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Iberian, French, and English Petrarchisms

If considered absolutely, one of the first Petrarchan imitations outside of Italy is Chaucer's adaptation of Petrarch's sonnet 132 in *Troilus and Criseyde* (1400–20). Another features forty-two sonnets by a Castilian court official, the Marqués de Santillana, composed in 1438–55. But a substantial Petrarchan poetics arrives in Europe only after the *RVF* and *Triumph* enter into print (1470), reaching a high point after 1525. From the start, printed editions offer textual commentaries with various, usually competing views of the poet's achievement. The earliest ones, edited by Antonio da Tempo (pub. 1477), Francesco Filelfo (pub. 1476), and Hieronimo Squarzafico (1484), represent Petrarch as a poet-diplomat in service to northern Italian despots such as the Visconti of Milan. In the most widely reprinted edition (1525), Alessandro Vellutello rearranges the sequence to narrate a dramatically coherent account of the poet's life and his love for Laura. That same year, Pietro Bembo's *Prose della volgar lingua* (*Writings on the Vernacular*) authorizes Petrarch's archaic Tuscan style as the supreme model for Italian lyric. Later editors, such as Giovanni Andrea Gesualdo (1532), Sylvano da Venafro (1533), and Bernardino Daniello (1536), emphasize Petrarch's rhetorical skills in deploying literary allusion, classical myth, and poetic figuration. Still others, such as Fausto da Longiano (1532), Antonio Brucioli (1548), and Ludovico Castelvetro (pub. 1582) – all hospitable to religious reform – foreground Petrarch's Scriptural and doctrinal references and his criticism of the Avignon papacy. Taken together, these approaches to Petrarch mediate the *RVF*'s reception throughout Europe, offering multiple versions of Petrarch as a public figure, poet, lover, scholar, and Christian moralist. In Spain, Portugal, France, and England, these commentaries inflect imitations of Petrarch in different ways and at different times.

Iberian Petrarchism

A sustained cultivation of Petrarch's model in Spain begins in 1543 with the posthumous publication of *Las obras* of Juan Boscán (c. 1490–1542) and

Garcilaso de la Vega (c. 1501–36). The former, a Castilian-educated gentleman from Barcelona, and the latter, his aristocratic friend from Toledo, had served in Charles V's army (Garcilaso died fighting in southern France), and both exemplify Castiglione's ideal of the soldier-scholar. Their joint *obras* include *sonetos* in Italianate eleven-syllable meters and *cançiones* (canzoni or odes) in stanzas of seven- and eleven-syllable meters, as well as elegies and epistolary poems in *terza rima*. Boscán's prologue defends his Castilian imitations of Italianate forms as augurs of a new literary standard for the rising Spanish Empire.

As it happens, Garcilaso's contributions to the volume proved more critically successful than Boscán's and exerted a greater impact upon later Spanish Petrarchism. The fluidity of his verse contrasts with Boscán's sometimes forced rhyme; the range of his allusions to Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Sannazaro, Bembo, and others exceeds that of Boscán; and the amplitude of his emotion as it wavers between certainty and uncertainty, melancholy and skepticism, contrasts with the easy resolution reached by his friend. Garcilaso's complaint in sonnet 25, "O fate, so active to promote my troubles," for example, leaves some doubt as to whether he is lamenting a failed love affair or bemoaning a deeper, more comprehensive loss: "With your destroying hands you felled the tree / and scattered on the ground the fruits and flowers."¹

Within decades, Garcilaso's poetry came to be uncoupled from Boscán's and republished on its own. Soldier-poets such as Diego Hurtado de Mendoza at Granada (1503–75) and Gutierre de Cetina at Seville (1514–54) took inspiration from him, while detailed commentaries by Francisco Sánchez de las Brozas ("El Brocense") at Salamanca (1574) and Fernando de Herrera at Seville (1580) canonized his work as the Spanish equivalent of Petrarch's. Herrera's (c. 1534–97) commentary is important in two ways: first as a major contribution to vernacular literary criticism and poetics in Spain, and second as an articulation of principles that would animate his own substantial body of poetry (pub. 1582, 1619). Other poets would innovate in different ways. In his *Rimas humanas* (1602) and *Rimas sacras* (1614), for example, the immensely prolific and versatile Lope de Vega (1562–1635) offsets conventional Petrarchan poems with variously satiric, parodic, topical, and profane sonnets.

