CHANGES OF MIND: IMITATION AND METAMORPHOSIS IN THE WORK OF PETRARCH, SHAKESPEARE, AND THEIR CONTEMPORARIES

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To the memory of my father, Safdar Ahmad Khan

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Ovidian myths of metamorphosis, as they are treated in the work of Petrarch and Shakespeare, with reference to the poetic theory of their times. *Imitatio*, practised throughout the Renaissance period in Europe, was always a convention followed by poets whose work is filled with reference to these myths. I argue that the subject and the technique are closely related. I focus on five main topics: the role of the sonnet mistress; the pursuit of an ineffable ideal; the transmutation of the self into the artefact; the disreputable image of poetry; and the tension between innovation and tradition. In their treatment of these points, the writers of fourteenth century Italy and sixteenth century England have much in common.

The thesis is in four chapters. Chapter One is on Petrarch's *Rime Sparse* and letters, and his use of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. I argue that Petrarch's poetry is absorbed in the difficult task of capturing intangible vision, imaged in the trope of the lover wooing his elusive mistress, Laura, who is also 'l'aura' (the breeze). I examine his sense of period, and his co-existent sense of mortality. The poem becomes the vehicle for an expanded mode of being that can span stretches of time, and the effort is to recreate the self in art. I argue that Laura becomes emblematic of this elusive goal, and that Petrarch appears in various forms in the poems, reinforcing, through his use of the *Metamorphoses*, his sense of everchanging selfhood. Chapter Two continues an examination of the *Rime Sparse* and the letters, in the context of poetic theories of fourteenth-century Italy. It explores Petrarch's engagement with, on the one hand, the image of secular poetry as sinful and, on the other, his evident sense of the creative power of poetic language. The two conflicting views merge in the figure of Apollo, who in Petrarch's time has acquired two traditional readings, as god of poetry and of the Augustinian appellation of demon. I argue that Petrarch, though aware of and often troubled by his culpability as secular poet, gracefully parries the attack by celebrating linguistic creativity in the vernacular. Chapter Three analyses the work of a number of poetic theorists in late Sixteenth-Century England, particularly Philip Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* and George Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie*, and picks up the themes of Chapter Two. I argue that the idea of poetry as deceptive is still present, but that a stronger sense is of the need to rescue it from its degraded image, particularly that of poetry in English. Since most of these works were written as defences of poetry, I examine the motives behind the need to defend. The visionary role of the poet is once again reinforced in these defences, while the promotion of secular poetry emerges as a nationalistic enterprise. I argue that the creation of an English poetic style is theorised in terms of imitatio, and debated as a departure from tradition. Chapter Four is on Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Rape of Lucrece* and the *Sonnets*. It returns to Chapter One, and examines Shakespeare's negotiation of the fragility of selfhood in multiple representation, viewed once again through the use of Ovid, of myths of metamorphosis, and of *imitatio*. Cleopatra is examined as a creation that is an 'anti-Petrarchan' revolt against the sonnet mistress in some ways, but is in others, and unintentionally, Petrarchan. The sonnet mistress is examined in the changing forms Shakespeare gives her, including the young man of the *Sonnets*. Lucrece's concerns in *Lucrece* are particularly compelling because hers is a story already with a history of retelling by the time of Shakespeare. I argue that this is Shakespeare's main preoccupation in this poem, as it is in *A&C*. In the *Sonnets,* I argue, he is once again confronting the problems of (mis)representation in stories, and that in these poems he employs techniques designed to ensure the longevity of the individual within a collective cultural continuum.

A NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

In this thesis it has been necessary to quote from texts in a number of languages. The task is not simple, and I have quoted in different ways from different texts. For the most part, I have quoted in the original, and provided a translation, sometimes my own.

ITALIAN

For Petrarch's *Rime Sparse* I have used Robert M. Durling's edition. The translations are on the whole lucid and faithful, and so I have quoted from it throughout. For Dante, faced with so many alternative translations, I have made my own.

LATIN

When quoting from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, I employ two tactics. In the first part of the thesis, dealing with Petrarch, I quote text and translations from Frank Justus Miller's parallel text (Loeb). In the second part, dealing with sixteenth-century England, I quote from Arthur Golding's translation, since it is possible to see actual verbal echoes in the writers who read this version.

Morris Bishop's cohesive and lively translations of Petrarch's Latin letters have been likewise used. I have also on occasion consulted Aldo S. Bernardo's edition in English. For quotations from Petrarch's *De otio religioso*, I use the Italian parallel text, and in this case I provide English translations of my own.

Cicero, Augustine, and Dante in his Latin work, are quoted in English.

GREEK

Aristotle and Plato are quoted in English translation.

FRENCH

I have quoted from Montaigne in the second part of the thesis. In this case, again, I have used the text most familiar to Renaissance readers - John Florio's. I do not quote the French, since my emphasis in the case of Montaigne is on the transference of ideas, not language.

ABBREVIATIONS

In referring so often to many texts, it has been more efficient, after an initial footnote, to reference the source briefly within the text. It has also been more convenient to use abbreviated forms. A list of these is below:

A&C	*Antony and Cleopatra*, edited by David Bevington (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990).
A&S	'Astrophil and Stella' in Sir Philip Sidney, *Selected Poems*, edited by Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1973).
Arte	Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie*, in G. Gregory Smith (ed), *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, vols. I and II (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1904).
Bernardo	Francesco Petrarca, *Rerum familiarum libri* I-VIII translated by Aldo S. Bernardo (New York: State University of New York Press 1975).
Bishop	Francesco Petrarch, *Letters from Petrarch,* edited by Morris Bishop (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1966).
Golding	Ovid, *The XV Bookes of P. Ouidivs Naso, entytuled Metamorphosis*, translated by Arthur Golding (1567) (London: Centaur Press 1961).
Inf.	Dante Alighieri, 'L'Inferno', in *The Divine Comedy*, vol. I, edited and translated by Charles Singleton (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1970).
LLL	*Love's Labours Lost* in William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, edited by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1988).
Lucrece	*The Rape of Lucrece* in William Shakespeare, *The Poems*, edited by John Roe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992).
Met.	Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, translated by Frank Justus Miller, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann 1984).
MND	*Midsummer Night's Dream,* in Wells and Taylor, loc. cit.
Par.	Dante Alighieri, 'Il Paradiso', in *The Divine Comedy*, vol. III, edited and translated by Charles Singleton (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1975).
Purg.	Dante Alighieri, 'Il Purgatorio', in *The Divine Comedy*, vol. II, edited and translated by Charles Singleton (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1973).
R&J	*Romeo and Juliet,* in Wells and Taylor, loc. cit.
RS	Francesco Petrarca, *Rime Sparse*, edited by Robert M. Durling (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press 1976).
Sidney	Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, edited by Geoffrey Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1965;1973).
Smith	G. Gregory Smith (ed), *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, vols. I and II (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1904).
Sonnets	William Shakespeare, *'The Sonnets' and 'A Lover's Complaint'*, edited by John Kerrigan (London: Penguin 1986).
TN	*Twelfth Night,* in Wells and Taylor, loc. cit.
VN	Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, edited by Giorgio Petrocci and Marcello Ciccuto (Milano: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli 1984).
WT	*A Winter's Tale,* in Wells and Taylor, loc. cit.

EPIGRAPHS

Page 2: Edmund Spenser, 'Prothalamion', refrain, in J. C. Smith and E. De Selincourt, *Spenser: Poetical Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1912, 1985).

Page 17: *Met.*, XV.165, XV.171-72, X.243-253. 'My Last Duchess', ll.1-2, 43-46, in Aidan Day (ed) *Robert Browning: Selected Poetry and Prose* (London and New York: Routledge 1991).

Page 66: Bishop, p.226.

Page 103: Norman Ault (ed), *Elizabethan Lyrics* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber 1949), p. 241. John Donne, Satire III.79-81 in John Donne, *The Oxford Authors: John Donne*, edited by John Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1990). Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, I.iii.19-21.

Page 151: Golding, XV.183-192, X.261-71. D. H. Lawrence, 'Lui et Elle', ll.33-34, in D. H. Lawrence, *Poems*, edited by Keith Sagar (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1972, 1986).

INTRODUCTION

Sweet *Themmes* runne softly, till I end my Song.

- Spenser, 'Prothalamion'

'Aquae fugiunt, flumen manet', wrote Petrarch in his *De otio religioso*.[1] This phrase captures many of Petrarch's concerns relevant to this thesis. In it can be seen his preoccupation with the passage of time, his sense of period, his need for capturing his personal history in a permanent form, and his anxiety that literary representations are inevitably as subject to change as life itself. It also captures his chosen imitative theme - the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid. In using Ovid Petrarch develops his theory of *imitatio*, whereby the imitated text is both preserved and changed in the hands of succeeding poets. In this way, the original poet finds new life in the new work; at the same time the imitating poet takes on the life, and at the same time the fame, of the imitated model. Hence *imitatio* is itself a form of metamorphosis, and thus aptly practised in the myths of metamorphoses which are the subject of Petrarch's imitative verse. This thesis will explore these subjects in relation to the *Rime Sparse*, the dialogue the *Secretum*, and the letter. Petrarch's poetry will be contextualised within the poetic theories of his time. The thesis will continue with an examination of English poetic theory and post-Petrarchan poetry in the 1590s. The final chapter will be on the topic of certain female figures of Shakespeare's, with an emphasis on the 'anti-Petrarchan', the Petrarchan and the Ovidian strains.

Petrarch's own concerns with personal fame are almost prophetic. During his life he enjoyed acclaim, and after his death his poetic style and themes became pervasively influential in Europe. Unnumbered successions of unrequited poets wrote sonnets to a 'Petrarchan' lady, who was marked by her almost iconographic qualities of chastity, beauty and virtue, the poems exhibiting stylistic features such as the oxymoron and the conceit, which are traceable to Petrarch. Inevitably, this 'Petrarchan' poetry shifts away from the poetry that Petrarch actually wrote. Neoplatonic commentaries such as Bembo's and additional matter such as *Il Cortegiano* combine with the long tradition of Courtly Love, so that by the end of the sixteenth century in England 'Petrarchan' poetry has a very precise meaning and set of conventions. It has become much formalised. The lady is recognisable because of her hair of gold, her eyes like stars, her skin like lilies and her lips like roses. She is chaste, virtuous and supremely desirable, superior to all other women. There is a Neoplatonic and religious element to the idolatry she enjoys. The poet, freezing and burning in joyful pain, aspires to possess her as to an ultimate ideal, always present, never attained.

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[1] 'The waters flee, the river remains.' Francesco Petrarca, *Opere Latini di Francesco Petrarca*, a cura di Antonietta Buffano (Torino 1975), p. 702.

The formula has become set in stone.

Yet Petrarch's own Laura was also 'l'aura', the breeze. She was unpredictable, shifting in mood and shape. Petrarch the poet of the *Rime Sparse* also changes shape and mood. His poetry has none of the meticulous and constant concern with praise found, for example, in the *Vita Nuova.* The mysterious, allusive quality of the *Rime Sparse* owes more to the pagan Ovid, with his involvement with the regenerative processes of nature, than with the stylized, Platonic conceptions of art that inform the conventions of the later 'Petrarchan' style.

Shakespeare reacts against this 'Petrarchan' style. But his work too is filled with changes of mood and aspect. Beloved women in Shakespeare's verse are hardly ever perfect, static ideals, but rather are unpredictable, fallible, changeable. He too is concerned with issues of lasting fame and the problems of representation. The Petrarchan strains in Shakespeare have often been noted, usually in terms of his satirising of the conventions. This satire has all the hallmarks of hearsay, and in fact it is not known that Shakespeare actually read Petrarch's poetry (see Chapter Four, I). The Petrarch that Shakespeare rejects is the sixteenth-century Petrarch of the school of 'Petrarchan' poetry, not the Petrarch of the *Rime Sparse* or the *Familiares*. This being so, it is all the more remarkable that there should be so many Petrarchan resonances in his work. These resonances have been observed by many commentators, for example by J. B. Leishman.[2] Leishman's sense of the 'affinity' between the two poets is unnecessarily essentialist in tone, since there is in fact a concrete link between them in terms of their source material - the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid. It is the Ovidian matter that they share that accounts for the similarities of theme and style. Ovid seems a congenial source for Shakespeare, one in which he could realise the concerns of his poetry and his time, just as Petrarch did. The question then is not of how much Petrarchan influence can be traced in Shakespeare, but why, given the thinking of their times, each of them should find such sympathetic resources in the *Metamorphoses,* and why their reworking of the myths should independently arrive at such similar results.

To explore this question I look at theories of poetry at the time of Petrarch and of Shakespeare. In Petrarch's time, writing poetry is a potentially deceptive and licentious activity at odds with sanctity. He aptly expresses the conflicts of his poetic ambitions and

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[2] J. B. Leishman, *Themes and Variations in Shakespeare's Sonnets* (London: Hutchinson 1961). Discussed below, Chapter Four, I.

his religious aspirations, in his imitation of Ovid's tales. For Shakespeare, the old objections to poetry as lies is given a new urgency by the Puritan arm of the Reformation. There are also new problems with the silent, idealised woman. Women are more active both in literature and politics than before, and this causes a certain dissolution of their mysterious faculty, and their metaphoric attributes. Representations of the male take on certain of these qualities. Again, the myths of Ovid illustratively express these changes and concerns.

The conflicts and anxieties of each poet's time are reflected in their desire to contain the uncontainable, to describe what is unknown. In the *Rime Sparse*, Laura is fugitive and elusive, and Petrarch himself encompasses paradoxical emotions, and changes physical shape. Shakespeare's Cleopatra has as many forms as there are voices to describe her; Lucrece is threatened with misrepresentation; the Dark Lady is unfathomable and deceptive. The young man of the Sonnets suggests an alternative ideal, and Antony partakes of Cleopatra's reliance on the multiple perceptions of others. Sixteenth-century theories of poetry follow similar concerns, exploring the possibilities and pitfalls of attempting description. Theories of poetry in both periods also concern themselves with writing in the vernacular, and with a nationalism sometimes at odds with tradition. Anxieties about breaking with the past when immortality is only achieved by a stable continuing tradition are present in the time and work of both Petrarch and Shakespeare. The ever-changing and vanishing waves are both a reality and a challenge to pursuit; the continuing river offers itself as present but at the same uncapturable in concrete terms.

Throughout this thesis I argue that the figure of woman in secular poetry is representative of the poetic enterprise and the poetic product itself. The poet is impelled to unite with her, and to beget his perfect self in the written work. She is thus not simply the poet's mistress, nor indeed the sexual ideal. Daphne is the archetypal figure for this interpretation. Another important mythic figure is Diana, Jonson's 'Queen and huntress, chaste and fair'. In the *Rime Sparse*, Laura emerges most obviously as another aspect of Daphne - but also appears as Diana, chased but at the same time hunting down the pursuer. Her hounds pursue Petrarch's flight as a deer; but elsewhere she is the deer that he longingly observes, the deer that is later to become more explicitly hunted in Wyatt's version of the poem.[3] The woman

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[3] 'Whoso list to hunt ...' in Thomas Wyatt, *Collected Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt*, edited by Kenneth Muir and Patricia Thomson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 1969).

in these poems is clearly both hunted and huntress - like poetic inspiration, or the muse, which both pursues the poet and is pursued by him. The image of this woman is further complicated by allusions to other archetypes, such as Eve and the Virgin Mary.

This woman is both a danger and a glory. Laura is ambivalently presented as saintly and as Medusan. Medusa also appears as a facet of Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra.* Clearly for both Petrarch and Shakespeare, and for different reasons, the poetic muse is problematic. In brief, then, in the first half of the thesis, dealing with Petrarch, woman suggests the ideal of secular poetry - and the problem confronted by Petrarch in negotiating this image is whether secular poetry leads to glory or damnation. In the second half of the thesis, which discusses Shakespeare, woman again stands for secular poetry - but the problem is different. It is more a question of whether a female figure can appropriately be held to represent such an ideal.

Both for the convenience of this thesis, and reflecting the Renaissance mind set, the poet is always read as male. The poetic muse is for the most part female. But the mythological personae found in the work of both poets are legion; and they are also sometimes male. Petrarch figures himself as Apollo, exploring the twin aspects of the practising poet as demonic and godly. In the case of Antony, in *Antony and Cleopatra,* various Greek gods and heroes are evoked, so many that Antony himself has no core identity. In this way Shakespeare explores the problems of truthful self-portrayal through the medium of mythic representation.

It will be clear, then, that Ovid's impact upon both Petrarch and Shakespeare is read in terms of their active use of the source. M. Baxandall writes about the negative connotations of the word 'influence': '[i]f one says that X influenced Y it does seem that one is saying that X did something to Y rather than Y did something to X. But [...] the second is always the more lively reality.'[4] In relation to Shakespeare, it is useful to apply what Emrys Jones writes of Shakespeare's use of Seneca to his use of Ovid: '[w]e need to remember that Shakespeare's use of Seneca (as of other authors) may be more oblique and audacious than is often supposed, more a matter of glancingly rapid effects than of a

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[4] M. Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1985), p.19.

laborious working out of correspondences.'[5] The question of influence is indeed a delicate one, not least in terms of the reader, who is aware of Ovid's work, of Petrarch's and of Shakespeare's, in a way not available to any of the writers themselves. In this perspective, each poet changes the poet he uses, as well as allowing himself to be altered by his reading, but also each poet changes for us, in the light of the others.

Thus, what I am in fact studying is a mythologised Petrarch, a mythologised and signifying Laura, while at the same time finding another Petrarch, readable between his lines. I read Shakespeare, and the texts they both read, Petrarch without Shakespeare, but Shakespeare emphatically after Petrarch. This is brought out most clearly in Chapter Four, where the Petrarchan love-ideal and perfect woman operates destructively on the relationship in *Antony and Cleopatra*, while both poets draw for their inspiration on the Ovidian myth of Medusa. In focusing this complex web of influence, the key imitated influence is Ovid, significantly altered in reception by the readings of Plato and Augustine, and effective in his *Metamorphoses* and as himself.

My critical methodology is principally shaped by the aim of scholarly inquiry and clarity. I am aware that my own reading is informed by a variety of contemporary theoretical paradigms, which allow me to observe and uncover the inherent vitality of Renaissance texts. Saussurian linguistics, for example, illuminate the Renaissance conceptions of *verba* and *res*; Bakhtinian theory, perhaps, awakens the latent dialogic quality of Renaissance texts; Jakobson enlightens and facilitates to an extent my analysis of poetic language. Again, the history of Renaissance studies inevitably colours any current reading. It is now impossible *not* to read the Renaissance through the lenses of Greenblatt, through his theory of colonialism, which David Lindley has called the 'orthodoxy of the eighties'.[6] *The Tempest* typifies for many the Renaissance, Shakespeare and all they stood for. But it is a *Tempest* specifically seen as a political text, and interpreted as a colonialism of language, which overlays any other possible reading of *The Tempest* and must affect, if not the reading

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[5] Emrys Jones, *The Origins of Shakespeare* (Oxford 1977), p.272; quoted by Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare and the Classical Tradition: the Influence of Seneca* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1992), p.9.

[6] David Lindley, paper at York University 1993.

itself, then at least the emphases of current interpretation, whether assenting or otherwise.[7]

On the whole, however, I approach my subject in a spirit of open curiosity, and do not conspicuously set out with a particular theoretical agenda. In recent years there has been a search for a new theoretical equipment in literary studies. Terry Eagleton sees the 'theory' of the past three decades as a stop-gap until a more coherent way of reading a radically changing world has been found.[8] Jonathan Bate introduces 'green criticism', more suited to contemporary students.[9] Bate discusses the question of placing his theoretical standpoint in the preface to *Shakespeare and Ovid*:

> [...] my orientation is broadly historical [...] I accept that my interpretations come from me as a reader, but by making a leap of faith and bringing forward a body of evidence I believe that they could also have been Shakespeare's interpretations or those of certain members of his original audience and readership.[10]

Bate points out, just as Eagleton does, the limitations of certain schools of theory. Both show how an over-zealous adherence to a particular theoretical standpoint can impede literary analysis of the texts under study. Eagleton comments on the field of Cultural Studies, which aims to embrace literature, history and theory, dissolving the old boundaries between them. Literature, in this new schema, *is* history, history itself is made up of theory. As Barker, Hume and Iverson write:

> [...] the current vitality of Renaissance studies stems not only from the interest of particular interpretations of specific works and authors, but also from the fact that the field has become an arena for the exploration and discussion of the underlying theoretical methods and assumptions which make interpretation possible. Not least, Renaissance studies has become the testing ground for the very viability of *historical* interpretation as such.[...] a sense that today history is in question, in theory and in practice; that 'history' as a signified, as a set of discursive practices, as an objective process, and as the sphere of human agency

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[7] 'Learning to Curse: Aspects of Linguistic Colonialism in the Sixteenth Century', in Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (New York and London: Routledge 1990), pp.16-39; and 'Martial Law in the Land of Cockaigne' in *Shakespearean Negotiations: the Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1988), pp.129-63.

[8] *Times Literary Supplement*, 15 July 1994, pp.3-4. Brian Vickers takes a similar line in *Appropriating Shakespeare: Contemporary Critical Quarrels* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1993).

[9] *The Times*, 1 June 1994, p.10.

[10] Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1993), pp.viii-ix.

> is in important ways now - for better or worse - a politically and theoretically contested terrain.[11]

It can be argued that the Renaissance as a period attracts a theory of history as part of a critical approach. This is not just in the Greenblatt mode of Marxist reinterpretations of establishment self-fashioning; it was also one of the preoccupations of the age itself. There is therefore a certain magnetism in Renaissance studies towards theories of history. While I am not interested in looking at texts simply in terms of their political reverberations, nor in seeing them solely as evidence of socio-economic factors in their era, I am committed, as an inextricable part of my thesis, to an examination of history, and even, in a sense, of history *as* theory. Paradoxically, I aim also at a definition of poetry, one which speaks with the voice of the Renaissance to the understanding of today. I am, then, engaged in examining Renaissance theories of history and poetry, the two being closely connected, the terms poet and historian having in the Renaissance a synonymous relationship, so much so that Philip Sidney feels bound to reassess both terms in the *Apology for Poetry*.[12] I am concerned with theories and perceptions of history and poetry, in the Renaissance itself, rather than with a critique, informed by a historicist, even New Historicist, approach, of the literature of the Renaissance as evidence of historical factors or products of political motivations.

The idea of history as theory is not new; it is there in the idea, Ciceronian in origin and well known in the Renaissance, that history is a matter of rhetoric. This is of seminal importance to the now famous concept of 'self-fashioning', which I interpret somewhat differently from Greenblatt as the attempt to transcend both mortality and imperfection by distilling a perfect and lasting essence of oneself, and preserving it, almost as if language were like a containing glass vessel. This is effected through poetic creation, such creation being seen as a perfecting of imperfection, since it is patterned, refined, elegant, controlled, in contrast to the flow of rude and imperfect speech and daily life, and of semantic and of cultural drift. This aesthetic has its origins in the Platonic ideal, and is to be seen again in Sidney's *Apology*, where he suggests that the poet is similarly in receipt of ideal vision, so

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[11] Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iverson (eds), *The Uses of History: Marxism, Postmodernism and the Renaissance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1991), p.1.

[12] Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, edited by Geoffrey Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1965;1973), hereafter 'Sidney' within the text; pp.106-107.

that his creations are more perfect than nature's (Sidney, p. 99-104).

The question is related to the old one of how a text may survive *as it was meant by the author*. This consideration may indeed be a naive one, but it must be addressed. It was one that concerned the poets of the Renaissance themselves, and when the conclusion is, as it must be, that it does *not* so survive, the implications have wide repercussions. The whole purpose of history must be reassessed, and not just in absolute terms, but in terms of the purposes it is seen to serve in conjunction with the way in which it is seen to function at any given period. The question is the Derridean one of the 'drift' of language: words change their meanings because of the aftermath of attendant meanings, the baggage of a particular cultural consciousness.[13]

History can be most instructively examined in terms of myth, and rhetoric. The history of each cultural moment is one that supports its values, while at the same time being ostensibly an objective lesson to instruct. It seems to come from outside (the past), but is in reality formed from within (in the present). In these discourses there is often a very definite sense of the past, while the present acquires a deceptive invisibility. Myth highlights this position: in the story of *Lucrece*, for example, the mythic figure of the chaste-sexual woman subsumes the individual Lucrece, and this figure, inhabiting a 'true' story from the past, shapes, magnifies and projects an inclination inherent in the values and fears of the age which relates the story. Moreover, the concrete setting of the historical Roman state seems to substantiate it further, in a way barred to Ovidian myth. In using Ovidian myth, the Renaissance poets are aware of its fictive function. In all the debates and exegeses, the important consensus that emerges is that myth is not literal. This may seem self-evident, but it is at the crux of the interaction between myth and history, poet and historian, and at the heart of the emerging definitions of these as different categories (for example in Sidney). It is of great significance whether the story or character being projected is seen to be historical or mythical, literal or literary - whether for example the character is Venus (interpreted ostensibly as myth/symbol), or Lucrece (interpreted ostensibly as history/example). As I try to show, Lucrece evidently carries the connotations that Venus does, while appearing to be distinct in type from her. Hence Petrarch and Laura, whom we accept as actual historical figures, are mythologised and made unreal in the

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[13] Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (Yale, New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1982), p.8. Discussed below, Chapter One, III.ii.

mythologising landscape of his poetry.

A theory of poetry in the Renaissance was not developed as a thing divorced from considerations of cosmic generation: hence, an analysis of how language works entails commenting on the way that nature is created; an analysis of consciousness and reason necessarily requires the presence and definition of a God. This of course varies from writer to writer, from decade to decade, so that what Petrarch writes in the *Secretum* differs from Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poetry*, or Thomas Nashe in *Foure Letters Refuted*: in other words the earnestness and portent of the topic is variable, which is usually a marker of the religious climate of the time. At the end of the sixteenth century Marlowe could (however riskily) indulge in atheistic statements; in the time of Petrarch there is still a Dantean reverence attached to the cosmic certainties, which reveals itself in his delicate teasings of conscience about the sin of art.

I spoke earlier about linguistic glass. This metaphor is aimed both at capturing the Renaissance sense of language as clothing an idea, much as the body clothes the soul; and at encouraging the lateral view of glass as itself tinted or opaque, thus making up itself the appearance of the object. The glass is not transparent, but is itself, just as language is, the focus and the shaping force. This is not, in terms of Renaissance Neoplatonic thought, an ideal state. Steiner uses the term to describe perceptions of postlapsarian degeneration: 'The tongue of Eden was like a flawless glass; a light of total understanding streamed through it.'[14] Despite this view, however, some poetry made use of the opaque nature of language, and its creative properties. Language not only ensures the shape of ideas and their reception, it also creates myth. This close involvement of language and myth, and of myth and history, pervasively infuses the texts I study. Language is hence itself an object of fascination. It is the medium through which the aims outlined above are self-consciously seen to be achieved, and this is particularly evident in Petrarch's poetry. Much of his verse seems devoted to the art itself of using language creatively, and I spend some time on this aspect of his work.

It has been my practice to use the word 'Renaissance,' in preference to 'Early Modern'.

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[14] George Steiner, *After Babel:Aspects of Language and Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1975), p.59.

My focus is on the beginnings of the Renaissance in Italy, and the height of the Renaissance in England. The period's sense of itself as a Renaissance is central to my thesis, and this sense is not contained by the less emphatic or less loaded term 'Early Modern'. The outlook is different. 'Early Modern' sees the period as the beginning of our own; 'Renaissance' emphasises its own sense of itself in relation to its past and its negotiation of its classical sources. In this way it is read as a period independent of, but significant and parallel to our own.

There *are* parallels. This too is a question of history, in that a reading of history is always a reading. After all, anyone reading the Renaissance now does so after Marx and Freud, after Locke, and Coleridge, after feminism and revolution, after Saussure, Derrida, Foucault, after Heisenberg, the discovery of DNA, the flight to the moon, nuclear warfare. This means there are particular significances for us, surrounding issues such as, for example, the idea of knowledge (particularly that of the dangers of knowledge) that the writers of the Renaissance did not have. It is surprising therefore, that they too were wary of too much knowledge (Dante's Ulysses; Marlowe's Faustus; Shakespeare's Prospero). Our current preoccupation with national identities renews the debate about the Italian vernacular in the fourteenth century and the creation of an English style in the late Sixteenth Century. There are therefore so many links of outlook between our own age and the Renaissance that it is not imperative to differentiate too meticulously between what constitutes our reading and what is theirs. I suggest, for reasons which are explored in this thesis, that the Renaissance had its own upheavals and discoveries that make it close to our own age in outlook. Our own knowledge equips us to unlock significances in these texts that might previously have eluded us.

The first two chapters are concerned with Petrarch. Chapter One examines the *Rime Sparse* in relation to the *Metamorphoses*. The figure of Laura is examined as she appears in the *Rime Sparse*, and at the same time another strand of the ideal poetic woman is explored, in relation to Dante, developing what will later become the 'Petrarchanism' of the Sixteenth Century. Petrarch's concerns with change, oblivion and fame are covered in the second half of the chapter. This includes an examination of Petrarch's conflicts between elitism and the vernacular. The presence of the Classics in early Renaissance Europe is partly responsible for a sense of period, of history as distances in time. They underpin the passage of time, but

also suggest ways of overcoming the accompanying oblivion. Petrarch sees himself in 'exile' from the present - yet uses that immediate sensory experience as the stuff of poetry - the question is how to reconcile these two self-identities. Petrarch is full of contradictions, and the struggle to marry them - a struggle that is fruitful and productive. Chapter Two looks at Petrarch's negotiation of the figure of Apollo, and attempts to clarify the conflict between poetry and sanctity in Fourteenth Century poetic theory. Petrarch's identification of himself with Apollo crystallises both the heretical and the creative aspects of poetry. Apollo as demon encapsulates the reading of secular poetry as deceptive and sinful. Augustine's writing on myth and language are central to the relevant debates, as are Aristotelian terms such as *mimesis*, and the Platonic ideals. The second half of the chapter takes the fictive capacities of poetry in a positive light, demonstrating that Petrarch as Apollo the god rejoices in the capacity of language to invent. The 'magic name of poet' is earned through the illusionist operation of language and I examine the ways in which this exercise is kept in mind throughout Petrarch's work. I shall look not only at the linguistic contortions within the poems, but also the use of myth, again particularly in relation to the figure of Laura. Metamorphic myth, particularly with reference to Ovid, is important in the construction of a defence against oblivion, and has something of the political about it when used by Petrarch. It is an expression of the transience of mortal life, while at the same time it leads the way to a method of overcoming it, using the poet's powers of transformation. There is therefore a sense of the poet as himself subject to the greater community of poets, linked through time - in which the poet takes on the characteristics of other poets, and becomes himself a body of work. I suggest that *imitatio* is a form of metamorphosis, and that this is implicit in Petrarch's work. The conclusion negotiates questions of Christian immortality, since it does not rely on the prospect of Heaven as the only form of immortality. There are of course anxieties connected with this, which are addressed in the linguistic structure of the poems. Petrarch's use of language, and especially of the pun, captures the balance between accuracy and arbitrariness resulting from the attempt to capture fluid experiential reality in art. Secular poetry, treating 'earthly' love, also exhibits love of the earth, so that sexual love stands for love of earthly things, as opposed to spiritual.

