



A Classical Source for Petrarch's Conceit of the Binding Knot of Hair: Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*

Camilla Caporicci¹

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Abstract

The conceit of the beloved's hair ensnaring and binding the poet's heart and soul is common in Renaissance poetry and particularly widespread in the tradition of Petrarchan love lyric. The topos can be traced back to Petrarch's *canzoniere*, or *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, in which Laura's golden hair is often described in terms of knots and laces tying both the poet's heart and soul. No classical antecedent has previously been identified for the image. In this study, I propose a possible classical source for the characteristic Petrarchan motif of Laura's binding hair knot: Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, a manuscript of which the poet owned and which he read and annotated several times. In particular, I show how passages such as Lucius's celebration of the beauty of women's hair (*Metamorphoses*, II.8–9), and especially his declaration of love to Photis, an oath he takes on 'that sweet knot of your hair with which you have bound my spirit' (*ibid.*, III.23), can be convincingly regarded as a source for Petrarch's conceit. In addition to the value inherent in the detection of a new source for an influential Petrarchan topos, the present study may have some further implications. It could offer novel arguments for the dating of a series of Petrarchan poems, and it could foster a potentially fruitful reappraisal of the influence of Apuleius's work on Petrarch's vernacular poetry.

The topos of the beloved's hair ensnaring and binding the poet's heart and soul is common in Renaissance poetry. Both a way to celebrate the beauty of a woman's

✉ Camilla Caporicci
camilla.caporicci@gmail.com

¹ Dipartimento di Lettere - Lingue, Letterature e Civiltà Antiche e Moderne, Università degli Studi di Perugia, Perugia, Italy

comely locks and to signify the invincible power of love, the conceit is particularly widespread in the tradition of Petrarchan love lyric, appearing in the works of innumerable authors, from Pietro Bembo¹ to Torquato Tasso,² from Pierre de Ronsard³ to Philippe Desportes,⁴ from Philip Sidney⁵ to Edmund Spenser⁶ and William Shakespeare.⁷ Indeed, the topos was a constituent feature of the codified language of Petrarchan poetry. But what was its origin? Like most topoi in this poetic tradition, it can be traced back to Petrarch (Francesco Petrarca), whose *canzoniere*, or *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, was the indisputable model for Renaissance love lyric. In several poems, Petrarch describes Laura's golden hair, one of the chief elements in the celebrative portrayal of the beloved, in terms of knots and laces tying both the poet's heart and his soul: 'torsele [le chiome] il tempo poi in più saldi nodi, / et strinse 'l cor d'un laccio sì possente, / che Morte sola fia ch'indi lo snodi' ('Then in still tighter knots time wound her hair / and bound my heart with cord that is so strong / that only Death can free it from such ties'); 'né posso dal bel nodo omai dar crollo, / là 've il sol perde, non pur l'ambra o l'auro: / dico le chiome bionde, e 'l crespo laccio, / che sì soavemente lega et stringe / l'alma' ('nor can I now break loose the lovely knot / which gold and amber and the sun surpasses: / I mean her golden hair, the curly snare / that with such softness binds and tightens round / my soul'); 'là da' belli occhi, et de le chiome stesse / lega 'l cor lasso ... folgorare i nodi ond'io son preso' ('there with her lovely eyes and hair she binds / my weary heart ... those knots which have bound me, shimmering'); 'O chiome bionde di che 'l cor m'annoda / Amor, et così preso il mena a morte' ('O locks of gold with which Love tangles tight / my heart, and caught this way leads it to death!'); 'spargi co le tue man' le chiome al vento, / ivi mi lega, et puo' mi far contento. / Dal laccio d'or non sia mai chi me scioglia' ('with your hands spread her locks upon the wind / and bind me there, and you will make me happy. /

¹ Pietro Bembo, *Rime*, in id., *Prose della volgar lingua, Gli Asolani, Rime*, ed. C. Dionisotti, Turin, 1966, IX, ll. 10–14: 'raccogliendo le trecce al collo sparse, / strinservi dentro lui, che v'era involto. ... intanto il cor mi fu legato e tolto'.

² Torquato Tasso, *Le rime*, ed. B. Basile, Rome, 1994, 221, ll. 1–2: 'Degni lacci d'Amor, crespi aurei crini / ove quest'alma ognor s'intrica e perde'; 395, ll. 3–4: 'Amore ... tese le reti di due trecce bionde'; 8, ll. 5–6: 'e da le bionde chiome / legato sono'. See also 5, ll. 5–6; 108, l. 2; and 69, l. 5.

³ Pierre de Ronsard, *Les Amours*, in id., *Oeuvres complètes*, IV, ed. P. Laumonier, rev. I. Silver and R. Lebègue, 4th edn, Paris, 1992, XCVIII, ll. 2–4: 'Dans ses cheveux une beaulté cruëlle ... Lia mon coeur'.

⁴ Philippe Desportes, *Les Amours de Diane*, ed. V. E. Graham, II, Geneva and Paris, 1959, XLI, ll. 1–2: 'Cheveux ... Mon Coeur, plus que mon bras, est par vous enchaîné'; id., *Les Amours d'Hippolyte*, ed. V. E. Graham, Geneva and Paris, 1960, XIX, ll. 7–8: 'Ses rets sont vos cheveux où tout ame il attire: / Ravie en si beau noeuds, si blonds et si plaisans'.

⁵ Philip Sidney, 'To the Tune of a Neapolitan Villanelle' (l. 1), in *Certain Sonnets*, in id., *The Major Works*, ed. K. Duncan-Jones, Oxford, 2008: 'Thy fair hair my heart enchained'. See also id., *Astrophil and Stella*, sonnet 12, l. 2; sonnet 103, ll. 6–8.

⁶ Edmund Spenser, *Amoretti and Epithalamion*, ed. K. J. Larsen, Tempe AZ, 1997, XXXVIII, ll. 1–6: 'those her golden tresses ... She may entangle in that golden snare'; LXXIII, ll. 2–3: 'My heart, whome none with servile bands can tye, / but the fayre tresses of your golden hayre.'

⁷ Shakespeare uses the conceit not in his sonnets but in one of his plays, *The Merchant of Venice*, in William Shakespeare, *The Oxford Shakespeare. The Complete Works*, ed. S. Wells et al., Oxford, 2005, III, ii.120–2: 'her hair ... A golden mesh t'entrap the hearts of men'.

No one shall free me from that golden snare’); “‘Son questi i capei biondi, et l’aureo nodo / – dich’io – ch’ancor mi stringe” (“‘Is this the blond hair and the golden knot,” I say, “that still bind me””).⁸ Constantly expressed through the images of the ‘laccio’ (lace) and the ‘nodo’ (knot) – two terms endowed with both a visual and a deep symbolic value – the conceit is frequent enough to be regarded as a characteristic feature of Petrarch’s poetry and, as such, an easy object of imitation.