In the larger Iberian setting, Portuguese poets experimented early on with Petrarchism. Returning from study in Italy in 1526, Francisco de Sá de Miranda (1481–1558) composed sonnets, canzoni, sestinas, *terza rima* epistles, and *ottava rima* stanzas in eleven-syllable meters. His disciple António Ferreira (1528–69) adopted these forms for his *Poemas Lusitanos*, motivating a new generation of imitators. The greatest of them is Luís de Camões

(1524–80), author of the epic *Os Lusíadas* (1572) and of hundreds of posthumously published sonnets and other lyrics. While some of these poems date to the author's youth at the Lisbon court, most originate after his exile for public brawling in 1552 and his subsequent service in the Portuguese trading outposts of Goa and Macao. Sonnets such as "Here in this Babylon" recount the travails of his banishment.² Others, such as "Dear gentle soul, who has, too soon, departed" express his grief upon learning of his beloved's death in Lisbon. The biographical component of Camões's sonnets, like that of the sonnets of Garcilaso and other soldier-poets in Spain, suggests the influence of Italian commentaries concerned with Petrarch's lived experience.

At Cordova, in the last decades of the sixteenth century, Luis de Góngora y Argote (1561–1627) brought an eclecticism and heterogeneity to Spanish poetry with his virtuoso forays into disparate genres, extravagant experiments in diction and syntax, and profligate borrowings from authors as diverse as Pindar, Euripides, Seneca, Ariosto, Tasso, and Marino. Both early and late in his career, he wrote sonnets that toy with Petrarchism – some would say parody and distort it – inviting the opprobrium of other poets. Chief among them in Madrid was Francisco de Quevedo (1580–1645), whose intense dislike of pretension and hypocrisy motivated his incursions into many, often divergent literary forms. Alternately serious and funny, plangent and grotesque, he approached Petrarchan poetry with the aim of recovering its moral seriousness. The Stoic convictions, Neo-Platonic formulas, and Biblical resonances of his love poems alternate incongruously with a derision of vanity and illusion, promiscuity and self-blindness in his satiric verse. Some early poems simply parody Petrarchism, as in the sonnet to a cross-eyed lady, which assures her that if her vision focused straight ahead, it would scorch the earth.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, the publication at Madrid in 1692 of poetry by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, a nun at a Hieronymite convent in Mexico City, includes sixty-six sonnets on philosophical, mythological, religious, and amatory themes in the Petrarchan mode. As fictions conceived in solitude and enriched with philosophical and classical allusions, the best of her erotic poems turn familiar Petrarchan motifs about artifice and beauty into meditations upon human frailty and fragility. Sonnet 145, "This that you gaze on, colorful deceit," disparages a portrait that exaggerates the author's attractive features and "with its fallacious arguments of colors, is to the senses cunning counterfeit."³ In the end, each of them "is but cadaver, ashes, shadow, void." Mirroring the split identity inscribed in Petrarch's imaginative consciousness, her poetry draws upon his figurations to soar across boundaries of ancestry and descent, territory and cultural behavior,

marking European Petrarchism's incursion into and return from the New World.

French Petrarchism

The marriage of the future French king Henry II to Catherine de' Medici in 1533 stimulated interest in Petrarchan poetry as courtiers welcomed the Italian bride to France. The Humanist scholar-poet Maurice Scève (c. 1501–64) opined that he had discovered Laura's tomb in Avignon, and the court poet Mellin de Saint-Gelais (c. 1491–1558) used the sonnet form for occasional verse to honor royal favorites. To curry favor with Francis I in 1539, Clément Marot (1496–1544) published translations of six sonnets from Petrarch's *RVF*. But the first serious efforts to replicate Petrarchan motifs – though not in the sonnet or canzone forms – came in the urban culture of Lyon with Scève's deeply intellectualized sequence of 449 dizains, *Délie, objet de plus haulte vertu* (1544), and with the varied *Rymes* (1545) of Pernette du Guillet (c. 1520–45), who is often considered the real-life prototype for Délie. A sense of Scève's powers can be gleaned from his reworking of Petrarch's celebrated sonnet 248, which begins: "Whoever wishes to see how much Nature and Heaven can do among us, let him come marvel at her." In the corresponding lines of Scève's dizain 278, a new emphasis on intellectual acuity ("scauoir") and listening competence ("ouyr") replaces Petrarch's emphasis upon visual experience ("veder," "mirar"): "Whoever wishes to know by evidence obvious to all how one can forget oneself, . . . come listen to her and unfold what she says."⁴ Scève's influence upon succeeding efforts proved striking.