Ultimately, I hope to show that this very anxiety is used as a powerful metaphor of the poet's power. I shall look at the idea of the poet as sorcerer, not simply in the Greek

sense of seer and prophet, but with connotations of subversion and heresy. Closely connected is the Heraclitian view of life as a state of constant change, the need to overcome oblivion, and the search for immortality; this is promised in more than one way in the writing and thinking of the period, Christian vision often conflicting with the longevity achieved through literary fame and the production of literary works. I shall examine these topics as evinced in Petrarch's thought partly through exploration of his letters, but for the most part by studying the *Rime Sparse*.

Chapter Three assesses theories of poetry in England in the late Sixteenth Century. A number of Elizabethan texts on the subject are analysed. Again the need to provide poetic glory by developing a vernacular style conflicts with the need for an enduring tradition located in the continuing language of the classics. Much of the writing is a defence against the degraded view of poetry, especially secular poetry in the vernacular. This is seen to be the property of the rabble and not of the elite, and the attempt is generally to rescue it for the elite. Again, theological aspects are brought into play, in the claims that poetry is not really about this world, but about universals. Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* is a core text, but there is coverage of other Elizabethan critics, such as Puttenham, Harington, Nash and Meres. Sidney is engaged directly with demonstrating the acceptability and rightness of poetry. His preoccupations with the self in art relate to a sense of re-created persona, dynamically marrying artifice and spontaneity. Two quotations from *Astrophel and Stella* locate the angle on Sidney most pertinent to the discussion: 'I am not I, pity the tale of me' and 'Fool, said my heart to me/ Look in your heart and write'[15]. The transformation is of the self into a selective artifact, engendered by the highly self-conscious and cultivated notion of naturalness. The chapter links with Petrarch in the institutional elements under scrutiny: the canonical figure of the poet; the Queen's English; English poetry.

Chapter Four is on Shakespeare. I examine Cleopatra and Lucrece, with reference to other female characters and male personae of the plays. I look at oblivion, history, and time. In the *Sonnets*, no story is told, and there is not even a description of the beloved - indeed Shakespeare quips at such descriptions. An alternative description of the lovers is reached, through the absence of description, in abstract, comparative terms that can therefore be endlessly renewed, according to shifting experience (a kind of metamorphosis), so that there

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[15] 'Astophil and Stella', 45.14, 1.14 , in Philip Sidney, *Sir Philip Sidney:Selected Poems*, edited by Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1973); hereafter '*A&S*' within the text.

is a loss of self but at the same time a strengthening of the self through alliance with repeated experience. By the time that Shakespeare writes, the anxieties have shifted in emphasis - not so much how poetry may be written, as how accurate it can be, given changing meanings, misrepresentation, the questions of history and truth. For Shakespeare it is the story of a life, in *Lucrece*, and the problems of telling it truthfully. There is the Shakespearean concern with unreliability of record, and the manipulation of truth in representations of individual stories in the past. Experience once recorded is interpreted by others, and perhaps distorted or misunderstood; Shakespeare is concerned to show how public misrepresentation spells individual extinction in time. Here Shakespeare's ideas of history are studied in the context of contemporary developments in the definitions of history. I consider the different ideas of history as inventory (as in Pliny's *Natural History*), as chronical, and, most pertinently, the Ciceronian idea of history as rhetoric.

'Imitation' and 'metamorphosis' are two words which will be continually tested and probed, and which yield a range of interpretations. 'Imitation' is not simply the imitation of past texts, but encompasses imitations of a broader kind, such as the negotiation of theories of poetry, and theories of poetry in one age by the writers of another period. 'Metamorphosis' is not just the linking theme of Ovid's poem: it is the transformation of persons into the written artefact; it is the mutation of poet into poet, in their intertextual dialogue across time. Finally, 'imitation' and 'metamorphosis' describe the engagement with Neoplatonic structures of divinity, multiplicity and earthliness. This engagement spans the Italian and the English Renaissance, and informs the thought of Petrarch, of Shakespeare, and of the other writers who contributed so actively to the theoretical ethos of their times.

CHAPTER 1

PETRARCH AND THE LAUREL: OVIDIAN MYTH AND POETRY IN THE *RIME SPARSE*

omnia mutantur, nihil interit

All things are changing, nothing dies

- Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

utque novis facilis signatur cera figuris
nec manet ut fuerat nec formam servat eandem,
sed tamen ipsa eadem est, animam sic semper eandem
esse, sed in varias doceo migrare figuras

And, as the pliant wax is stamped with new designs, does not remain as it was before nor preserve the same form, but is still the self-same wax, so do I teach that the soul is ever the same, though it passes into ever-changing bodies.

- Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

Quas quia Pygmalion aevum per crimen agentis
viderat, offensus vitiis, quae plurima menti
feminae natura dedit, sine coniuge caelebs
vivebat thalamique diu consorte carebat.
interea niveum mira felicitur arte
sculpsit ebur formamque dedit, qua femina nasci
nulla potest, opersique sui concepit amorem.
virginis est verae facies, quam vivere credas,
et, si non obstet reverentia, velle moveri:
ars adeo latet arte sua. viratur et haurit
pectore Pygmalion simulati corporis ignes.

Pygmalion had seen these women spending their lives in shame, and, disgusted with the faults which in such full measure nature had given the female mind, he lived unmarried and long was without a partner of his couch. Meanwhile, with wondrous art he successfully carves a figure out of snowy ivory, giving it a beauty more perfect than that of any woman ever born. And with his work he falls in love. The face is that of a real maiden, whom you would think living and desirous of being moved, if modesty did not prevent. So does his art conceal his art.

- Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive.
[...] Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. ...

- Browning, 'My Last Duchess'

I. INTRODUCTION

This chapter will be on the subject of Petrarch's perceptions of poetic creation and literary fame. I will examine Petrarch's treatment of the concepts of tradition and posterity. I will also consider the development of the Laurean figure later to become the staple of poetry in Europe. The chapter will discuss a number of Petrarch's works, including the *Letters* and the moral dialogue the *Secretum*, but it will principally examine the *Rime Sparse*, and explore Petrarch's representations of Laura, and of the laurel.[1] Durling's chosen title, *Rime Sparse* ('Scattered Rhymes') expresses, Durling says, the 'deepest preoccupation of the *Rime Sparse*: dismemberment or scattering versus integration; poetic immortality; poetic immortality versus death; the creation of poetry as an expression of the impossibility of speech resulting from sexual fear' (*RS*, p.29). Sexuality, however, is only implicitly present, and drawn out more by later imitators. Wyatt, for example, has been seen as 'far more carnal than spiritual', and 'avoid[s] the transcendental in Petrarch's sonnets.'[2] As to the 'scattered' quality of the collection, it has also been noted that the poems, despite Petrarch's title, have a certain structure. They have been divided into two halves, *in vita* (during Laura's life) and *in morte* (after her death); they have been seen as framed within the Christian year.[3] The poems themselves have a consistency of theme - but at the same time have great individual power. Each one opens up a new, vivid, limpid vision, and then closes it before the next poem, which again has its own eloquence and flavour. It is a collection of small, moving incidents, shot through with various lights and moods. An examination of a single poem will be the best introduction, a poem which is both self-contained and contains most of the Petrarchan themes to be treated in this chapter. No. 30 of the *Rime Sparse,* a

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[1] Petrarch, *Letters from Petrarch*, edited by Morris Bishop (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), hereafter 'Bishop' in text; Francesco Petrarca, *Rerum familiarum libri* I-VIII translated by Aldo S. Bernardo (New York: State University of New York Press 1975), hereafter 'Bernardo' in text; Petrarch, *Petrarch's Secret or The Soul's Conflict with Passion*, edited by William H. Draper (London: Chatto & Windus 1971; reprinted Westport, Connecticut: Hyperion Press 1978). See also Chapter Two, II.i-ii.

[2] Jack D'Amico, *Petrarch in England: An Anthology of Parallel Texts* (Ravenna: Longo Editore [no date]), p.33.

[3] Thomas P. Roche, *Petrarch and the English Sonnet Sequences* (New York: AMS Press 1989). Francesco Petrarca, *Rime Sparse*, edited by Robert M. Durling (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press 1976), p.8; hereafter *RS* within the text, even when the reference is to Durling's comments or introduction.

sestina, is just such a poem. The first two stanzas follow:

> Giovene donna sotto un verde lauro
> vidi più bianca et più fredda che neve
> non percossa dal sol molti et molt'anni;
> e 'l suo parlare e 'l suo bel viso et le chiome
> mi piacquen sì ch' i' l' ò dinanzi agli occhi
> ed avrò sempre ov' io sia in poggio o 'n riva.
>
> Allor saranno i miei pensieri a riva
> che foglia verde non si trovi in lauro;
> quando avrò queto il cor, asciutti gli occhi,
> vedrem ghiacciare il foco, arder la neve;
> non ò tanti capelli in queste chiome
> quanti vorrei quel giorno attender anni.

A youthful lady under a green laurel/ I saw, whiter and colder than snow/ not touched by the sun many and many years,/ and her speech and her lovely face and her locks/ pleased me so that I have her before my eyes/ and shall always have wherever I am, on slope or shore.
Then my thoughts will have come to shore/ when green leaves are not to be found on a laurel;/ when I have a quiet heart and dry eyes/ we shall see the fire freeze, and burning snow;/ I have not so many hairs in these locks/ as I would be willing, in order to see that day, to wait years (*RS*.30, 1-12).

Many typically 'Petrarchan' elements appear in this poem, as popularised throughout Europe to the time of Shakespeare.[4] The lady surpasses all others in the poet's mind, so that

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[4] For example, 'Truly she doth as far exceed/Our women nowadays,/As doth the gillyflower the weed' (Heywood, 'In praise of his lady', 1557, p.4); 'My lady's beauty passeth more/ The best of yours, I dare well sayen,/ Than doth the sun the candle-light' (Surrey, 'In praise of his love', 1557, p.16); 'As laurel leaves that cease not to be green ...' (Anon, 'In praise of a constant lover', 1557, p.35); 'Helen may not compared be, / Nor Cressida that was so bright;/ These cannot stain the shine of thee,/ Nor yet Minerva of great might;/ Thou passest Venus far away...' (Anon, 'My dear Lady', 1567, p.56); 'To muse in mind, how wise, how fair, how good, / How brave, how frank, how courteous, and how true / My lady is ...' (Gascoigne, 'Fie, pleasure, fie!', 1575, p.69). All examples are from *Elizabethan Lyrics*, edited by Norman Ault (London and Boston: Faber and Faber 1949). A succinct overview of sixteenth-century Petrarchism is provided by Leonard Forster in *The Icy Fire: Five Studies in European Petrarchism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1969). Forster points out that Bembo writes about Petrarch in *Gli Asolani* (1505); but outside England it is Castiglione's fictionalised Bembo in *Il Cortegiano* (1528) that is the vehicle for Bembo-ised Petrarch (p.26). Rudolf Gottfried writes too that '... the Elizabethan sonneteer enjoyed the paradoxical advantage of imitating poems which were already imitations; for him the obsessive hold of Petrarch's techniques were already weakened by transmission through Italian and French paraphrases.' Philip Damon (ed), *Literary Criticism and Historical Understanding* (New York and London: Columbia University Press 1967), p.118. Stephen Minta makes a related point: 'It is true that many poems in the Petrarchan tradition seem to offer little more than a tissue of conceits, but that is because the conceits were the most easily imitable feature of the *Canzoniere*. You had only to begin your sonnet with an antithesis and you were immediately fashionable, so it is not surprising that the love-poetry of the Renaissance is littered with living deaths, icy fires and the like.' *Petrarch and Petrarchism: the English and French*

he worships at the feet of the laurel (l.23), which contains his 'idol' (l.27). Stylistic features are also typical, such as the whiteness and coldness of the lady (l.10), the freezing fire and burning snow. The poet is also in the recognisably Petrarchan state of enduring but hopeless love, and weeps in the midst of his pleasure at her sight. Beyond these features, the poem contains much more that is truly Petrarchan, but not necessarily 'Petrarchan' (see Introduction for discussion of these terms, pp.3-5).

The poem is from the *Rime Sparse*, Petrarch's own collection of 366 of his poems, for the most part on the subject of his love for Laura. It is not known whether or not Laura was a real woman, and speculations were made during his life and afterwards as to whether or not she was merely an invented symbol (*RS*, p.4). The closeness of her name to the word *lauro* (laurel) certainly suggests that her symbolic elements are of great significance - whether or not she was a woman Petrarch knew, and, if she was, whether or not he invented a screen name for her in the Dantean manner.[5] Petrarch was well aware of the significance of the laurel as symbolic of poetic fame; his coronation ode as poet-laureate was on the subject (*RS,* p.2). What is more important is that Petrarch, in the *Rime Sparse*, in the *Letters* and the *Secretum*, *presents* Laura as a historical woman that he, a historical man, fell in love with.[6] Reading his poems we become witnesses of a transformative process, whereby living human beings are changed into emblematic figures, inhabiting a stylised landscape. In the poem quoted above, Laura (whose presence is inferential only, by association with the laurel) occupies a still moment in the poet's memory, that remains throughout the years, her locks remaining 'gold' (ll.24,38). His hair changes (ll.25-32) to snow (l.31), while she is 'not touched by the sun' (l.3).[7] Petrarch's own life is depicted as a voyage, in which he remains always at sea, and, as he puts it elsewhere, 'despairing of the

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Traditions (Manchester: Manchester University Press; New York: Barnes and Noble Books 1980), pp.19-20. Jack D'Amico traces particular poems in the English Renaissance that imitate or translate Petrarchan poems. D'Amico, loc. cit. Barbara L. Estrin explores the Laura figure in English poetry in *Laura: Uncovering Gender and Genre in Wyatt, Donne and Marvell* (Durham and London: Duke University Press 1994).

[5] Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, edited by Giorgio Petrocci and Marcello Ciccuto (Milano: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli 1984), Sections VI, VII.

[6] *RS* pp. 4-5; Bishop p.31; Bernardo, p.102.

[7] On the sun as emblematic of time see Chapter One, I.ii.

port' (*RS*, 189.14).[8] Petrarch's mortal self seeks the solidity of a shore. Both Petrarch and Laura have become altered in the work of art; Petrarch in real life did not ever travel by sea if he could avoid doing so, and he makes this clear himself in his letters (see Chapter Two, III.ii). The Petrarch within the poem is clearly a different Petrarch from the writer, just as he wishes us to understand Laura as a real woman mutated in symbolic verse (*RS*, p.4).

In the third stanza, Petrarch perceives the swift passage of time (l.13), and at the same time voices his resolve to remain in pursuit of the lady (ll.16-18). It is, however, now only the 'shadow' of the laurel that draws him (l.16). The sight of Laura triggered his endless search, but by stanza 3 it is as if that vision has almost faded, and become an insistent memory of a memory, a hint of transcendant beauty only darkly understood:

> Ma perché vola il tempo et fuggon gli anni
> sì ch' a la morte in un punto s'arriva
> o colle brune o colle bianche chiome,
> reguirò l'ombra di quel dolce lauro
> per lo più ardente sole et per la neve,
> fin che l'ultimo dì chiuda quest'occhi.
>
> (But because time flies and the years flee/ and one arrives quickly at death/ either with dark or with white locks,/ I shall follow the shadow of that sweet laurel/ in the most ardent sun or through the snow,/ until the last day closes these eyes (*RS*, 30.13-18).

This sense of enlightenment just beyond sight has an enormously wide frame of reference. It is there in Plato's simile of the cave, in Dante's sense of escaping inspiration, in Grosseteste's 'vestigia' of God's glory, in Ficino's theory of love, in Michelangelo's theory of art.[9] In all these cases, the sense is of an awareness of glory or perfection which cannot be captured by mortal art or sense. Petrarch's effort, as he grasps at the laurel itself, is to achieve full possession of it, to regain the vision that he had momentarily in that glimpse of the lady and to crystallise it successfully in verse. But time passes, and the years flee from him (the word 'fuggon' [l.13] suggests a pursuer), and he himself ages; his hair is 'snow' (l.31) and it is the property of snow to melt (l.21). The image powerfully pictures mortality, and Petrarch himself threatens to dissolve, just as Laura seems to fade into a shade.

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[8] 'Despering of the port' is Wyatt's translation: 28.14. In Thomas Wyatt, *Collected Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt*, edited by Kenneth Muir and Patricia Thomson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 1969), p.22.

[9] Discussed below, II.iii, ii.iv; Chapter Three, II.ii; Chapter Four, II.iii, III.v.

The progression of stanzas 1 to 3 has been of vision, followed by the quest through time, followed by desperation and a sense of mortality. To guard against this, he once again returns, in stanza 4, to the vision, insisting on its supremacy, and its durability - the lady's hair is diamond and gold (l.24), images of clarity and perpetuity, as well of paramount value. Stanza 5 echoes the sentiments of Stanza 2, looking back on the period of his suffering where stanza 2 looked ahead through it:

Non fur giamai veduti sì begli occhi
o ne la nostra etade o ne' prim' anni
che mi struggon così come 'l sol neve,
onde procede lagrimosa riva
ch' Amor conduce a pie' del duro lauro
ch' à i rami di diamante et d'or le chiome.

I' temo di cangiar pria volto et chiome
che con vera pietà mi mostri gli occhi
l'idolo mio scolpito in vivo lauro,
ché s' al contar non erro oggi à sett' anni
che sospirando vo di riva in riva
la notte e 'l giorno, al caldo ed a la neve.

There never have been seen such lovely eyes,/ either in our age or in the first years; / they melt me as the sun does the snow:/ whence comes forth a river of tears/ that Love leads to the foot of the harsh laurel/ that has branches of diamond and golden locks.
I fear I shall change my face and my locks /before she with true pity will show me her eyes,/ my idol carved in living laurel;/ for, if I do not err, today it is seven years/ that I go singing from shore to shore/ night and day, in heat and in snow (*RS*, 30.19-30).

Within the same poem, however, and indeed in the same stanza where Petrarch is at his most deliquescent, a note of permanence is sounded (ll.31-34).

Dentro pur foco et for candida neve,
sol con questi pensier, con altre chiome,
sempre piangendo andrò per ogni riva,
per far forse pietà venir ne gli occhi
di tal che nascerà dopo mill'anni,
se tanto viver po ben colto lauro. 36

Inwardly fire, though outwardly white snow,/ alone with these thoughts, with changed locks,/ always weeping I shall go along every shore,/ to make pity

perhaps come into the eyes/ of someone who will be born a thousand years from now - / if a well-tended laurel can live so long (*RS*, 30.31-36).

It is, it is true, a note that quivers with qualification ('perhaps', 'if') but it nonetheless rings through. If the lady will not hearken to him, perhaps someone else will, an unnamed posited reader of posterity. If he feels that he cannot fully recapture the vision, here, it seems, he suddenly understands that the poem has been written anyway, and has somehow succeeded. Stanza 6 returns to stanza 3, resolving those intimations of mortality with an explicit ambition for poetic immortality. With this thought the poem leaps to a climax of renewed confirmation of the vision of the first few lines.

L'auro e i topacii al sol sopra la neve
vincon le bionde chiome presso a gli occhi
che menan gli ani miei sì tosto a riva.

Gold and topaz in the sun above the snow/ are vanquished by the golden locks next to those eyes/ that lead my years quickly to shore (*RS*, 30.37-39).

His lady is indeed, he insists, the highest possible object of adoration. She triumphs over topaz and gold - more enduring that the precious metal that never tarnishes, or than a precious stone (ll.37-39). The comparison is not, however, solely on that level. It is also, as Durling notes, a reference to Psalm 119.12, ' "I have loved thy commandments above gold and topaz" (*RS*, p.88). Petrarch here confidently places his love of Laura/lauro on the same level as the love of God. And by drawing the analogy he also implicitly compares himself as poet with David the poet of the psalms - the poetic nature of the psalms was often invoked in defences of poetry (see Chapter Three).

There is thus a pattern to this poem, a series of reflections revisited in succeeding stanzas. The effect is of a wandering to and fro, a continual leaving and returning to the same thoughts, reflecting structurally the wandering of his symbolic voyage. The poem, a sestina, works round a structure of sixes - the first three stanzas are developed by the next three, in order. By the end of stanza 6 he has worked through the pattern, and reached the point where the last word of the stanza is the same as the last word of the first line - 'lauro'. He returns to the beginning, but it is not the same as it was at the beginning. After this point of resolution, the final triplet condenses the subject of the whole poem in a strong conclusion. The number 6 was clearly a significant one for Petrarch, since he marks the first day he saw Laura and the day of her death as both occurring on the 6th of April - 1327 and

1348 respectively (*RS*, pp.5-6; *RS*, 3.1; 336.12-14).

The poem introduces many of Petrarch's themes and approaches, which will be discussed below. We have seen the significance of the laurel; the preoccupation with mortality and decay; the sense of period (shown in this poem by looking forward and back through time in stanzas 2 and 5); the transference of life into art; the nature of poetic vision; the nature of poetic craft. The Daphne myth, so central to the *Rime Sparse*, is implicitly present. In this story the nymph Daphne, fleeing from Apollo, is transformed into a laurel tree, the leaves of which Apollo, god of poetry, then adopts as his own.[10] There are also threads here that will be picked up in Chapter Two, for example the equation of secular with scriptural poetry; the punning (lauro, l'auro); and the overall effect of deliberate obscurity only unveiled after meticulous, informed study.

Section One will examine the figure of Laura, particularly in relation to characters from Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* for example Daphne and Medusa, pertinent personifications, for example Gloria, and mythologised figures like the Virgin Mary. These figures, and to some extent their stories, are negotiated by Petrarch in relation to himself, and his story. The mythic figures chosen for this chapter are predominantly female. I would suggest that the concept of the female is itself to some extent significant here, in embodying and resolving the essential oxymoron, flux versus stasis, that generates the whole Petrarchan *oeuvre.* This means that the formula of the pursuing and defeated lover and the elusive but often guiding woman must be read in a new light. It is useful here to consider Plato's view of sexual love in the *Symposium*, as springing from the desire for immortality. As a result of the love, immortality may be attempted through the propagation of children, or else through the creation of art.[11] The sexuality of the flight and pursuit is in this reading simply illustrative, and the main point of the situation is that the woman is desired and pursued, and at the same time revered. She has, in other words, symbolic or mythic significance.

Myth may be defined here as in the first place figures from Classical writing, the gods and stories that appear in the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid; but the concept widens to include other definitions. That is, the way in which these Graeco-Roman mythic figures are seen

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[10] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, translated by Frank Justus Miller, 2 vols (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann 1984).

[11] Plato, *The Symposium*, translated by Walter Hamilton (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1951), pp.86-87.

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to signify is then applied to other figures, usually implicitly. The embodiment, whoever it is, holds certain associations, powers and aspirations. In this way Mary is a myth, promising eternity, perhaps, or salvation or guidance. Laura becomes a myth, invoking qualities such as chastity, poetry, fame. Petrarch becomes mythically Apollo. This process is later carried through in a different way in Chapter Four on Shakespeare, where Cleopatra is subsumed by the myth of the Petrarchan mistress, Lucrece's position complicated by the myth of the chaste-sexual woman (archetypally the Virgin Mary).[12]

The full significance of Petrarch's adherence to the Daphne myth will be considered. In the main, the issues raised in this section are those of flight and petrifaction, interchange of identity, and change of shape. Petrarch struggles to possess the Laura who only fleetingly appears, and he confronts the hints he is given of her existence beyond his scope - bewilderingly, she sometimes appears a wild beast (*RS*, 23), sometimes as Medusa (*RS*, 179), sometimes as an angel (*RS*, 90). If Laura were a 'real' woman, and Petrarch the 'real' man who lived from 1304-1374, then their existence as separate, wilful beings would indeed generate such conflicts of desire - Laura would escape his containing mind, simply because she had a mind of her own. In this way, Petrarch takes a situation, whether historical or fictional to begin with, sets it up as 'real', then uses that 'reality' as metaphor. If, as I suggest, his pursuit of Laura must more properly be read as a pursuit of poetry, then the delineation of the lovers metaphorically image the poet's experience as he has a fleeting inspiration, then fights to recapture it, and even in the act of poetic construction has the sense that there is more beyond the glimpses that he has not seen and over which he has no control. The *Rime Sparse* explore, among other things, the nature of poetic creation - in the Renaissance understanding of it, when it was fully believed that, as Shakespeare was later to put it '[t]here are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / than are dreamt of in your philosophy' (*Hamlet*, I.v.168-69). Perhaps we too feel that there is much still to be understood, but the Renaissance still believed in revelation, in truths being vouchsafed to the individual independent of empirical evidence or investigation. It was in that sense a non-empirical age. The role played by the empirical was a grey-edged one - it might suggest, but the information it gives is not of itself, but of a supernal reality. It mediates, is not actual in

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[12] Ted Hughes sees Ovidian myth as '[where] human passion *in extremis* [...] combusts, or levitates, or mutates into an experience of the supernatural,' and maintains that Shakespeare shares this view of the intensity of passion. Ted Hughes, 'On Ovid's *Metamorphoses', The New York Review of Books*, vol.44:12, (1997), p.18.

itself. Writing is in this sense the act of reading God's book of nature.

Woman in secular love poetry has a further significance, a parallel to the Augustinian interpretation of the scriptures. St Augustine reads the conception of Eve as prefiguring the Church: 'For in the beginning when a rib was taken from Adam, being asleep, to make Eve, this was a plain prophecy of Christ and the Church. Adam's sleep was Christ's death, from whose side being opened with a spear as He hung upon the Cross, came blood and water, the two sacraments whereby the Church is built.'[13] Laura is often connected with Christ-like images, such as the side-piercing of Apollo (*RS,* 197.1-2), and her association with light (*RS*, 9.10; 12.5; 18.1; 19.9-14; 90.12; 197.8). He first sees Laura on April 6, the date of the Crucifixion (*RS*, 3). She is born in a small town that echoes Bethlehem (*RS*, 4). This is not to say that Laura represents the Church, but that she is a parallel metaphor. She embodies a search for enlightenment that runs alongside the revelations of the Church, a differentiation made clear in *RS* 16, where the little old man searches for the Veronica and Christ's image, and the comparison is drawn with Petrarch's search:

> Così, lasso, talor vo cercand' io,
> Donna, quanto è possibile in altrui
> la disiata vostra forma vera.
>
> Thus, alas, at times I go searching in others, Lady, as much as is possible, for your longed-for true form (*RS*, 16.12-14).

The search for Laura - the attempt to capture half-perceived vision - is distinguished from the search for God. The question is whether the goal is the same or different - whether the pursuit of Laura is uplifting or deceptive. Petrarch sometimes seems to believe her light is heavenly, at other times suspects it is only a demonic glamour. There is thus a constant shifting of perspective in the *Rime Sparse*, on many levels.

Within poem 30, as I said, there are examples of 'Petrarchan' style and the 'Petrarchan' lady. Section I will conclude by developing the analysis, and retracing the 'Petrarchan' lady, looking at alternative routes such as Dante's *Vita Nuova*, by which she takes a form divergent from the Laura of the *Rime Sparse*. Section II develops the matter

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[13] Augustine, *City of God*, translated by John Healey (1610), introduction by Sir Ernest Barker, 2 vols. (London: J. M. Dent and Sons 1945), XXII.xvii.

of Section I, looking at Petrarch's pursuit of fame, his interest in the Classics, and his concept of 'posterity'. The conflict between developing the vernacular and the preservation of a Latin tradition colour his perceptions of cultural and linguistic changes, and how these threaten his quest for a durable poetic style that will continue the dialogue with the past in a dialogue with the future. In this section I shall focus more on Petrarch's letters.

'Posterity' is a concept erected by Petrarch as the answer to all his problems. 'Posterity' is almost sentient but it is also almost a state of being, another expression of the ideal state of existence which Petrarch attempts in various ways to achieve and by the absence of which he is tormented. The aim of Section II is to clarify period definitions of fame and of art, particularly in the context of the attempted transcendence of death. I aim to analyse Petrarch's views, mainly as presented in his letters; the ethics and methods of attempting to gain fame, and the difference between celebrity and history. These definitions are necessary, since they change in time, and are different in the work of Sidney and of Shakespeare: for example the unquestioned sanctity of stasis in the tradition Petrarch inherits has by the time of Shakespeare been severely questioned via the developments of science.

He learnt much by reading the classics, both from their content and from the fact of their existence; he wanders over Roman ruins and considers the gap of time, and this perhaps might have given him the idea of posterity, for whom he too might survive. So that he has an idea of the past, and the future reflected as it were from it, and, looking at both, he neglects to look at the mirror itself; he feels in exile (not only geographically, though that too) but more from his own time; he becomes a recluse, he writes of rejecting worldly success, and taking up solitude, both a Christian and a secular ideal. This chapter will also look at fourteenth century Italian knowledge of the Classics, and the effect this had on the thought and artistic output of the time. It will be an attempt to assess the character of the time, and look at Petrarch in the light of his contemporaries. The lessons offered by the Classics lay not only in the form and content of the writings themselves, but also in the mere fact of their existence; they give rise to a sense of period, of history as distances in time. They underpin the passage of time, but also suggest ways of overcoming the accompanying oblivion. There will be some discussion of Petrarch's sense of tradition, why this was important to him, and what use he proposed to make of it for his own ends.

He writes much of the offensiveness of the times, not only of the emphasis on gain,

of political and sexual moral corruption, but also of the offensiveness of the fact that everyone writes poetry. But there are other reasons too for his withdrawal; not only does it allow study, contemplation and artistic activity, it also allows for the author to have more or less total control over the way in which he will survive for posterity; that is, as a carefully selected body of work, just as the writers of the Classics have survived for him. Rather than appear in all his uncontrolled real self to his peers, he prefers to wait and be known in rarefied perfection to 'posterity'. The need to do this is driven by a strong sense of the transience of life, which must somehow or other be transcended. Since life is unsatisfactory as well as transient, the relatively purified self in art is the ultimate aim. In fact it is this imperfection of life that ensures its obliteration; the selected cream of an age is preserved for futurity, the dregs are forgotten - or should be, it seems. But posterity, of course, must be ensured to be of a sort that will comprehend Petrarch. What has survived? Since he is engaged always with a looking backward and forward, Janus-like, the only way he can elevate himself to the level of being able to claim the same attention, or to last as long as the Classics have, is by modelling himself upon them, and recreating or continuing that tradition. It is quite a deliberate enterprise. It involves the concept of *imitatio* - imitating past poetry - and to a large extent recreating it in the present. *Imitatio* is central to Petrarchan poetics. Petrarch himself exercised it in a flexible manner, often being quite free of interpretation, so that a fusion of books is often written about from an almost magic realist viewpoint as the fusion of persons, as discussed below. This is used in the re-invention of a tradition or frame; events are woven into poetry, even quite minor details. The characters of Petrarch and Laura are merged deeply with the mythic world of Ovid. Petrarch and Laura become themselves mythic, can be used as metaphors, just as to begin with myth was used to illustrate their story.

