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# ECHOES OF DESIRE



ENGLISH

PETRARCHISM

AND ITS

COUNTERDISCOURSES

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## INTRODUCTION:

## LOVE IN THE TIME OF CHOLER

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*Author.* In all this world I thinke none lov's but I.  
*Echo.* None lov's but I. *Auth.* Thou foolish tartling ghest,  
 In this thou telst a lie. *Echo.* thou telst a lie.  
*Author.* Why? Love him selfe he lodgeth in my brest.  
*Echo.* He lodgeth in my brest. *Auth.* I pine for griefe:  
 And yet I want reliefe. *Echo.* I want reliefe.  
*Author.* No starre more faire then she whom I adore.  
*Echo.* Then he, whom I adore. *Auth.* Herehence I burne  
 Still more and more. *Echo.* I burne still more and more.  
*Author.* Love, let my heart returne. *Echo.* my heart, returne.  
*Auth.* Is then the *Saint*, for whom thou makest mone,  
 And whom I love, but one? *Echo.* I love but one.  
*Author.* O heav'ns, is ther in love no ende of ill? *Echo.* In love no ende of ill.  
*Auth.* Thou prating voyce,  
 Dwellst thou in th'ayre, or but in hollow hills.  
*Echo.* In hollow hills. *Auth.* Cease of to vaunt thy choyse.  
*Echo.* Cease of to vaunt thy choyse. *Auth.* I would replee,  
 But here for love I die. *Echo.* for love I die.

(Watson, *Heratompahia*, 25)<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Watson's dialogue between a lover and Echo might well tempt literary critics themselves merely to echo the conventional wisdom about Petrarchan poetry. Though published in 1582, the poem is in many ways representative both of earlier Tudor sonnets and of

<sup>1</sup> cite Thomas Watson, *The Heratompahia or Passionate Centurie of Love* (London, 1582).

those that appeared in the 1590s. It invokes the diction of Petrarchism when its author describes the mistress as a saint and compares her to a star. It confirms the ideology of Petrarchism when Echo assents, "In love no end of ills" (14). And it not only exemplifies but also enacts the repetitiveness that is the fundamental praxis of Petrarchism, typically realized on levels ranging from diction to stanzaic structure to plot: if the speaker named Author is trapped in repeating sentiments from which he cannot escape, that process itself is replicated when Echo mimes his words. All these mirrorings are ironically played against the dialogue form, which normally implies their opposite, a give-and-take conversation.

Yet by turning the dyad of Petrarchan lover and mistress into a triad whose third member, Echo, in some sense rivals the lover ("he lodgeth in my brest" / *Echo*. He lodgeth in my brest" [4-5]), Watson directs our attention to an often neglected aspect of Petrarchism: the significance of competition, whether with other poets or other lovers. As we will see, not only texts participating in that movement but also ones reacting against it are triangulated in this and many other ways. More to our purposes now, if in some respects Watson's dialogue substantiates the conventional wisdom about Petrarchism, in others it challenges both that discourse and our critical perspectives on it. Certain passages in the lyric render this apparently straightforward Petrarchan poem anti-Petrarchan in at least the broadest senses of that contested and complex term. And the text calls into question as well many of the academic discourses that examine Petrarchism.

These interrogations of Petrarchism begin when the poem itself does: lines one and two, as well as lines seven and eight, draw our attention to the deceptions inherent in Petrarchan rhetoric. If both Author and Echo can claim that no one is fairer than their beloved, that commonplace assertion is revealed as at the very least hyperbolic, and thus the absolutes favored in Petrarchan diction and exemplified by the opening of this poem are challenged. Echo not only repeats the words of Author but mimes and even mocks his literary enterprise in that he too is echoing the conventional language associated with his genre. Like her prototypes in classical mythology, Watson's Echo is variously pathetic shadow and powerful satirist.<sup>2</sup> Lines seven and eight also embody a more unsettling subversion. Despite the explanatory note in the text, "S. Liquescent immutat sensum" ("the elision of S. changes the sense"),<sup>3</sup> more than the sense is being changed: a

<sup>2</sup>On the varied mythological versions of this figure, see John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), chap. 1; and Joseph Loewenstein, *Responsive Readings: Versions of Echo in Pastoral, Epic, and the Jonsonian Masque* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), chap. 1.