The publication of *Déffence et illustration de la langue francoyse* (1549) by Joachim Du Bellay (1522–60) bolstered French Petrarchism. Its author, a member of the provincial nobility, urged his peers to develop rhetorical skills that would vie with those of the educated gentry in service to the crown, and to this end he promoted an education in vernacular literacy based upon Humanist programs pioneered in Italy. To illustrate the possibilities for adapting Italian style to French poetry, Du Bellay published with the *Déffence* a collection of sonnets titled *Olive*. Sonnet 62 in this collection explicitly evokes Petrarch's sonnet 248: "Whoever would like to see the most precious tree that the orient or the south might offer, come to where my river frolics in the waves."⁵ The poem's succeeding lines nominate a canon of modern authors by associating Petrarch with the Arno river and Marot, Saint-Gelais, Scève and the poet himself with corresponding French rivers. In later years, Du Bellay diversified his Petrarchan imitations in sonnet sequences that are both personal and philosophical in tone. *Les Regrets*

(1558) satirizes the depravity of sixteenth-century Rome, where Du Bellay spent four years at the papal court, while *Les Antiquitez de Rome* and *Songe* (1558) chart the demise of the ancient Roman Empire in contrastive sequences laden with classical allusion.

While Du Bellay considered himself the king's servant, his friend Pierre de Ronsard (1524–85) saw himself as a professional poet, and he wanted others to see him so as well. When his debut collection of *Odes* (1550) met with derision, he retreated from public life to prepare a sequence of Petrarchan poems, *Les Amours* (1552), whose sonnet 1 imitates Petrarch's sonnet 248. Instead of inviting readers to marvel at his beloved Cassandre, he urges them to look at him and read his poems: "Whoever wishes to see how a god overwhelms me . . . should come see me: he will see my suffering and the rigor of the archer who tames me."⁶ In ensuing years, Ronsard sharpened his professional edge by revising *Les Amours*, first in an expanded edition (1553), and then in each successive edition of his *Oeuvres complètes* (seven between 1560 and 1587). He meanwhile augmented this sequence with others composed for different women, chiefly the rustic Marie, but also various mistresses (Sinope, Astrée) of high-ranking courtiers who paid him to celebrate their charms. These poems, too, received extensive revision and reorganization over the years.⁷

Other French poets followed Du Bellay and Ronsard. Six months after Du Bellay published *Olive*, Pontus de Tyard, in Lyon, issued his *Erreurs amoureuses* (1549), and then followed it with two more volumes of *Erreurs* (1551, 1555). In Poitiers, Ronsard's friend Jean-Antoine de Baïf assembled his *Amour de Francine* (1555). In 1555, at Lyon, Louise Labé (1522–66) included twenty-four Petrarchan sonnets in her *Euvres*. The volume's dedicatory preface sounds a ringing call for other women to join the ranks of men in scouting for "the honor that letters and learning bring to people who pursue them,"⁸ and her poetry aims to inspire them with models. With these achievements, French Petrarchism temporarily ran its course by the end of the decade.

As France descended into its wars of religion during the 1560s and '70s, the Maréchale de Retz initiated a literary salon to counter the mounting rancor and violence by promoting an aesthetic ideal of virtuous and refined Petrarchism. Its rising star was the young Philippe Desportes (1546–1606). Writing on commission to fashionable courtiers, as Ronsard had done, Desportes assembled in *Premières oeuvres poétiques* (1573) various sonnet cycles, which display a notable lack of personality and fervor. Evidently, Ronsard thought he could do better than Desportes, and so he accepted Catherine de' Medici's challenge to address one of her maids in waiting, Hélène de Surgères. The result was his *Sonnets pour Hélène* (1578), an

astonishing two-part sequence that records a battle of wits between the aging poet and a sophisticated, headstrong young woman, and brings Petrarchism in France to a rousing conclusion. Sonnet II.24, "When you are very old, in the evening by candlelight," cleverly turns the tables on the young beloved – and on Petrarch's premonitions of Laura's demise – by reimagining Hélène as an old lady full of regret for resisting the poet when she was young: "You will be an old woman hunched over the hearth, lamenting my love and your cruel disdain."