II. LAURA

i. 'Aquae fugiunt, flumen manet'

The passage of time is a theme to which Petrarch repeatedly returns. Ricardo J. Quinones writes that it became something of an obsession as Petrarch grew older, so that he needed to use every moment available to him, to sleep less, and to carry out several tasks at once.[14] Petrarch writes warningly to young people to use what time they have, since it will soon be gone (Bishop, p.111). Of the task of copying out Cicero's works he writes,

> I may perhaps have done such copying in the past, when I seemed to command endless time, though indeed it was silently slipping away. But the riches of time are the most uncertain, the most fleeting, of all possessions (Bishop, pp.155-56).

The theme is also treated in Poem 12, voicing the age-old *carpe diem* threat later to be employed so effectively, amongst others, by Herrick and Marvell, and by Yeats.[15] In this poem, Petrarch hints to Laura that he will see her grow old, and that the gold that stays gold forever in Poem 30 (above) will change:

> ch'i' veggia [...]
> [...] i cape' d'oro fin farsi d'argento,
> et lassar le ghirlande e i verdi panni,
> e'l viso scolorir [...]

> [...] that I may see [...] your hair of fine gold made silver, see you abandon garlands and clothes of green, and see your face lose its hue [...] (*RS*, 12.3, 5-7).

The effect is curiously inverted; because Petrarch writes in terms of metals, the alchemical change from gold to silver seems to suggest a marvel in nature, and argues all the more forcefully the supra natural power of time, which relentlessly supersedes all material things.

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[14] Ricardo J. Quinones, *The Renaissance Discovery of Time* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1972), p.160.

[15] 'Gather ye Rosebuds'; 'To His Coy Mistress'; 'When You Are Old and Grey'. The phrase *carpe diem* is originally from Horace's *Odes*: 'carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero' (' "seize the day, trusting little in tomorrow"'). Eugene Ehrlich, *A Dictionary of Latin Tags and Phrases* (London: Robert Hale 1987), p.67.

Oblivion is a constant prospect, acutely conscious as he is of the impermanence of the mortal state, of man as closely implicated in the mutations of nature. Durling writes:

> For Petrarch the term [fragments] expresses the intensely self-critical awareness that all integration of selves and texts is relative, temporary, threatened. They flow into multiplicity at the touch of time, their inconsistencies juxtaposed as the successive traces of a subject who dissolves and leaves only words behind (*RS*, p.26).

Petrarch adopted the Heraclitian theory of flux, which for Petrarch became intimately associated with the idea of dying and decay. In a long passage in the *De otio religioso,* his discussion of the monastci life, he talks about rivers, in myth, in the Bible, in the psalms, and of their common reference to the fleetingness of life 'nam quid, oro, fluenti aquae similis quam res hominem sine fine volubilis?' ('What is more like the flowing waters than the things of humanity that continually pass away?'); he sums up the idea in one Latin phrase, 'aquae fugiunt, flumen manet'('the waters flow by, the river remains').[16] The river might remain, but it is the ever-departing waves that preoccupy him. In a letter to a friend, he falls to musing - '[...] I was just wondering what I should say further or what I should not say, and meanwhile, as is my custom, I was tapping the blank paper with my pen top. My action brought me a subject, for I reflected how in that brief interval life was flowing on, and I was flowing with it, slipping down, departing, or to use the right word, dying. We are continually dying [...] I shall be dying when you read this, you die while I write, we both are dying, we are all dying, we are dying forever [...]' (Bishop, p.203). This sense of change and decay is behind his search for immortality, which mutates into a search for fame.

It is to guard against this imminent disintegration that he turns to Laura. Petrarch applies Daphne's story to Laura in a way that expresses his own objectives and desires; Laura, with the change of a single letter, becomes the *lauro*, the laurel, whose leaves Petrarch covets as a crown. This is clear for example in Poem 22:

> [...] et non se transformasse in verde selva
> per uscirmi di braccia, come il giorno
> ch'Apollo la seguia qua giù per terra!

[...] and let her not be transformed into a green wood/ to escape from my arms, as the day/

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[16] Bufano, loc. cit., pp.702, 703. Cf. *Met.*, XV.180-185 on the river of time.

when Apollo pursued her down here on earth! (*RS*, 22.34-36)

The analogies are carried further in Poem 34, where he calls on Apollo not to forget the leaves that limned first Apollo then Petrarch, and speaks of their seeing 'la donna nostra' as a laurel tree (34.13). Here he speaks of Daphne as 'nostra', 'ours', allying himself with Apollo to follow Daphne, who is in this incarnation Laura. In this way, the two women, Laura and Daphne, become fused, suggesting a further equation between Apollo and Petrarch. Laura is Daphne, who becomes the laurel which is Petrarch's goal. She will bring him lasting fame:

> [dico]
> "Da lei ti ven l'amoroso pensero
> che mentre 'l segui al sommo ben t'invia,
> poco prezzando quel ch' ogni uom desia;
>
> "da lei vien l'animosa leggiadria
> ch'al ciel ti scorge per destro sentero,
> sì ch'i'vo già de la speranza altero."
>
> [I say]
> "From her comes the amorous thought that, while you follow it, sends you toward the highest good, little valuing what other men desire;
> "from her comes the courageous joy that leads you to Heaven along a straight path, so that already I go high with hope." (*RS*, 13.9-14).

But the hope is in quotation marks, it is what he tells himself, and whether anything will counter the corrosion of time is a recurring doubt:

> Quanto più m'avicino al giorno estremo
> che l'umana miseria suol far breve,
> più veggio il tempo andar veloce et leve
> e'l mio di lui sperar fallace et scemo.
>
> The more I approach the last day that makes all human misery brief, the more I see that Time runs swift and light and that my hope of him is fallacious and empty (*RS*, 32.1-4).

These two quotations bring together the opposing moments of certainty and doubt in the *Rime Sparse*. These moments are crystallised in the punning reference to Laura as 'l'aura' (the breeze), for example in Poems 870, 90, 197 and 237. Poem 80 centres round Petrarch's favourite image of the wandering boat, perhaps most fully treated in Poem 189.

The breeze that fills the sails is Laura (l'aura):

> L'aura soave a cui governo et vela
> commissi, entrando a l'amorosa vita
> et sperando venire a miglior porto,
> poi mi condusse in più di mille scogli [...]
>
> The soft breeze, to whom I entrusted both sail / and tiller, entering upon this amorous life / and hoping to come to a better port, / carried me to more than a thousand rocks [...] (*RS*, 80.7-10).

Laura here is insubstantial, and his pursuit of her misleading. In Poem 90, her aspect as the breeze is differently treated. Here it rather figures the problems of capturing his vision of her in verse:

> Erano i capei d'oro a l'aura sparsi
> che'n mille dolci nodi gli avolgea,
> e'l vago lume oltra misura ardea
> di quei begli occhi [...]
>
> Her golden hair was loosed to the breeze, which turned it in a thousand sweet knots, and the lovely light burned without measure in her eyes [...] (*RS*, 90.1-4)

Laura is 'd'angelica forma,' 'un vivo sole'. The poem, as Durling notes, is an imitation of Virgil's description of Venus in the *Aeneid* (*RS*, p.192):

> o - quam te memorem, virgo? namque haud tibis voltus
> mortalis, nec vox hominem sonat [...]
> et vera incessu patuit dea.
>
> But by what name should I call thee, O maiden? For thy face is not mortal nor has thy voice a human ring [...] and in her step she was revealed, a very goddess (Aeneid, I.327-28, 405).[17]

Laura in *RS* 90 suggests this goddess Venus, but, in true imitative style, diverges from the original. Virgil's Venus first appears like a 'virginis arma,/ Spartanae' ('a Spartan girl [...] carrying her weapons' - I.315-16), a corporal, even a mundane image that is wholly missing from Petrarch's poem. Laura's hair is the only physical feature mentioned, and that is diffused into 'a thousand sweet knots'. The description is impressionistic, the sense of half-

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[17] Virgil, 'Aeneid' in *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid 1-6*, translated by H. Rushton Fairclough (London: William Heinemann 1932).

apprehended vision rightly described in 'l'aura' (the breeze), a thing clearly felt but not seen. The poem is reminiscent of Shakespeare's Sonnet 18, where the summer's day achieves a vivid characterisation of the beloved which is all the more remarkable for being born of such intangibility. In Poem 239, the images of Laura/l'aura are both present:

> Temprar potess'io in sì soavi note
> i miei sospiri ch'addolcissen Laura [...]
>
> Could I but tune in such sweet notes / my sighs that they would sweeten the breeze [...] (*RS*, 239.7-8)

Despair at failure of capture mingle with reproaches about Laura's lack of response (ll.16-18). This poem, as I shall discuss in Chapter Two, below, has an underlying implicit sense of creative triumph, but on the surface, the attempt is seen as futile: 'In rete accolgo l'aura e'n giaccio i fiori [...]' ('In a net I catch the breeze and on ice flowers [...]' - *RS*, 239.37). *RS* 197 employs the greatest concentration of punning meanings attaching to Laura:

> L'aura celeste che'n qual verde Lauro
> spira ov'Amor ferì nel fianco Apollo [...]
>
> The heavenly breeze that breathes in that green laurel, where Love smote Apollo in the side [...] (*RS*, 197.1-2)

The breeze is heavenly, is entangled verbally as well as semantically in the leaves of the laurel, while the wound in the side of Apollo recalls the wound in the side of Christ on the Cross. Through the facilities of language the progression to heavenly vision through the vision of Amor is trenchantly made. But Laura/l'aura/lauro is also l'auro, introducing the fourth variation on the theme, so that again everlasting gold is introduced, which shines brighter than the sun (l.8). Throughout the *Rime Sparse*, Laura is connected with light, often in contrast to the dark in which Petrarch finds himself - in this poem too he is in her shadow, in a darkened place from which he wishes to move out into the light (l.12).

There is also the comparison with Medusa. Of Laura's power he says, '[...] gli occhi ànno vertù di farne un marmo' ('[...] her eyes have the power to turn [my heart] to marble' - 197.14). The aspect of Medusa enters unexpectedly into the images of fluidity and progression towards brightness in the compressed form of this sonnet, aspects of Laura are packed intricately together - the sense that he cannot capture her mutates into a sense of being trapped by her. The doubt about the goal he follows in pursuing her is almost a moment of illumination, whereby she freezes him into stone, earthly matter, rather than

leading him in spirit to heaven. Marble is, however, an ambiguous image. Unquestionably of this earth, it suggests mortal grossness, matter not spirit, but it also suggests the marble of sculpted, lasting art, also part of this earth, but somehow a refined, elevated part, that transcends flux and time. The poem raises the question of what it is that Laura effects in her transformation of him into stone. It is a complex question, which runs throughout the *Rime Sparse*, and which will be further explored in the next sub-section.

ii. 'I miei pensier gelati'

There is clearly no simple solution, in terms of providing a stop to oblivion. Laura is not just Daphne; she is also Medusa - containing within this incarnation the difficulties and drawbacks of trying to capture fluid experiential reality in art. This dual aspect is suggested in the frequent references to statues in Petrarch's poems. His statues and sculpted stones surely indicate the desired imitation of the ideal state, permanence, stasis, an imperviousness to flux. So a statue, inferior to life, can ape eternity, superior to life. It is this sculptural capacity that he looks for in Laura, but comes to fear; if all she, his inspiration, can do is turn him to stone, in a manner of speaking, she with her 'bel diamante ond'ell'à il cor sì duro'('the lovely diamond with which her heart is so hard' - 171.9). He later writes:

> [...] andrei non altramente
> a veder lei che'l volto di Medusa,
> che facea marmo diventar la gente.
>
> [...] I would not go to see her otherwise than to see the face of Medusa, which made people become marble (*RS*, 179.9-11).

Medusa is the other side of Daphne, the dark side of the composite Diana they make up - the two parts of Laura. Diana should be borne in mind, since she is the female of Apollo, Phoebe to his Phoebus, and hence that suggests an identification of Laura with Apollo. Seemingly crystal-clear parallels refuse to remain separate, but blend and merge, allusions

shadowing each other, no one image remaining isolated.

In *RS* 23 and 50 Petrarch sets out the problems of attempting to transcend earthly life by moving beyond it, or out of it. The aim instead in the poems is to fix experience in art. But this too is a struggle:

> Misero me, che volli
> quando primier sì fisso
> gli [occhi] tenni nel bel viso
> per iscolpirlo, imaginando, in parte,
> onde mai né per forza ne per arte
> mossa sarà [...]

> Miserable me! What was I doing when for the first time I kept [my eyes] so fixed on her lovely face, to sculpture it for imagination in a place whence it would never be moved by any art or force [...](*RS*, 50.64-9)

He burns away, supported by a living rock, (50.77-78) which contrasts with the 'imagined sculpture' he attempts. Similar effects appear in *RS* 23:

> E se qui la memoria non m'aita
> come suol fare, iscusilla i martiri
> et un penser che solo angoscia dàlle,
> tal ch'ad ogni altro fa voltar le spalle
> e mi face obliar me stesso a forza,
> ch'e'ten di me quel d'entro, et io la scorza.
>
> [...] d'intorno al mio pensier gelati
> fatto avean quasi adamantino smalto
> ch'allentar non lassava il duro affetto

> And if here my memory does not aid me as it is wont to do, let my torments excuse it and one thought which alone gives it such anguish that it makes me turn back on every other and makes me forget myself beyond resistance, for it holds what is within me, and I only the shell [...] around my heart frozen thoughts had made almost an adamantine hardness which my hard effect did not allow to slacken. (*RS*, 23.15-20, 24-26)

The process of forming thoughts separates them from the thinker, and renders them rigid. There is even a sense in which the created work has an independent being, separating itself from the artist after creation, an idea familiar to readers of Pirandello. In the transformation he becomes through her inspiration a sculpted form, suggesting the transition from temporal reality into permanent art. The contrast is repeatedly made in this poem, where motion and

stasis are brought dynamically together, in what may be read as a study of the conflicts and agonies of attempting to capture fluid experiential reality in art. Formulating experience into a coherent or artistic shape is a terrifying and alienating experience, encapsulated in the moment when Laura, the inspiration to poetry, transforms the poet into 'un quasi vivo et sbigottito sasso' ('a half-living and terrified stone' - 23.80). The mistaken pursuit of poetry seems to lead to a terrifying revelation of its futility; the poet becomes a stone, returning to his earth-self, without even eloquence left, more matter than spirit. Yet avoiding poetry seems to lead only to more certain disintegration. Throughout the poem the poet repeatedly changes shape, first fleeing Laura and his petrified condition, turning his back on poetry, as it were, only to be confronted with his own insubstantiality:

> [...] né giamai neve sotto al sol disparve
> com'io senti'me tutto venir meno
> et farmi una fontana a piè d'un faggio[...]

> [...] nor did ever snow under the sun disappear, as I felt myself entirely melt and become a fountain at the foot of a beech [...] (*RS*, 23.115-17)

He continues to change shape, becoming at one point a laurel tree, then a spring, a wandering spirit, a stag, and in the final lines he evokes the exploitative disguises of Zeus, where love's transforming power makes him a bird, a flame, always returning, as he says at the end, to the laurel shape. Throughout the poem runs a current of reference to the myth of Daphne, whose flight and standstill aptly illustrate Petrarch's preoccupations. He is unable to arrest his changes, and surrenders to tears, returning to Laura, who briefly restores him to a sense of self, rapidly leading again to petrifaction as he once again pursues art:

> [...] né per nova figura il primo alloro
> seppi lassar [...]

> [...] nor for any new shape could I leave the first laurel [...]
> (*RS*, 23.167-68)

For Petrarch the enterprise is fraught with anguish, as in Poem 22, where a sense of inconclusiveness, of being in exile, are the dominant concerns; Petrarch wanders in a wood like that to which Virgil's unhappy lovers are consigned, above him the magnetic stars,

Heaven, stability.[18] But even while the stars draw him the pull is a painful one. There is a sense in which his incarnation as a human being is itself a form of exile, but a particularly imprisoning one; he is against his will at one with the earth and the woods, ruled over by the sun and governed by change (the sun is the engine of change in the *Triumphus Temporis*). This intimation is an echo of Augustine in *De Civitate Dei*, '[a]nd because during this life [mortal man] is absent from the Lord, and walketh by faith, and not by sight [2 Cor.v.6.7], therefore he refers all his peace of body, of soul, and of both, unto that peace which mortal man has with immortal God, to live in an orderly obedience under His eternal law by faith'.[19] But where Augustine sees clearly the peace elsewhere, Petrarch cannot, however much he tries, escape his desires, as in Poem 35, where he tries to find the most deserted places, but can never find paths harsh enough to stop Amor walking along with him, as they discourse together (cf. *RS*,360.46-60). The image recurs in Poem 18, where with all the inevitability of a shadow, desire follows him:

> Così davanti a'colpi de la morte
> fuggo, ma non sì ratto che'l desio
> meco non venga, come venir sòle [...]
>
> Thus I flee before the blows of death, but not so quickly that my desire does not come with me, as it is accustomed[...] (*RS*, 18.9-11)

Medusa is almost an inverted image of Pygmalion here - Pygmalion too is an aspect of Laura, since the stone she creates of him remains alive (*RS*, 23.78-80). The sheaf of references cluster around the central questions about the creation of the artistic product. Is art an artificialising process? - Does it therefore distort our self-knowledge, and our knowledge of others - since in art we appear to possess them? Shakespeare too, referring implicitly again to Pygmalion, explores such questions. It is only when she has stopped living that Desdemona comes near that statue-like state of permanence, that 'monumental alabaster', since alive she is always prey to change. There is no idea of death as decay here, simply as stasis. Similarly, in *The Winter's Tale*, Hermione's statue stands so long as she

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[18] Durling notes the allusion to Virgil in a note (*RS*, p.58). The location is *Aeneid* VI.

[19] *City of God*, loc. cit., XIX xiv.

exists only in the King's memory, without the changeability of the living woman. Desdemona once dead can be what Othello wants her to be - as with Hermione - but Othello creates the monumental alabaster himself, through language. He can never find that alabaster outside himself, in independent nature. Our view of others as ours clashes with the way in which they are their own - thus Petrarch, in portraying the contents of his mind, shows how Laura should be (and therefore is) in his mind; yet she wanders in and out in her own insistent form, he holds also the reception of things she has said and done that clash with what he wants of her. So she melts from possessed into elusive, angel to wild beast, the wild beast suggesting something unpredictable, unknowable, untamed.

But what Pygmalion wanted was for his doll to be alive. In both the above cases from Shakespeare, the petrified condition, while appearing quasi-divine, is not fruitful as the state of living is; Desdemona and Hermione are both preferable (however unpredictable) alive, and negative (though under control) when contemplated dead. So perhaps the husbands realise their mistake in desiring permanence, or certainty - it is not life. Through the Ovidian images of statues and stones Petrarch, just as Shakespeare does, explores the search for a concrete definition of the self and its fluid experiences, imaged as the capture of the other. But this search, and its end, the graven image of the poem, is conducted upon shaky ground. Impeded by mortality, prey to change and inadequate in the face of praetor-natural vision, the poet-mind is always already failing before its projected task. The task itself is beyond the scope of the mortal poet, bound to mutable earth as he is, since the task is to create a fixed object out of ever-changing material, within an ever-changing environment. The subject changes, the poet changes, readers change. This is the basic point at the heart of that sense of delusion in the pursuit of earthly poetic fame. Laura herself, the breeze, is the archetypal expression of this problematic crux. The paradox is that the image of static perfection can exist, even while its intangibility remains frustratingly evident.

So far I have discussed the themes of time and change in Petrarch's poetry, and his attempts to combat these through the use of Ovid; imitating Ovid creates a sense of continuity in response to fears of disintegration. In the rest of this section I will examine Petrarch's muse, Laura, comparing her to Dante's Beatrice. She might, like Beatrice, be seen as a guide to heaven, or, like Medusa (who turns men to stone), suggest entrapment within earthliness. Her problematic independence of being suggests the elusive nature of inspiration, as Petrarch seems to see it, and his doubts about the rightness of secular poetry.

iii. ' "I'non son forse chi tu credi"'

The poet, therefore, pursues a vision that, for a variety of reasons, always evades, but always offers sufficient hope of capture for the pursuit to continue. Petrarch's pursuit of Laura reflects this phenomenon. Laura is continually changing, and is generated allusively from a number of Ovidian antecedents. Her feminine essence is echoed by a range of female personifications, facilitated by the gendered nature of the Italian language. These genders of grammar engender an animated creation of beings, some of whom (Truth, Reason, Death) paradoxically have an essential stability, others of whom (Glory, for example) have the appearance of constancy but are perhaps veiling a deceptive insubstantiality. Throughout his pursuit of these ladies, the poet strains intellect and memory, stretching his mortal mind.

The mortal mind is not necessarily reliable, since it can fail to retain or express things - a point acknowledged by Augustine,[20] and treated by Dante in the *Commedia*:

> [...] il mio veder fu maggio
> che parlar mostra, ch'a tal vista cede,
> e cede la memoria a tanto oltraggio
>
> [...] Così la neve al sol si disigilla;
> così al vento ne le foglie levi
> si perde la sentenza di sibilla.

... my vision was greater than speech shows, that succumbs to such a vision, and memory succumbs to such an assault. Thus the snow in the sun melts away; thus in the wind on the light leaves the wisdom of the Sybil was lost. (*Par.*, XXXIII.55-57, 64-66)

The problem is as much of articulacy as of recall. In Poem 20 Petrarch too laments the inadequacy of his words in the face of his subject:

> Più volte già per dir le labbra apersi,
> poi rimase la voce in mezzo'l petto:
> ma qual son poria mai salir tant'alto?

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[20] Augustine, *Confessions*, translated by R. S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1961), p.217.

> Many times already have I opened my lips to speak, but then my voice has remained within my breast: but what sound could ever rise so high?
> (*RS*, 20.9-11)

A similar perception is later made by Michelangelo, for whom the vision of beauty is so much greater than what he sees as his poor attempts to cast it in stone.[21]

So the Petrarch of the *RS* is not free for having rejected an objective universe; he is caught up in his own susceptibility, which allows things of beauty to have power over him. At the same time it is because they are beautiful that he is affected by them -

> i'che l'esca amorosa al petto avea,
> qual meraviglia se di subito arsi?
>
> Non era l'andar suo cosa mortale
> ma d'angelica forma [...]
> un spirto celeste, un vivo sole
> fu quel ch'i'vidi ...

> I, who had the tinder of love in my breast, what wonder is it if I suddenly took fire? [...] Her walk was not that of a mortal thing but of some angelic form [...] a celestial spirit, a living sun was what I saw [...] (*RS*, 90.7-10, 12-13).

The stars too have their part to play, although perhaps for Petrarch they have less the function of Providence as of the poetic impulse towards beauty, and the judgement to recognise perfection. Thus he asks:

> [...] ché ben ch'i'sia mortal corpo di terra
> lo mio fermo desir vien dalle stelle [...]

> [...] for although I am a mortal body of earth my firm desire comes from the stars [...] (*RS*, 22.23-4)

The three elements, the object of love, the impulse to love, and the desire for beauty are inextricably bound up and mutually dependent. And they are all also within Petrarch himself. Within the framework of the metamorphic myths they weave a complex fabric that Greene has aptly termed a 'matted texture of allusion'.[22] The whole suggests a representation of the literary human consciousness where thoughts, perceptions of

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[21] For a discussion of Michelangelo see Nesca A. Robb, *Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance* (London: George Allen and Unwin 1935), pp.239-269.

[22] Greene, loc. cit., p.136.

experiential reality, impulses, impressions and fragments of reading unavoidably complement and alter each other in constant shifting play. In this connection, the Aristotelian contention that art is mimesis is important. If it is mimetic of the objective world, then there are all kinds of problems of accuracy; but for Petrarch, perhaps, it imitates the mind, which is nothing like so ordered or observable or predictable as might at first appear. Augustine has similar perceptions of the all-embracing mind in his discussions of the memory in the *Confessions* but what he calls a 'wonderful system of compartments',[23] to and from which different components of his memory are martialled in a co-operative and mutually exclusive way, is altogether more ordered and rational a picture than Petrarch's. In Petrarch's mingling and undefined mental processes, the inward and outward world are brought together; the metamorphic myth reflects the character of experience, mental and external, in an uneasy conjunction, the outer world existing primarily as subjective consciousness, but with a lurking realization that it has a separate being that cannot be controlled. The idea is in Freud:

> An infant at the breast does not yet distinguish his ego from the external world as the source of the sensations flowing in upon him. He gradually learns to do so, in response to various promptings [...] we may assume that there are many people in whose mental life this primary ego-feeling has persisted to a greater or less degree.[24]

There is something like this 'primary ego feeling' in the *Rime Sparse*, centred on Laura, so much more than woman, 'd'angelica forma .. un spirto celeste'. In referring to her he in fact relays that special quality of the mistress, which seems to belong to her, yet is bound up with the lover and therefore comes from him. The aspect raises difficulties in the question of possession, inherent in the Daphne myth: by becoming a laurel, Daphne surrenders herself to Apollo for all eternity; yet her action supremely defeats and evades him. Laura hints at the duality of her existence when she says, ' "I'non sono forse chi tu credi"' ("I am not perhaps who you think I am!" - 23.83); in his confrontations with her Petrarch is forced to acknowledge her independent refusal to be possessed, which clashes with the inward sense in which he does possess her, simply by virtue of her being there in his mind, she is immured

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[23] *Confessions*, loc. cit., p.217.

[24] Sigmund Freud, 'Civilisation and its Discontents' in Pelican Freud Library vol.12 (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1955), pp.254-55.

in the processes of his metamorphoses, is a breeze, a shadow, a cloud of golden hair, the letters of her name filtering through into other elements of his consciousness (*RS*, 5). Petrarch strains to become her, as when he takes on the laurel shape usually associated with her: 'Lasso, che son? che fui? [...] ei duo trasformaro in quel ch'i'sono /facendomi d'uom vivo un lauro verde' (Alas, what am I? what was I? [...] those two transformed me into what I am, making me of a living man a green laurel - 23.30, 37-39). The interchange of identity is achieved and yet impossible, Laura, as with Daphne, is his and yet successfully elusive, so that he must acknowledge - '[...] non posso trasformarmi in lei' (I cannot take on her form - 51.5).

For Petrarch the unavoidable mingling of mind and matter begins to seem something like a trap, since although reality is just so chaotic, there remains the promise, or goal, of another world, a world of the eternal, the stable, the purely mind, which is properly man's desire. Braudy writes - 'Petrarch's eternity, like Augustine's, does constitute a stillness, a static perfection, in which all earthly competition has been left behind. But, unlike Augustine, Petrarch does not quite make eternity the opposite of time, but rather a perfecting of time's inadequacy, just as heaven is a realization of earth'.[25] The attempt to contain it through a process of thought is itself a struggle amidst obscurity. Crammed with fragmentary thoughts and impressions, there is simply too much matter in the mind, so that the nature of human being impedes access to the truth. But the longing to throw off the 'grave velo', the heavy veil, of this world is not the desire to be entirely free of form; in contrast he mentions Laura's 'leggiadre velo' in heaven: she still has her form, but it is not the clumsy and limiting one of mortality. This refers not so much to the body but also to the faulty soul or psyche, which may be refined, perhaps by the pursuits of the intellect (the experience of becoming a bird, or a flame at the end of Poem 23), but is never truly freed until through physical death, or in other words by sloughing off all contact with organicism - a state necessarily denied to living man. Like Michelangelo after him, he can only aspire to heaven primarily through earthly things. The vision of beauty is somehow refracted through them - in Michelangelo's words: 'tardi ama il cor quel che l'occhio non vede' ('The heart is slow

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[25] Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and its History* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1986), p.262.

to love that which the eye cannot see').[26] The mundane suggests, like Plato's shadows, a greater glory, yet must be rejected for that greater glory. Laura is 'd'angelica forma ... un spirto celeste' because she is an echo or suggestion of divinity. She represents that impulse to heavenly perfection through the mortal. She is the laurel here -

> Un lauro mi difese allor dal cielo [...]
> che non mutasser qualitate a tempo

> A laurel defended me then from the heavens [... that] did not change [its] quality according to the season (*RS*, 142.13,18)

Durling translates 'tempo' as seasons, but there is also the broader meaning of 'time'; the laurel, unchanging with the seasons, an emblem of immortality, is yet emphatically a part of the growing, earthly world in which Petrarch finds himself, however unwillingly, and with which he must come to terms - in other words, he must transcend time within time, not outside it.

In this poem, the laurel suggests 'other branches' (the cross), to which he should turn his attention. To see the laurel tree in Ovid as emblematic of the cross is an old idea (it was the interpretation of the Fourteenth-Century exegete Pierre Bersuire in the *Ovidus Moralizatus*; he saw Daphne as the Christian soul)[27], but it nevertheless adds instructively to the duality of Petrarch's vision, the other 'tree' that exists shadowing the poetic laurel. Here, Mary is set against the quasi-divine woman of the earlier poems, as the true end of all effort, which Petrarch, now having 'found himself', can recognise; hers is the eternal stability he longs to achieve -

> Vergine chiara et stabile in eterno
> di questo tempestoso mare stella,
> d'ogni fedel nochier fidata guida:
> pon mente in che terribile procella
> i'mi ritrovo sol, senza governo,
> et ò gia da vicin l'ultime strida.

> Bright Virgin, stable for eternity, star of this tempestuous sea, guide on whom every faithful helmsman relies: see in what a terrible storm I am, alone, without a tiller, and I am close to the last screams. (*RS*, 366.67-71)

His pursuit of art through the love of Laura was an error - 'medusa et l'error mio m'àn fatto

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[26] Quoted by Robb, loc. cit., p.248.

[27] Leonard Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1986), p.111.

un sasso' ('Medusa and my error have made me a stone - 366.111) He has arrived at an answer for Poem 360.[28]

So there is something unsatisfactory about the capture of living, and therefore changeable, things, in fixed form. It is no accident that in all these examples it is a woman who is made static, to illustrate the process of capturing flux; woman is the archetypal changeable figure, as in *RS* 183: 'femina è cosa mobile per natura' ('a woman is a changeable thing by nature' - 183.12). Woman is changeability; but she is also muse. Laura, Death, Glory, are all inspirational, instructive figures, much like Dante's Beatrice. Ultimately, in a strange kind of way, Death becomes a muse; she is after all a woman, and so a spiritual guide on the road to Heaven. Like Glory, she replaces the mistress, replaces Laura; and it is only a few poems to *RS* 366, where the peak in the progression of female guides is reached, in the prayer to Mary, queen of Heaven. Thus an argument might be made to suggest that Mary herself stands for something else, inspiration, or art; and that therefore the Heaven that Petrarch longs for is artistic achievement, and his reverence is aimed at language itself. Mundanity *is* flux. Artistic capture can only achieve approximation of flux, as a series of stases. The attempt to apply any kind of logic to it is delusory, since the exercise of progressive motion is frozen at the point of change, by change, a fresh development inexorably deflecting it from the prospect of a logical conclusion, an eternal paradox generating Art's own Uncertainty Principle. These problems of preservation, or the craft of the poet, is as important a subject as what is preserved. The breeze in the *Rime Sparse* is an image of fluidity, of formlessness, which is at the heart of Petrarch's sense of things - it captures one of the convictions towards which he gropes: that art cannot imitate life, because art is static and life is in flux. Paradoxically, this is what he employs his art to say.