<sup>3</sup>I am grateful to my colleague Denis Feeney for assistance with this translation.

female voice is praising Narcissus in terms usually reserved for a female Petrarchan mistress. The transgression here is recognized and intensified when the author asks if they love the same person, a decidedly unconventional question that Echo finesses with a return to the most conventional of sentiments, "I love but one" (12). While one should avoid the temptation to make too much of this confusion of gender boundaries (its subversion is, after all, contained by the obvious explanation for Echo's words, the myth starring herself and Narcissus), its unresolved undertones remain and again call into question the workings of Petrarchism.

Moreover, the poem complicates and even compromises some common critical assumptions about the connections between gender and power in Petrarchism. If this lyric is read as an instance of the dependency that the Petrarchan lover shares with the client in a patronage system, an interpretation many new historicists would favor,<sup>4</sup> the ways the name "Author" draws attention to the lover's power of speech are neglected. Alternatively, one might cite the poem in support of the feminist argument that Petrarchism is both source and sign of male potency: after all, not only does Watson literally give his fictive Echo her words, but that authorial power is replicated when his alter ego in the poem does so as well.<sup>5</sup> Yet in merely repeating what has been said, Echo occasionally challenges it as well. Thus an ostensibly powerless female voice achieves some types of agency. Moreover, the speaker, like Echo, claims to die at the end: his power of speech culminates in a statement about the ultimate loss of power, the loss of life itself. If storytelling is an assertion of male power,<sup>6</sup> what happens when a man tells stories about his own defeat?

Seemingly conventional enough to exemplify Petrarchism, seemingly unremarkable enough to invite the briefest summary of how it does so, the lyric thus twists and turns in a way that the third line implicitly glosses: "In this thou telst a lie. *Echo*. thou telst a lie." Although that assertion initially refers to Echo's claim that no one else loves, the doubled lines of the poem hint that line three could apply to other types of duplicity as well. Is Author's claim that Echo lies itself a lie? And, in a broader sense, might the author's claims throughout the poem be lies, as Echo's response

<sup>4</sup>For the most influential presentation of this case, see Arthur F. Marotti, "'Love is not love': Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order," *ELH*, 49 (1982), 396-428.

<sup>5</sup>Compare Maureen Quilligan's different but related suggestion that the mythological figure of Echo represents the situation of the Jacobean woman author ("The Constant Subject: Instability and Authority in Wroth's *Urania* Poems," in *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth-Century English Poetry*, ed. Elizabeth D. Harvey and Katharine Eisman Maus [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990], pp. 310-312).

<sup>6</sup>Many critics have argued this position. See, e.g., Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Random House, 1985), esp. chap. 4.

to his first assertion would suggest? In recognizing that Echo challenges the veracity of Author, we should recognize as well that her voice interrogates the author and the authority of Petrarchan love poetry.

Watson's poem, then, exemplifies and examines the subject of this book: how Petrarchism is variously criticized, contradicted, and countermanded in Tudor and Stuart culture. In so doing, it introduces a range of related issues, such as the linkage between formal decisions and cultural conditions, the role of rivalry in love poetry, the workings of repetition, the paradoxes of recounting one's own failures, and, above all, gender, that nexus of questions about sameness and difference. The relationship between Echo and Author also alerts us to another manifestation of sameness and difference: the difficulty of distinguishing the discourses and counterdiscourses of Petrarchism. Many attacks on Petrarchism can be traced to members of its own battalions. The problem of differentiating friend and foe, Petrarchan and anti-Petrarchan text, is echoed and in part generated by the difficulty of clearly distinguishing masculine and feminine in Petrarchism and in Tudor and Stuart culture.

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Protean and pervasive in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, both Petrarchism and the reactions against it prove notoriously hard to define. The *Rime sparse*, a collection as variable as Laura herself, includes many characteristics that might otherwise be labeled anti-Petrarchan, such as a renunciation of love in favor of spiritual values. Moreover, the *Rime sparse* was read in editions festooned with lengthy and often contradictory commentaries, editions that, like some Bibles, frequently sported a relatively brief passage from Petrarch surrounded by far bulkier glosses.<sup>7</sup> The very presence of these lengthy explanations attests to both the cultural significance and the intellectual complexity of Petrarch's sequence. Far from re-