English Petrarchism

In England, an initial wave of Petrarchism broke during the early 1530s and then receded for several decades, surfacing at intervals before a tidal re-emergence in the 1590s. Its initiator was Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503–42), an adventurer and court-appointed diplomat whose mission to Italy in 1526–27 exposed him to Petrarch's *RVF*. His friend Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517–47), the son of England's leading peer, joined him in translating, adapting, and imitating dozens of Petrarch's sonnets, with notable stylistic variations. Their respective treatments of Petrarch's sonnet 140, "Love, who lives and reigns in my thought," display the differences between them. Wyatt's "The longe love, that in my thought doeth harbar," with its jagged rhythms, abrupt turns of phrase, and use of colloquial dialect, conveys a dynamism that contrasts with the wit and polish of Howard's "Love that doth raine and live within my thought."⁹ As aristocratic amateur poets who felt no need to publish, both reached print posthumously in Richard Tottel's multi-authored miscellany of *Songs and Sonnets* (1557), where their work caught the imagination of a middle-class readership curious about the passions and pastimes of the nobility. Tottel himself encouraged such curiosity by affixing to each poem a moralizing headnote, usually declaiming the folly of lust and the bitterness of repentance.

The popularity of this much-reprinted anthology spurred various efforts during the 1570s and '80s to engage with Petrarch and his continental imitators. George Gascoigne's prose narrative *The Adventures of Master FJ* (1573, revised 1575) – replete with eight Petrarchan sonnets – portrays its hero as a cad who seduces the wife of his benefactor, only to be replaced by her secret paramour. Two decades later, Thomas Nashe's novella *The Unfortunate Traveler* (1594) – with two Petrarchan sonnets and a ballad inserted – recounts how its narrator, Jack Wilton, takes sexual advantage of the mistress of his benefactor, a fictionalized Henry Howard. In the interval, poets with diverse agendas experimented with Petrarchan themes and verse forms, drawing upon the *RVF*, as well as Petrarch's Italian, French, and

Spanish epigones. Petrarchism was beginning to echo and repeat itself. Thomas Watson's *Hekatompathia* (1582) assembles paraphrases from Petrarch, Serafino, Ariosto, Ronsard, and others, with commentaries on their sources, analogues, and moral import. Thomas Lodge's *Phyllis* (mid-1580s, pub. 1593) delivers translations from Petrarch, Bembo, Ronsard, Desportes, and others. But the pivotal moment came in 1591, when Thomas Newman published a piratical edition of *Astrophil and Stella* by Philip Sidney (1554–86), igniting a Petrarchan sonnet craze six years after the English author's death.

Sidney composed his sequence of 108 sonnets and eleven songs around 1581–82 upon temporary banishment from court after decrying Elizabeth I's proposed marriage to the Duke of Anjou. A year or so earlier he had drafted *A Defence of Poesy* (pub. 1595), in which he argues that "passionate sonnets" such as Petrarch's run the risk of "abus[ing] men's wit" unless readers assess them constructively.¹⁰ The poetry of *Astrophil and Stella* tests this theory, as Sidney ironizes his besotted persona with fleet, funny, and politically pungent insight into the lover's shortcomings. Sonnet 71, "Who will in fairest booke of Nature know, / How Vertue may best lodg'd in beautie be," is his imitation of Petrarch's sonnet 248, and it shows how Astrophil misreads the former's high moral sentiment through indolence and self-pity. Willfully distorting his verse with slant rhymes, mixed meters, and outrageous conceits – "As fast thy Vertue bends that love to good: / But ah, Desire still cries, give me some food" – Astrophil reveals himself sinking under the weight of his own incomprehension.

Sidney's reinvention of Petrarchism pervades the sonnets of Edmund Spenser (1551?–99), assembled in a sequence, *Amoretti* (1595), to commemorate the poet's marriage to Elizabeth Boyle. *Amoretti* offers a Reformed Protestant version of Petrarchan desire made conformable with married love: "Love is the lesson which the Lord us taught" (sonnet 68).¹¹ William Shakespeare (1564–1616) published his own *Sonnets* late in his career (1609, but begun in the early 1590s), cementing his claims as a professional poet and complementing his work as a successful dramatist. Laced with echoes from Horace and Ovid and with reminiscences from Sidney and Spenser, these sonnets recount a lover's tortuous relationship with a Young Man and a Dark Lady that appears quite remote from Petrarch's influence and that of continental Petrarchism. Still, a haunting recall of fleeting time and approaching death from the *RVF* punctuates sonnet 17, "Who will believe my verse in time to come," sonnet 64 "When I have seen by Time's fell hand defacèd," and sonnet 104, "To me, fair friend, you never can be old."¹² Other Petrarchan figurations float close to the surface throughout the collection.

