Oregon Petrarch Open Book Project

Principle Investigator	Project Manager	Programmer and Web design
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The OPOB Project Website: http://language.uoregon.edu/petrarch
(username: nwacc, password: nwacc)

Overview. Our goal for the "Oregon Petrarch Open Book," or "OPOB," was to produce a database-driven website focused on Francis Petrarch's fourteenth-century poetry collection, the *Canzoniere*. We feel we've made excellent progress towards our April 2008 goal. Now available at the website above, soon to be open to the public, are: 1) an archive of the original 366 poems of the *Canzoniere*, 2) full translations in English and Spanish of the original Italian as well as limited translations in 4 other languages, 3) a small collection of commentaries, translations, and rewritings from other writers whose work was influenced by Petrarch, 4) a copyright-free multimedia archive containing art, music, and short movies that illustrate or are inspired by the *Canzoniere*, 5) a pedagogical structure for both scholars and students to contribute to the site's contents, and 6) means of communication (forum, newsletter, email) by which to grow and encourage collaboration on the site's future development.

Our project team's early work (May-August 2007) focused on content creation: populating the *Canzoniere* database with the original poems (and published variations), translations from the original Italian (in several languages, but principally in English and Spanish), multimedia annotations, critical commentaries, and bibliographic information. Much of this work was done during Lollini's graduate seminar on Petrarch last spring when students were asked to read Petrarch's original poems along with Renaissance translations and commentaries. One of their initial tasks was to produce paraphrases and summaries of the individual poems. This became the first "user-generated" content for the Canzoniere database. Subsequent tasks expanded on this valuable process of working from a source document to annotate, summarize, and exemplify.

The OPOB was built from the ground up to be equally useful to three distinct audiences: the general public, literature and humanities students, and scholars of Petrarch and his cultural heritage. The site has a carefully constructed hierarchy of privileges for each, but there's a great deal of overlap in core functions, including content construction. Students and scholars alike may write (peer-reviewed) summaries, compile critical

commentaries, edit primary source documents, and add textual and multimedia annotations.

More recent work (September 2007 – January 2008) has focused on the architecture of the website, refinement of the user interface, and further content development. This was our first experience with the Drupal content management system and it took several months for us to understand and efficiently use its many modules. We soon began to appreciate its power and flexibility, and have taken abundant advantage of the vast resources being developed for it. Originally, the OPOB had been a collection of discrete web tools (a wiki, database, html-based authoring tool); our current structure is far more integrated and allows for much richer and more explicit links between and among items. We still use Filemaker Pro for pieces of the backend database, but we plan to migrate everything to Drupal (PHP and MySQL) in the coming year.

The user interface is still far from finished, but we think we've been able to provide users with flexible and easily understood paths through the OPOB. Users have a rich set of creation and editing tools accessible from the menu system. One of the most popular tools is *Versions*. Throughout his lifetime, Petrarch constantly revised the text of the *Canzoniere*, including the order of the poems; *Versions* lets users compare up to five different iterations of the collection. Our content creation tools, contained in the Tools menu, are still less intuitive than we'd like, but our preliminary testers have said that they are easily learned. They also said our search tools, one for the site as a whole, and the other for the *Canzoniere* itself, are very useful and important. See Appendix 1.

Use. While the database is still only a shell of what we ultimately envision, its core elements have enabled Lollini to use it very productively in his teaching over the past year. In three very different kinds of courses—a graduate seminar on Petrarch last Spring where it served as the core text, a Freshman survey course with a large enrollment in the Fall where it served as an introduction to research in the humanities, and in another small graduate seminar on the 19th-century Italian poet, Leopardi (who was much influenced by Petrarch), the OPOB proved valuable, stable, and interesting. In addition, Lollini will use the OPOB in the summer of 2008 while taking a UO workshop on teaching beyond the classroom. The workshop would allow him to develop on-line one section of his Winter 2009 course on Petrarchims (RL 407/507) which will feature use of the OPOB.

Evaluation. Student feedback on the OPOB has been very positive. We did a focus group after last Spring's graduate seminar and the students responded very well to the constructivist or "bottom up" approach to literary study that the OPOB makes possible. Since then Lollini has been putting together an Advisory Board of Petrarch scholars for the Project. Besides providing the usual academic stamp of approval that a distinguished Board can provide, it is our hope that some of these board members will be early adopters of the data-driven teaching techniques databases such as ours make possible. See Appendix 2.