<sup>7</sup>On the commentator, see esp. two studies by William J. Kennedy, "Petrarchan Textuality: Commentaries and Gender Revisions," in *Discourses of Authority in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, ed. Kevin Brownlee and Walter Stephens (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1989), and *Authorizing Petrarch* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995). I am indebted to the author for making his book available to me before publication and for a number of useful suggestions about my work. The commentators' influence on Wyatt in particular is analyzed in Maxwell S. Luña, "Wyatt's 'The Lover Compareth His State' and the Petrarchan Commentators," *TSL*, 12 (1971), 531-535; and Patricia Thomson, *Sir Thomas Wyatt and His Background* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964), pp. 190-200, and her earlier version of the argument, "Wyatt and the Petrarchan Commentators," *RES*, 10 (1959), 225-233.

solving the interpretive problems posed by the *Rime sparse*, however, Petrarch's early commentators often confound them. William J. Kennedy has persuasively demonstrated the variety in Renaissance interpretations of the author of the *Rime sparse*: he is read as devout Christian, civic humanist, monarchist, and so on.<sup>8</sup> "The history of Petrarchism," as Kennedy aptly observes, "is a narrative of multiple Petrarchs."<sup>9</sup>

When one turns from Petrarch to his Continental heirs and assigns, the challenges of describing and defining Petrarchism are further confounded. Categorizing the poems in this tradition is itself problematical. Donald Stone Jr., for example, observes that the twenty-third sonnet of Ronsard's *Continuation* ("Mignonne, levés-vous") "abandons Petrarchism indirectly by creating an intimacy between poet and lady unparalleled in the Italian tradition";<sup>10</sup> others, however, might expand their definitions of Petrarchism to include frankly erotic lyrics like this one. Even authors who are clearly writing Petrarchan poetry respond very differently to the *Rime sparse* and in so doing create alternative Petrarchan traditions; witness the contrast between respectful imitators like Bembo and more radical reinterpreters like Serafino.<sup>11</sup>

By the time the sonnet was in vogue in England, then, poets who wished to write within or react against that tradition confronted not one but several traditions—and not one but several Petrarchs. Hence scholars debate whether the reinterpretation of Petrarch's Poem 190 that shapes Wyatt's "Whoso List to Hunt" should be traced to Giovanni Antonio Romanello (the Italian poet who recast the poem) or to commentaries on Petrarch himself.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, all these problems are further complicated in light of the historical perspective of sixteenth-century sonneteers. The tradition must have seemed even more flexible, inchoate, or both to poets composing sonnets in 1592—or even 1594 or 1595—than it does to us today. Its sixteenth-century practitioners could not turn to their Norton Anthologies for a convenient summary of its characteristics and development, and they may well not have defined Petrarchism in all the ways a twentieth-century scholar would. At what point, for instance, was the fourteen-line

<sup>8</sup>See Kennedy, "Petrarchan Textuality," and his *Authorizing Petrarch*, esp. chap. 2.

<sup>9</sup>William J. Kennedy, "Colonizing Petrarch," paper presented at 1990 meeting of the Modern Language Association, Chicago.

<sup>10</sup>Donald Stone Jr., *Ronsard's Sonnet Cycle: A Study in Tone and Vision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 64.

<sup>11</sup>Compare F. T. Prince, "The Sonnet from Wyatt to Shakespeare," in *Elizabethan Poetry*, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies, 2 (London: Edward Arnold, 1960), pp. 11-12.

<sup>12</sup>See Alastair Fowler, *Conceitful Thought: The Interpretation of English Renaissance Poems* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1975), pp. 3-4; Kenneth Muir and Patricia Thomson, eds., *Collected Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1969), pp. 266-267; and Thomson, *Sir Thomas Wyatt*, pp. 190-200.