While the Renaissance use of the topos clearly originates from the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, we may wonder whether Petrarch himself was indebted to some other source for the conceit of Laura’s entangling hair. In his study of the classical origins of poetic topoi, Marbury B. Ogle claims that this specific motif has no such antecedent and must therefore be the fruit of Petrarch’s invention:

This conceit does not appear, as far as I have discovered, in exactly this form in ancient literature, but the idea is evidently due to it. Both Greek and Latin poets often write of Love (Aphrodite, Venus, Eros, Amor, Cupido) as a hunter who ensnares lovers in a net, and Greek poets sometimes describe the eyes of their beloved, not the hair, as the net in which their gaze or their heart is held captive. ... Who was responsible for this shift from eyes to hair it is impossible to say. Petrarch seems to have been the first to make the change, inspired, perhaps, by some such passage as Chrétien, Cligés 194 sq. where Fenice’s hair is woven into the web garment and is indistinguishable from the gold thread.⁹

In response to Ogle, Ted-Larry Pebworth claimed in 1971 to have found the source for Petrarch’s conceit, not in classical literature, but in the Bible. In particular, he referred to the Song of Songs 7:5, where the male lover states that a king (presumably himself) is held captive in the woman’s waving locks – a passage that Pebworth quotes in Hugh J. Schonfield’s translation: ‘The head of you is like Carmel, / And your tresses like purple threads. / A king could be caught by their coils.’¹⁰ The idea is fascinating, especially since the Song of Songs was a significant source for Petrarch’s poetry. There is, however, a major problem with this hypothesis. While the Hebrew text presents the motif of the woman’s hair imprisoning the lover,¹¹ in

⁸ Petrarch, *Canzoniere*, ed. M. Santagata, Milan, 2006, CXCVI, ll. 12–14; CXCVII, ll. 7–11; CXCVIII, ll. 3–10; CCLIII, ll. 3–4; CCLXX, ll. 59–61; CCCLIX, ll. 56–7. All references to the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* are to this edition. All translations of Petrarch’s *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* are from Petrarch, *The Canzoniere or Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, transl. M. Musa, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1996, with some modifications. For a variation of the conceit, see also LIX, ll. 4–5 and CCLXX, ll. 56–7, where Love hides (LIX) and is asked to hide once again (CCLXX) the laces in Laura’s golden hair.

⁹ M. B. Ogle ‘The Classical Origin and Tradition of Literary Conceits’, *The American Journal of Philology*, 34, 1913, pp. 125–52 (129–30).

¹⁰ T.-L. Pebworth, ‘The Net for the Soul: A Renaissance Conceit and the Song of Songs’, *Romance Notes*, 13, 1971, pp. 159–64.

¹¹ Among modern versions, see, e.g. *Song of Songs*, transl. T. Longman, Grand Rapids and Cambridge, 2001: ‘Your head (on you) is like Carmel and the hair of your head like purple. The king is ensnared by your tresses.’ For a discussion of the complex meaning and translation of the passage, see *Il Cantico dei cantici. Commento e attualizzazione*, ed. and transl. G. Ravasi, Bologna, 1992, pp. 561–6.

accordance with imagery typical of Eastern love lyric,¹² the Latin Vulgate Bible, which was the main biblical version circulating in the Middle Ages and the one almost certainly used by Petrarch, reads ‘comae capitis tui sicut purpura regis vincta canalibus’ (‘the hairs of thy head as the purple of the king bound in the channels’). Evidently, this version does not immediately invite a reading which sees the male lover imprisoned by the beloved’s hair, and medieval exegetes – at least Western ones, basing their interpretations on the Vulgate – do not seem to favour this reading.¹³

Ogle’s claim about the absence of a classical source for Petrarch’s conceit appears confirmed by the most recent and authoritative critical editions of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, including those by Marco Santagata and Rosanna Bettarini, as well as the editions of Ugo Dotti, Paola Vecchi Galli and Sabrina Stroppa, which do not refer to any classical antecedent in relation to the relevant Petrarchan passages.¹⁴ Indeed, these editors do not give any source for the Petrarchan topos, with the exception of Bettarini’s mention, in her discussion of sonnet CXCVI, of Cino da Pistoia as the inventor of the conceit of love’s knot, to which the poet is tied by his beloved’s tresses: ‘Omè! ch’io sono all’amoroso nodo / legato con due belle trecce bionde’ (‘Alas! I am tied to the amorous knot / with two beautiful blonde tresses’).¹⁵ There is doubtless an affinity between Cino’s image and Petrarch’s. Yet Bettarini does not seem to establish a necessarily direct relationship between the two poems; moreover, Cino’s conceit is somewhat different from Petrarch’s, above all because his knot appears to be primarily a symbolic one, rather than an actual knot of hair.

Without necessarily dismissing Cino’s poem, I would like to propose a new potential source for Petrarch’s conceit: a classical antecedent of which the poet was surely aware. It is a passage in Apuleius’s *Metamorphoses*, a work which Petrarch knew well, since he owned and annotated a manuscript containing the text. Possibly compiled as a gift to Petrarch, perhaps under his direction,¹⁶ the codex, Vatican City,

¹² The conceit of a woman’s hair imprisoning her lover is found in other Eastern poetic traditions, including the Palestinian – ‘Oh, your black drooping hair: / seven tresses take us prisoners’ – and in the Egyptian love lyric tradition, as in these two poems from the Chester Beatty and the Harris 50 papyri: ‘With her hair she threw the rope at me / with her eyes she caught me’; ‘my hands are caught in her hair, / a bait under a trap ready to catch’; see *Cantico dei cantici*, ed. and transl. G. Barbiero, Milan, 2004, pp. 181 and 322–3. My translations, based on Barbiero’s Italian version. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

¹³ The Venerable Bede, who dwells on this passage in his commentary, *In Cantica canticorum*, does not consider the image of the ensnared king, nor does the *The ‘Glossa Ordinaria’ on the Song of Songs*, transl. M. Dove, Kalamazoo, 2004, p. 147 (which reads ‘iunta canalibus’ instead of ‘vincta canalibus’): ‘the channels which receive the king’s purple are the hearts of the faithful’.

¹⁴ Petrarch, *Canzoniere*, ed. Santagata (n. 8 above); id., *Canzoniere: Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, ed. R. Bettarini, Turin, 2005; id., *Canzoniere*, ed. U. Dotti, Rome, 2004; id., *Canzoniere*, ed. S. Stroppa, Turin, 2011; id., *Canzoniere*, ed. P. Vecchi Galli, Milan, 2012.

¹⁵ Cino da Pistoia, ‘Omè! ch’io sono all’amoroso nodo’, in *Poeti del Dolce stil nuovo*, ed. M. Marti, Florence, 1969, ll. 1–2. See Petrarch, *Canzoniere*, ed. Bettarini (n. 14 above), p. 908.

¹⁶ According to G. Billanovich, ‘Quattro libri del Petrarca e la biblioteca della cattedrale di Verona’, *Studi Petrarqueschi*, n. s., 7, 1990, pp. 233–62, MS Vat. lat. 2193 is of Veronese origin, together with three other books belonging to Petrarch’s library – MSS Par. lat. 5054, Par. lat. 8500 and Troyes, Médiathèque du Grand Troyes, Fonds ancien 552 – which the poet obtained but did not commission. On this group of manuscripts, see also L. Refe, *Le postille del Petrarca a Giuseppe Flavio (codice parigino*

Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS 2193, brought together Apuleius's major works and his philosophical writings in one corpus, and was read with care by the poet.¹⁷ This is shown by the number of his glosses, the long timespan over which they were made¹⁸ – revealing that the text accompanied Petrarch throughout his mature years and old age – and by the substantial traces that this attentive reading left in his glosses to other manuscripts, most notably his copy of Virgil (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, MS A 79 inf.), in which he entered a remarkable number of glosses referring to Apuleius.¹⁹