It is questionable whether Laura is truly 'Medusa', or whether this was a misleading aspect of her. The change of mind here is possibly simply a shift in attitude; he remains conscious of his imperfection, unable to escape change, offering as he does to Mary his 'cangiati desiri' ('changed desires' - 366.130). His state is still fraught with tears and sighs. Mary is a distant star, inaccessible to the mortal 'helmsman', who perforce can only use her

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[28] Minta connects Laura and Medusa in this poem. He also notes that Petrarch uses the same language to describe Mary as he used before to describe Laura: he compares line 55 with ll.5-6 of Poem 342 to make the point. Minta, loc. cit., p.99.

as a guide; the tempestuous sea remains his reality. It is as if the adulation of Mary is an ideal state to which he can only aspire, while he remains hampered with mortality. Hence all the problems even if worked out always generate other ones. How is Petrarch to reconcile his 'exile' from the present when he draws so much upon it? The tension is born of the inapplicability of his changing interactive view of life to the clear divisions of the orthodox view. In producing this tension he is authentically the child of his shifting times.

So far I have explored the representations and significances of the figure of Laura in the *Rime Sparse*. The pursuit of Laura runs parallel to the pursuit of poetic vision, and through the linguistic and mythic metamorphoses that Laura undergoes we can see Petrarch's problems with *mimesis*, in the Aristotelian sense, the imitation of life in art; we have also seen the operation of *imitatio*, whereby classical texts are imitated in the poetic endeavour. Both enterprises are impelled by a need to achieve their goals by creating lasting poetry, and this is consistently linked to the spiritual immortality of soul to be achieved through Christian salvation. The connection is not always an easy one, since sometimes poetic glory is seen as leading towards heaven and sometimes as leading away from it. The figure of Laura is complemented by other female figures, including the personifications Morte, Gloria, Ragione, and culminate in the presence of Mary in *RS* 366. In these representations, there is a cumulative sense that the figure of woman is connected closely to the quality of spiritual transcendence located in poetic creation. Although Petrarch's Laura, who supremely represents this quality, is shifting, multi-faceted, and in many ways unreliable, the representation of the poetic woman in 'Petrarchan' poetry generally comes to be also the representation of a transcendant ideal. In many ways, this ideal is often more precisely and economically delineated than in Petrarch's actual poetry, with more certainty, cutting out the shadows of doubt. To an extent, the conventionalised 'Petrarchan' mistress of later poets owes more to Dantean and 'Courtly Love' troubadour antecedents than to Petrarch, or to Petrarch's own inspiration, Ovid. The rest of this section will compare Laura and Beatrice.

iv. 'Donne che avete intelletto d'amore'

The standard 'Petrarchan' sonnet mistress begins before Petrarch with Dante's inspiration in the *Vita Nuova*, where as a result of questions put to him by a group of ladies he hits on a new style of poetry - that of praise, rather than simply description of his own mental state:

> Onde io, pensando a queste parole, quasi vergognoso mi partio da loro, e venia dicendo fra me medesimo: "Poi che è tanta beatitudine in quelle parole che lodano la mia donna, perché altro parlare è stato lo mio?" E però propuosi di prendere per matera de lo mio parlare sempre mai quello che fosse loda di questa gentilissima; e pensando molto a ciò, pareami avere impresa troppo alta matera quanto a me, sì che non ardia di cominciare; e così dimorai alquanti dì con disiderio di dire e con paura di cominciare.
>
> Then I, thinking about this conversation, departed almost in shame, and said to myself, 'If there is so much blessedness in words that praise my lady, why has it been my habit to write in any other way?' And I therefore decided to take as my constant theme praise of this noble woman; and thinking about this often, it seemed to me that I had taken upon myself a subject too great for me, so that I was unwilling to begin; and so I passed some days between the desire to write and the fear of beginning (*VN*, XVIII.8-9). [29]

The resulting 'praise poetry' invests the lady of the poet's desire with superhuman attributes of goodness and wisdom, attributes shared by extension by all women, as in Dante's first praise poem after this revelatory decision, which is addressed to 'Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore' ('Ladies who have intelligence of love' - *VN*, XIX.1), where women are assumed to have special knowledge. [30] The figure of Beatrice herself causes apocalyptic effects, for instance in the poem forecasting her death, sonnet XXIII of the *Vita Nuova*, where her death is seen by Dante in a dream:

> Poi mi parve vedere a poco a poco
> turbar lo sole e apparir la stella,

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[29] All references are to Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, loc. cit. In this edition sentences are numbered within the prose parts of the text, and I refer to these. The poems in the text have separate line numbers, and are signposted accordingly. For an English version I refer the reader to Barbara Reynolds' excellent verse translation, *La Vita Nuova* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1969); but all translations from Dante in this thesis are my own.

[30] Shakespeare parodies this teaching attribute of ladies in the stylised world of *Love's Labour's Lost* (IV.3, esp. ll.287-341).

e pianger elli ed ella;
cader li augelli volando per l'are,
e la terra tremare;
ed omo apparve scolorito e fioco,
dicendomi:- Che fai? non sai novella?
morta è la donna tua che era sì bella. -

Then it seemed that I saw, little by little, the sun in turmoil and the stars appear; and everyone weeping; the birds fell down that flew in the air, and the earth shook; and a man appeared discoloured and fiery, saying to me - 'What are you doing? Have you not heard? Your lady is dead who was so surpassingly lovely.
(*VN*, XXIII.49-56)

And in the last poem in the sequence, Dante's spirit travels out beyond the spheres, only to find Beatrice in the heavens. This poem too is addressed to ladies, and Dante notes this meticulously:

> [...] nel fine di questa quinta parte dico 'donne mie care', a dare ad intendere che sono donne coloro a cui io parlo.
>
> [...] at the end of the fifth part I say 'dear ladies' to show that it is ladies to whom I speak (*VN*, XLI.7).

In the *Divina Commedia* (*Purg.*, XXXII-XXXIII) Beatrice appears as a guide, much as the daughter does in *Pearl*. What Dante invests women with is similar to his conception of the angels, with their special powers and special language.[31] This Dantean woman is to be seen often in the figure of Laura, especially in the *in morte* poems, when she assumes, like Beatrice, heavenly qualities, is so much more in touch, as it were, with angelic truth than when she was on earth (for example, *RS*, 359, 302).

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These qualities of woman is of relevance when it comes to looking at the lady of the sonnets, and her pedestaled state. The connection of women and poetry serves a certain function in picturing the imaginative construct of the mind of the poet-lover and of human aspiration. It has been suggested that Boccaccio, seeing literature as a delicate and leisured thing, not real work, that is to say not masculine territory, symbolically confines it to the

[31] 'De volgare eloquentia,' in Dante, *The Literary Criticism of Dante Alighieri*, translated by Robert S. Haller (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1973), II.1-4.

world of women - dedicated to the ladies.[32] This was Boccaccio's way perhaps of avoiding the emotive issue of truth and fable always evoked with the backing of the Church in the face of fictional composition. Petrarch also and perhaps for closely related reasons relegates poetry to women; it re-emphasises his sense of poetry as aesthetic rather than practical. But through that protective colouring of poetry as merely entertainment, the figure of woman comes to suggest other things associated with poetry; the poet's (humanity's) attempts to gain transcendant understanding, to achieve immortal art, a godlike state, or ultimate knowledge. This is to be seen in Dante's gloss on that final poem of the *Vita Nuova*, where Beatrice is found in a Sphere so divine as to be, though apprehended by the soul, incomprehensible to the intellect:

> Ne la quarto [parte] dico come [lo 'spirito pelegrino'] la vede tale, cioè in tale qualitade, che io no lo posso intendere, cioè a dire che lo mio pensero sale ne la qualitade di costei in grado che lo mio intelleto no lo puote comprendere; con ciò sia cosa che lo nostro intelletto s'abbia a quelle benedette anime sì come l'occhio debole a lo sole [...]
>
> In the fourth part I tell how my 'pilgrim spirit' saw her in such a blessed state that I cannot grasp it, that is to say that my thought ascends to such qualities of her that my intellect cannot comprehend it; our intellect responds to those blessed souls in the same way as our weak eyes to the sun [...] (*VN*, XLI.6, p.248)

This discrepancy between some sort of soulful understanding and intellectual grasp or eloquence is at the heart of what these poets are attempting when they write poetry, or create art. I mentioned before Michelangelo's sense of the same thing in the way his art was always to fall short of his vision - and indeed if vision could be perfectly achieved that must herald death, the end of effort (like Galahad's glimpse of the grail).[33] Death of course does not simply mean the end of life, but the move to heaven, out of the earthly struggle amidst imperfection. And this (heaven) is precisely where Beatrice and Laura go, from where they draw the poet's soul towards the divine and away from the earthly.

The association of poetry and 'love' with women works against the prevailing trivialisation of love poetry, and instead elevates it, through the elevation of the figure of

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[32] Robin Kirkpatrick, 'The Wake of the Commedia: Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Boccacio's *Decameron*' in Piero Boitani (ed), *Chaucer and the Italian Trecento* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983), p.210.

[33] Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, edited by Sir John Rhys (London, etc.: Dent; New York: Dutton 1906; 1978), 2 vols., vol.2, Chapter XXII.

woman. John Roe has written about Pygmalion and Orpheus as in some sense successful and unsuccessful artists, and of the opposing elements of both these artists in the Elizabethan sonneteer. This too suggests an element of the transcendent about the woman who is the object of their apostrophe, as does the accompanying idea of aiming to make the silent lady speak.[34] Of course such idealised remote figures were only possible in an era when the experience of literature was male territory; it could not happen when women have a quotidian voice, and are discussed and known in the public field, so that there is no longer the possibility of man's seeing woman as worshipful and remote, as semi-divine because mysterious.

v. ' "Di ciò non far parola"'

The lady has always also been cruel; an aspect again traceable to Dante - the commonplace conceit of the lady's taking and possessing the lover's heart can be seen in the moment in the *Vita Nuova,* where Amor takes Dante's heart and gives it to Beatrice to eat (*VN*, III.3-7; and Poem XXX.119-14). The motif is repeated in the *Rime Sparse*, by Petrarch. And it is here that the long line that is destined to run from Dante to the sixteenth century sonneteers diverges slightly; Petrarch's story of the stolen heart is less derivative from the troubadour or courtly-love tradition as it is from an older, pagan, amoral source; the scene in Petrarch is essentially Ovidian, both in its adapted detail and in its tone.[35]

That potential predation by the female in the poet-mistress equation is well located in the story of Medusa, as discussed above. The story has compelling resonances for poets, all of whom want, like Orpheus, to make their hearers stand still in rapt attention. Some of them see this essence of seductiveness reflected in what they feel for women, something

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[34] John Roe, 'Pygmalion, Orpheus and the Petrarchan Lady', unpublished paper.

[35] Durling writes on the troubadour antecedents, including Andreas Capellanus. *RS,* p.18. John Charles Nelson writes: 'Petrarch had treasured a Plato manuscript, which he was unable to read [the Timaeus]'. John Charles Nelson, *The Renaissance Theory of Love: the Context of Giordano Bruno's* Eroici Furori (New York and London: Columbia University Press 1958), p.68.

Ficino discusses: 'Man is spirit. The spirit of the lover is in the beloved.'[36] It is the fascination that they sense emanating from the woman that they covet, and ultimately they want not to possess the woman, for that would mean being vanquished by the spell, but to get hold of the power itself, and use it.

Dante, in the *Vita Nuova,* being on one occasion unexpectedly confronted by the sight of Beatrice, trembles and is silenced and feels faint (VN, XIV). *He senses his spirits leave him* (just as Antony is deserted by his daemon; *A&C*, IV.iii). He is annihilated by her disempowering eyes, and possessed or usurped by the implacable spirit of Amor. But Dante seeks to control and use this situation, since her eyes also shine with heavenly and infinitely desirable Beatitude. After a few days' struggle and thought, he comes up with praise poetry as one way out of the difficulty - the mistress is distant but the cause of purely beatific poetry (*VN*, XVIII). The petrifaction she inflicts on him could also be the marble of an enduring statue, and handled the right way a fatal glance might be to the poet's lasting advantage. He also tries through emulation to take on her characteristics - and finally succeeds, himself exhibiting qualities he admires in her - humility, happiness, love.

Petrarch's effort is not so harmonious. He writes of Laura:

> Questa che col mirar gli animi fura
> m'aperse il petto el' cor prese con mano,
> dicendo a me: "Di ciò non far parola."
> Poi la rividi in altro abito sola,
> tal ch'i' non la conobbi, o senso umano!
> anzi le dissi 'l ver pien di paura;
> ed ella ne l'usata sua figura
> tosto tornando fecemi, oimé lasso!
> d'un quasi vivo et sbigottito sasso.

> She, who with her glance steals souls, opened my breast and took my heart with her hand, saying to me: "Make no word of this." Later I saw her alone in another garment such that I did not know her, and so I told her the truth, full of fear, and she to her accustomed form quickly returning made me, alas, an almost living and terrified stone (*RS*, 23.73-80).

This recalls Dante, as I said; but the most direct influence is the *Metamorphoses.* One story behind this incident in Petrarch's poem is (as Durling notes) the story of Battus and Mercury

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[36] Paul Oskar Kristeller (ed), *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, translated by members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science (London: Shepheard-Walwyn 1975), pp.78-79.

(*Met.*, II.676-707), as is the bloody tale of Tereus and Philomela (*Met.*, VI.549-562); but there is also a suggestion of Medusa. The change Laura effects on the poet here is only one of many shifts of form throughout the poems. Throughout they are infused with a tormented adherence to the metamorphic world-view illustrated throughout Ovid's poem, but most clearly outlined in Pythagoras' doctrine of change and the transmigration of souls 'omnia mutantur, nihil interit' (*Met.*, XV, 165):

> [...] omnia mutantur, nihil interit: errat et illinc
> huc venit, hinc illuc, et quoslibet occupat artus
> spiritus eque feris humana in corpora transit
> inque feris noster, nec tempore deperit ullo
> utque novis facilis signatur cera figuris
> nec manet ut fuerat nec formam servat eandem,
> sed tamen ipsa eadem est, animam sic semper eandem
> esse, sed in varias doceo migrare figuras
> [...] cuncta fluunt, omnisque vagans formatur imago [...]

> All things are changing; nothing dies. The spirit wanders, comes now here, now there, and occupies whatever frame it pleases. From beasts it passes into human bodies, and from our bodies into beasts, but never perishes. And, as the pliant wax is stamped with new designs, does not remain as it was before nor preserve the same form, but is still the self-same wax, so do I teach that the soul is ever the same, though it passes into ever-changing bodies. [...] All things are in a state of flux, and everything is brought into being with a changing nature.
> (*Met.*, XV.165-72, 178)

This passage illustrates the whole question of imitation and metamorphosis, especially taking into account the notion that each succeeding poet by imitation metamorphoses into a past poet, who is metamorphosed in turn to a new embodiment.

It will be clear from the preceding that I wish to read the sonnet tradition as not merely poetry of sexual desire, but poetry of love in a different sense; not Love in the Christian sense either; but borrowing from both concepts to express the other burning desire, which may be described as love, which is the aspiration to art. This is why the sonnet lady has to be perfect, remote, and always slightly out of reach, never possessed but always in sight. Despite Laura's warning, Petrarch does go on to 'make words' of the subject; indeed the image is made up of words in the first place. But the warning lingers, like another echo of the dangers attendant upon the fruitfulness of pursuing the shifting object of desire, of seeking '[i]n a net [to] catch the breeze' (*RS*, 239.37).

I have been attempting to place an idea of the female essence, and what it stands for. In this it can contain all the oppositions that the soul itself can contain. In the retractions that were so often indulged in, by Petrarch, Boccaccio and Chaucer, amongst others, the repentance was brought about by the fear that the poetry pursued is itself a sort of heresy, a golden calf, or, speaking symbolically, that woman, posing as soul, was actually earthly temptation, the light of Hell's fires mistaken for the light of an altar. Robin Kirkpatrick notes this point when he writes of the literary self-consciousness of Boccaccio and Chaucer; and of Petrarch, for whom Laura might be delusive, so that it is possible that poetic glory is as misleading as secular love; he contrasts them with Dante, for whom no division exists between literary and moral life, and who is confident in the validity of his moral task.[37]

I have examined in Section I Petrarch's explorations of poetic inspiration, earthly and heavenly love, and the space occupied by the configurations of the feminine in his poetry. Running through these explorations is his sense of the constant passage of time and his negotiations of various forms of earthly change. Implicit issues such as fame and tradition remain to be addressed. These will form the basis of Section III of this Chapter.

III. LAURO

i. Containing History

In the *Rime Sparse*, and through the practice of *imitatio*, Petrarch keeps Ovid's *Metamorphoses* constantly in play, alluding to the tales and altering them in imitation. I have discussed the ways in which the myths of metamorphosis reflect his perceptions of earthly change and mortality. The use of Ovid in this way, however, has further

[37] Kirkpatrick , loc. cit., p.203.

significances. It has to do with Petrarch's sense of the past, his conception of the future, and his pursuit of fame. Petrarch's letters, which he wrote throughout his life and intended for publication, shed light on his views about the texts of classical antiquity and what they suggest to him about a means of literary immortalisation. The existence of a body of literature from an isolated period in the past illuminates for Petrarch the containment of historical persons within a literary artefact - whether as the author of a text or as the subject of it. Petrarch devotes a certain amount of labour to similar immortalisation both of himself and of others within his works. The text offers the opportunity for selection and refinement, as well as for lasting fame. Petrarch writes of wandering over the ruins of ancient Rome, and reflecting on all the great figures of its past, from Romulus and Remus to Peter and Paul (Bishop, p. 63 ff.). In this way, pagan and Christian stories are included in a picture of early Rome, which is to be continued into the present day, and will place Petrarch in a definitive history, when he is finally crowned poet laureate in Rome; the event must take place in Rome, 'on the ashes of the ancient poets'.[38] His emphasis on this indicates a sense of the crystallisation of history into sections. The periodization process begun in the fifth century and the revival of texts in this new light gave Petrarch a sense of being of being at a distance of period from the past,[39] and hence of himself perhaps as the posterity for which the Greek authors may be said to have written, and by analogy becomes overtly conscious of himself as writing for posterity. Just as he sees himself as part of a tradition local in time, so he tries to place himself in a span of successive ages. In Poem 70 he faces the knotty problems of observation, desire, motivation, futility and mortality in each stanza. Laura is the cause and the end of the poetry, he says. But there is another dimension in this poem, as each stanza ends with a line from Arnaut Daniel, Cavalcanti, Dante, Pistoia, and finally Petrarch himself (*RS*, p.150). This implicitly solves the problems raised in the body of the poem, by establishing himself in a long line of poets, set within the recorded frame of history. One of the tasks he sets himself is to create something like a definitive history, or list, of names judged worthy of being included in it, just as in the *Triumph of Love* the long procession seems designed to encompass every correctly famous lover. The idea can be seen at work

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[38] Francesco Petrarca, *Rerum familiarum libri*, I-VIII, translated by Aldo S. Bernardo (New York: State University of New York Press 1975), vol.I, p.192.

[39] See especially Barkan, loc.cit. Barkan writes of the 'periodization' of the Church Fathers writing historically, which makes the same process possible a thousand years later (p.94).

again when he rewards a goldsmith who gives up his trade to persevere in the craft of poetry, by mentioning his name:

> His chief drawback was his age, although, as we all know, Plato undertook the study of philosophy when well along in years, and Cato in his old age made good progress in the study of Greek. Perhaps for this very reason my friend should properly find a place somewhere in my works. Therefore I record that his name is Enrico, his surname Capra. (Bishop, p.172).

So the man is judged worthy of Petrarchan immortalisation, and such immortalisation depends to some extent on survival beyond the fluid current state. There is a relevant discussion in Braudy of Dante's *Inferno*, and the desperate concern of the shades to have their names remembered on earth[40] - Petrarch may have been influenced by this element of Dante's thought, in just another strand in the complex web of reference and imitation in which he operated.

This is another reason for creating such a structure; the mimetic enterprise is, as we have seen, unsatisfactory as a means of achieving eternity, since the nature of reality is such that it cannot be arrested by art. Thomas P. Roche has commented on the need to contain experience within a structure, and the 'attempt to make sense of the continuing sweep of history within the compass of a single year'.[41] His is an ingenious application of a very firm structure to the poems, as being tied to the Christian calendar, the poems corresponding to dates such as Christmas Day and the death of Christ. Nicholas Mann similarly observes the need for enclosure within dates.[42] Petrarch certainly manifested a scrupulous regard for dates, recording the occasions of his life in a felicitously coincidental arrangement that attempts to contain external events within a personal and symbolic frame; thus he records on the flyleaf of his Virgil manuscript, in phrases reminiscent of Dante's *Vita Nuova* (*VN*, I, II):

> Laura [...] first appeared to my eyes in early manhood in the Church of St Clare in Avignon, in the 1327th year of our lord, on 6 April, at the early morning service. And in the same city in the same 6th day, at the first hour in the year 1348, her light was taken from that of this world (*RS*, pp.5-6).

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[40] Braudy, loc. cit., p.234.

[41] Thomas P. Roche, *Petrarch and the English Sonnet Sequences* (New York: AMS Press 1989), p.43.

[42] Nicholas Mann, *Petrarch* (Oxford: University Press 1984).

However, I would suggest that there is more to this than merely dates and naming. It is also a question of who is preserved, and how and why. The concept of *imitatio* is important in the history-making process. It is a blending of personal details with myth in an intricate and subtle manner. To remember Ovid you must not only quote Ovid but emphasise that it is you that is remembering him; you have to bring your own life into the poem that imitates his.

ii. Posterity and exile

The ideal of 'posterity' as a repository for the artistic product is important. But what is the artistic product? The notion is inextricable from ideas of exile, and seclusion. Leo Braudy has suggested something similar when he writes of Petrarch:

> Thinking of posterity, he argued, allowed one to move out of the annoyances, irritations and compromises of the present and thereby be free to act nobly. The concept of posterity was therefore a moral concept, but one that was secular in origin, even though in its disdain for the frailties of the body and in its constant eye on production it might be called a secular spirituality.[43]

Preoccupied with the Heraclitian notion of flux, he renounces dependence on the present, and instead engages in a dialogue with the past and future (sometimes literally, as in the letters to Virgil and Cicero, and to Posterity). From his own time he is in exile -

> I devoted myself, though not exclusively, to the study of ancient times, since I always disliked our own period; so that if it hadn't been for the love of those dear to me, I should have preferred being born in any other age, forgetting this one; and I always tried to transport myself mentally to other times (Bishop, p.7).

This notion of exile is an interesting one, since it covers Petrarch's attitude to his contemporaries, and to being known to his contemporaries - a status from which he appears

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[43] Braudy, loc. cit., p.257.

to shrink: 'I am grievously tormented by the popular mangling of those few youthful poems of mine [...]' (Bishop, p.180). This reaction to being widely known might seem contradictory. Yet he is full of disgust:

> Isn't it true that the itch for writing, like other itches, is incurable, as Juvenal says? Let me add that the disease is contagious [...] We can remember when there were few who wrote this kind of thing; now no one doesn't write, and few write anything but poetry [...] Now Horace's words are perfectly true: "Lettered and unlettered, we all write poetry all the time". [...] Poetry [...] has fallen into the hands of the mob [...] This I find very offensive (Bishop, pp. 119-20, 115)

The offensiveness clearly lies in the popularity of the pursuit; the mob, it seems, lower the status of poetry, it becomes a careless pastime, and not the product of toil and erudition that Petrarch wishes it to be. Equally, popular involvement with poetry threatens the supremacy of the poet which Petrarch is anxious to promote:

> [...] poetry is very sweet to the taste, but it is to be appreciated by only a few superior minds possessing a lofty, incurious contempt for common concerns, given to high meditations, and with an appropriate natural gift (Bishop, p.120).

It is only in this way that he can place himself on a scale of a very few, one of the three great Italian poets, as he writes to Boccaccio, who, it seems, feels threatened by Petrarch's popularity:

> Let us suppose that I, who would so proudly be your equal, am your superior; suppose that the master of our vulgar tongue [Dante] takes first place; do not take it ill that one or the other (and especially your great fellow citizen) should precede you. Should you not be proud of being one of so few rather than to claim the distinction of being first? (Bishop, p.242)

It is to escape extreme contemporary popularity that he returns to writing in Latin, after a brief foray into the vernacular, which he later regarded as a mistake (Bishop, p.180). So he writes to posterity in Latin. The Italian poems are addressed to the present, ensuring immediate coronation as a poet; the coronation itself then passes into history (through Petrarch's own hand, in the Letter to Posterity) and becomes the image of Petrarch for future ages. Leo Braudy believes that Latin was 'a special place for him [... where] he could converse with the great men of the past, while he reserved Italian for his poems of introspection and his tribute to his muse, Laura.'[44]

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[44] Braudy, loc. cit., p.256.

There is of course another reason too for writing in Latin. Even once articulated, language is unreliable. Reading and interpreting classical texts out of context highlights their temporal quality, as Thomas M. Greene observes:

> If a remote text is composed in a language for which the present supplies only a treacherous glossary, and if it is grounded in a lost concrete specificity never fully recoverable, then the tasks of reading, editing, commenting, translating and imitating become intricately problematised - these were the tasks that preoccupied the humanists.[45]

He goes on to cite Derrida's image of the word as 'orphan', subject to the 'incipient drift structurally inherent in all language' (p.11). If the only hope of preserving language is in writing, then to perceive the problems of interpretation in another age reflects the anxiety current at the time over permanence and meaning and calls into question the possibility of having any tradition at all. Writing in Latin, which is prey to considerably less flux than the vernacular, overcomes this problem to some extent. There is hence a need to perpetuate actively the notion of tradition, and to specify and preserve the language and culture which are its medium. In this category come all the attempts to purify and specialise language. Thomas Greene suggests that language reflects 'the ruptures of a psyche torn by moral conflict' and the search for 'a new moral style' (p.118).

So if Petrarch sees himself in exile, it is a calculated, self-imposed exile, which enables him to recreate himself for preservation within an artistic medium. Quinones writes about Petrarch's 'idealisation' which makes him 'a stranger to his time.' He continues:

> Searching for the rarest beauty and committed to an excellence that would endure - both connected in his mind - he separated himself in life as well as in art from the language and movements of the everyday and the mob.[46]

A. Bartlett Giametti writes similarly of Petrarch's need to exile himself from the present to 'gain the necessary perspective on himself truly to determine, or create, who he was' (p.13). He compares the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries on their similar sense of the past, and concludes: 'Exile is the precondition to identity' (p.14).[47] The state is not without its tragic side, as may be seen in the recurring image of the storm-tossed boat in his poems. That the

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[45] Greene, loc. cit., p.8.

[46] Quinones, loc. cit., p.117.

[47] A. Bartlett Giametti, *Exile and Change in Renaissance Literature* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1984).

boat is an image of exile from his rightful place, which paradoxically he can never occupy while he is alive, and therefore never, consciously, is evident from this comment, where he also voices the comparison of himself with an animal, with a natural habitat, which frequently occurs in the poems:

> I'll leave the air to the birds and the sea to the fish; I am a land animal, and I prefer roads [...]. Send me where you will, even to the Indies; but if by water, I refuse [...] (Bishop, p.57).

The 'exile' from the present, then, is a necessary part of the creation of a selected self, a *simulacrum*. In order to succeed in this enterprise, he must withdraw from popular acclaim, which might cause him to relax his continuous effort at excellence; and which might lead him to forget the excellence that he sees as possible only for a few committed souls. The vernacular occupies an ambiguous position in these aims. On the one hand he wishes to elevate Italian poetic style; on the other he suspects any poetry written in this tongue is not only too accessible to 'the mob' but is also likely to prove only temporary, as the language changes over time.

iii. Suspect Heights

This calculating element is evident in Petrarch's politics - not politics in the sense of involvement in the state, but in the sense of promoting a broad philosophy beneficial to his cause. This included promoting Rome as centrally important, emphasising its past glory, and the need to continue in that tradition, again following perhaps Dante's theories regarding the Roman Empire. Petrarch probably did not feel nationally Roman, although he did write once, influenced by contemporary attitudes to Greece, attitudes which were to change within the next century or so:[48] 'I think no one will deny that it is more honourable

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[48] Gunar Freibergs, 'The Knowledge of Greek in Western Europe in the Fourteenth Century', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, vol. 11 (1989), pp.71-85; Steven Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople* (Cambridge: University Press 1965), pp.160-191.

to be an Italian than a Greek' (Bishop, p.24), but he felt strongly linked via the traditions of literature, in which he was so completely implicated. *RS* 128 glorifies 'the noble Latin blood', and exhorts Italy to take action before it is too late, and regain some of its status, as he puts it elsewhere, '[...] who can doubt that if Rome should commence to know itself it would rise again?' Similarly he addresses *RS* 10 to Stephano Colonna the elder:

> Gloriosa columna in cui s'appogia
> nostra speranza e'l gran nome latino [...]
>
> Glorious Column on whom rests our hope and the great renown of Latium [...]
> (*RS*, 10.1-2)

It is all part of the corruption of the age, connected to his disgust at the 'vulgar mob';and his condemnation of the military and sexual morals of his time - the aims and end of action are lowered:

> Qual vaghezza di lauro, qual di mirto?
> "Povera et nuda vai, Filosofia,"
> dice la turba al vil guadagno intesa.
>
> What desire for the laurel is there? Or for the myrtle? "Philosophy, you go poor and naked!" says the mob, bent on low gain (*RS*, 7.9-11)

He retires to Vaucluse, in search of a 'la vita serena'('a tranquil life', *RS*, 128.105), rejecting his career at the papal court of Avignon, which he attacks as the seat of corruption and the modern Babylon in several of his poems and in his letters, especially those collected in the *Libro sine Nomine*;[49] in Vaucluse, by contrast, he says, '[n]ot the smallest part of my pleasure is that I rarely see a human creature' (Bishop, p.67). In a reaction to the extravagances of the world, Petrarch writes frequently in his letters of the advantages of poverty (Bishop, p.31-40), as in his letter on the subject of his housekeeper (who is perhaps the *vechierella* of the poem), where he stresses her lack of beauty, and disregard for it, her constant toil, and her resulting contentment (Bishop, p.122-23).

He writes at the age of sixty-seven:

> I could have risen in the world, but I did not want to; all heights are suspect to me. Thus I remained in my humble condition [...] (Bishop, p. 287).