poem established as one of its principal norms? To be sure, most sonneteers do adopt it. Yet in 1582 Watson himself publishes eighteen-line poems that, despite their prosody, are insistently Petrarchan in other ways. Fifteen years later another minor sonneteer, Richard Tofte, calls his heroine "Laura" and puns on "laurel." He does not, however, feel constrained to write fourteen-line poems, and, given how derivative his poems are in other respects, the absence of that norm suggests not excitement with prosodic experimentation and variation (a desire, so to speak, to wear his laurel with a difference) but a lack of concern for the verse form now considered one of the central markers of Petrarchism. Indeed, in asking how Petrarchism was interpreted by those writing within it and hence in some sense re-creating it, one needs to entertain the possibility that in some instances Petrarch himself might not have been seen as the central source for the love lyrics critics now associate primarily with him. Certainly many sonneteers are keenly conscious of their classical antecedents and insistently draw attention to them, in part, perhaps, to lend respectability to the dubious enterprise of writing love poetry; the title page of Giles Fletcher's *Licia* reads "to the imitation of the best Latin Poets, and others,"<sup>14</sup> while the prose passages attached to each sonnet in Watson's *Heratompithia* explicate his sources, including many classical ones.<sup>14</sup>

Defining anti-Petrarchism is no less complicated.<sup>15</sup> In some instances, of course, the label fits neatly. One has no more trouble designating the satiric poem about Mopsa in Sidney's *Arcadia* anti-Petrarchan than we do categorizing its sources and analogues, notably so-called ugly beauty poems by Berni and Ronsard, as such. Often, however, the process of classification is less clear-cut. To begin with, a definition of anti-Petrarchism necessarily draws on that perilous enterprise of defining Petrarchism. Because many poems, including Watson's, oppose Petrarchism at certain points and embrace it at others or oppose it with the ambivalence that characterizes Petrarchism itself, the very category anti-Petrarchan is itself often problematical. Petrarchism regularly incorporates attacks on its own vision, so distinguishing lyrics that participate in that movement from ones that rebut it is by no means easy—should we, for example, label poems that

<sup>14</sup>Fletcher is cited from *Licia, or Poemes of Love* (Cambridge, Eng., 1593?).

<sup>15</sup>Two studies, though dated, provide detailed background on the range of sources behind the English sonnets. See Lisle Cecil John, *The Elizabethan Sonnet Sequence: Studies in Conventional Contents* (1938; rpt., New York: Russell and Russell, 1964); and Janet G. Scott, *Les Sonnets Elisabethains: Les sources et l'apport personnel* (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1920).

<sup>16</sup>In chap. 2 of her unpublished book, "Passion Lends Them Power: The Poetry and Practice of Elizabethan Courtship," Ilona Bell attempts to negotiate this problem by distinguishing what she terms *anti-Petrarchism* from *pseudo-Petrarchism*, which refashions a tradition.

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reject *apudias* for *carias* anti-Petrarchan or simply acknowledge that they are replicating a move made by Petrarch himself? One critic, in fact, misleadingly claims that until the eighteenth century, so-called anti-Petrarchism is merely a convention of Petrarchism which never seriously challenges it, a common interpretation that neglects the intensity and even cholera with which certain poets attack Petrarchism.<sup>16</sup> In fact, the dialogue between the two movements is as complex and variable as the interchange between Watson's Echo and Author; in both cases the voices are sometimes antagonistic opponents, sometimes virtually indistinguishable alter egos.

Neither is it easy to delimit the scope of the movement generally called anti-Petrarchism. Given the prevalence and significance of Petrarchism in sixteenth- and even seventeenth-century England, texts that never explicitly allude to it may well respond to it implicitly. Petrarchism is a basso continuo against which arias in different styles and genres are sung. Thus in the 1590s, as I will suggest later, the decision to write an epyllion is in many seventeenth-century texts are grounded in an unspoken commentary on Petrarchism; as Gordon Braden and William Kerrigan persuasively demonstrate, the development of lyric poetry during that era may virtually be plotted as a series of different reactions to Petrarchism.<sup>17</sup> "Renaissance love poetry," Ilona Bell observes, "cannot be a-Petrarchan."<sup>18</sup>

The present book responds to the methodological challenges inherent in its vast subject by defining its topic narrowly in some ways and broadly in others. I direct my attention to the sixteenth and earlier seventeenth centuries, though both Petrarchism and its counterdiscourses are exemplified by such contemporary poets as John Berrymann and Marilyn Hacker,<sup>19</sup> and I focus mainly on texts whose relationship to Petrarchism is overt. I refer

<sup>16</sup>See Leonard Forster, *The Icy Fire: Five Studies in European Petrarchism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 56–58.

