch on the subject—and the sestina RVF 80 is completely dedicated to it—perhaps the best treatment of shipwreck occurs in RVF 189. Here the speaker identifies himself not only with a sailor in general but specifically with Odysseus (3), sailing in a ship that is already perilous because it is so heavily laden with forgetfulness (“colma d’oblio,” 1). The storm lashes the boat with winds and rain; Laura’s eyes, once again compared to guiding stars, are now hidden; and the speaker begins to despair of ever reaching the port safely (“tal ch’ i’ incomincio a desperar del porto,” 14). This ominous line bears particular weight as it is not only the last line of the poem but, given 189’s position at the end of the forma Chigi version of the Canzoniere (Cachey 31), the final line of the entire collection for a time. Petrarch and the characters of The Waste Land share a common fear of shipwreck and drowning. The images are not completely parallel: Petrarch’s tend to focus on the torments of frustrated desire and subsequently on the sorrows of lost love, while Eliot’s seem to hint at a deeper failure and ultimately a dissolution of cultural values and personal identities. But both poets
make similar and extensive use of a theme that Eliot would have rightly traced back through Homer and Dante, but he would likely have been loath (or unable) to indicate that “Fear death by water” (55) was as important an instruction for Petrarch’s poetic narrator as for his own.

The shared debt, exemplified by the use of the figure of Odysseus, that Petrarch and Eliot owed to classical literature also appears in the prominence of the Procne/Philomela myth and in the significant role of the Cumaean Sybil. In *The Waste Land*, the story of Procne, Philomela, and Tereus (as discussed in Chapter 5.2) forms a central part of “A Game of Chess” (97-103) and reoccurs in “The Fire Sermon” (203-06); Eliot then stresses its importance by a final allusion near the end of the poem: “*Quando fiam ceu chelidon* – O swallow swallow” (428). Petrarch also avails himself of the imagery of the nightingale and the swallow; in *RVF* 10, for example, he alludes to the somber myth:

```
e ’l rosigniuol che dolcemente all’ombra
tutte le notti si lamenta et piagne,
d’amorosi penseri il cor ne ’ngombra.
```

And the nightingale that sweetly in the shadows laments and cries every night, weighs my heart down with thoughts of love. (10-12)

Much later in the *Canzoniere*, Petrarch returns to the story and goes beyond using it for a simple metaphor. In *RVF* 310-311, the poet explicit evokes the myth, beginning with a very literary description of springtime, which brings “garrir Progne et pianger Filomena, / et Primavera candida et vermiglia” (“chattering Procne and weeping Philomena, / and white and crimson Spring.” 3-4). The speaker is unable to enjoy the new season, however, and mourns the loss of his beloved. Even the “little birds’ singing” (12) cannot
cheer him; he identifies less with the cheerful song of the creatures they have become and more with the miserable women they once were. The subsequent poem begins with a description of the nightingale’s song:

Quel rosigniuol che si soave piagne…
di dolcezza empie il cielo et le compagne
con tante note si pietose et scorte,
et tutta la notte par che m’accompagne
et mi rammente la mia dura sorte;

That nightingale that so gently weeps…
fills the heavens and the fields with sweetness
with her notes so sad and passing,
and all night it seems that she stays with me
and reminds me of my difficult fate. (311.1, 3-6)

As is his wont, Petrarch creates poetic texture by combining opposites. The mournful beauty of the bird’s song is juxtaposed with the speaker’s own sadness as he spends the night taking comfort in shared sorrow. The final lines of both sonnets also parallel broad themes from The Waste Land: “nulla qua giù diletta et dura” (“nothing here below delights and lasts,” 311.14) is one lamenting conclusion, and in the other the beauties of nature seem to him nothing but “un deserto” (310.14), a wilderness, a waste land. Again, Eliot does not rely solely on Petrarch for the image of the nightingale and the swallow, but he draws from and continues a long tradition in European lyric poetry (e.g., Milton’s “To the Nightingale,” Keats’ “Ode to a Nightingale”) that reaches back to Petrarch.

Another key part of The Waste Land that reflects the classical world (cf. Chapter 5.3) echoes a Petrarchan sentiment. The poem’s epigraph is a quotation from Petronius’ Satyricon: “Nam Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis meis vidi in ampulla pendere, et cum illi pueri dicerent: Σίβυλλα τί θέλεις; respondebat illa: ἀποθανεῖν θέλω” (“Indeed, I saw with my own eyes the Cumaean Sibyl hanging in a jar, and when the boys said,
‘Sibyl, what do you want?’ she responded, “I want to die.”). Although Petrarch does not refer explicitly to the Cumaean Sybil, he seems to allude to her (for example in 333.7, where he speaks of “gathering her scattered leaves,” strongly suggestive of the oracle’s method of prophecy), and in several places he evokes her wish (the one quoted by Eliot) in very similar words. Like the Sibyl, he wishes for his own death: “Noia m’è ’l viver si gravosa et lunga / ch’ i’ chiamo il fine…” (“Living is such a grave and lengthy distress / that I call for the end, 312.12-13). In the congedo of RVF 323, he writes:

Canzon, tu puoi ben dire:
“Queste sei visioni al signor mio
àn fatto un dolce di morir desio.”

Song, well can you say:
“These six visions have given my lord
a sweet desire to die.” (73-75)

Like the Sibyl, who wastes away perpetually, Petrarch suffers constantly from his sorrow for Laura’s death to the point where he wishes for nothing else but to join her. And he knows, as she does, how devastating being denied that final gift would be: “ché ben po nulla chi non po morire” (“For indeed he can do nothing who cannot die,” 152.14). In this living death of the Cumaean Sybil we can see Petrarch’s “viva morte” (132.7) and Eliot’s state of being “neither / Living nor dead” (39-40). The speaker in “What the Thunder Said” mournfully summarizes the theme: “He who was living is now dead / We who were living are now dying” (328-29).

And yet despite the heavy notes of despair and loss that both poets evince, there is still room for hope. A final critical correspondence between the Rerum vulgarium fragmenta and The Waste Land is peace: the last word of both works. Eliot finishes his poem with the simple three-word line: “Shantih shantih shantih.” In a footnote, the poet
himself explains, “Repeated as here, a formal ending to an Upanishad. ‘The Peace which passeth understanding’ is a feeble translation of the content of this word.” Eliot has done more than evoke the Upanishads, however—in his triple recitation, he has mirrored the final line of Petrarch’s RVF 128: “I’ vo gridando: Pace, pace, pace” (“I go crying: Peace, peace, peace,” 122). More importantly, in ending his lengthy poem with the word, he follows Petrarch, who ends the final poem of the Canzoniere thus: “ch’ accolga ’l mio spirto ultimo in pace” (“that he may accept my final breath in peace,” 366.137). For two men whose poetry was so motivated by sorrow, despair, and fear, it is perhaps fitting and certainly somewhat comforting that their two literary masterpieces end in peace.
WORKS CITED