Further proof of Petrarch's careful and fruitful reading of Apuleius is found in his own writings. Many studies have underscored the significant influence of Apuleius's works on Petrarch, even though he claimed, in a famous letter to Boccaccio on the norms of imitation, that he had read Apuleius 'Only once' and 'hastily and quickly', and that, of the several things he had seen in his work, he had culled only a few and retained even fewer, 'and these I laid aside as common property in an open place, in the very atrium, so to speak, of my memory. Consequently, whenever I happen either to hear or use them, I quickly recognize that they are not mine, and recall whose they are; these really belong to others, and I have them in my possession with the awareness that they are not my own'.²⁰ This influence, Petrarch continues,

Footnote 16 (continued)

lat. 5054), Florence, 2004, pp. 28–39. S. Rizzo, 'Un codice veronese del Petrarca', *L'Ellisse*, 1, 2006, pp. 37–44, has more recently confirmed the Veronese origin of MS Vat. lat. 2193; on the basis of her discovery of the emblem of the Della Scala family in the code, she suggests that the manuscript was commissioned by a member of the family, possibly as a gift for Petrarch. The hypothesis that the manuscript was compiled under Petrarch's direction was first suggested in P. de Nolhac, 'Manuscrits à miniatures de la bibliothèque de Pétrarque', *Gazette archéologique*, 14, 1889, pp. 25–32. According to C. Tristano, 'Le postille del Petrarca nel ms. Vat. lat. 2193 (Apuleio, Frontino, Vegetio, Palladio)', *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, 17, 1974, pp. 365–468 (367), this hypothesis is strengthened by an analysis of the guide letters for the miniatures, which all seem to have been written in the same period and in Petrarch's hand.

¹⁷ The manuscript contains, in this order, Apuleius (and Pseudo-Apuleius), *De deo Socratis, Asclepius, De Platone et eius dogmate, De mundo, Florida, Apologia, Metamorphoses*; Cicero, *Pro Marcello*; Frontinus, *Stratagemata*; Vegetius, *Epitoma rei militari*; Palladius, *Opus agriculturae*; Cicero, *Pro Ligario*; Petrarch, *Observationes quaedam super agricultura*.

¹⁸ According to A. Petrucci, *La scrittura di Francesco Petrarca*, Vatican City, 1967, pp. 42–3 and 117–18, the first layer of Petrarchan glosses dates to 1340–1343, and the second to 1347–1350. On Petrarch's glosses, see Tristano, 'Le postille del Petrarca' (n. 16 above).

¹⁹ See *Le postille del Virgilio Ambrosiano*, ed. M. Baglio et al., 2 vols, Rome and Padua, 2006, pp. 31, 34, 45, 49, 52–3, 55, 58, 60, 70, 84–6, 127, 191, 209, 217–18, 228, 248, 265–6, 280, 283, 297, 317, 322, 333, 335, 344, 347–8, 354, 394, 478, 601–3, 652, 742, 786, 811, 921–2, 924. References to Apuleius also appear in Petrarch's glosses to other manuscripts, including his Suetonius (Oxford, Exeter College, MS 186) and the Troyes Cicero (Troyes, Médiathèque du Grand Troyes, MS 552); see Tristano, 'Le postille del Petrarca' (n. 16 above), p. 369; G. Billanovich, 'Nella biblioteca del Petrarca, II: Un altro Svetonio del Petrarca', *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, 3, 1960, pp. 28–58; M. Bertè, *Petrarca lettore di Svetonio*, Messina, 2011, pp. 50–51; P. de Nolhac, *Pétrarque et l'humanisme*, new ed., 2 vols, Paris, 1965, I, p. 243. For an overview of Petrarch's library, see, e.g. M. Feo, 'La biblioteca', in *Petrarca nel tempo: tradizione, lettori e immagini delle opere*, ed. M. Feo, Pontedera, 2003, pp. 457–516.

²⁰ Petrarch, *Le familiari*, text by V. Rossi and U. Bosco, (Ital.) transl. U. Dotti, 5 vols, Turin, 2004–2009, Ep. XXII.2.11: 'Legi semel apud Ennium, apud Plautum, apud Felicem Capellam, apud Apuleium, et legi raptim, prope, nullam nisi ut alienis in finibus moram trahens. Sic pretereunti, multa contigit ut viderem, pauca decerperem, pauciora reponerem, eaque ut comunia in aperto et in ipso, ut ita dixerim, memorie vestibulo; ita ut quotiens vel audire illa vel proferre contigerit, non mea esse confestim sciam, nec me fallat cuius sint; que ab alio scilicet, et quod vere sunt, ut aliena possideo.' All translations of

is very different from that exerted by authors such as Virgil, Horace, Boethius and Cicero, whose works he had read ‘not once but countless times’, not hastily but very attentively, so that their writings ‘have so become one with my mind that were I never to read them for the remainder of my life, they would cling to me, having taken root in the innermost recesses of my mind. But sometimes ... I may adopt them and for some time regard them as my own ... I may forget whose they are and whether they are mine or others’.²¹

Without entering the complex discussion of Petrarch’s (un)reliability – though there are several examples of his conscious ‘reshaping’ of the truth, with his well-known treatment of Dante emblematic in this sense – his claim to have read Apuleius only once and hurriedly is contradicted by the evidence of his own annotated manuscript. Furthermore, the idea that he had retained only a very few things from this reading is equally challenged by both his glosses to other manuscripts and the several references to Apuleius in his writings, such as those found by Giuseppe Billanovich in the *Rerum memorandarum libri*,²² or others highlighted in the *Familiarum rerum libri* by various scholars, including Caterina Tristano, who also noted that some Apuleian passages were useful to Petrarch when writing the *Africa*,²³ and Robert H. F. Carver, who has identified references to Apuleius also in Petrarch’s *Invective contra medicum*.²⁴ Among the works of the Apuleian corpus, the *Metamorphoses* – a text to which Petrarch had repeated exposure²⁵ – appears to have been especially influential. In the *Familiarum rerum libri*, for instance, there are many references to Apuleius’s novel;²⁶ and, in at least one case, the work had a specifically stylistic influence. As Silvia Rizzo has shown, Petrarch’s description of his first visit to Paris, ‘Pariseorum civitatem ... introii non aliter animo affectus quam olim Thesalie civitatem Ypatham dum lustrat, Apuleius’²⁷ (‘I entered Paris

Footnote 20 (continued)

Petrarch’s *Familiarum rerum libri* are from Petrarch, *Letters on Familiar Matters*, transl. A. S. Bernardo, 3 vols, New York and Baltimore, 1975–1985.

²¹ Ibid., 12–13: ‘Legi apud Virgilium apud Flaccum apud Severinum apud Tullium; nec semel legi sed milies, nec cucurri sed incubui Hec se michi tam familiariter ingessere et non modo memorie sed medullis affixa sunt unumque cum ingenio facta sunt meo, ut etsi per omnem vitam amplius non legantur, ipsa quidem hereant, actis in intima animi parte radicibus, sed interdum obliviscar auctorem, quippe qui longo usu et possessione continua quasi illa prescripserim diuque pro meis habuerim, et turba talium obsessus, nec cuius sint certe nec aliena meminerim’. On Petrarch’s theoretical view and practical application of *imitatio*, see G. Martellotti, ‘“Similitudo non identitas”. Alcune varianti petrarchesche’, in id., *Scritti petrarcheschi*, ed. M. Feo and S. Rizzo, Padua, 1983, pp. 501–16 (previously published in *Rivista di cultura classica e medioevale*, 19, 1977, pp. 491–503), and V. Fera, *La revisione petrarchesca dell’Africa*, Messina, 1984, pp. 28–32.

²² Petrarch, *Rerum memorandarum libri*, ed. G. Billanovich, Florence, 1943, pp. 29, 309–310.