<sup>17</sup>In emphasizing the continuing influence of that movement, Gordon Braden maintains, however, that seventeenth-century poetry typically reflects Petrarchism rather than rejecting it; the validity of this thought-provoking but ultimately unpersuasive assertion once again depends on how one defines Petrarchism and anti-Petrarchism ("Beyond Frustration: Petrarchan Laurels in the Seventeenth Century," *SEL*, 26 [1986], 5–23). For a related interpretation of seventeenth-century responses to Petrarchism, see also an essay he coauthored with William Kerrigan, "Milton's Coy Eve: *Paradise Lost* and Renaissance Love Poetry," *ELH*, 53 (1986), 28–38.

<sup>18</sup>Ilona Bell, "Milton's Dialogue with Petrarch," in *Milton Studies*, 28 (1993), 109.

<sup>19</sup>See esp. Lynn Keller's essay on Hacker, "Measured Feet 'in Gender-Bender Shoes': Marilyn Hacker's *Love, Death, and the Changing of the Seasons*," in *Feminist Measures: Somnolign in Poetry and Theory*, ed. Lynn Keller and Cristanne Miller (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994). I am grateful to the author for making this text available to me in manuscript.

briefly to Continental poems when they are especially germane, but this is a study of English Petrarchism, not a comparative analysis. Indeed, I am particularly interested in certain characteristics of Petrarchism and anti-Petrarchism which specifically interact with Tudor and Stuart culture: advantages as well as limitations accrue from the decision to read the movement in part as a response to local conditions.<sup>20</sup> Tip O'Neill repeatedly observed that all politics is local; in some senses the politics of even as international a movement as Petrarchism is so too. I further delimit my topic by concentrating mainly on lyric poetry, though my conclusion considers reactions against Petrarchism in other genres and modes; there, as elsewhere, I respond to the breadth of my subject by trying to allude suggestively to issues I could not hope to analyze definitively.

This book also counters the problems inherent in the term *anti-Petrarchism* by attempting to avoid it. Because, as I have noted, that label is at best imperfect and at worst misleading, when possible I substitute the concept of the counterdiscourse, itself in turn redefined. As deployed by Richard Terdman in *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France*<sup>21</sup> and by other critics as well, that term is meant to apply to a range of reactions against a dominant discourse. Because it can readily be declined in the plural, "counterdiscourse" aptly suggests the variety of ways Petrarchism was resisted and rejected. Moreover, this label is more appropriate than "anti-Petrarchism" for describing the many instances in which a text both espouses and rejects Petrarchism or the cases in which its relationship to that discourse is, in more senses than one, too close to call. Like Terdman, in using the term in question I want to suggest a continuing process of struggle and one that often ends in the containment of the transgressive assertions in the texts that criticize Petrarchism. The containment of the reactions against Petrarchism is not, however, inevitable or even normative, as the paradigm deployed in *Discourse/Counter-Discourse* is prone to suggest. Nor is Petrarchism itself a stable or monolithic discourse with the hegemonic ability to repel all challenges. The relationship between discourse and counterdiscourse is a closely matched and often indeterminate power struggle, once again as volatile and variable as the relationship between Watson's Author and Echo.

<sup>20</sup>Roland Greene also alludes to local conditions influencing Petrarchism, though his approach to that issue is very different from mine (*Post-Petrarchism: Origins and Innovations of the Western Lyric Sequence* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991], p. 3).

<sup>21</sup>Richard Terdman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).



However we define and label them, the reactions against Petrarchism deserve more attention than they have hitherto received. To understand Petrarchism, certainly one of the most significant discourses in Tudor and even Stuart England, we must understand its counterdiscourses; this book is itself in some important ways a study of Petrarchan poetry, as any study of anti-Petrarchism is virtually bound to be. Analyzing the reactions against Petrarchism also allows us to address many questions currently at the center of early modern studies, notably problems about gender, the female body, male subjectivity, and nationalism. At the same time, studying the counterdiscourses of Petrarchism invites us to reexamine the kind of issues that are variously dismissed and celebrated as the staples of traditional criticism. Thus the problems of repetitiveness and of modes of difference and sameness in Watson parallel prosodic questions: the sonnet may play the sameness of its quatrains against the difference of the couplet, or, similarly, it may play the recurrence of the sonnet form from one poem to the next against variations within their stanzas, and so on. Generic questions also explicate the relationship of Petrarchism and its assailants, for rejections of that discourse are often expressed by invoking a range of alternative genres.