Expenditures. We felt we were able to maximize our results from the NWACC grant. We spent approximately 45% on programming and server set up, approximately 40% on content creation and editing, and 15% on travel to the CALICO conference to present the OPOB. Because of the NWACC grant, Lollini was also able to obtain another small

grant from the U. Oregon's Faculty IT Initiatives Fund, which supported his and the Yamada Language Center's work on the OPOB.

Dissemination. We've tried to share our work with different audiences both at the University of Oregon and elsewhere; we've particularly aimed our outreach at the sometimes very separate worlds of foreign language and literature specialists. Lollini has given two presentations on the OPOB to campus audiences interested in using IT for teaching and research, and in May he will do a special lecture for humanities faculty. Magoto and Kerr presented on Drupal's applications for foreign language teaching at the Oregon state foreign language educators' conference, COFLT. In March, Lollini and Magoto formally introduced the OPOB at CALICO, one of the premier conferences for the use of computer technology in the teaching of language and literature. Our work has also been featured in campus publications, *IT Connections* and the *YLC Quarterly*.

Future Plans. Like most web-based initiatives, the long-term success of the OPOB is very much dependent on the community we are able to build around it. As noted above, the site is meant to grow and respond proportionally to the level of interest and commitment that the community generates for it. Based on preliminary indications, we're confident that the response will be enthusiastic. We've recently used OPOB v.1.0 as the basis for a proposal to NEH for one of their digital humanities startup grants. Securing more funding from a source such as NEH will insure that the site will continue to grow and be revised and that a wider audience will become aware of it. Even if no future funding is obtained, we feel that we've developed a useful teaching/research tool that will contribute to our field's growing understanding of how the teaching of the humanities can be revitalized and reshaped by the use of technology.

Appendix 1: Screen Shots of OPOB

From the RVF Menu:
A basic view of poem 1 of the Canzoniere. With every poem a user can see a translation, read a commentary, see a re-writing, find out what multimedia assets are available, and see (or add) keywords and summaries.

From the RVF Menu:
The OPOB currently has translations into English, Spanish, and 4 other languages (in part). Side by side comparisons are quite possible with this tool.

From the Tools Menu: Petrarch continued to revise the Canzoniere throughout his life. The OPOB's *Version* tool permits side by side study of the different iterations.

From the Tools and Project Menu:
The OPOB aims to have a high level of integration, indexing and cross referencing. Key to this is its *Search Tool*. In addition, thanks to a Drupal translation module, it's easy to prepare "content" pages in different languages and let the user switch between them.

Appendix 2: Evaluation of OPOB v.1.0—Professor Theodore Cachey, Dept. of Romance Languages and Literatures, University of Notre Dame

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March 31, 2008

To whom it may concern:

Professor Massimo Lollini has asked me to write a letter of endorsement in support of his proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities for the "Oregon Petrarch Open Book" (OPOB) project and I am pleased to do so.

The project promises to fill a major lacuna in the resources currently available on-line for the study of classic Italian literature of the Middle Ages. Both the Dartmouth Dante Project (DDP) and Brown University's Decameron Web centered on Boccaccio's masterpiece are already well-established and widely used. There is no comparable resource currently available for the study of Petrarch. The Oregon project proposes to the combine the best qualities of the DDP and the Decameron Web by combining the highest quality scholarly resources in terms of texts and commentaries such as those published by the DDP with the collection of hypermedia and pedagogical resources such as those that grace the Decameron Web.

I have had the opportunity to review the site and am impressed by the strong beginning that Professor Lollini and his colleagues have made with very modest resources since inaugurating the project in 2007. It seems to me that the project has very good support on the technical side from the Yamada Language Center at the University of Oregon. In addition, the University of Oregon is the home of very strong Humanities programs, in particular in Comparative Literature, English, and the Romance Languages and this bodes well for the future of the project, which very appropriately emphasizes the comparative and more broadly interdisciplinary reception of Petrarch's masterpiece in its design.

The plan to include in addition to commentaries on the text, all translations from all periods of the poems that make up the collection is indeed an exciting prospect. The collection of resources that are to be gathered relating to the iconographical traditions associated with the work will have an analogous resonance. The current site (under "versions") includes a handy section dedicated to illustrating the different transformations of the *Canzoniere* during its "making" which I found to be a suggestive illustration of the pedagogical potential of the site. To have the commentaries all in one place available on-line as the Dante commentaries are in the DDP would be a major benefit to scholarship.

Finally, I believe that the principal investigator has the international scholarly credentials and reputation to bring such an ambitious project successfully to completion. These qualities should not be underestimated. The success of the Decameron Web was due in large measure to the leadership and scholarly standing of the P.I. I am pleased to

recommend this project to the National Endowment for the Humanities as worthy of the most serious consideration.

Sincerely,

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