²³ Tristano, ‘Le postille del Petrarca’ (n. 16 above).

²⁴ R. H. F. Carver, *The Protean Ass: The Metamorphoses of Apuleius from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, Oxford, 2007, pp. 124–7.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 124.

²⁶ Petrarch, *Le familiari* (n. 20 above), *Epp.* I.1.12; I.2.22; I.4.4–5; I.10.1, 3; IX.10.4; IX.13.24–5, 27; XV.4.5; XX.1.21.

²⁷ Ibid., *ep.* I.4.4.

... with the same kind of attitude shown by Apuleius while visiting Ipatea, a city of Thessaly'), is indebted to *Metamorphoses* II.1–2, not only for the general situation, but also for some specific lexical choices.²⁸ Even more significantly, Ezio Raimondi has underlined the influence of the *Metamorphoses* on Petrarch's satirical novella about an old, lascivious cardinal in Epistle XVIII of the *Liber sine nomine*. The stylistic impact here goes far beyond Petrarch's explicit and intentionally parodic reference to Apuleius's narrative of Cupid and Psyche – a narrative which, Igor Candido argues, Petrarch recognized as the source of Boccaccio's tale of Griselda and which influenced his own Latin translation of Boccaccio's text.²⁹ Not only does Petrarch describe the miserable young woman yielding to the ancient prelate as entering the bed-chamber 'velut Psyche illa Lucii Apulei felicibus nuptiis honestanda' ('just like the famous Psyche of Lucius Apuleius, destined to be honoured with a happy marriage');³⁰ but, as Raimondi writes, the 'ridiculosa historia' of the libidinous prelate was a skilful adaptation of Apuleius's narrative, revealing substantial traces of Petrarch's reading of the *Metamorphoses* on many levels, from the construction of the scene to its dramatic syntax and lexical texture.³¹ As these examples indicate, Apuleius's impact on Petrarch was not limited to mentioning his name and taking brief quotations from his works. While Petrarch's claim that he possessed and used Apuleius's words 'with the awareness that they are not my own' may find some confirmation in the fact that most of his references to the *Metamorphoses* are not assimilated into his discourse but instead explicitly attributed to Apuleius,³² the Latin novel also inspired Petrarch's writing in a deeper manner, orienting his style and vocabulary.

Scholarly attention, as we have seen, has primarily been devoted to Apuleius's influence on Petrarch's Latin prose writings, and not on his vernacular poetry – no doubt because the *Metamorphoses* is itself a Latin prose work. In their editions of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, Santagata and Bettarini between them refer

²⁸ S. Rizzo, 'Note alle *Familiari* del Petrarca', in *Vestigia. Studi in onore di Giuseppe Billanovich*, ed. R. Avesani et al., II, Rome, 1984, pp. 607–11.

²⁹ I. Candido, 'Psyche's Textual Journey from Apuleius to Boccaccio and Petrarch', in *The Afterlife of Apuleius*, ed. F. Bistagne et al., London, 2021, pp. 65–78.

³⁰ Petrarch, *Liber sine nomine*, ed. G. Cascio, Florence, 2015, XVIII.53.

³¹ E. Raimondi, 'Un esercizio satirico del Petrarca', in id., *Metafora e storia. Studi su Dante e Petrarca*, Turin, 1970, pp. 189–98.

³² In addition to the two references to Apuleius, cited above, in *Familiarum rerum libri*, I.4.4–5, and *Liber sine nomine*, XVIII.53, several other references to Apuleius in the *Familiarum rerum libri* are also of this nature: 'Non audeo illud Apuleii Madaurensis in comune iactare: "Lector, intende: letaberis"' (*Ep.* I.1.12), cf. *Metamorphoses*, I.1; 'Hospitem Apuleii Milonem prodigalitatis arguet quisquis hunc viderit vel semel audieritque disciplinam rei familiaris yconomicis nulli unquam philosopho cognitiss regulis coarctantem' (*Ep.* I.10.3), cf. *Metamorphoses*, I.21; 'Evasi in cubiculum non quidem solis fabulis, ut apud Milonem Ypate olim Apuleius, sed lautissimis cenatus cibus' (*Ep.* IX.10.4), cf. *Metamorphoses*, I.21 and ss; 'verissimumque est quod apud Apuleium legisti: "non immerito" enim, inquit, "prisce poetice divinus auctor apud Graios, summe prudentie virum monstrare cupiens multarum civitatum obitu et variorum populorum cognitu summas adeptum virtutes cecinit"' (*Ep.* IX.13.27), cf. *Metamorphoses*, IX.13; 'Quod ipsum in libris *Metamorphoseos* ponit Apuleius: "Certus" inquit, "fragilitatis humane fidei et quod pecunie cunte sint difficultates pervie auroque soleant adamantine etiam perfringi fores' (*Ep.* XX.1.21), cf. *Metamorphoses*, IX.18.

to Apuleius only four times in total: once in relation to *De mundo* and three times to the *Metamorphoses*, only one of which is clearly a source reference: ‘Vien poi l’aurora, et l’aura fosca inalba’ (‘Dawn comes and brightens the dark air’, CCXXIII, l. 12), connected by both editors to *Metamorphoses*, X.20: ‘At intus cerei praeclara micantes luce nocturnas nobis tenebras inalbant’³³ (‘Inside wax candles sparkled with brilliant light and whitened the night’s darkness for us’).³⁴ There are, however, other passages in the *Metamorphoses* which merit consideration.

Lucius, the protagonist of the novel, is a great admirer of female beauty and appears to have a particular weakness for women’s hair. He commences the portrayal of his lover Photis by stating that a woman’s chief beauty is her hair and continues with a long demonstration of this claim, which includes a laudatory description of different types of hair and hairstyles, culminating with Photis’s (*Metamorphoses*, II.9):³⁵

Quid cum capillis color gratus et nitor splendidus inlucet, et contra solis aciem vegetus fulgurat vel placidus renitet, aut in contrariam gratiam variat aspectum et nunc aurum coruscans in lenem mellis deprimitur umbram, nunc corvina nigredine caeruleus columbarum colli flosculos aemulatur, vel cum guttis Arabicis obunctus et pectinis arguti dente tenui discriminatus et pone versum coactus amatoris oculis occurrens ad instar speculi reddit imaginem gratiorum? Quid cum frequenti subole spissus cumulat verticem, vel prolixa serie porrectus dorsa permanat? Tanta denique est capillamenti dignitas ut quamvis auro veste gemmis omnique cetero mundo exornata mulier incedat, tamen, nisi capillum distinxerit, ornata non possit videri.

Sed in mea Photide non operosus sed inordinatus ornatus addebat gratiam. Uberes enim crines leniter remissos et cervice dependulos ac dein per colla dispositos sensimque sinuato patagio residentes paulisper ad finem conglobatos in summum verticem nodus adstrinxerat.³⁶

[But think what it is like when hair shines with its own lovely colour and brilliant light, and when it flashes lively against the sunbeams or gently reflects them; or when it shifts its appearance to produce opposite charms, now glistening gold compressed into the smooth shadows of honey, now with raven-blackness imitating the dark blue flowerets on pigeons’ necks; or when it is anointed

³³ Apuleius, *Metamorphoseon libri XI*, ed. M. Zimmerman, Oxford Classical Texts, Oxford, 2012. All references to the *Metamorphoses* are to this edition. Both editions of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* refer to Apuleius in connection with XXXIV, l. 11 (though the reference is more to Petrarca’s gloss on Apuleius’s *De mundo* rather than to Apuleius’s text itself). The other Apuleian references are to CCLXXIII, l. 13 in Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, ed. Santagata (n. 8 above) and to CCCLX, l. 9 in id., *Canzoniere*, ed. Bettarini (n. 14 above).