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[49] Petrarch, *Petrarch's Book Without a Name,* edited by Norman P. Zacour (Torino: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies 1973).

All heights do not however, include heights such as that covered in the 'Ascent of Mont Ventoux' (Bishop, p. 45); a refusal to rise in the world ensures rising outside it, although exactly where is one of Petrarch's problems; the clash, that is, between engagement with the eternal (Christian) afterlife, and the immortality of literary fame within history. Meanwhile the reclusive, inspirational existence at Vaucluse would promote his pursuit of greatness. This also had precedents in Rome, as Braudy says:

> Cicero may have believed that literature should be a handmaiden to political greatness [...] But with Horace and Virgil literature becomes an alternative to the world of political action and public fame [...] a fame defined not by the things of the world but by its intangible ability to transcend them, the authority of its authorship.[50]

Another advantage of the solitary life, and the reliance on posterity, is that a rigorous selection process may be carried out. But this maintaining of position also depends on careful arrangement of what is allowed to be seen. He writes to Robert of Sicily, on the loss of his daughter:

> [...] she herself is happy not only because she has moved over the frightening threshold of death to the pleasures of the eternal life but because you have glorified her for all time in your highly noble praises.

The implied good fortune is the temporal and social longevity of an individual; but the fame that Petrarch seeks is closely connected to praise. In other words it is not the whole person that he wishes to preserve in memory, but a selected, rarefied part of them, which extracts the best for preservation, and consigns the rest to waste (a notion not far from that of the Platonic ladder, and the attempt to reach perfection through effort). The question is covered in Poem 326:

> Or ài fatto l'estremo di tua possa,
> o crudel Morte [...]
>
> ma la fama et'l valor, che mai non more,
> non è in tua forza [...]
>
> Now you have done your utmost, O cruel Death [...] but the fame and the worth, which never die, are not in your power [...] (*RS*, 326.1-2, 7-8)

It is a personal, individual immortality that he seeks - but not to be known in the form of a

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[50] Braudy, loc. cit., p.120-121.

story, or autobiography; rather it is as the body of his thoughts that he wishes to be known, just as Cicero is no longer Cicero the man, but is Cicero the voice of his letters and orations, in other words a refined and selected Cicero, all the stronger for being so. By being thus refined the poet undergoes a sort of sea-change, selecting only those elements that are valuable and precious. Petrarch's preservation within his poems is one of the subjects of poem 50, where the poet enters into the narrative of the poem, his hair literally becoming the laurel leaves that he seeks to earn.

iv. Weaving myth and life

Petrarch was particularly influenced by reading Cicero, and his typically Roman cult of self-advertisement. The question is discussed by Braudy:

> Even when they clearly had the talent or even genius for what tasks they undertook, they also possessed not only the Alexandrian trait of making sure others knew what they had accomplished, but also what I might call the Ciceronian talent for planning their way.[51]

This active pursuit of fame is something that filters through to the time of Petrarch. It marries well with a new humanist sense of the individual, partly encouraged by Petrarch himself, who wrote: 'The varieties of men are infinite; there is no more similitude of minds than of faces' (Bishop, p. 80). He can, therefore, strive for personal glory, for fame which glorifies the man himself and his thoughts, as opposed to recognition for military or statesmanlike actions. The same attitude may be seen in the story of his coronation as poet; it was a poetic convention current at the time to call on Apollo for inspiration; Dante invokes Apollo at the beginning of the *Paradiso*, asking to be crowned with laurel leaves. But where Dante is content for this to remain an image, for Petrarch it must be an actuality, he must act it out; it has to become actual, literal as well as literary, to show how symbol and significance invade life. This is in keeping with his whole notion of the intermingling

[51] Braudy, loc. cit., p.72.

of different areas, the objective and the subjective becoming one. Again, the smallest concrete details of life are woven into the grand scheme of the Laura story, for example one poem is simply a poetic note to accompany a gift of truffles, but it is incorporated into the larger web of the love-story. The praise of Laura, the artifice created to court fame, is created out of the stuff of life; the spring season which produces the truffles becomes the spring Petrarch will never see - possibly the spring as in the time of fruition of all his hopes. Similarly, in Sonnet 119 of the *Rime,* Glory appears to him as a beautiful woman, who shows him her sister Virtue, thus underlining the essential relationship between the two. The figure of Glory employs much of the language and character of Laura:

> Ma non me'l tolse la paura o'l gelo
> che pur tanta baldanze al mio cor diedi
> ch'i'le mi strinse a'piedi
> per più dolcezza trar de gli occhi suoi [...]
> Con voce allor di sì mirabil tempre
> rispose, et con un volto
> che temer et sperar mi farà sempre [...]
>
> But my fear and chill did not prevent me from giving so much daring to my heart that I threw myself at her feet, to draw more sweetness from her eyes [...] Then with a voice of marvellous temper she replied and with a look that will make me always fear and hope (*RS*, 119.31-34, 43-45)

This recalls the Laura of 23, the 'possente Donna'('powerful Lady' - l.35):

> Ella parlava sì turbata in vista
> che tremar mi fea dentro a quella petra [...]
>
> She spoke, so angry to see that she made me tremble within that stone
> (*RS*, 23.81-82).

The allusion in 119 uses the Petrarch-Laura scenario as a frame of reference to create the figure of Glory and the accompanying arguments, thus establishing his own story as a recognised convention which may itself be drawn upon to provide imagery for the representation of other ideas. By this means the poem becomes a subtle confirmation of the legitimacy and likely success of the pursuit of fame through Petrarch's chosen mode, crossing the border between imitation and model, between text and context.

Through this close involvement, Petrarchan poetics in several ways seems to offer an alternative salvation - his theory of poetry and the teachings of the Church alike

acknowledge the imperfection of the mortal self, but where the Church offers redemption, Petrarch comes up with a different sort of refining process. He has noticed that all that survives of ancient writers is their strongest parts, a selection made possible by conscious editing. Thus a life of retirement is to be preferred by the poet, who hopes in this way to control what is seen of him, and re-shape and select the self that he projects, through the medium of his writing.

Petrarch was constantly self-conscious about what he wrote, and his possible audiences (Bishop, p. 18-19), superintending the editing of his own letters as much as he was able (another edition of miscellaneous letters was published after his death). It was after he discovered the manuscript of Cicero's *Letters to Atticus* that he could see a collection of letters as a legitimate literary form, especially for the selective preservation of the self (Bishop, p.206). The *Rerum Familiares*, he writes, in his introductory letter to the editor, his friend Socrates, is:

> [...] a sort of effigy of my mind, a simulacrum of my character, contrived with great labor [...] (Bishop, p. 22).

This simulacrum will go forth, like a time capsule, to future ages. He actually writes a letter addressed to posterity, in Latin - Latin, the language of enduring tradition. The Italian poems are addressed to the present, ensuring immediate coronation as a poet; the coronation itself then passes into history (through Petrarch's own hand, in the 'Letter to Posterity') and becomes the image of Petrarch for future ages.

This idea is given play in his whimsical relationship with books and long-dead authors, explored in the last chapter, especially the above-quoted observation '.. books thrill you to the marrow; they talk to you, counsel you, admit you to their living, speaking friendship'(Bishop, p.40). He expects to continue this mystic communication himself:

> What can silence me while I breathe, when I plan to speak to [my friends] still with my chill lips from the grave? (Bishop, p.211)

'Nothing' he says, 'moves me so much as the quoted maxims of great men. I like to rise above myself, to test my mind to see if it contains anything solid or lofty, or stout and firm against ill-fortune, or to find if my mind had been lying to me about itself. And there is no better way of doing this - except by direct experience, the surest mistress - than by comparing one's mind with those it would most like to resemble. [...] I eagerly converse with our predecessors the only way I can [...] I exert all my mental powers to flee

contemporaries and seek out men of the past [...] many would be stunned to learn that I am happier with the dead than with the living' (Bishop, p.68). But the special fusion that Petrarch sees as imitation means that he, as he says, 'swallows' and 'digests' the classics, which become '[...] a part of myself [...] so thoroughly absorbed and fixed, not only in my memory but in my very marrow' (Bishop, pp.183). A similar way of keeping the memories of past heroes alive was the habit Petrarch had of giving his friends classical nicknames ('Socrates' the editor of the letters, is a case in point - Bishop, p.224). This is a lighthearted expression of the polemic; Socrates of Athens lives on here, as a living man, albeit in this instance only in name.

Exuberant as well as significant as these enterprises are, the use of metamorphosis in the pursuit of fame is clear. The idea is expressed aptly here:

> An actor can wear any kind of garment; but a writer cannot adopt any kind of style. He should form his own and keep it, for fear we should laugh at him, dressed grotesquely in others' clothes, or plucked, like the crows, by the other birds that assemble to reclaim their stolen feathers. Certainly each one of us has naturally something individual and his own in his utterance and language as in his face and gesture. It is better and more rewarding for us to develop and train this quality than to change it. (Bishop, p.183).

The 'something individual' is nevertheless given meaning by attaching itself to the 'individual' poets of the past. *Imitatio* as a literary device makes each new poet live in his work - but, as the term implies, previous poets must exist and be themselves renewed as the new poet takes life from them. Petrarch's keeping past poets alive in his written 'correspondence' with them complements his incorporation of himself into his work. The former is in a sense a reassuring justification of the latter. Within the immediate framework of the letters he is putting into practice what he hopes for himself from posterity.

CHAPTER 2

THE TWO FACES OF APOLLO: PETRARCH AND FOURTEENTH-CENTURY POETIC THEORY

Be reasonable. I know of many who have attained the highest saintliness without literary culture; I don't know of any who were excluded from sanctity by culture.

- Petrarch to Boccaccio, 1362

I. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I shall be looking at poetic theory in the time of Petrarch, his problems with poetry and his celebration of it. These issues are covered in his vernacular poetry, especially the *Rime Sparse*, in his letters, and in the *Secretum*.[1] Important insight is given by reference to Boccaccio, his contemporary and writer of *De Genealogia Deorum Gentilium*, a compendium of myths including, in Book XIV, a defence of poetry.[2] The prevailing concern is over the perception of poetry as sinful; this stems from the Church fathers in the fourth century, and particularly Augustine, and their attempts to establish the Church at the expense of, or - more significantly - alongside pagan myth, which it would either have to replace or to appropriate in the civilised world. The pagan gods are not denied so much as assimilated, coming to be seen as demons, and the stories which make them out to be gods are seen as misleading: hence, poetry, or poetic fable, is made up of lies, temptation and demonic seduction.[3] This in turn involves a critique of language which has its origins in Plato, a mistrust of sophistry and a move to use language as a transparent vehicle to convey the truth.[4] The problem was not made any easier by the literary style of the Bible, which as Augustine himself recognised has a poetic form, and creates difficulties of its own as regards reading and interpretation.[5]

By the time of Petrarch and Boccaccio, the question has particular currency because of the rise of the vernacular as a literary medium. The problems as fourteenth century Italy inherits them are mainly that, firstly, poetry is made up of lies, illusions, and inventions; and, secondly, that poetry is a distraction, and the search for poetic (secular, worldly) fame is

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[1] Petrarch, *Petrarch's Secret or The Soul's Conflict with Passion*, translated by William H. Draper (London: Chatto and Windus 1911; rpt. Westport, Connecticut: Hyperion Press 1978).

[2] In Robert Con Davis and Laurie Finke (eds), *Literary Criticism and Theory: the Greeks to the Present* (New York: Longman 1989).

[3] Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: the Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art* (New York: Harper and Brothers 1961), p.17. Dante and Milton both place mythological figures in Hell as demons.

[4] Davis and Finke, loc. cit., p.118.

[5] *City of God*, loc. cit., II.xvi.

misguided and blasphemous in that it takes the place of piety and abstention. Poetry tempts the soul in its downward tendency towards the earth, rather than encouraging its upward tendency towards heaven, and a reliance upon earthly fame distracts from contemplation of divine eternity. In this context it is illuminating to recall that the word *secular* derives from the phrase *relinquere seculum*, to relinquish time: this was a phrase used to describe entering a monastery, in the medieval period, for example by Hugh of St Victor who sees 'change in history as a decline from the stability of paradise.' There was therefore a very conscious opposition between the *tempus* of the earth, and the *aeternitas* of God and Heaven.[6] A conflicting argument is presented by the classical texts which were also available, and which deal emphatically with the phenomenal world and its changes. Petrarch's problem was to reconcile writing vernacular poetry about love and pagan myth, with his undoubted Christian faith. How could he write about changing form and about disintegration and integration within the phenomenal world, when what should always be before him, as indeed it is sometimes, is the eternal, the stable, the unearthly, the heavenly? How, again, can he justify inventing things and using an opaque language to do so, when this very exercise is called into question by the faith which he professes? How can he pursue the illusory fame of the earth, rather than eternal salvation? The theory of *imitatio*, central to his work, poses difficulties here, relying as it does on the imitation of pagan poets, an imitation that is partly invention, so that the product of the imitation resembles its model as a son resembles a father, - no one feature the same but an irresistible likeness overall, something imitated and something invented (Bishop, p.198). In his poems, the disquiet is evidenced first in the subject matter, of earthly change and its limitations and then in the retractions and regrets about a youth passed in writing poetry. A key metaphoric figure for this debate is Apollo. Apollo is the god invoked to create poetry, the immortal, conferring immortality. But Apollo the god is also (for Christian writers) Apollo the demon. This crystallises the twofold idea of poetry as glorious and as sinful. The two sections of this chapter will explore these two aspects of Apollo.

It is significant that Petrarch takes on the associations of Apollo. In the *RS* he is frequently related to Apollo, Apollo as God of poetry, creative, inspiration, desired, not demonic and feared. Even the idea of Petrarch as the demon poet is not a straightforward

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[6] Peter Burke, *The Renaissance Sense of the Past* (London: Edward Arnold 1969), p.19.

one, since it contains more than the Christian 'demon', but suggests also the Platonic *daemon*, the good spirit or guiding genius. In this guise Apollo reveals the positive sides of what he can do, especially by refusing to renounce this earthly world. The imagery that he uses, or 'lies' as the followers of Augustine would call it, is created from images of this world, so that the production of poetry is unavoidably linked to earthliness - but an earthliness deliberately not reported faithfully but manipulated in all sorts of fruitful and lateral ways. Indeed this impact of life on poetry becomes so complex that sometimes the two are mingled. The effect of the imagination upon physical and vice versa is constantly alluded to: for example, books are seen as living people, and affect physical details of Petrarch's experience.

Poem 30, discussed at the opening of Chapter One, contains a couple of points that will be explored in this chapter. The poem operates on the veiled level, necessitating effortful interpretation, informed by much reading, and in this way it is an apt example of another of Petrarch's perceptions of poetry, that it should be difficult and be accessible only to a few 'lofty minds'. The other point is that the final stanza enters the debate about the rightness or wrongness of writing poetry. This too will be discussed below.

The parallel between Petrarch and Apollo is, as we have seen, a dubious one to adopt in the light of Christian doctrine, and to some extent Petrarch is engaged in justifying it within the bounds of Christianity. He adopted Augustine as his mentor, an unquestioned church authority. The *Secretum* is in the form of a dialogue between Petrarch and St. Augustine, during which Petrarch is made to see the error of his dependence upon the pursuit of fame and earthly love. The dialogue has its parallel in *RS* 137 where Amor and Petrarch present their opposing views to Ragione. In that poem, the argument is left inconclusive, and Petrarch remains ambivalent, on the one hand expressing devout belief and piety, on the other treating religious objections with a certain amount of lightness, so that both sides of the argument are presented. For example, he shows a certain amount of repentance - becoming a changed man, but simultaneously existing on the other side of the fence. In his poetry there is finally a case to be made for his entering positively into mythic writing, and creating a pious world out of it, what Braudy calls a 'secular spirituality' (p.257).

At the same time, he demonstrates the fictive capabilities of language and celebrates its creative power in a daring and playful manner, in the poems themselves. Finally, as I

hope to show, even the phenomenal world is seen, through the medium of language, to have powerful metamorphic and generative capabilities; Petrarch takes the idea of life as a book imaginatively to heart.[7] The medieval notion of the world and the Bible being the two encoded texts provided by God for our understanding is given a new slant by Petrarch.[8] The imagination, especially as incarnated in the written word, is seen as creative of magical situations and capable of spanning otherwise impassable gulfs.

II. PETRARCH AND THE DEMON APOLLO

i. Words and Lies

In Poems 13 and 32, respectively, the pursuit of earthly fame is set against the resulting neglect of Christian salvation (see Chapter One, II.i). Laura is 'il sommo ben' ('the highest good'); nevertheless, Petrarch worries, as he approaches death, that the hope was an illusion. The two conflicting perceptions are brought together in Poem 360, where in a dialogue between himself and Amor the futility or gainfulness of earthly love is inconclusively explored.

In this poem, the dialogue is conducted before Reason, a benign female personification who enigmatically refuses to mediate. Petrarch speaks first, finding himself, in the consciousness of impending death, 'quasi uom che teme morte et ragion chiede' ('like a man who fears death and begs for justice'). He characterises Amor vividly as 'questo lusinghier crudel' ('this cruel flatterer'), a laughing demon, who, he says, 'per inganni et per forza e fatto donno/ sovra miei spirti' ('by treachery and force he has made himself master of my

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[7] Cf. Dante in *Inf.* I.ii, where he talks about memory as a book. Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy* , edited and translated by Charles Singleton; vol. I, 'Inferno' (Princeton: University Press 1970).

[8] David and Finke, loc. cit.

spirits') (65-66):

> in quanto amaro à la mia vita avezza
> con sua falsa dolcezza,
> la qual m'atrasse a l'amorosa schiera!
> Che, s'i' non m'inganno, era
> disposto a sollervarmi alto da terra [...]
>
> Questi m'à fatto men amare Dio
> ch' i'non deveva, et men curar me stesso [...]
>
> Cercar m'à fatto deserti paesi [...]
>
> To how much bitterness has he trained my life with his false sweetness, which drew me to the amorous flock. For, if I am not deceived, I was of a nature to raise myself high above earth [...] He has made me love God less than I ought and be less concerned for myself [...] He has made me search among wildernesses [...] (*RS*, 360.25-30, 32-33, 46)

Now only the hope of 'pieta celeste'('heavenly pity') can offer any balm, as opposed to the unsuccessful struggles for earthly fame. The Petrarch of this poem is suffering doubt - not religious doubt, far from it, but doubt about his hitherto relentless faith in earthly fame. This faith has spurred and pursed him, made him search ('cercar' is the first word of l.30)in the form of his secular love poetry; Amor pursues him wherever he tries to flee (ll.46-60).

Amor replies with the voice of an earlier Petrarch, insisting that he inspired nobility and lofty aspirations (ll.95-104, 121-35), and that he has ensured him at least earthly immortality:

> Sì l'avea sotto l'ali mie condutto
> ch' a donne et cavalier piacea il suo dire;
> et sì alto salire
> il feci che tra' caldi ingegni ferve
> "il suo nome, et de'suoi detti conserve
> si fanno con diletto in alcun loco;
> ch'or saria forse un roco
> mormorador di corti, un uom del vulgo!
> I'l'esalto et divulgo
> per quel ch' elli'imparò ne la mia scola
> et da colei che fu nel mondo sola.
>
> (... I had so carried him under my wings that his speech pleased ladies and knights; and I made him rise so high that among brilliant wits
> "his name shines, and in some places collections are made of his poems; who now would perhaps be a hoarse murmurer of the courts, one of the mob! I exalt him and make him known by what he learned in my school and from her

who was unique in the world.)

(*RS*, 360.110-120)

Finally, Amor neatly marries God and Eros, by suggesting that the reason for Laura's death was heaven's own desire for her:

> "Ancor, et questo è quel che tutto avanza,
> da volar sopra'l ciel li avea dat' ali
> per le cose mortali,
> che son scala al Fattor, chi ben l'estima:
> ché mirando ei ben fiso quante et quali
> eran vertuti in quella sua speranza,
> d'una in altra sembianza
> potea levarsi a l'alta cagion prima,
> "et ei l'à detto alcuna volta in rima.
> Or m'à posto in oblio con quella donna
> ch'i'li die' per colonna
> de la sua frale vita." A questo un strido
> lagrimoso alzo, et grido:
> "Ben me la die', ma tosto la ritolse!"
> Responde: "Io no, ma chi per sé la volse."
>
> ("Again, and this is all that remains, I gave him wings to fly above the heavens through mortal things, which are a ladder to the Creator, if one judges them rightly; for, if he looked fixedly at how many and great virtues were in that hope of his, from one likeness to the next he could have risen to the high First Cause,
> "And he has said it several times in rhyme. Now he has forgotten me along with that lady whom I gave him as the support of his frail life." At this I raise a tearful cry, and shout: "He gave her to me indeed, but he soon took her back!" He replies: "Not I, but One who desired her for Himself.")
>
> (*RS*, 360.136-150)

'Petrarch' in this poem is displaced by the character of Amor. He does not say so explicitly, but here he makes Amor tackle the problematic question of whether or not secular love poetry is compatible with the love of heaven. Poetry, 'Petrarch' maintains now, in his moment of doubt, is deception 'parolette (anzi menzogne)' ('words, or rather lies' - l.81); on the other hand, Amor insists that love poetry inspires him through earthly things to transcendent vision (ll.137-39), and, indeed, that Laura's rightful place is heaven (l.150). Since Amor is only saying here what Petrarch says in his own voice elsewhere, the 'Petrarch' of this poem is in a sense playing devil's advocate, voicing the arguments against poetry, while Amor defends it. The conclusion is ambiguous, since the issues are further clouded by the structure of dramatis personae, so that it is not clear whether or not this

argument (ll.136-150) is being presented as a truth or as an iniquitous deception on the part of the 'lusinghier crudel'. The use of reported speech to frame the arguments, just as in *RS* 13, heighten the effects of subjective argument rather than objective 'truth', so that the argument is always veiled by levels of assertion and disavowal. The final lines do nothing to resolve this point:

> Ella allor, sorridendo:
> "Piacemi aver vostre questioni udite,
> ma più tempo bisogno a tanta lite."
>
> She then, smiling: "It pleases me to have heard your pleas, but more time is needed for such a lawsuit." (*RS*, 360.155-157)

'Petrarch' seems caught in a revelation of his own deluded past, as if he had been formerly trapped in a glamour that has now faded and revealed the shabby stage for what it is. The poem, with its two perfectly balanced advocates, has led us to expect a final summing up, a judgement. By refusing to fulfill this expectation, Petrarch leaves the issue still burning, suggesting, as perhaps he believed, that it is unresolvable, but nevertheless always debatable. The state of irresolution is typical of the Petrarchan stance, freezing and burning at once, personae changing and fusing with one another. In this poem, Petrarch the man finds himself in a realm peopled by animated abstract concepts, ultimately invented characters. Instead of observing two personifications in dialogue, Petrarch is himself in dialogue with one, judged by another. This is fitting, since 'Petrarch' here too is an invention, a different person from the 'Petrarch' who revered Laura unquestioningly as '[il] sommo ben' ('the highest good') (*RS*, 13.10). It might be ambiguously presented, but the point has nevertheless been made that secular poetry is a noble pursuit blessed by heaven.

It is not in the *Rime Sparse*, appropriately, that Petrarch shows certainty about the deceptions of secular poetry. That would be difficult when he was in the thick of the seduction. In the *Secretum*, he again explores the questions surrounding fame and earthly love, and in this work he seems to renounce all such marred efforts to live in this world. Here another mediating female personification, the Lady Truth, presides over Petrarch's dialogue with 'St Augustine', recalling Boethius's Lady Philosophy, but again having a vividly created character of her own, as does Petrarch's 'St Augustine'.[9] Like another

[9] Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, translated by V. E. Watts (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1969).

Pirandello, Petrarch meditates in a darkened study, which is invaded by autonomous and opinionated characters, who lead him to change his mind. In this dialogue, 'St Augustine' employs Socratic techniques to make Petrarch see the error of his ways. The work was not, it seems, designed for publication, and was written purely as an aid to Petrarch's private search for truth. As a non-poetic work, it is interesting as a parallel rather than as an adjunct to the *Rime Sparse*. It was written in 1342, when Petrarch was 38.[10] In the *Secretum*, Petrarch is imaged as yet another character, one that exists separately from the Petrarch(s) of the *Rime Sparse*. The latter remained anguished and vacillating, by turns elated and despondent, and throughout the collection of poems remains dedicated to teasing meaning out of changeful life into static (or not so static) art.

ii. Early Youthful Error

In *RS* 30 (see above, Chapter One) Petrarch suggests that he has reached a deeper level of understanding and is no longer in error, as he was in *RS* 1 (1.3). This sub-section will explore these questions of error and understanding further, in relation to poetic theories of Petrarch's time. Pious and pro-pagan views were current at the same time, and often conflicted. In terms of the dominant ideology, the Church, to write about crossing boundaries of form was unacceptable. Uncertainty and plasticity of form ran counter to the doctrine of stability and eternal truth. Man's relinquishing his shape (made in the image of God), however briefly, for the shape of brute beasts is sacrilege, especially in terms of what Saint Augustine has to say in *The City of God,* where he sees shape-shifting as a particular mark of the devil's work.[11] It was the proper attribute of a witch, in the popular imagination. Similarly (and Augustine goes into this in the *Secretum)* the Ovidian metamorphic world conflicts with the orthodox stand of the Church on the irrelevance and

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[10] *Secretum*, loc. cit., pp.xxi, 5.

[11] *City of God*, loc.cit., X.ix, x.

deceptiveness of reliance on earthly things. Petrarch himself is apparently brought to see this in his dialogue with 'St Augustine' in the *Secretum*.

Indeed, according to his letters, Petrarch was the object of attacks naming him a sorcerer: 'Under these judges,' he complains, 'Virgil would perish [... because] they would regard him not as a poet but as a wizard. [...] I myself, the greatest living enemy of divination and magic, have often been called a necromancer by those worthy judges because of my affection for Virgil' (Bishop, p.118). To a 'jesting letter' he responds lightheartedly:

> With your calumnies you make me out to be a magician. Already I seem to myself to be Zoroaster, the discoverer of magic, or one of his followers. Or maybe I am Dardanus or Damigerus or Apollo or somebody else famous in that art. It is no small feat to make me a prestidigitator of words (Bishop, p.32)

And although here he is taking part in a kind of playful sparring with his correspondent, the thought recurs later, in a curious letter, written in 1355, where Petrarch laments the loss of Apollo to the legions of darkness:

> In fact it would have been better if the oracle had never spoken, and if its inhabitant, Apollo, had been forever mute. He did not speak with true poetic voice, since 'all the gods of the gentiles are devils.' Apollo admitted as much in his own words; since to one who inquired he was forced to tell the truth, that he was a demon. Certainly no one would deny that the loss of the sweet solace of literature is more damnable than the failure of contact with a perfidious and mendacious demon (Bishop, p.154).

This is a strange view in the light of the *RS* (of which he was engaged in producing the first edition at the time), and in which Apollo is always the inspiration and the goal, perhaps even an alter ego; but at any rate it acknowledges, as Plato does, the attractiveness and power of poetry, and, as Plato does, seems to suggest that such fascination is dangerous.

The view expressed is to some extent a conventional one. It is the same as that we find in the frequent disclaimers with which he comes to fill his writings, when he speaks, for example, of '[...] mio primo giovenile errore / quand'era in parte altr'uom da quel ch'i'sono' ('[...] my early youthful error, when I was in part a different man from the one I am now' - *RS*, 1.3-4). It was a convention for both Paul and Augustine to speak of a man as being 'different men' before and after conversion, and it is no doubt to this that Petrarch here alludes.[12] This is one form of change that is acceptable. Petrarch puts the concept of

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[12] Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Body of Beatrice* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press 1988), p.107.

change explicitly into St Augustine's mouth - acknowledging the mistake of his own many attempts to change, while he says, he was looking for the right state of being.

In retrospect he is able to justify his pursuit of the laurel crown - and all that it entails - as a youthful error: 'as a young man's mind craves glory more than virtue [...] why should I not admit my own desire for it?' (Bishop, p.51). Similarly, he writes:

> [...] a mature man should treat different themes than does a boy. And at that age I could think of nothing else [...] I was distracted from sound judgement by blind love, by the foolishness and prejudice of my years [...] (Bishop, p.70).

He writes of the need, in old age, to move on from study of the classics, saying he must now value substance over style, salvation over noble language (Bishop, p.92). And yet style and noble language were the very substance of his life's work. He has become a *changed man;* nevertheless, it is after the achievement of producing the *Rime Sparse* that he can afford to think in this way. The change is, in the nature of changes, by no means an absolute one; it exists on the level of Petrarch's own actual existence during life, but not in the temporal realm of his work, in which he will eternally change back to 'la dolce tempo de la prima etade' ('the sweet time of my first age' - *RS*, 23.1). At the same time as writing the disclaimers, he still editing the *RS* - a task he never fully gave up until his death in 1374 (see Chapter One, I, on 'posterity', the projected reader).

It has been posited that this last poem in the *RS* forms a conventional close to the sonnet sequence, and is not necessarily therefore an expression of Petrarch's personal philosophy.[13] Petrarch hints as much in a letter probably written in 1360, 'He Turns from Profane to Religious Literature':

> I think that the Muses and Apollo will not merely grant me permission, they will applaud, that after giving my youth to studies proper to that age, I should devote my riper years to more important matters (Bishop, p.190).

However seriously or not we take his retractions, Petrarch deals with the question in an altogether different way when he hears that Boccaccio has been terrified into renouncing literature, as the result of a monk's vision, in which it was revealed that Boccaccio was soon to die and must reject all his books if he had hope of salvation. And although Petrarch's reply is consoling in the extreme - 'Be reasonable. I know of many who have attained the highest saintliness without literary culture; I don't know of any who were excluded from

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[13] Minta, loc. cit., p.5.

sanctity by culture' (Bishop, p.226) - it is obvious that there is a charge to be answered; and it is not just the subject-matter; it is the act of poetry-writing itself that is the witchcraft. The craft and its subject together are illicit. Saint Augustine certainly connected witchcraft and poetry, since he speaks of demons and delusions when he speaks of poets.[14]

One of the contributory factors to this sense of taboo was undoubtedly the oft-quoted decision of Plato's to banish poets from his republic, a motion that hung like the sword of Damocles over all succeeding poets. It gathered fuel from the branch of scholastic exegesis that had its beginning in Augustine, and meant that post-Augustinian critiques of Greek mythic writing were often produced in a spirit of justification.[15] The disquiet stemmed from a view of myth as being both misleading and anti-Christian, and is closely connected to Augustinian linguistics; a point which Marcia Colish has incisively discussed:

> The poets, he says, use words erroneously, since they use them to refer to things and ideals which are nonexistent or untrue [...] The beauty of this poetry is doubly dangerous, according to Augustine, since it is used to create a world of shadows and to make the fantastic morality of that world attractive and convincing.[16]

This condemnation involves a close criticism of language itself, and its fictive capabilities. Words must be cleared of all mysteries or inaccurate application, in the interests of ascertaining the truth. They must be recognised for what they are, signs for mental images of actual things; and Augustine sees the word, or logos, as being within man, like a key to unlock revelations of spiritual and temporal reality.[17] Language is a sacred responsibility; to misuse it close to a notion of sinfulness, especially if it were used to create things or moral systems which have no substance in reality:

> [...] at the outset you must be very careful lest you take figurative expressions literally [...] There is a miserable servitude in this habit of taking signs for things, so that one is not able to raise the eye of the mind above things that are corporal and created to drink in eternal light.[18]

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[14] *City of God*, loc. cit., XIX.ix.