Because of what they do and what they fail to do, previous studies of early modern English literature further encourage us to examine both Petrarchism and the reactions against it. The contemporary predilection for analyzing Tudor and Stuart drama at the expense of the poetry and prose of the period guarantees that the sonnet tradition has received less attention than it deserves during the past two decades. In this book I attempt to redress that imbalance and to encourage further work on lyric poetry in general.

Although neither the Petrarchan discourse nor its counterdiscourses have received the attention they deserve and demand, the former, at least, has not been completely disregarded. Contemporary studies of Petrarchism, notably important books and articles by Ilona Bell, Gordon Braden, and Roland Greene, among other scholars, have demonstrated its continuing significance and have generated an exciting climate in which to address the subject.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, however, the lacunae and limitations in many current analyses invite reinterpretation. In particular, critics often claim that

<sup>22</sup>Bell, "Passion Lends Them Power"; Gordon Braden, "Love and Fame: The Petrarchan Career," in *Paganism's Freud: The Moral Disposition of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Joseph H. Smith, M.D., and William Kerrigan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); Greene, *Post-Petrarchism*.

Petrarchism is really about politics, not love.<sup>23</sup> Like most correctives, these statements demonstrate both the polemical benefits and the intellectual limitations of hyperbole. The tendency to read love as a decoy for another subject may well remind us of the type of allegorical temper that sees allusions to religious ideas virtually everywhere; in the case at hand, the equivalent of the original, transcendental signified is politics. As the title of this chapter insists, both Petrarchism and anti-Petrarchism are indeed often about subjects like politics, history, or the relationships among men, but they are always—and often primarily—about love, desire, and gender as well.

A second interpretive problem, which we have already encountered in passing, arises in some, though by no means all, new historicist and feminist commentaries on love poetry. Engaged in demonstrating parallels between courtship and courtiership, a number of new historicists have identified the Petrarchan lover with the subservient and often unsuccessful candidate for patronage.<sup>24</sup> Thus this tradition becomes a narrative of failure and the loss of agency. Alternatively, some feminist scholars encapsulate Petrarchism as a successful assertion of male power and the concomitant erasure of the female. As one typical presentation of that position puts it, "The Petrarchan love poem is a theater of desire—one in which men have the active roles and the women are assigned silent, iconic functions, and are notable primarily for their absence in the script."<sup>25</sup>

In this book I adopt a complex and often contestatory stance towards such arguments about power and silence. One can make a case for either the passive subservience or the aggressive if often masked dominance of the Petrarchan lover precisely because Petrarchism typically enacts a dynamic, unending slippage between power and powerlessness and between one of their principal sources, success and failure.<sup>26</sup> Hence readings that

<sup>23</sup>See Marotti, " 'Love is not love' "; for a related argument that connects love and politics without suggesting that the first is primarily a screen for the second, cf. Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Sallysbrass, "The Politics of *Astrophil and Selva*," *SEL*, 24 (1984), 53–68.

<sup>24</sup>See esp. Marotti, " 'Love is not love' "; and Jones and Sallysbrass, "Politics of *Astrophil and Selva*." The argument has, however, been widely disseminated.

<sup>25</sup>Gary F. Walker, "Struggling into Discourse: The Emergence of Renaissance Women's Writing," in *Silent but for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators, and Writers of Religious Works*, ed. Margaret Patterson Hanmay (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1985), p. 242. Also cf. the version of this argument in an essay by Margaret Homans, "'Syllables of Velvet': Dickinson, Rossetti, and the Rhetorics of Sexuality," *Feminist Studies*, 11 (1985), 569–593, a study that connects Petrarchism with developments in poetry of later centuries.

<sup>26</sup>Though critics have slighted this aspect of English Petrarchism, Thomas M. Greene trenchantly traces the uneasy relationship between success and failure in Petrarch's own poetry (*The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982], chaps. 6 and 7).

emphasize the potency and agency that Petrarchism bestows on its poets tell a partial story at best.<sup>27</sup> As we will see, the lurch between success and failure which characterizes that movement corresponds to recurrent problems in other arenas of Tudor and Stuart England, notably the conflicts among several different systems for assessing social status, and hence accounts in no small measure for the attraction of this mode of love poetry. Similarly, I maintain that reexamining female speech as constructed both in Petrarchan texts and elsewhere in the culture complicates frequently asserted connections among gender, speechlessness, and passivity. Although the Petrarchan mistress is sometimes silenced, in many instances she is not. Her voice, like that of Watson's Echo, is threatening not least because it comprises such varied and even contradictory registers.