³⁴ Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, transl. J. A. Hanson, Loeb Classical Library, 2 vols, Cambridge MA, 1989. All translations of the *Metamorphoses* are from this edition, with slight modifications.

³⁵ On this passage, see D. van Mal-Maeder, *Apuleius Madaurensis Metamorphoses. Livre II. Texte, Introduction et Commentaire*, Groningen, 2001, pp. 171–82. At p. 171, van Mal-Maeder notes that Apuleius’s praise of women’s hair appears to be modelled on Ovid ‘funerary’ praise of Corinna’s hair in *Amores* I.14.

³⁶ In MS Vat. lat. 2193, fol. 46^v, the passage bears some marks, which are probably not Petrarch’s. There are also two glosses which are definitely not by Petrarch: ‘Quod capillum pre ceteris sit ornamento’ and ‘Quot modis colligantur capilli’.

with Arabian oils and parted with a sharp comb's fine tooth and gathered at the back so as to meet the lover's eyes and, like a mirror, reflect an image more pleasing than reality; or when, compact with all its tresses, it crowns the top of her head or, let out in a long train, it flows down over her back. In short, the significance of a woman's coiffure is so great that, no matter how finely attired she may be when she steps out in her gold, robes, jewels, and all her other finery, unless she has embellished her hair she cannot be called well-dressed. In my Photis's case, her coiffure was not elaborate, but its casualness gave her added charm. Her luxuriant tresses were softly loosened to hang down over her neck, then they spread over her shoulders and momentarily rested upon the slightly curved border of her tunic; they were then gathered in a mass at the end and fastened in a knot to the crown of her head.]

Apuleius's detailed praise of the beauty of women's hair was unlikely to go unnoticed by an author aiming to celebrate female loveliness. It clearly captured the attention of Boccaccio, an enthusiastic reader of Apuleius,³⁷ who, in his *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine* (*Ameto*), draws extensively from Lucius's account of his lover's hair for the portrayal of a lady encountered by Ameto:

Egli rimira la prima, la quale, e non immerito, pensava Diana nel suo avvento; e di quella i biondi capelli, a qualunque chiarezza degni d'assomigliare, senza niuno maesterio, lunghissimi, parte ravvolti alla testa nella sommità di quella, con nodo piacevole d'essi stessi, vede raccolti; e altri più corti, o in quello non compresi, fra le verdi frondi della laurea ghirlanda più belli sparti vede e raggrati; e altri dati all'aure, ventilati da quelle, quali sopra le candide tempie e quali sopra il dilicato collo ricadendo, più la fanno cianciosa. A quelli con intero animo Ameto pensando, conosce i lunghi, biondi e copiosi capelli essere della donna speciale bellezza Adunque tanta estima la degnità de' capelli alle femine quanta, se, qualunque si sia, di preziose veste, di ricche pietre, di rilucenti gemme e di caro oro circundata proceda, senza quelli in dovuto ordine posti, non possa ornate parere; ma in costei essi, disordinati, più graziosa la rendono negli occhi d'Ameto.³⁸

[He admired the first maiden, who he thought was Diana at her arrival – and not undeservedly. He observed her very long blond hair, worthy of comparison to any splendour, which was gathered in part on top of her head without any

³⁷ Among the many studies on Boccaccio's reading and use of Apuleius, see, e.g. Candido, 'Psyche's Textual Journey' (n. 29 above); id., *Boccaccio umanista. Studi su Boccaccio e Apuleio*, Ravenna, 2014; J. Haig Gaisser, *The Fortunes of Apuleius & the Golden Ass*, Princeton and Oxford, 2008, pp. 93–121; Carver, *The Protean Ass* (n. 24 above), pp. 127–41; G. F. Gianotti, 'Da Montecassino a Firenze: la riscoperta di Apuleio', in *Il Decameron nella letteratura Italiana*, ed. C. Allasia, Rome, 2006, pp. 9–47; M. Fiorilla, 'La lettura apuleiana del Boccaccio e le note ai manoscritti laurenziani 29, 2 e 54, 32', *Aevum*, 73, 1999, pp. 635–68; G. Vio, 'Chiose e riscritture apuleiane di Giovanni Boccaccio', *Studi sul Boccaccio*, 20, 1991–1992, pp. 139–65; L. Sanguineti White, *Boccaccio e Apuleio: caratteri differenziali nella struttura narrative del Decameron*, Bologna, 1977.

³⁸ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine* (*Ameto*), ed. A. E. Quaglio, Florence, 1963, p. 41 (XII.7–9).

artifice, and bound with a lovely knot of her same hair; and other locks, either shorter or not bound in the knot, were still more beautifully dispersed and twisted in a laurel wreath, while still others were blown by the wind around her temples and around her delicate neck, making her even more delightful. Completely absorbed in her, Ameto recognized that the long abundant blond hair was the special beauty of this maiden Therefore he deems the beauty of her hair so important for a woman that anyone, whoever she may be, though she go covered in precious garments, in rich stones, in glimmering gems and bright gold, without her hair tressed in due order, she cannot seem properly adorned; yet in this maiden the disorder thereof renders her still more charming to Ameto's eyes.]³⁹

Through passages such as this, Carver writes, 'Apuleius' Photis helps to define Renaissance ideals of feminine pulchritude: the hair as the chief glory of women's beauty; the tresses gathered up "without any artifice" (*sanza niuno maesterio*); the seeming paradox of graceful disorder' – an *inordinatus ornatus* which would be easily absorbed, in the 16th century, 'into the notion of *sprezzatura* ("artful artlessness", or "studied nonchalance"), that Castiglione establishes as one of the chief marks of the successful courtier'.⁴⁰

Boccaccio's reference to Apuleius is unmistakable; however, he might not have been the only one of the 'tre corone' (the so-called 'three crowns' of Italian literature: Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio) to be inspired by the passage. Petrarch, for whom Laura's hair was one of her chief ornaments and a constant source of fascination, might also have been receptive to Lucius's rapturous description of women's hair, particularly Photis's. The impression of golden hair shining brighter than the sun, flowing down onto feminine shoulders or gathered up in tresses, was evoked by Petrarch in relation to Laura's hair on many occasions. No less attentive than Lucius to his beloved's hairstyle, Petrarch could have taken from Apuleius the idea of Photis's artfully neglected hairdo – a style dear to classical lyric poets – and especially her knot of hair, the beautiful 'nodus', an image which Petrarch also used several times when describing Laura's hair.⁴¹

This image acquires far greater significance in a passage a little further on in *Metamorphoses* which is highly relevant for our purposes, and which appears on a page in Petrarch's Apuleius manuscript that the poet read carefully, as it features at least one of his glosses, as well as some marks made by him.⁴² In the third book, Lucius promises Photis that he could never prefer another woman to her, and he does so

³⁹ Giovanni Boccaccio, *L'Ameto*, transl. J. Serafini-Sauli, New York, 1985, pp. 27–8, with minor changes.

⁴⁰ Carver, *The Protean Ass* (n. 24 above), p. 130.

⁴¹ On the specific features of Photis's hairstyle, particularly the hair knot, and on the preference of classical poets for this kind of artfully neglected style, see van Mal-Maeder, *Apuleius* (n. 35 above), pp. 179–82.