[15] Barkan, loc.cit.

[16] Marcia L Colish, *The Mirror of Language* (Lincoln and London : Yale University Press 1968), p.25.

[17] Charles Trinkaus,*The Poet as Philosopher* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1979), p.46.

[18] *On Christian Doctrine*, loc. cit., III.v, p.136.

The idea of perverse or secondary generation was familiar to the pre-Renaissance imagination, and was behind the judgement of usurers - Dante puts them in the seventh circle of Hell.[19]

The subsequent process of clearing myth from the taint of falsity had been begun in the fifth century, by figures such as Boethius, who allied Ovid's stories to Aesop's fables, as illustrations of moral points. Nearer Petrarch's time, the *Metamorphoses* were interpreted in a number of ways, all designed to make them read in a non-literal way, as figures of speech; or as allegories of nature; so for example in the myth of Apollo's pursuit of Daphne daughter of Peneus the river god, the reading is that the sun (Apollo) draws mist (Daphne) from the river (Peneus).[20] The tension between the legitimacy of allegorical reading and the dubiousness of myth informed the climate in which Petrarch operated.

Of course because of the unstable and schismatic nature of Christianity at the time he was writing, and because of his own involvement with Manicheism, a movement he was later to see as a heresy, Augustine was particularly anxious to be specific about the nature of language and its capacity to lead us to God's truth - or else to demonic deception.[21] But as to why the question became so important in fourteenth century Italy, and why it seemed to take poets by surprise is an entirely different matter. One reason was that taking secular poetry seriously was relatively recent. The word Renaissance was not used until much later, but a word that was used was 'awakening'; an image that occurred with relative frequency and was used by writers like Salutati, Villani and Boccaccio, was that of the Muses stirring after their thousand years' sleep, and stretching their limbs, and going forth to visit poets again - and this was much to the consternation of the scholastic theologians who had thought them safely buried for good.[22] Some of the resulting negotiations of vernacular poetry and its problematic subject-matter will be explored in the next sub-section.

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[19] *Inf.*XVII; see also *Inf*, loc. cit., note to Canto XVII, p.229.

[20] Barkan, loc. cit., pp.102-11.

[21] Henry Chadwick, *Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1986), pp.75-86.

[22] B. L. Ullman, *Studies in the Italian Renaissance* (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura 1973), pp.15-20.

iii. Plato's Fabled Ban

In Dante Alighieri's treatise, *De volgare eloquentia* - written in Latin - he questioned the accepted assumption that Latin was a noble language, in which matters of importance could be discussed, while subjects treated in the vernacular need not be taken seriously. He maintained on the contrary that the vernacular was nobler, on the grounds that we are used to it from birth, and it is naturally and not artificially acquired; and that it should therefore be retrieved from its inferior status.[23]

By elevating the vernacular language, however, he also gave weight to the traditional topics of vernacular poetry; and this unleashed another problem. Plato had banished poets, and banished they henceforward were, if not from any republic, at least from serious discourse; and serious discourse came to mean the Scriptures, and the concern most important to man - his salvation. Poets did continue to operate, but for the most part were not of importance. They were entertainment, and gradually came to occupy their own place; they wrote in the vernacular, they wrote about earthly love and other trifles; they were free to embellish their art as they wished, since they were not seen as a threat in any way to the establishment. To raise these poets to a respectable position in intellectual discourse seemed like some sort of desecration.

Thus Petrarch, coming into his own in a climate that favoured his own sense of greatness, is with one stroke setting himself up as an important figure in the cultural consciousness of the time, and simultaneously reviving an allegiance to a rival culture that Christianity had gradually come to replace. There were others like him, most of the leading humanists were poets,[24] they wrote in the vernacular, wrote about earthly love, about Greek myth, especially metamorphic myths, and also appeared to aspire to the field that the Church reserved for itself - secular poetry became as honourable a subject as the scriptures, which hitherto had been the only topic for literary analysis. In the ensuing battle, which seems to have become a fairly general one, to judge by the riotous mob of ignorant objectors that Boccaccio conjures up in his own defence of poetry, the writings of Augustine were

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[23] 'De volgare', loc. cit., I .i.

[24] Ullman, loc. cit., p.15.

important in the use made of them to give authority to the arguments on both sides. In his defence, in *De Genealogia Deorum Gentilium*, Boccaccio sets out to answer certain charges, the chief one being that poets are liars. There are two points he wishes to make, one that the charge is irrelevant:

> [...] no one can in the proper discharge of his duty incur by that act the taint of infamy. If the judge, for example, lawfully visits capital punishment upon malefactors, it is not called homicide. Neither is the soldier who wastes his enemy's fields called a robber. [...] So a poet, however he may sacrifice the literal truth in invention, does not incur the ignominy of a liar, since he discharges his very proper function not to deceive, but only by way of invention.[25]

His other point is that it is illogical to condemn the whole class of poets on the basis of what some of them write:

> Every art, like every liquor, has its lees [...] What for example, is truer than Philosophy, mistress of all sciences and arts? Yet she has had as her dregs, so to speak, the cynics and epicureans [...] shall we say that for the sake of these we must abandon also Socrates? [...] And what is holier than the Christian religion? Yet she has her dregs [...] and we do not therefore regard Basil, and St John Chrysostum, and Ambrose as profane [...][26]

Boccaccio's arguments come close to Plato's actual rather than fabled reservations about poets; he does not wish them to be entirely banned, simply controlled by the state, to make sure that what they produce is beneficial - poetry is useful rather than otherwise when employed, for example, to teach children. Its effects seduce, just as music does, but the fault, according to Plato, is not in the poetry itself, but in its content - poetry does not always show a moral, therefore have the potential to persuade wrongfully.[27] Boccaccio writes:

> This poetry, which triflers cast aside, is a sort of fervid and exquisite invention, with fervid expression, in speech or writing, of that which the mind has invented. it proceeds from the bosom of God, and few, I find, are the souls in whom this gift is born [...] This fervour of poetry is sublime in its effects: it impels the soul to a longing for utterance; it arranges these meditations in a fixed order, adorns the whole composition with unusual interweaving of words

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[25] Davis and Finke, loc. cit., XIV.xiii.

[26] Ibid., XIV.xix.

[27] 'Republic', II.ix, in Davis and Finke, loc. cit..

and thoughts; thus it veils truth in a fair and fitting garment of fiction.[28]

Boccaccio as much as Plato or Augustine appears to subscribe to the assumption that a poet must write on pagan myth. He defends such writing - for example to the accusation that poets write about the many and false gods of antiquity, he replies they are actually writing about the multiple facets of the one deity, and do not literally mean to imply that there are many gods.

This kind of defence of poetry perhaps explains Petrarch's reference to Augustine to defend his artistic endeavours - Augustine, the undisputed Church authority whose writings he embraced:

> You say that I am affronting not only the silly populace but heaven itself with my pretenses, and that thus I have embraced Augustine and his works with simulated ardor, without renouncing the poets and philosophers. But why should I renounce what I see manifest in Augustine himself? (Bishop, p.30).

The matter is complicated by the fact that Augustine did not, any more than Plato did, simply condemn poetry and fables. He could not deny that the Bible itself operated in the same way. This makes the question of poetry more problematic. It was like the parameters of magic that the Church was engaged in defining, again a difficult area in that it is close to the rituals of the Church. The difference between incantation and prayer, for example, had to be outlined: the difference between prayer and incantation was said to lie in the mechanical nature of the spell, which implies power over the forces of nature; prayers are a supplication to a listening God to change his mind. A couple of centuries later the Catholic Church was to be, at the height of the witch trials, accused of witchcraft itself; the Catholic Church's differentiation between different sorts of magic, some acceptable under the aegis of the Church, others not, comes under attack as being no different - for example, the potency of talismans and the practise of opening the Bible at random to reveal the future.[29] This is a practice, incidentally, that Petrarch follows in the 'Ascent of Mont Ventoux' when he opens Augustine's *Confessions* to look for guidance (Bishop, p.49). Just as with magic, so with poetry; it is not something that can be dismissed out of hand, it must be negotiated with, and rules must be laid down, and clarified. They were. Much of

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[28] Ibid., XIV.vii.

[29] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1971), pp.27-89.

Augustine's writing is devoted to a critical system whereby the Bible should be read. The question of language and what language expresses is involved closely with ideas of truth, and subjectivity; whether it is the act of communicating or expressing, the selection and emphasis, that distorts - or the associations of the words themselves, loaded with contextual and phonetic meanings, that render each telling different, and therefore suspect. In the *De doctrina christiana* he does suggest, in relation to the Bible, that multiple interpretations may simply illustrate the all-encompassing nature of God's truth; but the more usual reading of Augustine's stance in medieval times, influenced by writings of Aquinas and others, related to what he wrote about poets and mythology, and their misleading nature.[30] The tension between the legitimacy of allegorical reading and the dubiousness of myth informed the climate in which Petrarch operated. This is evident in the selective and fabled way in which Plato's ban on poets was so often used.

iv. 'Qual vaghezza di lauro?'

Poetry, therefore, is seen by many in Petrarch's time as a vain pursuit. The suspicion with which it is regarded is related to a more general suspicion extended to language itself. The slipperiness of language and its capacity to distort what is seen as objective 'truth' is a view with a long tradition, with both classical and Christian adherents. For Plato, words represent reality, which represents the ideal, in a definite, separated, progression; thus for Socrates, words can only be secondary knowledge, inferior to immediate knowledge of the thing itself. For Aristotle, there is only the one world - the signs may be interpreted. For Augustine, words have the potential to create lies, and misrepresent the real world. In all of these cases, words exist in a secondary, interpretative role, empty and lifeless without the soul given them by meaningful reality. For Petrarch, however, the world of words lives in

[30] Marcia Colish, *The Mirror of Language* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 1968).

itself, and is related to the world of the mind.[31]

According to Marcia Colish the Stoics treat language as a natural phenomenon, taking this stance in the debate about the naturalness or arbitrariness of language. In the *Cratylus*, says Colish, the discussion centres on the question of the natural or arbitrary relation of words to things. Socrates concludes that although language may be metaphorical or comparative in the way it is used, words are naturally applicable to things; that is they are mimetic. They are not, it would seem, randomly chosen, but mysteriously decreed.[32] In the *Gorgias*, rhetoric is not seen as an 'art' but merely as a 'skill' by Socrates; he draws an implicit distinction between an instructive definition, which seeks to get at the word's meaning and to convey it; and a merely descriptive one, couched in apt and witty terms for the convenience of those who already know the meaning. Rhetoric is like 'personal decoration' and ' by means of that which is most pleasant, captivates and seduces ignorance. [...I]t has no knowledge of the things which it employs [...] deceiving [...] by smoothness and outward appearance'.[33] There is a recognisable Platonic need to be precise in the definition of words, and definitions are instructive, not merely descriptive for those who already know. In relevant discussions there is an unquestioned basic assumption: that there is a fixed and stable truth which man seeks to reveal to himself through language.

Augustine is also close to the Platonic in his view of language; Socrates's aim is to cut out the unessential, and to aim for clarity through brevity. In the *Gorgias,* through his examination of the rhetorician Gorgias, he draws an analogy between language and medicine and a journey - none of these, he says, are in themselves desired - they are simply the means by which the end is reached; everything may be described under one of three headings; good, evil, and intermediate. The intermediate may be used to reach either of the other two.[34] The critical methods resulting from these views were developed by medieval theologians, and operated according to a four-fold system of interpretation. To proponents of this, the mixed and muddled writing of myth seemed hopelessly obscure, a thing of darkness, lacking clarity, logic, or sense.

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[31] Ibid., pp.9-11.

[32] Ibid., pp.8-11.

[33] Plato, *The Works of Plato,* edited by Henry Carey (London: George Bell and Sons 1892), vol. I., p.157.

[34] Ibid., pp. 160-161.

Petrarch inherits Augustine's view of myth as a self-generated creation. But he appropriates it in such a way as to corrode the notion of untruth. Language in his hands employs its logic and nuances in the independent generation of situations, and ultimately structures a whole body of work out of a centrally negative or hollow state, the state of non-possession of Laura. Petrarch thus embraces Augustine's stand in a positive way. *Imitatio* itself as Petrarch defines it would be perverse in the Augustinian sense, since it relies on the use of secondary material. He is always however in search of truth:

> Let thousands of years flow by [...] never will the road to investigation of new ideas be blocked to keen minds [...] what is rather to be feared is that men may cease to exist before our pursuit of humanist studies breaks through the intimate mysteries of truth (Bernardo I, p.49).

The means of arriving at the truth, admittedly, involves a wide-angled view of experience which is not factual but is nevertheless truthful. Within the question of truth and lies, there comes to be a place for fiction. Robin Kirkpatrick has written illuminatingly about fiction in Boccaccio; fiction 'sidesteps disaster', he says (p.225), acting as a reassurance and providing closure. The idea of fiction arises out of the notion of objective truth, which language does or does not express. In postmodern terms, where truth is a dubious concept, fiction is never really fiction.[35] But perhaps for the pre-Petrarchan age language could either wrongfully create (lie) or rightfully create without being fiction at all by being allegory, symbolism, metaphor. The use of myth lies somewhere between these poles.

The contemporarily accepted idea, originating with Aristotle and central to the concept of *imitatio*, was that art is mimetic, either of other work or more principally of nature itself.[36] The apian image of the bees' imitation of nature's production of nectar with their own illustrates Petrarch's sense of imitation through creation; he aims as closely as Aristotle might at accuracy and truth, but the end and subject of the aim has shifted, focusing more on the portrayal of mental and physical alchemy than on its ingredients. It is thus through his mythopoeic writing that Petrarch, like Boccaccio, begins to supply a new sanction to fabular creation, seeing it not as lies, but fiction.

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[35] J. B. Trapp (ed), *Background to the English Renaissance* (London: Gray-Mills Publishing 1974), pp.1-8.

[36] Aristotle, 'On the Art of Poetry' in Aristotle, Horace, Longinus, *Classical Literary Criticism*, edited and translated by T. S. Dorsch (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1965), pp.31ff.

Petrarch, therefore, implicitly pioneers a view that sees linguistic creation as legitimate. Its end lies in itself. This attitude might have been strengthened by the knowledge that the impracticality of poetry is frequently under attack. At his outset, Petrarch's father burnt some of his poetry books so that he would continue the study of the more useful Law; and much later Petrarch writes of an old man who comes to him with reproaches because of his son, who has abandoned his studies so as to write poetry; Petrarch, by his influence has deprived the son of the means of earning a useful living (Bishop, p.293). It is precisely this old-fashioned attitude to poetry that the new advocates of poetry-writing as a glorious pursuit are anxious to change. Petrarch comes close to saying this when he glorifies poetry as the highest of the arts precisely because it serves no purpose. For Petrarch it is precisely this inessentiality that is its glory. Its end lies in itself and therefore it is the purest of the arts:

> [..].toil always precedes glory, but glory does not always follow toil. The sailor or the farmer works just as hard as the general or the philosopher; thus although all glory is laborious, often labor is inglorious [...] (Bishop, p.283).

His attitude is more positive than Boccaccio's, since it raises poetry above other activities, instead of subordinating it. Naturally this focuses the attention more firmly on the way poetry works, the craft of the poet, in other words, and it is my aim to show that this is one of the main concerns of Petrarch in the very poems which exercise the craft.[37]

This section has examined the negative views of secular poetry, especially of poetry in the vernacular that treats of pagan myth. Petrarch's commitment to the production of such poetry conflicts with his reception of pious condemnation of the art he practised. However, even when he sees himself as a magician in thrall to the demon Apollo, the perception is not entirely one of repentance. In the next section, I will discuss aspects of Petrarch's poetic craft which demonstrate linguistic sleight of hand, and which suggest Petrarch's adherence to the effects and the effectiveness of poetic composition.

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[37] Trinkaus, loc.cit, p.36ff.

III. APOLLO THE GOD

i. Plurality and Puns: the Opacity of Language

The negative perception, in fourteenth-century Italy, of the creative properties of language is clear enough. Similarly clear is the mistrust of the Graeco-Roman myths, and of the poetry that takes these myths as its subject. This poetry was predominantly written in the vernacular, which was one reason for denying the vernacular literary status. Another reason for this denial would seem to be the fluid uncontrolled nature of the vernacular, in opposition to the fixed classical tongues, inherited in a limited number of texts, and, if spoken, subject to careful regulation.

It is possible, however, to see the creative aspect of language in a positive light, and this is what I suggest Petrarch does, implicitly by exercising it in his written work, both poetry and prose. He sees any pursuit of knowledge as ennobling:

> All good men have the same goal, but there are numberless ways thither [...] Every such journey is a blessed one, but the way of knowledge is certainly more glorious, illumined, and lofty. Hence there is no comparison between the simple piety of the rustic and the intellectual faith of a scholar (Bishop, p.227).

What emerges from his writing is that Petrarch's own 'goal' remains always an exploration of the extent to which language can generate events, in different aspects, situations and persons. The 'intellectual faith of a scholar' is elsewhere 'the magic name of poet' (Bishop, p. 117). And it is really with demonstrating this magic that Petrarch is involved.

As the title of the *Rime Sparse* indicates, he thinks of the poems as 'scattered', and the prevailing emphasis is on fragmentation. The Dantean divine order is no unquestioned certainty for Petrarch: '[w]e must not seek an order in the world that has never existed.' (Bishop, p.231). The order is created by man. Stability is in some sense achieved when the interplay of movement and possibilities is somehow entered into, held captive and at the same time acknowledged, that is to say within mythic composition. The theory emerging

is much like that of the nineteenth century philologist Friedrich Max Müller, who maintained that 'mythology [...] is in truth a disease of language', meaning that if inanimate objects are spoken of as performing actions, they are endowed with intentionality, thus generating a false image of them as sentient beings; an example is the phrase 'the sun rises', which implies intention on the part of the sun.[38] Augustine would have been highly sympathetic to such analysis; but Petrarch seems to take it on in a positive way, and in such a way as to corrode the notion of untruth. Muller's thesis is pertinent in a number of ways: the creativity of language, its ability to take off on a number of routes; the use of words themselves, and their associations, in new groupings; and the creation of things that are not.

Nowhere is language more non-functionally employed than in punning. Here meaning is subordinated, grows out of the words, rather than vice versa. The pun poses certain problems, in that it has provoked opposing responses in readers - it suggests either dissolution or cement. Two meanings for the same word either cause the word itself to mean nothing, and float alarmingly free of necessity in meaning; or they simply draw the two meanings more firmly together, linking them and the word in a happy knot of certainty, in a world full of significance and interlinked realities. It is possible that both these views are to be found in Petrarch's work. At all events, the pun is significant in the illustration of the engineering of association and suggestion, the tendency of the mind (sometimes deliberately exploited) to hold open an arena of infinite possibilities, some of them contradictory. But it is first necessary to examine how his contemporaries and seminal influences see puns and wordplay.

In Roman poetry the concern is with the linked and significant universe. Etymologies were put together solely on phonetic similarity; linked sounds meant a sublime linkage of fates. The Latin for 'dog' and the Latin for 'sing' begin with the same three letters (c-a-n); therefore, the etymologist concludes, 'sing' derives from 'dog'.[39] In Petrarch's day, the word 'lauro' (laurel) was thought to derive from the verb 'laudare' (to praise).[40] This is

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[38] Friedrich Max Müller, *Lectures on The Science of Language* (London: Longman 1862), p.11.

[39] Frederick Ahl, *Metaformations: Soundplay and Wordplay in Ovid and Other Classical Poets* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 1985), pp.22-55.

[40] *RS*, p.40 (footnote).

interesting because it does not allow for the possibility that in another language, the two words might sound entirely different. Can all languages be as naturally mimetic as each other? One answer might be that they are not; that there is one (or perhaps two) perfect or 'right' languages; hence the preservation of the Latin tongue in the Renaissance.[41] The Greeks, however, producing the Sophists and the concept of Acrasia, saw a world in imminent danger of falling apart, of revealing that it *has* no structure, and language being similarly unreliable. In such a state of affairs the linguist makes the most of uncertainty to make language say whatever it is required to say, thus obtaining a precarious kind of control over ambiguity. In the context of Augustine, the plurality of meanings attached to words becomes a sinister concept. Müller sees mythology as a disease of language, and disease is an implication of the Augustinian stance.[42] The duality of meaning creates a feeling of uncertainty and confusion in which single truths can no longer be expressed.

The matter becomes even more problematical when nuance is added to meaning, and the significance of words becomes impossible to contain or define. Here the question is not one simply of sophistry, of re-presenting the truth in such a way as to appear to mean something quite different; nor is it a concern with how expression inevitably distorts through selection and emphasis; the preoccupation is now with the infinite suggestiveness of the words themselves. When Petrarch plays with the name of Laura in his poems, he addresses this question directly. It is a way of placing a slippery hold on slipperiness. He illustrates and defines the elusiveness of meaning in the same exercise; in *RS* 207, for example, 'fame' ('hunger') suggests 'fama' ('fame'), binding fame and the desire for it inextricably together. Again, through a happy placement of letters he can relate Laura the woman to all the other meanings suggested by words that sound similar; thus in *RS* 5 the name of Laura is threaded through other words: Laura is '[il] nome che nel cor mi scrisse Amore' ('the name that Love wrote on my heart' - 5.2). The different syllables of her name are overtly extracted from other words. The first stanza refers to sounds of her, whereas the second to her physical presence; she is therefore heralded before she appears. So Laura exists, in her Latin version, Laureta, in the words 'LAU-dando' and 'RE-al' (which translates as 'royal', but also has

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[41] Petrarch writes 'Latin is of course the loftier language' (Bishop p.244). See also Dante, 'De volgare', loc. cit.

[42] Ibid., p.233ff.

the meaning of 'real'), which further complicates the meaning. In TA-ci, she appears as a command to silence - she is imperious, and words fail before her. And by tying her name to the words he is saying not simply that they are to be associated with her - but that she partakes of their being - the links of language make his contentions more powerful, by giving them some kind of mystic sanction, which appears in the next lines:

> Così LAU-dare et RE-verire insegna
> la voce stessa [...]
>
> Thus the word itself teaches LAU-d and RE-verence (*RS*, 5.9-10)

The next allusion is less overt, since it refers to the 'lauro' ('laurel') that links with her name: '[...] suoi sempre verdi rami [...]' ('his [Apollo's] eternally green boughs' - 5.13). The shift is achieved by language now, first in parallels of sound and spelling (which in Italian are particularly closely linked), then through definition, or description. It is clear that she is the evergreen branches, through the medium of the 'lingua mor-TA-l' ('mor-TA-l tongue' - 5.14), which she also is; in other words she is immortal art, but only through her definitely earthly tongue. In this poem his argument, hidden as he preferred poetry to be, is expressed by means of association rather than definition or rhetorical structure.

If for Petrarch puns meant uncertainty, then the pun on Laura would simply mean that the word stopped short of meaning, meant neither the woman nor the breeze, and Laura, without her name, would flee and fade; in this case the pun would be a powerful statement of her elusiveness to him. I would, however, say that Petrarch inclined more towards the substantial signals of the pun: Laura means the breeze, the breeze means Laura, and this new complex being also has the attributes of the laurel, and of gold; and these are further enriched by metonymic associations, of glory, poetry, fame, muses, changeability, insubstantiality (qualities sometimes suggested by standard symbolic interpretations, and sometimes by recognisable attributes, such as movement for the breeze), not to mention allusive connotations derived from the Daphne myth, that all of these associated words bring with them. Petrarch in fact, far from fastening on disintegration and chaos, plumbs and uses the capacity of the human mind to build these complex creatures; as if the mind is made up of databanks where the field names relate to phonetic families that have nothing to do with the logic or structure of the world, or grammar, or argument. They are in one sense completely random and nonsensical. In another they make perfect sense - within their own

system. What Petrarch does is draw out these databanks, and justify them - since the sense that our minds, involuntarily, make of martialling words by sound, also then makes sense beyond that, seems to justify itself, to reveal the hidden reason for that system of filing which is continually engaged in, as a subsidiary and irrelevant activity, never expected to be of any service, except perhaps in dreams. Poetic punning is a way of calling upon that function and legitimising and rendering sublime an instinctive and purely personal portion of the mind. Closely related is the power of rhyme, where words are brought close in meaning *artificially*, whereas simply through sense they might not be.

ii. Unnatural Creation

Müller's contention that mythology is a 'disease of language' is further relevant in relation to Petrarchan linguistic myth-making. Graeco-Roman myth, seen in the Christian exegetical tradition as demonic untruths, exists primarily through linguistic creation. Petrarch allies himself, however, with those who sought to legitimise myth, or to make sense of it in a way that lay within a definition of 'truth'. The process of clearing myth from the taint of falsity had been begun in the fifth century, by figures such as Boethius, who allied Ovid's stories to Aesop's fables, as illustrations of moral points. Nearer Petrarch's time, the *Metamorphoses* were interpreted in a number of ways, all designed to make them read in a non-literal way, as figures of speech; or as *integumentum*, allegories of nature; thus in the myth of Apollo's pursuit of Daphne daughter of Peneus the river god, for example, the sun (Apollo) draws mist (Daphne) from the river (Peneus).[43]

For Petrarch such concise representational analyses impoverish the image, make it no more than a sign or method of communication. If words themselves are representative, then the meaningful mythic image created by their means must be something more and other. It has its own visual power and rules of creation. This view opposes the sculptural clarity of

[43] Barkan, loc. cit., pp.102-11.

allegorical interpretations, where figures are qualities, and their separate identity as figures becomes marginalised.[44] To say Apollo is the sun makes Apollo merely another name for the sun, but to see him separately as the sun and as a man enriches both concepts and engenders a third, that of god. The two are superimposed on one another, and the resulting unit is more powerful than either alone. An otherworldly being is thus created from perceptions of this world, and relayed through language. Language as productive of a secondary reality is discussed by Plato who sees words as producing their own shadow-world, just as the tangible world is a shadow of the world of ideal forms.[45] Although Petrarch did not have access to much of Plato, he was familiar with many originally Platonic ideas, principally through the medium of Augustine.[46] Language, it seems, is for Petrarch no longer a means to an end, a transparent vehicle, nor has it the role of mediator; it remains self-conscious and self-generative. This is at the heart of the equation of Petrarch with Apollo - Apollo not just as god of poetry but as demon and magician; and, as we have seen, it is not his critics but Petrarch himself who initiates the idea.

The magic is that of an illusionist, the wizardry is of words. The power of words is always an issue, the ability of language - and poetic language as a distinct form - to create out of nothing. Personification is the creation out of nothing: form created out of abstract, generating people, events, actions, emotions, story. The negative state of non-possession of Laura brings forth a whole body of work, peopled and active. This is of course perverse in the Augustinian sense; Augustine talks of evil as being the absolute negation of good, in other words, the state of absolute nothingness - to apprehend evil, he says, would be like seeing darkness, or hearing silence.[47] But in Petrarch's poems creation out of nothing is openly celebrated. In the 239th poem of the series, he confidently declares: 'Nulla al mondo è che non possano i versi' ('there is nothing in the world that cannot be done by verses' - 239.28) - verses can, he says, catch the breeze in a net and adorn the ice with

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[44] In this context J. B. Trapp provides an illuminating discussion of the allegorical figures in the Twelfth Century *Hortus deliciarum* of Abbess Herrad of Hohenburg: see Trapp, loc. cit., p.78.

[45] Especially in the *Cratylus*; see Colish, loc. cit., pp.8-9.

[46] Freibergs, loc. cit.; E. N. Tigerstedt, 'The Decline and Fall of the Neoplatonic Interpretation of Plato', *Commentationes Humanorum,* vol. 52, pp.10-21.

[47] *City of God,* loc. cit., XII.vii.

flowers, and immediately, as if to prove his point, like a conjuror producing a flock of white pigeons out of a hat, he creates a rippling line of laughing flowers on a hillside which in the preceding verses had seemed bare. Like Edmund, he recognises that he can create 'something of nothing' - in *Lear* the tragedy is that it is Lear, Gloucester and Cordelia who (like Brutus) cannot see this, and so, victims of a mistaken notion of truth, are no match for the less scrupulous characters. The economic truth-seekers fare badly - therefore it follows that you must phrase what you wish to say with bias, and not rely on bald statement. People are rarely swayed by truth, they are emotively convinced, by a skilful use of language, by being used. Paradoxically, deception must be used in order to convey the truth. The very definition of truth is questioned, and redefined (*Lear*, I.ii; *Julius Caesar*, III.ii).

In *RS* 332, where Petrarch is struggling to overcome the finality of death, language is used as the prime mover in this enterprise. The poem uses the sestina form, but whereas the sestina hitherto in his poems has been stopped short of the logical final seventh stanza (where the rhyme scheme would have come full circle back to the first stanza), in this poem he not only finishes the seventh stanza, but goes on beyond it to create six more - significantly, he stops short of the fourteenth stanza, and ends in the established way - the conclusion reached is necessarily one of inconclusion. The problem of earthliness still remains, with all its limitations and fertility. The overall effect is of stepping on beyond an intermediate stage; the seventh stanza encapsulates the situation so far, and is perhaps the most succinct expression of the Petrarchan position on the whole:

> Nesun visse giamai più di me lieto,
> nesun vive più tristo et giorni et notti,
> et doppiando'l dolor, doppia lo stile
> che trae del cor sì lacrimose rime.
> Vissi di speme, or vivo pur di pianto,
> ne contra Morte spero altro che morte.

> No one has ever lived more glad than I, / no one lives more sorrowful both day and night / or, sorrow doubling, redoubles his style / that draws from his heart such tearful rhymes. / I lived on hope, now I live only on weeping, / nor against Death do I hope for anything but death (*RS*, 332.37-42).