The paradigm of the dominant and manipulative poet and silenced mistress is deceptive not merely because it neglects that variety but also because it typically presupposes the stability of gender categories. Writing poetry, according to this model, is gendered masculine, and it is associated with many forms of power and agency, not least the power to silence the female voice. But other studies have drawn our attention to the problematics of gender categories in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England,<sup>28</sup> and queer theory in particular has encouraged us to see both gender and sexuality in terms of overlapping and unstable subject positions rather than clear-cut binaries.<sup>29</sup> Petrarchism, I will argue, repeatedly challenges the boundaries between characteristics that might be gendered masculine and feminine; whereas its counterdiscourses react to those challenges in many different ways, one of the most common and most revealing is their attempt to reestablish gendered distinctions.

Despite, and because of, the confusions of gender which are so characteristic of Petrarchism, this book focuses on what I term *diacritical desire*, a phrase intended to refer to the desire to make distinctions, its relationship to desire in the erotic sense, and the markers that attempt to establish such boundaries. Petrarchism, however imitative its style may be, is grounded in attempts at differentiation. Its poets distinguish themselves from their

<sup>27</sup>For an example of those readings, see Braden, "Love and Fame."

<sup>28</sup>See, e.g., Phyllis Rackin, "Androgyny, Mimesis, and the Marriage of the Boy Heroine on the English Renaissance Stage," *PMLA*, 102 (1987), 29–41; and Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womanhood, 1540–1620* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), esp. pt. 2. My argument about the eroded boundaries in Petrarchism between male and female is also related to the observations by Jonathan Dollimore about the threat of sameness (*Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Foucault* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1991], chap. 17).

<sup>29</sup>See, e.g., Jonathan Goldberg, *Solomonites: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), esp. the Introduction.



predecessors and from contemporary love poets as sciously as Petrarch marks the divide between himself and Dante and between the youthful and mature Petrarchs. And Petrarcan poets emphasize the divide between the poet and the mistress—even as they erase it. For Petrarchism also stages the breakdown of distinctions; witness the relationship between Author and Echo, analogous confusions about gender in other poems, and the oxymoron itself. More to our purposes, diacritical desire is both the impulse behind and the defining characteristic of anti-Petrarchism. I am concerned throughout to stress the contiguities—chronological, ideological, and stylistic—between Petrarchism and its counterdiscourses, one of which is the replication of diacritical desire in those counterdiscourses. They are, of course, based almost by definition on distinguishing one's own poem and sometimes, too, one's own lady from their counterparts in conventional Petrarchism. We will see that the diacritical agendas of anti-Petrarchism are realized as well in nuances of diction, patterns of syntax, and choices of genre. Cultural conditions, notably the often neglected consequences of early parental death, help to explain the attraction to these manifestations of diacritical desire.

The adjective *diacritical* typically refers not only to the impulse to make distinctions but also to the markers that do so. Focusing on them, I ask, What strategies, whether formal, ideological, or otherwise, serve to establish distinctions between one poet and another or between the poet and his lady? Why are both those markers and the desire to deploy them so attractive to the culture and the specific poets who do so? And why, given the prevalence and efficacy of these diacritical markers, are the texts in question characterized not by clear-cut separations between male and female, powerful and powerless, successful and unsuccessful, Petrarcan and anti-Petrarchan, but by slippages within and between those sets of categories?

In stressing the instability of both power and gender, however, I do not simply posit a kinder, gentler patriarchy. To be sure, I argue that to read Petrarchism primarily as an exercise in domination and silencing is to misread it, and I maintain as well that responses to some of the cultural tensions I explore are more complex than critics often acknowledge. But this book also uncovers anxieties about gender in some arenas that have been neglected by many students of literary and cultural history, notably demographics and the history of medicine. And, as the title of this introduction would suggest, I argue that the misogynistic hostility and anger that often impel both Petrarchism and the reactions against it can be even more pervasive and virulent than we sometimes acknowledge. In lyrics in these traditions, cholera is variously directed towards the Petrarcan mistress and

deflected onto women from whom she is seemingly different or onto other poets. Patriarchy may be most threatening when it is most threatened, most offensive (in both senses) when it is most defensive.