⁴² MS Vat. lat. 2193, fol. 51^r. Among several marks, many of which are undoubtedly Petrarch's, there is one next to the passage in question that has the same unusual appearance (two vertical dots separated by a horizontal line) as the marks next to the passage celebrating women's hair (see n. 36 above). These marks, however, were probably not made by Petrarch.

through an image which is very close to Petrarch's conceit: 'Adiuro per dulcem istum capilli tui nodulum, quo meum vinxisti spiritum, me nullam aliam meae Photidi malle'⁴³ ('I swear by that sweet knot of your hair with which you have bound my spirit that there is no other woman I prefer to my Photis', *Metamorphoses*, III.23). The reference to the sweet knot of the beloved's hair binding the lover's spirit (and we should recall that Petrarch identified Lucius with Apuleius himself)⁴⁴ is reminiscent of the knot of Laura's hair binding the poet's heart and soul. In Petrarch, the Latin 'spiritus' turns into the Italian 'cor' (heart) and the more Christian 'alma' (soul); but this is a small and predictable change. The similarity between the two images, on the other hand, is remarkable: both Apuleius's and Petrarch's knots are real hair knots, which acquire a metaphorical value in the lovers' refined language and, in this way, become the centre of a striking conceit signifying the power of the beloved women over the narrative/lyrical 'I'. The image of the knot appears in virtually all the Petrarchan occurrences of the motif of binding hair, as sonnet CCLXX, the only exception,⁴⁵ did in fact feature the 'nodo' in its first version, preserved in the so-called 'codice degli abbozzi', Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS 3196:⁴⁶ 'Spargi co le tue manj le chiome al uento, / Stringimj al nodo usato, e son contento' ('with your hands spread the locks upon the wind / Bind me to the same old knot, and I am happy').⁴⁷ All these indicate the importance of the knot for Petrarch's conceptualization of the topos, strengthening the hypothesis that Apuleius was his source.

Some Petrarchan images and specific terminological choices further reinforce the connection between Apuleius and Petrarch. In sonnet CXC VIII, for instance, Petrarch uses the verb *folgorare* to express the shining of Laura's binding golden knots: 'vedendo ardere i lumi ond'io m'accendo, / et folgorare i nodi ond'io son preso' ('to see those lights that burn and make me burn / and those knots which have bound me, shimmering', ll. 9–10). This verb, usually applied by Petrarch to Laura's eyes and not to her hair, may appear here, as Bettarini remarks, because the hair is

⁴³ In MS Vat. lat. 2193, fol. 51', the 'I' in 'dulcem' is missing.

⁴⁴ See Rizzo, 'Note alle *Familiari*' (n. 28 above), p. 608. It is worth noting that in MS Vat. lat. 2193 the author of the *Metamorphoses* is given the name 'Lucius'.

⁴⁵ CCLXX, ll. 59–61: 'spargi co le tue man' le chiome al vento, / ivi mi lega, et puo' mi far contento. / Dal laccio d'or non sia mai chi me scioglia' ('with your hands spread her locks upon the wind / and bind me there, and you will make me happy. / No one shall free me from that golden snare').

⁴⁶ MS Vat. lat. 3196 is an autograph manuscript composed of 20 sheets, bound together long after Petrarch's death, which features several Petrarchan texts, including 54 poems later included in the *Rerum vulgariarum fragmenta*. These texts are in various redactional states, ranging from first drafts to texts ready to be transcribed in fair copy. For a study and edition of MS Vat. lat. 3196, see L. Paolino, *Il codice degli abbozzi. Edizione e storia del manoscritto Vaticano latino 3196*, Milan and Naples, 2000. For a contribution on the glosses to the manuscript, see for instance V. Fera, 'Problemi ecdotici ed esegetici delle postille nel "codice degli abbozzi"', in *Francesco Petrarca e la sua ricezione europea*, ed. G. Cascio and B. Huss, Messina, 2020 pp. 115–38.

⁴⁷ Paolino, *Il codice degli abbozzi* (n. 46 above), p. 247, 59 [270], ll. 44–47 [59–62]. The numbers outside brackets refer to the poem and lines numbers in MS Vat. lat. 3196, while the numbers in square brackets refer to the corresponding poem and lines numbers in the final version of the *Rerum vulgariarum fragmenta*.

close to the eyes, sharing their intense luminosity.⁴⁸ Yet, it is worth recalling that Apuleius uses the Latin equivalent of this verb (*fulgurare*) in the passage quoted above celebrating women's hair, where the splendour of luminous locks 'contra solis aciem vegetus fulgurat' ('flashes lively against the sunbeams', *Metamorphoses*, II.9). He also employs it in the famous episode of Cupid and Psyche, which is surely behind Petrarch's reference in the *Liber sine nomine*, in which Cupid's golden locks, arranged in ringlets and falling down on his milk-white neck (images reminiscent of so many Petrarchan sonnets), have a flashing splendour: 'quorum splendore nimio fulgurante iam et ipsum lumen lucernae vacillabat' ('the lightning of their great brilliance made even the lamp's light flicker', *Metamorphoses*, V.22). Furthermore, in sonnet CCLXX, the golden lace/hair tying the poet – which, as we have seen, was a knot ('nodo') in the poem's first version – is described as 'negletto ad arte, e 'nnanellato et hirto' (l. 62), that is, 'artfully neglected' and 'curled' or 'thick with ringlets' and 'high on her head'. Not only does Laura's hairstyle bring to mind the passage of Apuleius (*Metamorphoses*, II.9), but its specific features recall Photis's hair, which was gathered in a knot high on her head ('in summum verticem nodus adstrinxerat') and distinguished by an artful artlessness ('inordinatus ornatus').⁴⁹ The hair of Photis and of Laura is so beautiful that both Lucius and Petrarch ask for it be loosened and to flow freely: 'spargi co le tue man' le chiome al vento, / ivi mi lega, et puo' mi far contento' ('with your hands spread her locks upon the wind / and bind me there, and you will make me happy', CCLXX, ll. 59–60),⁵⁰ 'Sed ut mihi morem plenius gesseris, in effusum laxa crinem et capillo fluenter undante redde complexus amabiles' ('But humour me even more: unloose your tresses and let them flow, and embrace me lovingly with your hair rippling like waves', *Metamorphoses*, II.16). Finally, and most significantly, Apuleius's adjective 'dulcis' in the passage most relevant to our discussion – 'Adiuro per dulcem istum capilli tui nodulum, quo meum vinxisti spiritum' ('I swear by that sweet knot of your hair with which you have bound my spirit', *Metamorphoses*, III.23) – appears to have left traces in Petrarch's version of the conceit. Not only is the binding knot of hair presented, in sonnet CXC VII, as the equivalent of the 'dolce giogo' ('sweet yoke', l. 3), but the knots of Laura's hair, this time in the plural form, are described in sonnet XC as 'dolci nodi' (l. 2), just like Photis's 'dulcem nodulum'.⁵¹

Since several indications suggest that the passage in *Metamorphoses* could be the source for Petrarch's conceit of the binding hair knot, it will be helpful to consider

⁴⁸ Petrarch, *Canzoniere*, ed. Bettarini (n. 14 above), p. 919.