But because where normally the poem would end, it continues, so the effect is of going one stage beyond the orthodox, and achieving something beyond the stopping point, in this case, beyond death. This achievement is engineered solely through the use of language, and the different nuances of the words 'amor' and 'morte'. Durling and Gianfranco Contini both

transcribe certain instances of these words in this poem with an upper case initial ('Amor' and 'Morte'), although this is not the case in the manuscript Vat. Lat. 3195. In other places, 'amor' and 'morte' remain in lower case in Durling's edition. Durling tells us he has changed punctuation and spelling for clarity's sake (*RS*, Preface), and although he does not specifically mention this poem, I would suggest that on close examination his and Contini's alteration to upper case initials in some cases is an interpretative move, highlighting the ways in which these two words shift in nuance in different parts of the poem.[48]

Laura and Petrarch recede a little in this poem, and the action centre-stage is between the two protagonists, Amor and Morte, man and woman, who take their place. The subject is partly the loss of eloquence, resulting from a weight of sorrow: 'i soave sospiri' ('sweet sighs') were expressed in rhyme; 'gravi sospiri' ('heavy sighs') cannot be so expressed. The missing element is desire, or hope, and the sight of lightness or gladness. The prospect of death is the cause of never being 'lieto' ('light'); death makes him heavy, dark, inarticulate, both by removing Laura, and also in the sense of being an end, a silence, the end of eloquence; the opposite of tears is singing, not laughter; real despair is dumb, happiness is speech. But death has at the same time made Laura 'lieto', she whose living presence made Petrarch 'lieto' before. Death after all removes the clogging and physical attributes of mortality, and makes lightness and purity of being or thought possible. It is on this point that Petrarch fastens, as he begins the effort to go beyond death. To achieve this he must first clear his mind of love.

In stanza 5, he presents the case to Love, almost apologetically, and shows why he must now turn his prayers to the more powerful death. Love has set him on the road which

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[48] Petrarca, Francesco, *Canzonieri,* Testo critico e introduzione di Gianfranco Contini; Annotazioni di Daniele Ponchiroli (Torino: G Einaudi 1964). Durling's preface acknowledges this edition. His own edition is based primarily on the manuscript Vat. Lat. 3195, since this is 'partly in Petrarch's hand and incorporates his last revisions of individual poems and of their order' (*RS*, p.x). He primarily uses Ettore Modigliani's diplomatic edition of the *RS* (Roma 1904). According to Graziadio Ascoli's transciption of the *RS, Rerum vulgarium fragmenti* (Roma: Presso la Società 1904), there are no upper case initials in this poem, except at the beginnings of stanzas, while Durling and Contini both sometimes use upper case initials and sometimes lower for the words 'amor' and 'morte'. These cases are identical in each edition, except for l.42 (Durling: 'né contra Morte spero altro che morte'; Contini: 'né contra Morte spero altro che Morte'). Ascoli's transcript reads 'Ne cōtra morte spero altro che morte'. The discrepancy between Durling and Contini in this single instance is a clue to the interpretative nature of the changes. Both editors' alterations result for the most part in a coherent interpretation of the different ways in which 'love' and 'death' are viewed in this poem, which I discuss fully below. In the case of this line, however, I would suggest that 'né contra morte spero altro che Morte' would be more consistent with the interpretation Durling and Contini imply. See also the manuscript 'Codice Vaticano Latino 3195', reprodotto in Fototipia a cura della Biblioteca Vaticana (Milano: Ulrico Hoepli editore 1905).

eventually makes him long for death, a longing which is a vision of eternity that would not have been possible without love in the first instance, since love led him to Laura, and his devotion to Laura leads him to believe in her existence after death, provides him with a window, in a manner of speaking, into 'quell'altra vita' ('that other life'). Now he must dispose of love - before he can go on to dispose of death (death as mortality). The way in which this is achieved is purely linguistic. The different aspects of love and death are highlighted by Durling's and Contini's use of the upper case - in the difference between Amor (upper case) and amor(lower case), Morte and morte (upper and lower). Only in stanza 3 is love 'amor' - the impassable condition, where he asks with wonder about his lost past. Then presumably, he was less aware, and was to some extent simply the passive receptor of a real flow of (natural) forces. The 'Amor' of l.68, on the other hand, is the subject of verses, of secondary experience, can to some extent be contained, and deprived of autonomy. By converting amor to Amor, Petrarch releases himself from the invisible, subjective and enveloping power of love. Amor himself becomes a 'chiaro segno' (l.35) in a different sense from the obvious one, a target rather than a signal, one which Petrarch is occupied metaphorically in shooting down. By l.35 Amor has been surpassed by Petrarch and his vision - 'Non à'l regno d'Amor sì vario stile' ('The kingdom of Love does not have so varied style'). In the same way, 'Morte' is the active being; 'morte' is the condition, the end, oblivion, termination. Thus morte, glorified by personification, seems to attain a status that is in fact entirely illusory - since what happens is that 'Morte' becomes an instrument, and engine by means of which (eternal) life and light will be reached. It is to escape 'morte' (the condition), against which there is no answer and no defence, that Petrarch erects 'Morte', creating something active, describable, and that by being given attributes becomes something limited that he can circumvent.

The poem, despite its first impression of bleak despair (the longing for death), has a certain optimism and sage triumph about it. The very existence of the poem answers his lament at the loss of eloquence; he declares that weeping cannot be conveyed in rhymes, but the very fact that he produces them means he is not really weeping (not really in despair). Sonnet 334 is an even clearer expression of the convictions of 332: the faith and hope that Christ and Heaven exist for him beyond this world. So with a sophistry of which Socrates would have been proud, he succeeds in proving death is life. By 332 the surprise, innocence and bewilderment of the earlier poems has been replaced by a grim and hard-won wisdom.

The spiritual development of the *Rime Sparse* may be traced through study of the sestine - which is used here exclusively for the subject of love and related concerns - none of them treat of political or civic concerns. Love poetry, as I have suggested, is particularly concerned with the nature of poetry itself, and so it is fitting that it is in one of the sestine that Petrarch explores the capacities of language so fully.

iii. Natural Creation

It is arguable that humanity is capable only of imagining that which is within the range of human experience. Yet fantasies and the supernatural are part of every culture. It is largely through the miracles wrought by language that the unimaginable is rendered real within the mind. One of the relevant features of language in this context is its capacity to relay empirical events or phenomena, recreating by this means a mental picture of the observed subject. By this means, the one who employs language is able to draw on various different components of the memory banks, and yoke them together in ways in which they would not naturally be found. Petrarch also explores the ability of language to pile association on association, building complex structures on tenuous beginnings; so - when Petrarch in a poem seeks deserted places, alert to flee at the sight of a human footprint - without actually saying so, he takes on the attributes of a deer (*RS* 35). The allusion strengthens the image of his position as hunted and pursued, and illustrates how richly language uses every image and reference to create other frames of being, its ability to draw the fantastic from the mundane. 'Chi udì mai d'uom vero nascer fonte?' he asks in *RS* 23, but then adds 'parlo cose manifeste et conte' ('Who ever heard of a spring being born from a real man? [...] I am saying things obvious and known' - 23.119-120). Obvious and known they are, since when Petrarch describes the process of becoming a stone that then melts away into water, he is drawing on a familiar enough image, that of melting ice. And the reference is not inappropriate in the context, since a few lines further up he talks about his frozen thoughts creating an adamantine hardening around his heart. The effect is the same as that in Dante's

Hell, where the wayfarers come across the plains with falling flakes of fire; the idea of falling snow, presumably the inspiration for the scene, cannot be avoided, and serves to accentuate the scorching torment of the souls - just as the idea of water lurks irresistibly and significantly behind the image of Milton's fiend chained on a burning lake.[49] These poets, of course, write about Hell, and their snows of fire and lakes of flame are examples of demonic topsy-turvydom, of an evil aping of creation. But Petrarch uses the same techniques to create instead a sort of earthly paradise. Such invention does not have to be demonic, he seems to say. It could also visualise the ideal.

Thus earthly life actually provides the material for creation; it is not renounced, and the mythic creation has prominence. This is not as allegory, but in a more blurred form. Different levels of meaning are not overtly demarcated, and the proper characteristics of different mythic figures overlap. It is this quality in Petrarch's work that lies behind Thomas M.Greene's comment:

> In fact to reduce any of the metamorphoses to [detailed] interpretation would only be to impoverish them. They need to live in their own slightly mysterious rhetorical region.[50]

It is this tendency to link connected ideas that makes allegory and parable work, since another mental tendency is to see the abstract in terms of the visual and concrete. However, in poetry language is the material as well as the vehicle, of art. Poetry actually examines these functions and phenomena of language, it awakes the required responses, working through a profound understanding of the psyche, and at the same time celebrates and underlines the way in which it works. The process is as significant as the product - the product is almost only significant as evidence of the process. For Petrarch the metamorphic myth reflects the character of experience, mental and external; mind, in this reading, *is* myth-making; the similarities of poetic and dream symbol is interesting in this context. Freud writes persuasively of the parallels between symbols of the subconscious mind and of poetry.[51] The magical poet deals in dreams, so that contextually the statement

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[49] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, edited by Alastair Fowler (London and New York: Longman 1968, 1971), I.46-74; Dante, *Inf.*, XV.

[50] Greene, loc. cit., p.128.

[51] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, translated and edited by James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1953, 1988).

'quanto piace al mondo è breve sogno' ('whatever pleases in the world is a brief dream' - *RS*, 1.14) takes on a different meaning. The relation between dream and poetic symbol is not just something uncovered by Freud (indeed Freud is interesting more as a literary critic than a psychologist, since he drew much of his interpretations from poetry, and especially Greek myth); it was developed in the medieval genre of dream-poetry, and is certainly implicit in Petrarch's work. Life is a dream; but the dream is poetry, which is life. The statement, which has scriptural echoes, is also an expression of the poetic craft.

In Petrarch's use of Ovid's stories, the emphasis is less on the effected change than on the process of changing. No one story is told as a completed episode, but rather his work is woven with cross-references to fragments of stories, and all of them refer to the personal and specific situation he is describing. In Poem 23, the myth of Daphne is evoked, yet it is Petrarch himself who turns into a laurel, by this action himself invading the narrative, which is again fragmented by allusions to the stories of Cygnus, Icarus, Battus and the exploits of Zeus. There is a sense in which the sharp divisions of matter and spirit, developed in the medieval world-view, have become for Petrarch inaccurate perceptions of reality. The very physical focus of his changing trees and stones and fountains, their material detail, together with the mixed emotions and motivations that complement and inform them, suggests a different, holistic notion of the world, as part of an organic process that embraces even the most coldly logical thought together with biological and botanical processes. The line between mind and matter is so thin as to be even obliterated in places. The mutual involvement of myth and sense and the physical world connects with Petrarch's rejection of objective systems such as astrology, and his attack on the notion of fate: 'For the meaning of these and similar events is nothing but a succession of wounds, sudden deaths, looting, etc. etc.; their causes are not Fortune or fate or anything else but are actually men ... Fortune does not exist' (Bishop, p.259).

'Se mortal vel il mio veder apanna,' he asks, 'che colpo è di stelle / o de le cose belle?' ('If a mortal veil dulls my sight what fault is it of the stars or of the beautiful things?' - *RS*, 70.35-37) Responsibility is grounded within the individual, not exactly as a matter of choice, since the way he feels and acts is the result of being human, it is 'la sua propria colpa' (*RS*, 70.48), his own fault, but unavoidably so, proper to him in the Aristotelian sense. He is thus not free for having rejected an objective universe; he is caught up in his own susceptibility, which allows things of beauty to have power over him. The rendition

of images in the mind is not concerned with the study of things, in the Aristotelian mode, but with the objective world strictly in relation to man observing or receiving them; that is, the objective world internalised, made subjective. There is the question of how far art is mimetic of anything, and how much it is in turn, from a Lockean standpoint, imposing itself upon life - the nature we see being man's image of nature, not nature itself.[52] This, perhaps, lies behind Petrarch's observation 'We must not seek an order in the world that has never existed' (Bishop, p.224).

iv. Awakening the Book

The Lockean hypothesis illuminates Petrarch's treatment of the idea of life as a book - or *vice versa.* He gives this commonplace a particular individual interpretation:

> Vegnendo in terra a'lluminar le carte
> ch'avean molt'anni già celato il vero [...]
>
> [He] who, coming to earth to illuminate the pages that for many years had hid the truth (*RS*, 4.5-7).

The power of the imagination to affect physical details is one which fascinates him. He speculates: '[...] certainly this is the origin of the stigmata of St. Francis: his meditation on Christ's death was so constant and forceful that he transferred it for long to his own mind. He felt himself nailed to the cross with his master, and finally his pious imagination transplanted the marks from his mind to actuality in his body' (Bishop, p.257). It is to be noted that despite epithets such as 'pious' in this passage, the explanation for the stigmata is not a divine miracle, but the power within the man, the power of mind. In this way, purely mental activity is seen to work upon the physical world, ideas can be instrumental in shaping the world. It is here that his special relationship with books is important. He

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[52] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by John W. Yolton (London: Dent 1961), III.5

writes: '[...] books thrill you to the marrow; they talk to you, counsel you, admit you to their living, speaking friendship' (Bishop, p.40).

This 'living speaking friendship' is carried to extremes in his 'correspondence' with Cicero - 'correspondence' being somehow an appropriate term, with Petrarch continually writing conversationally, as if to a person he knows; and when he writes, 'I hope my previous letter did not offend you,' the conclusion is irresistible that perhaps he writes like this because Cicero has refused to write back, out of offence. He hurries to make up for the insulting tone of the last letter:

> I am sorry for your life, as I have said; I acclaim your genius and your noble utterance. O great father of Roman eloquence, I thank you, as do all who bedeck themselves with the flowers of the Latin language [...] It is by your presence in spirit that we have gained whatever art and principles in writing we may possess (Bishop, p.208)

His tone is invariably that of a friend, whose 'presence in spirit' is always there. In this letter he inventories the books of Cicero that are missing at the time of writing, almost as if he expected them by return of post. On another occasion and more curiously he writes:

> Listen to the trick Cicero played on me - Cicero, whom I have loved and cherished since boyhood! [...] 'What's this, my Cicero?' I said. 'Why are you wounding me?' He didn't say a thing; but the next day when I entered the room he smote me again, and jokingly I put him back in his place again [...] (Bishop, p.170).

All that has happened is that a volume of Cicero's letters have fallen off a shelf, and hurt Petrarch in the leg. This wound persists, and is occasionally referred to in later letters. It is as if here too, Cicero the man-in-writing must enter into real, physical existence. Significantly, despite the effort of others (doctors) who should know best, it is only Petrarch himself who can heal the wound, by means of a special poultice. He makes his own decisions, rejects the experts, and comes to terms himself with the impact, sometimes harmful, that Cicero (and by implication others of his 'dead' friends) have had upon his life.

Petrarch repeatedly notes the power of writing to communicate, in the most vivid way, experiences, and even locations, as he writes in an invitation to Vaucluse:

> Well, Father, even while I am inviting you I seem to have spared you the trouble of coming; for if you read this and believe it, you will have a full-length picture of me. And now farewell. While I have been talking with you, I forgot that I was writing a letter (Bishop, p.67).

In writing to Cicero, he underlines the fact that he is communicating with the dead, ending one letter:

> Written among the living, on the right bank of the Adige, in Verona, a city of Transpadane Italy, on the 16th of June, in the 1345th year of that Lord whom you did not know (Bishop, p.207).

This is not in fact too different from Dante journeying with Virgil in Hell - just the resemblance, indeed, of the son to the father. The difference is in the special tone, a sort of whimsical daring, a vividness; it is Petrarch in real life, it seems, attempting to commune with Cicero, almost like a spell, an invocation under the aegis of the black arts. Surely here too what he writes must have connotations of necromancy, and also of paganism, since he emphasises two things in the letter; that Cicero is dead, and that Cicero is unChristian. Given this, it is not surprising that Petrarch has to face accusations of sorcery. In an era when the occult had such status, when there was much exploration of divination and magic, when witches were burnt and it was, as T. S. Eliot puts it, '[...] an age in which men still saw visions. It was a psychological habit [...]',[53] he could not but partake of the climate in the way he sees the poet, something of Coleridge's visionary. At the same time it was hardly a position he could openly espouse; the dangers of too much investigation and knowledge is frequently stressed. It is there in Dante's judgement of Ulysses, and has clear expression in the story of Faust.

Petrarch's treatment of these ideas is often sportive, as I said, showing a certain pleasant exuberance, that runs, like a surprising thread of light, through all the mixed, conflicting and usually anguished, emotions. But for all that, the ideas expressed are significant. In all these examples, it is the power of words, both to convey invented images, and to convey images of reality, and also to reawaken long-dead people, that is stressed. All are bound up with the use of the metamorphic myth, especially in imitation - which is a continuation of a tradition, but at the same time adds something new.[54] This is the rationale behind the changes and invasions of persons that occurs in the *Rime Sparse*, Petrarch becoming Laura, becoming Apollo, Apollo becoming Petrarch. This is the sorcery against which he defends himself. Imitation *is* metamorphosis - the metamorphosis of the poet into

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[53] T. S. Eliot, *Dante* (London: Faber and Faber 1929, 1965), p.15.

[54] Bishop, p.183. See Chapter One, III.iv (above), for full quotation.

his work, the metamorphosis of the poet into other poets, an alchemical fusion catalysed by language which engineers the transfer of mind to work, and then effects the second metamorphosis, the metamorphosis of poet into poet. Petrarch becomes Ovid, Ovid becomes Petrarch, so Ovid lives on, as Petrarch, overcoming change by change. This is the immortality that Petrarch finally discovers, through imitation, which not only preserves and maintains traditional modes of art, but also keeps them alive, by constantly adapting them to the present, both in style and content. It becomes a complex tissue of reference and new information, ensuring a dynamic and ever more closely woven fabric of connection with the past, and, by implication, with the future. The laurel, unchanging with the seasons, is yet emphatically a part of the growing, earthly world in which Petrarch finds himself, however unwillingly, and with which he must come to terms - in other words, he must transcend time within time, not outside it. The poets live by transposing a vital portion of themselves into the living stream of literature, which will be later joined by other souls, who will themselves provide a new incarnation for the writers, and achieve incarnated immortality in it. 'Acque fugiunt, flumen manet': he has finally found a way of confronting the river, and making sure the waves are properly replaced.

CHAPTER 3

'*ARIOSTO* DOTH IT': ENGLISH IMITATION AND INVENTION IN THE LATE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

I heard a noise and wished for a sight,
I looked for life and did a shadow see
Whose substance was the sum of my delight,
Which came unseen, and so did go from me.
Yet hath conceit persuaded my content
There was a substance where the shadow went.

I did not play Narcissus in conceit,
I did not see my shadow in a spring:
I know mine eyes were dimmed with no deceit,
I saw the shadow of some worthy thing:
For, as I saw the shadow glancing by,
I had a glimpse of something in mine eye.

But what it was, alas, I cannot tell,
Because of it I had no perfect view:
But as it was, by guess, I wish it well
And will until I see the same anew.
Shadow, or she, or both, or choose you whither:
Blest be the thing that brought the shadow hither!

- Anon, c.1597

On a huge hill,
Cragged, and steep, Truth stands, and he that will
Reach her, about must, and about must go [..].

- Donne, Satire III

Duke. We have strict statutes and most biting laws,
The needful bits and curbs to headstrong weeds,
Which for these fourteen years we have let slip [...]

- Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the preceding chapters, Petrarch has been shown to foreground problems concerning the search for permanence. The desire for temporal immortality clashes in his poetry and prose writings, with a consciousness of the unreliability of memory, of language, and of altering and differing perceptions of a posited core truth. As a result, he is anxious to preserve an image of the poet, a composite poet that is manifested anew in individual incarnation, as Ovid, perhaps, or as Petrarch himself.

For Petrarch the Christian belief in a stable heaven contrasts with earthly change, and he is, to an extent, engaged with reconciling the two. Through purifying and eternalising an Italian poetic style he attempts to combat cultural drift, and through his self-presentation he attempts to create a persona that will be crystallised with that style for all posterity. The paradoxes of such attempts are best viewed through Petrarch's engagement with *imitatio*, which, while avowing an allegiance to past tradition, also emphasises new development and focuses on contemporaneity. The images he uses for these concerns are aptly drawn from Ovidian myths of metamorphosis. In using these, he not only carries out the scheme of renewal, but also uses the images to illustrate the problems. In particular, the elusive and changing but ever-present Laura/l'aura encapsulates the variable and effortful nature of the enterprise.

Stephen Greenblatt has written of the 'conduct manuals' produced in the first half of the sixteenth century, which, he says, '[suggest] the great "unmooring" that men were experiencing, their sense that fixed positions had somehow become unstuck, their anxious awareness that the moral landscape was shifting.'[1] In the late Sixteenth Century in England, a number of writers negotiate questions of certainty and instability in ways which echo Petrarchan concerns, but are renewed in the following contexts: the creation of a literary tradition and the generation of a canon; the reputation of poetry; the rise of the vernacular as a serious literary language. Sir Philip Sidney is interested in advertising the role and nature of the poet; George Puttenham in defining the characteristics and requirements of English

[1] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 1988), pp. 87-88.

poetry; Richard Carew in asserting the particular virtues of the English tongue; and Francis Meres in listing England's great poets.

The poetic theorists included in Gregory Smith's anthology offer a diverse range of views, with unifying strands.[2] George Puttenham came from the Elyot family, and began his career in the 1540s in Cambridge. His writing is characterised by an earnest, thorough tone. He wrote *Parthenides, A Justification of Queen Elizabeth in Relacion to the Affaire of Mary Queen of Scottes*, and, loyal to the Queen, was also antagonistic towards Puritans, coming into conflict with two Reforming Bishops.[3] His definitive work, *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589) will be discussed below. Gabriel Harvey's contributions to Smith's collection - the *Foure Letters* (1592), *Pierce's Superogation* (1593), and *A New Letter of Notable Contents* (1593) give a flavour of the learned Ciceronian rhetorician and scholar that he was, and also provide evidence of his conflicts with Thomas Nashe.[4] Nashe, his opponent in pamphlet wars, is notable for his clever, colourful, flowery style, much adorned and allusive, sprinkled with personal insults. His earlier influence by *Euphues* can be seen even in his later satirical refutation of the Euphuistic style. He was a friend of Harvey's sworn foe Greene, was involved in the trouble over the lost play *The Isle of Dogs*, and also came into conflict with the ecclesiastical authorities - Archbishop Whitgift and Bishop Bancroft vetoed the Nashe/Harvey pamphlets in their censorship of satires, epigrams and plays in 1599. Nashe is often coupled with Greene, Kyd and Marlowe, the 'University Wits'.[5] His work in Smith's collection is the *Preface* to Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* (1591), and *The Foure Letters Refuted.* Sir John Harington, the 'merry poet' of both Queen Elizabeth's and James I's courts, writer of elegantly scurrilous verse and translator of Ariosto, appears in Smith in his

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[2] G. Gregory Smith (ed), *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, vols. I and II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1904). All Elizabethan theorists discussed below are included in this edition, and, with the exception of Sidney, this is the source I have used. For Sidney's theoretical treatise, I have in the main consulted Geoffrey Shepherd's edition, loc. cit. All further references to Smith and Sidney will be in parentheses within the text.

[3] George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, edited by Gladys Dodge Willcock and Alice Walker, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1936, 1970), Introduction.

[4] Gabriel Harvey, *Gabriel Harvey's* Ciceronianus, with an English translation by Clarence A. Forbes, edited by Harold S. Wilson (London: University of Nebraska Press 1945); Introduction; and Virginia F. Stern, *Gabriel Harvey, his Life, Marginalia and Library* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1979).

[5] Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller*, edited with an essay on the life and writings of Nashe, by Edmund Gosse (London: Chiswick Press 1892), Introduction; and Thomas Nashe, *Pierce Penniless his Supplication, Summer's Last Will and Testament, The Terrors of the Night, The Unfortunate Traveller*, edited by Stanley Wells (London: Edward Arnold 1964), Introduction.

A Preface, or rather a Briefe Apologie of Poetrie (1591).[6] Samuel Daniel, perhaps the one of these theorists best known as a poet, is interested in definitions of rhyme and the dignity of poetry (particularly in his *Defence of Rhyme*, 1604), and was extremely prolific. His knowledge of and connections with Italy are known, as are his connections with the Pembroke household and his friendship with Fulke Greville and his Calvinist sympathies.[7] Thomas Campion, also known as a lyrical poet and musician, wrote *Observations on the Art of English Poesie* (1602). He is interested in the sounds and shapes of poetry, and was a follower of Sidney.[8] Other theorists examined below include Richard Carew (*The Excellency of the English Tongue* 1575-6), William Webbe (*A Discourse of English Poesie* 1586), and Francis Meres (*Palladis Tamia* 1598).

The complexities and changes in the air at the time these critics wrote are reflected in the particular biases, loyalties, and polemics in which they sometimes conflict, and sometimes concur. All, however, are concerned with definitions - often of subjects that defy easy categorisation. The metamorphoses of language and faith that were occurring throughout this period meant that both had to be determined with artifice and deliberation: '[a]t the heart of sixteenth century culture lies the belief that words can - or should - reveal the Word. The violence with which Renaissance polemicists used words - as weapons - testifies to an often fanatical desire to promulgate their version of God's plan.'[9] Imitation and metamorphosis, so central to Petrarch's work, here appear afresh. Writers, while wishing to branch out and create a distinctively English style, still do so under the aegis of the classics and of preceding continental writers. Similar efforts were being made in other European nations, for example in France. A recurring emphasis is on individual national consciousness, but this in itself is

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[6] Virgil, *The Sixth Book of Virgil's Aeneid*, translated and commented on by Sir John Harington (1604), edited by Simon Cauchi (Oxford:Clarendon Press 1991), Introduction.

[7] Joan Rees, *Samuel Daniel: A Critical and Biographical Study* (Liverpool: University Press 1964).

[8] Walter R. Davis, *The Works of Thomas Campion* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1967), Introduction; and Edward Lowbury, Timothy Salter and Alison Young (eds), *Thomas Campion, Poet, Composer, Physician* (London: Chatto & Windus 1970).

[9] Lawrence S. Friedman, 'Words into power: Renaissance expression and Thomas Campion', *English Studies,* vol.69 (1988), pp.130-45; p.132. This is part of Friedman's thesis about the power words were seen to have: he compares Petrarch and Tyndale with Sidney in their 'obsession with words and their effects' (p.134): '[t]he ghosts of Petrarch and Tyndale meet in Sidney's great synthesis - and a theory of art becomes a theory of culture' (p.135).

part of a broader cultural phenomenon throughout Europe at this time.[10]

Sidney, in what has often been recognised as a self-conscious display of rhetorical finesse, *The Apology for Poetry,*[11] simultaneously demonstrates and analyses the capacity and role of the poet, specifically the English poet. He relates it closely to a Neoplatonic model, and draws on ideas of inspiration, originality and (less overtly) *imitatio* and mimesis. He takes up moral, religious, Platonic concerns. Inevitably, for an issue to attain consequence, it is elevated to encompass the dominant ideology, as Cicero recognises when recommending ways to capture an audience's attention.[12] Sidney's response to posited Puritan condemnation of poetry is to create a sort of poetic theology, with the poet as magus or priest, purveying arcane knowledge to the populace. These questions become closely involved with ideas of the nature of divinity, especially in relation to the idea of the poet as maker.[13] The first section of this chapter consist principally of an examination of Sidney's essay, contextualised in a historical perspective, and embedded in the writings of his contemporaries.

The second section will examine English nationalism in literary endeavour, the advertisement of the vernacular as a legitimate literary vehicle and the search for a refined and legislated standard English, touching on the written attempts to reflect these aims in a stronger literary front. Again I shall look at imitation, this time in relation to nationalism, and the debate about whether or not authoritative texts are to be imitated. In examining the campaign to create an English literary language and an English poetic style, it is illuminating to consider briefly the contemporary debates on Biblical translation and canonicity. Then I shall examine the exclusivity that results from all this, and from the creation of the 'Courtly Poet' (Puttenham; Smith II, p.164). The two major points will be as follows: the uncertainties

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[10] J. Du Bellay, *La Défense et illustracion de la langue française* (Paris: Nelson Éditeurs 1936). George Hugo Tucker discusses Du Bellay's thesis in *The Poet's Odyssey: Joachim Du Bellay and the* Antiquitez de Rome (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1990), especially pp.8-21.

[11] For example, by Friedman, loc. cit.; Weiner, 'Moving and teaching: Sidney's *Defence of Poesie* as a Protestant Polemic', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, vol. 2:2 (1972), pp.259-278; p.266; Sidney, pp.11 ff..

[12] Cicero, *De Inventione* (1949), with an English translation by H. M. Hubell (London: William Heinemann Ltd.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1949), I.xvii.

[13] Jane Donaworth examines this question of the divinity of the poet, and concludes that it was more wish than belief: 'If the poet longs at times for an innate power in language, its absence is yet a fortunate one, because it requires him to be a maker: his language grows powerful as he invests it with harmony, knowledge, and imagination. It is through these means that the poet moves his audience with a force that seems divine.' Jane Donaworth, *Shakespeare and the Sixteenth-Century Study of Language* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press 1984), p.46.

about language, reflected in the passionate attempts to create something coherent and precise out of chaos; and the connected campaign to generate a canon of English literature.

The engagement with language centres on the Renaissance (mis)conception of words and meaning as separable. This separation is to be seen again in Renaissance ideas of the use of stories; a story allegorically clothes a sub-textual significance, just as words themselves clothe meaning. Debates centring around these questions borrow weight and significance from the Catholic and Protestant debates on plain writing and the interpretation of Biblical stories.[14] This chapter will consider these questions as a preliminary to the final chapter of the thesis, which looks at the way stories can be read in Shakespeare as changeable commodities, emphasising their elusiveness in the grip of changeable language.

II. 'THE SUNNE IN A BASON OF WATER': THE FUNCTION OF POETRY

i. Judgement and Jewels

Sidney, in laying out the *inventio* of his defence, encapsulates the widespread and traditional nature of the objections which poets since Plato had been answering, and with which they still concerned themselves in Sidney's day:

> Now then go we to the most important imputations laid to the poor poets. [...] First [...] a man might better spend his time than in this. Secondly, that [poetry] is the mother of lies. Thirdly, that it is the nurse of abuse, infecting us with many pestilent desires, with a siren's sweetness drawing the mind to the serpent's tale of sinful fancy [...] And lastly, and chiefly, they cry out with an open mouth as if they outshot Robin Hood, that Plato banished them out of his commonwealth. Truly, this is much, if there be much truth in it (p.123).

In this reference to Robin Hood, we may note, Sidney is subtly allying the so-called 'enemies of poetry' with the unpolished popular material to which they object. Lord Morley,

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[14] For a lucid discussion of this subject, see Gerald Hammond, *The Making of the English Bible* (Manchester: Carcanet New Press 1982), Chapter 6.

Petrarch's translator, differentiates between good and bad poetry in just such terms: the mob, he says, cannot appreciate refined poetry, 'desyringe rather to have a tale of Robyn Hoode or some other dongehill matter.'[15] He refers of course to Aesop's fable about the cockerel who turns up a jewel in a dunghill and fails to recognise its value. Thomas Nashe is no doubt thinking of just such jewels and dunghills when he talks of his *Anatomy of Arte* as a work of surgery formulated to purge the 'diseases of art' (Smith II, p.230), and William Vaughan echoes 'I conclude that many of our English rimers and ballet-makers deserue for their bawdy sonnets and amourous allurements to bee banished, or seuerely punished: and that Poetrie it selfe ought to bee honoured and made much of, as a precious Iewell and a diuine gift.' (Smith II, p.326). It is the desire to get at this divine jewel-like aspect of poetry that generates the attempts to define and regulate its rules, and thus to be rid of the features that have so discredited the art. Poetry is in such a diseased state that it lays itself open to attack. Harington quotes the apparently habitually quarrelsome Cornelius Agrippa, who, he says, sees poetry as 'a nurse of lies, a pleaser of fooles, a breeder of dangerous errors, and an enticer to wantonnes' (Smith II, p.199).