Spenser and Shakespeare in turn furnished materials for their successors to transform. In *Idea* (1599), Michael Drayton revised his *Ideas Mirror* (1594), where allusions to Petrarch and Ronsard jostle with echoes from Sidney and Daniel, adding references to Spenser and – in still later editions – Shakespeare. In 1621, Philip Sidney's niece, Mary Wroth (1586?–1651?) brought English Petrarchism to an end with her sonnet sequence, *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, appended as a supplement to her two-volume prose romance, *Urania*.¹³ Its protagonists derive from her narrative (which itself incorporates other sonnets and poems): Pamphilia is Queen of Morea, a paragon of virginal chastity and communal obligation; Amphilanthus is King of Naples, Holy Roman Emperor, and a lout. Wroth uses witty echoes from her uncle's poetry to distinguish between their respective personae. Sonnet 14, "Am I thus conquer'd?", for example, rewrites Sidney's sonnet 47, "What, have I thus betrayed my libertie?" With Pamphilia's renunciation of servitude to Cupid, the trope of amatory enslavement takes its final turn.

Transmitted with commentaries in early printed editions of the *RVF*, Petrarch's figurations and motifs traveled outside of Italy. The commentators' multiple representations of Petrarch as a poet, lover, scholar, public servant, and religious moralist took flesh in myriad ways that would respond to turbulent cross-currents of new eras. The diplomat-poet in the earliest commentaries anticipates the poet-adventurer of Garcilaso, Camões, and Wyatt, while the scholar-poet of Bembo, Gesualdo, Daniello, and others nourishes the intellectual interests of Herrera, Scève, and Du Bellay. The lover beset with tribulation in Vellutello's re-ordered *RVF* subtends the sharply defined narratives of many sixteenth-century sequences, and with Ronsard and Sidney it bleeds into the figure of the scholar-poet. The proto-Reformation Petrarch of Brucioli and Castelvetro modulates the Protestant accents of Spenser, Wroth, and Sponde. Still later, the amatory Petrarch merges with the doctrinal and moralist poet in the sonnets of Quevedo and Sor Juana. Collectively, these poets rework Petrarch's fourteenth-century poetry as they respond to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century concerns. The plurivocality of the *RVF* invites such reactions, and the multiple voice of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century commentaries clears a capacious space for them. In diverse registers and tones, the voice of the *RVF*'s protagonist reverberates through the lyric poetry of Renaissance Europe.

NOTES

- 1 John Dent-Young, ed. and trans., *Selected Poems of Garcilaso de la Vega: A Bilingual Edition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
- 2 William Baer, ed. and trans., *Selected Poetry of Luís de Camões: A Bi-Lingual Edition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

- 3 Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *Poems, Protest, and a Dream*, ed. and trans. Margaret Sayers Peden (New York: Penguin Books, 1997).
- 4 Ian D. McFarlane, ed., *The Délie of Maurice Scève* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966).
- 5 Joachim Du Bellay, *Oeuvres poétiques*, 2 vols., eds. Daniel Aris and Françoise Joukovsky (Paris: Bordas, 1993–96).
- 6 Pierre de Ronsard, *Oeuvres complètes*, 2 vols., eds. Jean Céard, Daniel Ménager, and Michel Simonin (Paris: Gallimard, 1993–94).
- 7 For English translations, see Pierre de Ronsard, *Selected Poems with a Prose Translation*, ed. and trans. Malcolm Quainton (London: Penguin Books, 2002).
- 8 Labé, *Complete Poetry and Prose*, 43.
- 9 Richard S. Sylvester, ed., *English Sixteenth-Century Verse: An Anthology* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984).
- 10 Katherine Duncan-Jones, ed., *Sir Philip Sidney: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- 11 William A. Oram, Einar Bjorvand, Ronald Bond, Thomas H. Cain, Alexander Dunlop, and Richard Schell, eds., *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).
- 12 William Shakespeare, *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. Colin Burrow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- 13 Josephine A. Roberts, ed., *The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1983).