⁴⁹ Another possible source for Petrarch's 'negletto ad arte', underscored by several critics, is Ovid's *Ars amatoria* III.153–5: 'Et neglecta decet multas coma; saepe iacere / Hesternam credas; illa repexa modo est. / Ars casu similis' ('Even neglected hair is becoming to many; often you would think it lay loose from yesterday; this very moment it has been combed afresh. Art counterfeits chance'); all Latin text and English translations are from Ovid, *The Art of Love, and Other Poems*, transl. J. H. Mozley, The Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge MA, 1957. These lines belong to a passage similar to Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, II.9, in which Ovid describes several feminine hairstyles.

⁵⁰ Petrarch is here addressing Love.

⁵¹ The term 'dolce nodo' reappears in *Triumphus Mortis II* (ll. 128–9), supposedly composed after sonnet XC, to express the amorous knot tying Laura's heart. In this case, however, there is no reference to hair (since it is Laura's heart which is tied, the conceit would not make much sense). Petrarch, *Triumphs*, ed. V. Pacca, Milan, 1996. For the dating of *Triumphus Mortis II*, see Pacca's introduction, pp. 303–8.

the dating of the poems in question in relation to his reading of Apuleius's text. Before doing so, however, it is important to stress that while the strong literary connections between the texts of Apuleius and Petrarch are the basis of my hypothesis, the chronological considerations are highly conjectural, given the great uncertainty among scholars surrounding the date of composition of these poems. Nevertheless, it is still possible to make some potentially interesting observations.

The first thing to note is that, while it is not easy to establish the exact date of the conceit's first appearance in the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (for reasons I shall explain), all the poems featuring it were most likely written after Petrarch's first reading of Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, which is certainly not later than the first layer of his glosses in MS Vat. lat. 2193, dating back to 1340–1343.⁵² We might go as far as to claim that the characteristically Petrarchan image of the 'nodo' of Laura's hair makes its first appearance only after these years, and perhaps precisely at this time. Indeed, sonnet XC, possibly the first poem to feature the image in both textual and chronological terms, which presents a version of the motif particularly close to Apuleius's, with Laura's 'dolci nodi' recalling Photis's 'dulcem nodulum', is tentatively dated by several scholars to the early 1340s, when Petrarch was probably reading and annotating Apuleius's text for the first time.⁵³ Although there were other sources from which he could have drawn the image, the dating and specific wording of the Petrarchan passage suggest that Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* may well have been his source.⁵⁴

Dating the earliest appearance of the conceit of the binding hair knot, as I have already indicated, is far from easy. The difficulty is mainly due to the complex

⁵² See Petrucci, *La scrittura* (n. 18 above), pp. 42–3 and 117–18. The only occurrence of a conceit similar to that of Laura's ensnaring hair which might be antecedent to Petrarch's annotation of Apuleius's text is in LIX, which some scholars attribute to a period prior to the early 1340s – e.g. Petrarch, *Il Canzoniere* ... , ed. L. Mascetta, Lanciano, 1895; E. H. Wilkins, *The Making of the 'Canzoniere' and Other Petrarchan Studies*, Rome, 1951, p. 350. This dating, however, is purely tentative, as is pointed out in Petrarch, *Canzoniere*, ed. Santagata (n. 8 above), p. 307; and A. Foresti, 'Studi sul Petrarca. Dalle prime alle "secondo lagrime". Un capitolo della storia d'amore di Francesco Petrarca', *Convivium*, 12, 1940, pp. 8–35, seems to suggest that it might be datable to the years 1339–1340. Moreover, Petrarch might have corrected the poem in a later period. Even more relevantly, in this case Laura's hair is not the knot which ties the poet, but instead the place in which Love hides the lace, ll. 4–5: 'Tra le chiome de l'òr nascose il laccio, / al qual mi strinse, Amore' ('Within the locks of gold was hid the noose / with which Love bound me tight'). The knot is not necessarily an actual knot of hair.

⁵³ Petrarch, *Canzoniere*, ed. Santagata (n. 8 above), p. 443, suggests a date after 1341; Foresti, 'Studi sul Petrarca' (n. 52 above) proposes 1339–1340; R. Amatore, 'Petrarca', in *La letteratura italiana. Storia e testi*, II.1: *Il Trecento*, Bari, 1971, pp. 73–405 (281), dates the poem 1341; E. Taddeo, 'Francesco Petrarca: "Erano i capei d'oro a l'aura sparsi"', in *Dai 'Fiori di parlare' al 'Giardino incantato'. Proposte per un uso didattico del testo letterario*, ed. G. Pirodda, Padua, 1981, pp. 31–48 (34), deems 1342 a plausible date for the sonnet. Wilkins, *The Making* (n. 52 above), p. 365, though without assigning a certain date to the poem, suggests that it may belong either to the period 1342–1343 or 1345–1347.

⁵⁴ The reference to the knot of a woman's hair is found, e.g. in the passage quoted above from the *Ars amatoria* III.139–40, in which Ovid, when describing several feminine hairstyles, states that a round face requires a woman's hair to be gathered high in a knot – 'Exiguum summa nodum sibi fronte relinquit, / Ut pateant aures, ora rotunda volunt' ('Round faces would fain have a small knot left on top of the head, so that the ears show'). For other classical examples, including Ovid's *Metamorphoses* VIII.391 and Horace's *Carmina* II.1, 23, see van Mal-Maeder, *Apuleius* (n. 35 above), p. 182. The reference to the knot is found also in Matthieu de Vendôme's *Ars versificatoria*, ed. F. Munari, Rome, 1988, I.55, 8–9, a text that might have influenced Petrarch's feminine portraits, in which Helen's hair is described as: 'Auro respon-

compositional history of the so-called ‘ciclo dell’aura’, in which the image first enters the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*.⁵⁵ In this group of four sonnets (CXCIV, CXCVI, CXCVII, CXCVIII), which all open with the motif of ‘l’aura’ – the breeze, but also a pun on Laura’s name – three feature the motif: ‘torsele [le chiome] il tempo poi in più saldi nodi, / et strinse ’l cor d’un laccio sì possente, / che Morte sola fia ch’indi lo snodi’ (‘Then in still tighter knots time wound her hair / and bound my heart with cord that is so strong / that only Death can free it from such ties’, CXCVI, ll. 12–14); ‘né posso dal bel nodo omai dar crollo, / là ’ve il sol perde, non pur l’ambra o l’auro: / dico le chiome bionde, e ’l crespo laccio, / che sì soavemente lega et stringe / l’alma’ (‘nor can I now break loose the lovely knot / which gold and amber and the sun surpasses: / I mean her golden hair, the curly snare / that with such softness binds and tightens round / my soul’, CXCVII, ll. 7–11) ‘là da’ belli occhi, et de le chiome stesse / lega ’l cor lasso ... i nodi ond’io son preso’ (‘there with her lovely eyes and hair she binds / my weary heart ... those knots which have bound me’, CXCVIII, ll. 3–10). According to Giovanni Ponte, this group of sonnets was first composed in 1342.⁵⁶ It is tempting to accept his dating, since it reinforces my hypothesis; however, it is not supported by any strong evidence and has been contradicted by several scholars, many of whom suggest a later date of composition for sonnets CXCIV, CXCVII and possibly CXCVIII (though Wilkins assigns it to 1342).⁵⁷ Although several hypotheses have been formulated regarding the compositional history of the ‘ciclo dell’aura’, for which the ‘codice degli abbozzi’ is a witness,⁵⁸ there is no consensus as to their chronology.