I approach broad questions like these by focusing closely on particular authors and movements and above all on particular texts within the counterdiscourses of Petrarchism. One aim of this book is to direct attention to some neglected poets and poems, notably the writing of that obscure but intriguing seventeenth-century figure John Collop. My close scrutiny of specific texts is, however, also polemical. We too often conflate the ideological agendas that were frequently though not always characteristic of New Criticism with its methodological protocols and therefore dismiss the latter out of hand; by precept and example, *Echoes of Desire* attempts to demonstrate how close readings can illuminate the questions that interest even—or especially—new historicists and feminists. If all politics is local, so too are many avenues for understanding politics.

In these and other respects, the methodology of this book is eclectic. It dovetails some of the concerns of more traditional critical modes, notably genre studies and formalism, with the agendas of newer ones. In particular, though I take issue with the ways certain new historicists and feminists have interpreted the sonnet tradition, I am profoundly indebted to those two approaches. Indeed, one of my principal goals is to bridge new historicism and feminism, a project more often advocated than attempted by students of Renaissance literature.

In Chapter 2 I examine the poetry of Petrarch and its relationship to the dynamics of English culture, asking why both that discourse and its counterdiscourses were so popular and so influential in England. My third chapter provides an overview of the counterdiscourses within the sonnet tradition as a whole, whereas the fourth concentrates more intensely on the work of three of the most important participants in that tradition: Sidney, Shakespeare, and Wroth. Chapter 5 studies a particularly significant manifestation of the counterdiscourses of Petrarchism, the so-called ugly beauty tradition, aiming as well to direct attention towards Collop. John Donne, often considered monarch of anti-Petrarchism as well as of the adjoining kingdom of wit, is the subject of Chapter 6, and I engage there not only with the love lyrics that are generally studied when critics evaluate his relationship to Petrarchism but also with his work in other genres. My conclusion, Chapter 7, extends the scope of the book by surveying some specimen instances of the counterdiscourses in genres other than lyric poetry. In addition, I extend the discussions of our profession and our discipline which appear from time to time in previous chapters. Commentaries on issues like professional rivalries and tenure policies are typically confined



to the pages of journals such as *Profession* or the *ADE Bulletin* rather than being integrated into a scholarly study. I mention such problems in passing within early chapters and at greater length in the conclusion partly because Petrarchism, like other literary topics, provides an apt analogue to many of them. And I do so as well because I believe that in our own time of opposing and often choleric critical movements, these professional issues are at once so pressing and so intriguing that we should expand the forums in which we address them.

## CHAPTER TWO

### PETRARCHAN PROBLEMATICS: TRADITION AND THE INDIVIDUAL CULTURE

#### I

Petrarchism, itself a discourse of extremes, demands from its critics a rhetoric of qualifications and modulations. For lyrics in this tradition resist easy generalizations as determinedly as Laura flees her Apollo: their meaning is as tantalizingly veiled as her face, as evanescent as the snow that so often figures her. The tradition not only stages but also represents a series of paradoxes; its poems are, for example, more likely than texts in many other genres to be either singularly conventional or strikingly transgressive or both, and they may variously celebrate and subvert ideologies of gender. More to our purposes here, the reception of these lyrics was no less paradoxical than their own agendas: they enjoyed an extraordinary vogue throughout much of Europe yet endured repeated attacks from the very cultures and poets who seemed most enamored of them.

Petrarch's love poems are particularly liable to problems in interpretation. Critics part company on the most basic issues: Is their fundamental aim the praise of the lady, as some scholars of an earlier generation assumed, or the establishment of the poet's own subjectivity, as many of their contemporary counterparts would assert?<sup>1</sup> Is the final poem the culmination of a movement towards spiritual resolution or an instance of the ways that movement has been compromised throughout the sequence?<sup>2</sup> The rhetoric of the

<sup>1</sup>For instances of these positions, see, respectively, Leonard Forster, *The Icy Fire: Five Studies in European Petrarchism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), esp. p. 9; and Gordon Braden, "Love and Fame: The Petrarchan Career," in *Paghamism's Friend: The Moral Disposition of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Joseph H. Smith, M.D., and William Kerrigan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

<sup>2</sup>Many critics have espoused each of these positions; for example, see, respectively, Mar-