Footnote 54 (continued)

det coma: non replicata magistro / Nodo, descensu liberiore iacet’ (‘Like gold is her hair: not folded in a master’s / Knot, rather loosely falls down’). In this case, however, what Matthieu says is that Helen’s hair is *not* tied in a knot. One might think of a possible conflation of various sources (Apuleius, Ovid, Matthieu de Vendôme and others) in sonnet XC, yet the conceit of the knot of hair tying the poet’s spirit appears only in Apuleius. For a study of the possible influence of Matthieu de Vendôme’s *Ars versificatoria* on Petrarch’s work, particularly his feminine portraits, see E. Raimondi, ‘Ritrattistica petrarchesca’, in id., *Metafora e storia* (n. 31 above), pp. 163–87; and V. Fera, *La revisione petrarchesca* (n. 21 above), p. 155.

⁵⁵ As already explained (n. 52 above), in LIX the knot is not necessarily an actual knot of hair.

⁵⁶ Petrarch, *Rime sparse*, ed. G. Ponte, Milan, 1979.

⁵⁷ Wilkins, *The Making* (n. 52 above), p. 352. For a concise discussion of the various hypotheses regarding the date of composition of this group of sonnets, see Petrarch, *Canzoniere*, ed. Santagata (n. 8 above), pp. 845–6. Most scholars now tend to believe that sonnets CXCIV and CXCVII were first written in MS Vat. lat. 3196, fol. 2^r, probably around 1368 (two Petrarchan glosses indicate that fols 1 and 2 of this manuscript were used by Petrarch between 5 December 1366 and 13 October 1368, the latter date found in a gloss to song CCCXXIII, on fol. 2^v). As for CXCVIII, which is not present in MS Vat. lat. 3196, while Wilkins assigns it to 1342, in Petrarch, *Canzoniere*, ed. Santagata (n. 8 above), p. 846, the date of composition is said to be more likely 1368, while in id., *Canzoniere*, ed. Bettarini (n. 14 above), p. 898, the idea that all the poems of the ‘ciclo dell’aura’ were composed in the same (late) years is favoured.

⁵⁸ At MS Vat. lat. 3196, fol. 2^r, there are versions of sonnets CXCVI, CXCIV, CXCVII (CXCVIII is not present in this manuscript, but only in MS Vat. lat. 3195) which have several corrections, a sign of Petrarch’s work of revision, and which display various differences from the final form of the poems. For a study of the variants in the ‘ciclo dell’aura’, see C. Segre, ‘I sonetti dell’aura’, in id., *Notizie della crisi*, Turin, 1993, pp. 43–65 (previously published in *Lectura Petrarce* III, 1983, pp. 57–78).

Many critics, however, agree that sonnet CXCVI is probably the first of the group written by Petrarch,⁵⁹ and, I would add, most likely the antecedent, in terms of date of composition, of all the other poems featuring the conceit in question (CXCVII, CXCVIII, CCLIII, CCLXX, CCCLIX). Some critics even maintain that CXCVI may be much older than the other sonnets of the 'ciclo dell'aura',⁶⁰ attributing its first composition, following Wilkins, to 1342–1343.⁶¹ In this dating, the sonnet would seem to be contemporary, like sonnet XC, with Petrarch's first reading and glossing of Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, further strengthening the hypothesis that Photis's sweet knot of hair was the source of Laura's binding hair knots.⁶²

Conclusion

The characteristic Petrarchan motif of Laura's knot of hair binding the poet's heart and soul, which is prominent in the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, has a classical antecedent, and one that can be plausibly regarded as a source for Petrarch. It is found in Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, a manuscript of which Petrarch owned and which he read and annotated several times. Such passages as Lucius's celebration of the beauty of women's hair (*Metamorphoses*, II.8–9), and especially his declaration of love to Photis, an oath he takes on 'that sweet knot of your hair with which you have bound my spirit' (*Metamorphoses*, III.23), could well have captured the attention of Petrarch, who was acutely sensitive himself to the charms of feminine hair and was disposed to appreciate a conceit like the binding hair knot. Perfectly combining an exquisite naturalistic detail with a wide symbolic potential, this conceit was

⁵⁹ The idea is based on the fact that in MS Vat. lat. 3196 sonnet CXCVI is the first of the group, which appears in this order: CXCVI, CXCIV, CXCVII.

⁶⁰ See Petrarch, *Canzoniere*, ed. Santagata (n. 8 above), p. 846; Paolino, *Il codice degli abbozzi* (n. 46 above), p. 133.

⁶¹ Wilkins, *The Making* (n. 52 above), p. 352.

⁶² This hypothesis remains valid if we consider sonnet CXCVI as it appears in MS Vat. lat. 3196: though extensively revised and quite different from its final version, the sonnet presents the motif of Laura's 'nodi' already in its first attested form. In MS Vat. lat. 3196 version, the motif appears in the sestet; see Paolino, *Il codice degli abbozzi* (n. 46 above), p. 185, 11 [196], ll. 7–11: 'Le chiome, oggi raccolte in perle e 'n gemme, / Allor disciolte, et soura òr terso bionde, / Le quali ella spargeua, et spirti tali / Vidi et [ta' no]di ch'io ritorno all'ésca, / Et, s'io u'aggiungo, fiamj il fuggir tardo' ('The hair, gathered now in pearls and gems, / Flowing then, and more blonde than furbished gold, / Which she used to loosen, and such spirits / I saw and such knots that I return to the bait, / And, if I bide, my fleeing is slow'). In the passage from MS Vat. lat. 3196 to MS Vat. lat. 3195, the sestet of CXCVI was transferred, with significant revisions, to CXCIV; yet the motif of the hair knots remained and was rearticulated in CXCVI. Several elements suggest a possible connection between CXCVI and XC: the two sonnets revolve around Petrarch recollecting a past vision of Laura and comparing it with the current state of things; and in both texts the image of Laura's hair, and of her hair knots, is an essential element in this recollection and comparison.

especially suited to Petrarch's praise of Laura's comely locks, while also expressing the indissoluble nature of his love for her through a term, 'nodo', endowed with profound symbolic significance both in the Italian poetic tradition and in Petrarch's specific vocabulary. The abstract image of the amorous knot, recurrent in Petrarch's vernacular poetry,⁶³ thus acquired a powerful plastic physicality, which materialized into a knot of golden hair.

In addition to the value inherent in the detection of a new source for an influential Petrarchan conceit, the present study may have some further implications. On the one hand, it could offer novel elements for the dating of a series of Petrarchan poems, especially sonnet XC and the sonnets of the 'ciclo dell'aura' (CXCIV, CXCVI, CXCVII, CXCVIII). Even more significantly, it could foster a potentially fruitful reappraisal of the influence of Apuleius's work on Petrarch's vernacular poetry. This study has shown that Apuleius's influence was not limited to Petrarch's Latin prose works and extended to his vernacular poetry. It has also suggested that this influence might have been deeper than is traditionally acknowledged – surely deeper than was acknowledged by Petrarch himself in his letter to Boccaccio. Apuleius's words, rather than hurriedly read and possessed 'with the awareness that they are not my own', appear instead to 'have so become one with [the poet's] mind' that they shaped the expression of one of his most recurrent and significant conceits. Whether or not Petrarch forgot 'whose they are and whether they are mine or others', Photis's beautiful, binding hair knot entered the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* and, consequently, became a widespread topos in Renaissance poetry, destined to influence love lyric for many centuries.

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⁶³ The image is pervasive in the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* but also appears in Petrarch's vernacular *Triumphs* (n. 51 above), esp. *Triumphus Cupidinis I* (ll. 67–72); *Triumphus Cupidinis II* (ll. 23–4 and 45); *Triumphus Cupidinis III* (l. 64); *Triumphus Mortis II* (ll. 128–9).

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