Whatever the case, there are enough objections here, it seems, to justify a spate of defences; writers argue in order to come to magnificent conclusions like this: '[i]t cannot bee therefore that anie scorne or indignitie should iustly be offered to so noble, profitable, ancient, and diuine a science as Poesie is,' (Puttenham; Smith II, p.10) with poets 'as creating gods' (Puttenham; Smith II, p.4); Sidney too makes this claim (for example, pp. 98, 99, 120). The four points that Sidney lays down are frequently taken up by other defenders of the poetic faith; Harington, for example, writes

> *Plato* [...] found indeed iust fault with the abuses of some comicall Poets of his time [...] yet you see he kept still that principall part of Poetrie, which is fiction and imitation; and as for the other part of Poetrie which is verse, though he vsed it not, yet his master *Socrates* euen in his old age wrote certaine verses, as *Plutarke* testifieth (Smith II, p.204).

The issue for debate is then what definitions of poets and poetry are made, and how their focal position in learning and knowledge is argued. Andrew Weiner identifies these attempts thus:

Although it is customary to speak of Sidney's *Defence of Poesie* as a response

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[15] Petrarch, *Tryumphes of Fraunces Petrarcke,* translated by Henry, Lord Morley the first English Translation of the *Trionfi* (composition probably 1546, printed between 1553 and 1556), edited by D. D.Carnicelli (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), p.77.

> to the attacks of Puritans, like Stephen Gosson, or Platonists, or even Plato himself, we do not often consider why there is a need for a defence against their charges. [...] even Calvin was willing to admit that "heathen poets [...] acknowledge that philosophy and laws, and all useful arts, were the inventions of the gods" and that since "the Spirit of God is the only fountain of truth, we will be careful, as we would avoid offering insult to him, not to reject or contemn truth wherever it appears" (*Institutiones*, II, ii, 15). [...] Rather than replying to individual attacks on individual abuses, Sidney, I suggest, is concerned with correcting what he considers inadequate conceptions of the nature and function of poetry held not only by her attackers but also by her defenders and indeed even by her practitioners. [...] At the root of Gascoigne's difficulties is the damage done by the Protestant Reformation to medieval and humanist justifications of poetry [...].[16]

One question which undoubtedly arises here is - what is poetry? It is clear that poetry is not just a question of metre and imagery - although that too is part of it - because, as we shall see, metre and imagery, to a certain extent, come under fire in examples of bad poetry; but as Sidney writes:

> [...] the greatest part of poets have apparelled their poetical inventions in that numbrous kind of writing which is called verse - indeed but apparelled, verse being but an ornament and no cause to Poetry, sith there have been many most excellent poets that never versified, and now swarm many versifiers that need never answer to the name of poets [...] it is not rhyming and versing that maketh a poet, no more than a long gown maketh an advocate who though he pleaded in armour should be an advocate and no soldier. But it is that feigning notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a poet by [...] (p.103).

There is clearly a perceived distinction here between form and content. Verse is a delight and an aid to memory, but 'it is not rhyming and versing that maketh poesy. One may be a poet without versing, and a versifier without poetry' (p.121).

So there is an attempt to differentiate between types of poetry. Which sort would Plato banish? What would he keep? To determine this a particular faculty must be exercised - that of judgement. Puttenham is sure it exists, although he is not very clear about what it is; he takes for granted that there *must* be one absolute 'iudgement'. It is a faculty of 'the discerning part of the mind', which he calls 'decency' but does not, however, define further, since, he says (with some truth) 'peraduenture it be easier to conceaue then to espresse' (Smith II, p.173, 175). There is therefore a sense that, for all the analysis and rule-making,

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[16] Weiner loc. cit., pp. 259-260.

there is still a mysterious, personal element to the writing of poetry. This 'iudgement' is at the heart of the tension between the desire to have clear knowledge and the uneasy apprehension that the questions that are being addressed do not offer enough concrete material to allow for definite conclusions. A certain frustration is evident, for example in Samuel Daniel's response to all attempts to define or explain poetic language; he also objects that swapping one form of language for another is not going to change matters:

> Suffer then the world to inioy whatsoeuer force of words doth mooue, delight, and sway the affections of men, in what Scythian sorte soeuer it be disposed or vttered, that is true number, measure, eloquence, and the perfection of speach: which I said hath as many shapes as there be tongues or nations in the world, nor can with all the tyrannicall Rules of idle Rhetorique be gouerned otherwise then custome and present obseruation will allow. And being now the trym and fashion of the times, to sute a man otherwise cannot but giue a touch of singularity; for when hee hath all done, hee hath but found other clothes to the same body, and peraduenture not so fitting as the former. But could our Aduersary hereby set vp the musicke of our times to a higher note of iudgement and discretion, or could these new lawes of words better our imperfections, it were a happy attempt; but when hereby we shall but as it were change prison, and put off these fetters to receiue others, what haue we gained? (Smith II, p.363).[17]

Samuel Daniel's sense of creative joy is implicitly present in others that particularly delight in words, such as Sidney and Nashe, but the moral function of poetry is a greater preoccupation. It is with 'that feigning notable images' and 'that delightful teaching' that this section will be concerned. In order to justify its rescue from a Platonic banishment, true poetry must be extracted from the 'swarm' of 'versefiers that need never answer to the name of poets'; and must be shown to be of moral and aesthetic benefit.

ii. 'A maker and a counterfaitor'

The poetic judgement, 'easier to conceaue then to espresse', is an issue implicitly addressed in both Sidney's and Puttenham's attempts to define the nature of poetic inspiration. The

[17] Daniel and Puttenham are interesting put side by side on the subject of rhyme, and the debate for and against it.

poet, working within a literary inheritance and an imitation of styles, is also seen to have that quality of vision and creativity which is somewhere outside the literary sphere. It is connected to the poet's function, in Sidney's words, 'to teach and delight'. This role is earned through the poet's privileged, other-worldly vision (often underlined in the image of the blind poet). The poet's vision and judgement is seen in terms that come close to the notions of inventiveness, and originality. In this it is a new departure, moving away from the commitment to imitatio and mimesis that traditionally informed poetic theory.

In this connection, it is useful to consider the ways in which the word 'invention' was understood in this period. Sir Thomas Wilson uses *'inventio'* to mean 'finding out of apt matter' in *The Arte of Rhetoric* (1553).[18] According to the OED, 'invention' was used in the sixteenth century to mean 'new fashion'; to mean 'inventing and discovery'; 'solution of problems'; 'finding or selecting of topics to be treated', or 'arguments to be used', as a 'literary composition, produced by exercise of the imagination' (Caxton 1484, Nashe 1593, Shakespeare 1601); as 'a figment or fictitious statement'; 'a new institution formally introduced'; 'a method of doing something introduced by ingenuity of some person'; 'original contrivance or device' (of, for example, drawbridges). Ascham uses it to mean 'originality in contriving or invention'. In the sense of '[t]he action of devising, contriving, or making up; contrivance, fabrication,' the first use is 1526, '[t]hese thynges, whyche be not of myne inuencion, but with great labour gathered ' (clearly, this use is still derogatory). It is used of dice-playing (invented by Lucifer, according to Elyot, *The Gouernour*, 1531), tobacco, printing, gunpowder etc. As '[t]he faculty of inventing or devising; power of mental creation; inventiveness' it is used first by Henryson in 1480. Not until 1638 is it used to mean literary invention. In all these uses inventiveness, in the sense of original creation, and as something that was possible and indeed desirable, was slowly growing.

Inventiveness as an issue is to be seen in Puttenham's understanding of the origins of the word 'poet' and the significance of those origins:

> A poet is as much to say as a maker. And our English name well conformes with the Greeke word, for of ποιεῖν, to make, they call a maker *Poeta.* Such as (by way of resemblance and reuerently) we may say of God; who without any trauell to his diuine imagination made all the world of nought, nor also by any paterne or mould, as the Platonicks with the Idees do phantastically suppose. Euen so the very Poet makes and contriues out of his owne braine both the verse and matter

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[18] George H. McKnight, *The Evolution of the English Language* (New York: Dover Publications Inc. 1968), p.129.

> of his poeme, and not by any foreine copie or example, as doth the translator, who therefore may well be sayd a versifier, but not a Poet. The premises considered, it giueth to the name and profession no smal dignitie and preheminence, aboue all other artificers, Scientificke or Mechanicall. And neuerthelesse, without any repugnancie at all, a Poet may in some sort be said a follower or imitator, because he can expresse the true and liuely of euery thing is set before him, and which he taketh in hand to describe: and so in that respect is both a maker and a counterfaitor: and Poesie an art not only of making, but also of imitation (Puttenham; Smith II, p.3).

In this passage are present various ideas relevant to my argument: firstly, the notions surrounding invention and imitation; that 'the Poet makes and contriues out of his owne brain'; that the translator is 'not a poet'; and the seemingly paradoxical juxtaposition of making and imitating. The paradox is resolved in the reference to God who 'made all this world of nought' - the poet cannot do this, since he is made in God's image, and therefore always and unavoidably in imitation. But what is also interesting in this passage is the emphasis on personal production, instead of on the wisdom of past texts. Boccaccio talked about the 'divine fervour' and Petrarch was interested in the capacity of the mind to create. Puttenham is also interested in the brain:

> For as the euill and vicious disposition of the braine hinders the sounde iudgement and discourse of man with busie & disordered phantasies, for which cause the Greekes call him φαντασότικος, so is that part, being well affected, not onely nothing disorderly or confused with any monstruous imaginations or conceits, but very formall, and in his much multiformitie *uniforme*, that is well proportioned, and so passing cleare, that by it, as by a glasse or mirrour, are represented vnto the soule all maner of bewtifull visions, whereby the inuentiue parte of the mynde is so much holpen as without it no man could deuise any new or rare thing. [...] There be againe of these glasses that shew thinges exceeding faire and comely; others that shew figures very monstruous and ill-fauored. Euen so is the phantasticall part of man (if it be not disordered) a representer of the best, most comely and bewtifull images or appearances of thinges to the soule and according to their very truth [...] (Smith II, p.19-20).

Here Puttenham seems to have transferred all the arguments about good and bad poetry into a focal centre, the brain, where it is all generated, and sees the productive mind itself as having the potential for good or ill; this he identifies as 'the inuentiue parte of the minde'.

The image of the mirror which Puttenham uses was frequently used in the field of theology to illustrate the instructive value of the 'books' of God, the signs or messages which are, in

brief, the lessons of the scriptures, the lessons of history, and the lessons of nature. The mirror of poetry parallels the mirrors of creation; there is a similar medieval tradition of seeing this as a book that hints at divinity, the Pauline-Augustinian tradition; Grosseteste calls it *vestigia*, a faint imprint of God in all His creation.[19]

This idea that the poet 'reads' the earth and intuits the divine from it (Michelangelo's view: see Chapter One, II.iii), is differentiable from the idea that the poet is in touch with divine knowledge not available to others. Sidney therefore holds that David's Psalms are 'a heavenly poesy, wherein almost he showeth himself a passionate lover of that unspeakable and everlasting beauty to be seen by the mind, only cleared by faith' (p.99). This last aspect is epitomised in the recurring motif of the blind poet. It means, for example, that Homer, an old and blind man, can write of distant things vividly (Puttenham; Smith II, p.4). Edgar Wind has written about Pico della Mirandola and the concept of 'love', as a faculty behind and above the intellect, with the accompanying impression that rationality is inferior to feeling. He sees Pico as linking the Epistles of St Paul and the Neoplatonic and Orphic visions of spiritual beauty, the 'mystery of joy beyond understanding', which is underlined in the visionary by corporeal blindness (for example in Tiresias, Homer and St Paul).[20] This notion underlines the sense of an intuitive access to knowledge in the poet/prophet, which Puttenham picks up. Physical blindness is a powerful argument against those who object to 'poetry' as being too much of the earth; the blind poet is oblivious to the distractions and clutter of the mundane. Shakespeare experiments with this concept in *King Lear*, where blind Gloucester 'falls over' an imaginary cliff evoked in words by Edgar. Here the recipient of the words of the poet (represented by Edgar) is blind, rather than the poet, but it is the same idea in reverse; again, Gloucester is not distracted by the crowding images of the external (secondary) reality, and thus images are allowed their full force (*Lear*, IV.iv).[21]

The image of blindness is also used to depict the access to Godly truth even in the 'blindness' of a pre-Christian era, Donne's 'first blinded age' (Satire III, l. 7, ll.12-13), through man's innate faculty, put there by God; and even Sir Thomas More considers that

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[19] A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott, *Medieval Critical Theory and Criticism c1100-c.1375* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1988), pp.169-70, 172.

[20] Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1980), pp54-58.

[21] Jan Kott writes on this scene and the power of the imagination in relation to mime. 'King Lear or Endgame' (1964) in *Shakespeare, King Lear* (Casebook Series) edited by Frank Kermode (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan 1969), pp.270-292.

any society, even unenlightened by Christianity, would come to right conduct through the scrupulous exercise of reason.[22] This is in contrast to the medieval idea that although the pagans thought reason was the highest possible 'cognitive power', there is another beyond that of knowing God, which is beyond expression,[23] Sidney's 'inconceivable excellencies of God' (p.102).

But the words 'love', 'reason' and 'intellect' are capable of various interpretations; I would suggest that a thesis such as Puttenham's focuses in his idea of the activity of the brain, which may be described as 'imagination' - part 'reason' and part 'fervour'.[24] Sidney too talks about this mix of effort and inspiration, which must speak to the 'imaginative and judging power' (p.107): 'a Poet no industrie can make, if his owne genius bee not carried unto it; and therefore is it an old Proverbe, *Oratur fit, Poeta nascitur*'(p.132), but he admits the need for a certain 'marshalling' as well (p.133).

So the creative genius includes artifice, although Puttenham writes with some energy about the idea of art as natural, and draws the line at 'schollerly affectation; which thing is very irkesome to all men of good trayning, and specially to Courtiers.' (Smith II, p.187). He compares the poet to the physician and the gardener. All three have to employ artifice to improve on nature. It would therefore seem that art is conscious but single-minded and imbued with fervour, not simply a studied attempt to look informed or eloquent. He continues to show that the poet differs from the craftsmanlike painter, in that he does not simply imitate nature, but is revealing his own nature, or prowess, by producing poetry (Smith II, p.188-92). Dante would say, perhaps, that the poet has something of the character of angels, in the desire to communicate vision; his picture of the angels is an image of the ideal state of communication, which is imperfect in man's experience, since he has to operate through the impediment of speech: '[...] since angels have a most immediate and ineffable capacity of the intellect for the purpose of setting forthe their glorious thoughts, by means of which each one makes himself known to the others either within himself, or in that most brilliant mirror in which all things are most beautifully reflected and most eagerly

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[22] Thomas More, *Utopia*, edited by George M. Logan and Robert M. Adams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989).

[23] Minnis and Scott , loc. cit., p. 125.

[24] Mary J. Curruthers discusses the medieval concept of memory, which combines knowledge with memory as we understand it, resulting in 'what we call "ideas" and what they were more likely to call "judgements".' *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990), p.1.

contemplated, they would seem not to require any outward sign in speech'.[25] Puttenham writes about the capacity of the mind in itself, not simply as a vessel or mouthpiece, but as an autonomous entity:

> There is nothing in man of all potential parts of his mind (reason and will except) more noble or more necessary to the actiue life than memory; because it maketh most to a sound iudgement and perfect worldly wisedome, examining and comparing the times past with the present, and, by them both considering the time to come, concludeth with a stedfast resolution what is the best course to be taken in all his actions and aduices in this world. It came, vpon this reason, experience to be so highly commended in all consultations of importance, and preferred before any learning or science, and yet experience is no more than a masse of memories assembled, that is, such trials as man hath made in time before (Smith II, p.40-41).

The idea of the 'masse of memories assembled' recalls the Augustinian mind that I suggested was developed by Petrarch in his poetry.

The imitative part, then, is differentiated from what can be seen or read, and becomes a kind of inwardness, Sidney's 'an inward touch'(*A&S*, 15.10), and, although Puttenham rejects for God the 'ideas' that 'the Platonicks do phantastically suppose'(p.3), clearly these are there for the poet. The tension between ideas of imitation and invention can be seen in Sidney's conception of imitation, which he begins by describing in explicitly Aristotelian terms. 'Poesy therefore is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in his word *mimesis*, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting or figuring forth - to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture - with this end, to teach and delight' (p.101). Then he describes three forms of mimesis, the first being imitation of 'the inconceivable excellencies of God', and quotes Biblical examples, adding '[i]n this kind, though in a full wrong divinity, were Orpheus, Amphion, Homer in his Hymns, and many other, both Greeks and Romans'(p.102); the second kind are philosophers (moral, natural, astronomical or historical):

> But because this second sort is wrapped within the fold of the proposed subject, and takes not the course of his own invention, whether they properly be poets or no let grammarians dispute, and go to the third, indeed right poets, of whom chiefly this question arises. Betwixt whom and these second is such a kind of difference as betwixt the meaner sort of painters, who counterfeit only such faces as are set before them, and the more excellent, who having no law but wit, bestow that in colours upon you which is fittest for the eye to see: as the constant though lamenting look of Lucretia, when she punished in herself another's fault; wherein he painteth not Lucretia whom he never saw, but painteth the outward

[25] 'De volgare', loc cit., I.ii.3.

beauty of such a virtue. For these third be they which properly do imitate to teach and delight, and to imitate borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be; but range, only reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be and should be. These be they that, as the first and most noble sort may justly be termed *vates*, so these are waited on in the excellentest languages and best understandings, with the foredescribed name of poets; for these indeed do merely make to imitate, and imitate both to delight and teach; and delight to move men to take that goodness in hand, which without delight they would fly as from a stranger, and teach, to make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved [...] (pp.102-103).

Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, maintains that poetry is imitative, that is, that representations of men are imitative of men, in three ways: either 'better' than they are, or 'worse' or 'the same as they are'.[26] Sidney is improving on this theory. From this paragraph we learn that invention is considered superior to imitation, in that the outward appearance reflects or *properly should reflect* the inner personality, the fairy tale 'as good as she was beautiful' syndrome. Hence writing the story of Lucretia is not simply an attempt to write an autobiographical account of Lucretia, but is used as an exemplary fable; the story becomes a tool in the service of morals or aesthetics, or both together (as would seem to be the point). This is reflected in what Sidney has to say when comparing the philosopher with the historian: the philosopher is too obscure (p.106) and abstract; the historian limited by what is, 'the particular truth of things and not to the general reason of things [...] Now doth the peerless poet perform both: for whatsoever the philosopher saith should be done, he giveth a perfect picture of it in some one by whom he presupposes it was done, so as he coupleth the general notion with the particular example' (p.107). The poet achieves this Olympian clarity of view by affecting a disjunction from the poet-historian that he used to be. After Sidney the poet and the historian are irretrievably parted,[27] but without any loss to the poet. Before, the historical burden or responsibility added to the poet's stature, as with Dante and Petrarch and their divine frames of reference, and Virgil's and Ovid's. But he is not simply a moralist: '[...] the philosopher

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[26] Aristotle, Longinus, Demetrius, *Aristotle, The Poetics, Longinus, The Sublime, Demetrius, On Style*, translated by A. Hamilton Fyfe and W. Rhys Roberts (London: Heinemann 1927), pp. 9-10. Note p. 37, on poetry not being merely verses but an account of what might happen; and p.35 sounding very like Sidney on historians.

[27] '[F]rom 1586 to 1594, they actually saw something they had not seen before: they saw history subjected to method; they saw history and poetry unravelled, the worlds of fact and fable divided, commented upon, and given styles and importance proper to themselves. [...] both *The Faerie Queene* and the *Britannia* [might be] responses to Sidney's *Defence* [...].' Wyman H. Herendeen, 'Wanton discourse and the engines of time: William Camden - historian among poets-historical',in *Renaissance Rereadings*, edited by Maryanne Cline Horowitz, Anne J. Cruz and Wendy Ann Furman (Urbana: University of Illinois Press 1988), pp.142-156; p.152.

with his learned definition - be it of virtue, vices, matters of public policy or private government - replenisheth the memory with many infallible grounds of wisdom, which, notwithstanding, lie dark before the imaginative and judging power, if they be not illuminated or figured forth by the speaking picture of poesy' (p.107).

This 'speaking picture' is generated by a 'purifying of wit, enriching of memory, enabling of judgement, and enlarging of conceit, which commonly we call learning, under what name soever it come forth, or to what immediate end soever it be directed, the final end is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of.' (p.104) There are various attempts to reach this perfection, astronomy, music, maths: '[b]ut all, one and other, having this scope - to know, and by knowledge lift up the mind from the dungeon of the body to the enjoying his own divine essence.' (p.104)

Sidney sees man and Nature as both engaged in a secondary creation, after their creation by God, man being

> set beyond and over all the works of that second nature: which in nothing he showeth so much as in Poetry, when with the force of a divine breath he bringeth things forth far surpassing her doings, with no small argument to the incredulous of that first accursed fall of Adam: since our erected wit maketh us to know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it (p.101).

Andrew Weiner has argued that therefore the Sidneian poet is in touch directly with the truth, with the Neoplatonic Ideal truth, appearing to most of us in uncertain shadows but available to the poet in more certainty, through the imagination. He overrides all timid attempts to justify poetry by underlining its servitude to truth.[28] So Sidney's poet, like Dante, travels beyond the spheres, to transcendent vision (*VN*, XLI).

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[28] Andrew D. Weiner, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Poetics of Protestantism* (Mineapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1978), p.29.

iii. Sweet Stars and Clayey Lodgings

The Neoplatonic glimpse of beauty, then, is a glimpse of truth.[29] But what is truth? It must be recognised that the idea was current of a 'fixed truth' difficult to conceive of in our post-Darwinian age.[30] It is precisely an evolutionary view of things of which the theorists of the late sixteenth century were afraid (as were some of Darwin's contemporaries). That evolving world is the 'brazen' world Sidney dismisses as 'secondary', while he sees the poet - that is, man at his best - as being able to ' by knowledge lift up the mind from the dungeon of the body to the enjoying his own divine essence' (p.104) - as superior, capable of the 'golden' creation (pp.99-100). It is an idea so deep-rooted as to be unquestioned and unexamined that somewhere there is an ideal state of permanent perfection; this is expressed either in God's creation before the Fall or in Plato's ideals - or both. Milton later visualises the loss of this prelapsarian state most vividly and succinctly in *Paradise Lost*:

> So saying, her rash hand in evil hour
> Forth reaching to the fruit, she plucked, she ate:
> Earth felt the wound, and nature from her seat
> Sighing through all her works gave signs of woe,
> That all was lost. [...]
> From his [Adam's] slack hand the garland wreathed for Eve
> Down dropped, and all the faded roses shed [...][31]

The corruption of a fallen world was seen to be something that must be struggled against, for example in poetry, or in language, since man's Godly part is seen to consist precisely of 'iudgement' - unlike animals, for example, or uneducated people, who do not care what is carelessly engendered in an endless straying from the truth.[32] The 'infected will' is an idea deriving from Calvin, prevalent amongst writers on all subjects, for example Greville, who

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[29] Erasmus too connected truth and beauty, allying both with goodness. See Manfred Hoffman, 'Erasmus on language and interpretation', *Moreana*, vol.28 (1991), pp.1-20; p.3.

[30] George Steiner uses the Darwinian model in a number of ways to illustrate his debate on translation. Steiner, loc. cit., pp.xiii-xv.

[31] Milton, loc. cit., IX.780-84, 892-93.

[32] This is an idea widely held: Cicero, loc. cit.; Dante, 'De volgare', loc.cit., I.2-3; Erasmus (see Hoffman, loc.cit, p.1); Puttenham (Smith II, pp.6-11).

talks about the 'staining' of affection and will,[33] and is understood as man's degeneration after the Fall. Calvin writes of the 'instinctive seed' of godliness in man and how it can easily become 'so corrupted that by itself it produces only the worst fruits,' the branch of sin which 'continually bears new fruits.'[34] Similarly, the 'infected will' and the 'clayey lodgings' are obstacles in the way of clear sight.[35] For Sidney, as Judith Dundas suggests, '[t]he higher truths of the unseen world can only be described poetically ' (p.273), '[a]ddressing an audience of supposed enemies to poetry, all his efforts are bent to persuade them that there is a value in what is not literally true ' (p.270).

This aim is, of course, fraught with problems, since while the goal is to discover 'truth', there remains the possibility that what is perceived as 'truth' is a misguided invention. So the poets see man as struggling amidst obscurity, in a tussle between fact and fiction, finding or creating truth, or perhaps doing both, since creating was somehow an act of divination. The unseen is seen to exist as a matter of course, but the attempts to reach it are widely diversified. This creates problems of selection, and embittered attacks on others; Harington comments in passing on how it seems to be a sign of the times to attack things (Smith II, p.194). Medieval theologians were engaged with the unknowable nature of God, in endless linguistic philosophising[36]; but in the Renaissance the case seems to be different. Sidney may claim that '[...] whatsoever action, or faction, whatsoever counsel, policy, or war strategem the historian is bound to recite, that may the poet (if he list) with his imitation make his own, beautifying it both for further teaching, and more delighting, as it pleaseth him: having all, from Dante's heaven to his hell, under the authority of his pen' (p111); but obviously (as is implicit in Sidney's statement) this is now acknowledged as a conceit. For Dante the crystal spheres *were* real; by the time that Sidney was writing the Ptolemaic universe has cracked, and flown off in shards across a strange unfamiliar expanse of space, and the movement of the planets is continually re-assessed.

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[33] Quoted by Richard Waswo, in 'Damnation, Protestant Style: Macbeth, Faustus and Christian Tragedy', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, vol.4:1 (1994), pp.63-100; p.69.

[34] Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, edited by John T. McNeill (Philadelpha: Westminster Press 1960), I.4, I.6.

[35] As discussed by Weiner, loc. cit., p.40. Hume later goes further still in his Sceptical discussion of the unreliability of what we perceive by the senses: *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals,* edited by A. Selby-Brigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1975), Section XII.

[36] Minnis and Scott, loc.cit, give examples: pp.169-70.

All these questions contribute to the sense of uncertainties, the feeling of being at sea. Wyatt's Petrarchan translation 'My galley charged with forgetfulness' reads like an early expression of these conflicts and doubts -

> Those stars be hid that led me to this pain
> Drowned is reason that should me comfort
> And I remain despairing of the port.

For Petrarch those stars might signal man's distance from enlightenment in a muddy world - in his poem they are less ambiguously and more clearly the 'duo mei dolci usati segni' ('two usual sweet stars') of his mistress's guiding eyes (*RS*, 189.12). But he at least knows and can name the dangers and the saviour. Wyatt diverges significantly from the original in that the precise mythological references - Scylla and Charybdis - in Petrarch are erased, and the fable of the poem is less clear; its end is more hopeless, and the effect is of a search for landmarks. S. K. Heninger writes on this subject:

> When the notion of the *uni*verse broke down [... the poet] had to contrive his own comparisons, and a known by which to explain an unknown was hard to come by. This change in epistemology, I believe, is the best way to define the phenomenon commonly known as metaphysical poetry. [...] Uncertainty about ultimate reality has become increasingly manifest in poetry since the renaissance.[37]

This 'uncertainty' Heninger talks about lies at the root of, and indeed impels, all the attempts to find definitive versions of the truth; one Bible, one definition of poetry, one language, and so on. It is notable that seventeenth-century attempts to define or discover God usually use mathematical or geometrical language, so that words are finally rejected as being too uncertain or unstable.[38] It also explains the eclectic use of sources (the classics, the scriptures), with the aim of finding a unifying agenda. In the same vein are the massive attempts of Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola to unite all under one theology; hence

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[37] S. K. Heninger, 'Metaphor as cosmic correspondence', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, vol. 3 (1967), pp. 3-22; pp.19-20.

[38] See Fig. 2: 'The Emblematic Manifestation of the Trinitarian Nature of the Universe' in Robert Fludd, *Essential Readings*, selected and edited by William H. Huffman (HarperCollins 1992), p.97; Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), translated by John Cottingham, edited by Bernard Williams (Cambridge, etc.: University Press 1986), chapter 6; Frances Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1972); Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1986).

the excitement at the Hermetic writings, only later exposed as a post-Christian fake.[39]

This is tempered by the sense, outlined above, that none of this is invention, but is instead revelation. And since there is ultimately no certainty about revelation, as Puttenham would seem to suggest (Smith II, pp.19-20), I would argue that Sidney and others protest too much. In the end, perhaps, the strongest argument, because the most convincing in practical terms, is the one that sees poetry as instruction; poetry is for uncomprehending mortals 'the first nurse, whose milk by little and little enabled them to feed afterwards of tougher knowledges' (Sidney p.96), what Dundas calls Sidney's 'playful expression of higher truth'.[40] There is a sense in which this apprehension of the divine is really beyond expression, except perhaps through the seductive sensation of poetry 'in its effects,' and not, that is, directly through the exercise of reason, language, or experience. It is a 'pleasant conueyance', which is seen as a stepping-stone towards sterner Godly truths, the 'philosophy that is not philosophie' (Smith II, p.198), says Harington. He argues:

> [...] sith we liue with men and not with saints, and because few men can embrace this strict and stoicall diuinitie [...] therefore we do first read some other authors, making them as it were a looking glasse to the eyes of our minde, and then after we haue gathered more strength, we enter into profounder studies of higher mysteries, hauing first as it were enabled our eyes by long beholding the sunne in a bason of water at last to looke vpon the sunne it selfe (Smith II, pp.197-8).

Beatrice and Laura were just such reflections of a heavenly sun. And so here in Harington the stormy seas of the Petrarch and Wyatt poem have become cleared and distilled into a reflective pool, a mirror of truth, like looking at the Gorgon in a shield. The sun (an image that could suggest Apollo - sun-god as well as god of poetry - or that could suggest God), is presented to us in such a way as to be clear and approachable. Here perhaps is what becomes of poetry after all the efforts to resurrect it from the dunghill; it is set up again as 'the highest estimation of learning' (Sidney, p.96), the 'handmaiden of theology'.[41]

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[39] Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 1964), pp.398-403.

[40] Judith Dundas, ' "To speak metaphorically": Sidney in the subjunctive mood', *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 4:2 (1988), pp.268-87; p.286.

[41] Minnis and Scott, loc.cit., p.125.

iv. 'A Pitiful defence of poor Poetry'

So, as we have seen, poetry is despised as a lightweight, *uncultivated* amusement, so much so, that, as Puttenham notes, poets publish anonymously, as if ashamed; Sidney writes 'I have just cause to make a pitiful defence of poor Poetry, which from almost the highest estimation of learning is fallen to be the laughing stock of children [...]' (p.96); and Nashe complains that current poets are merely crudely latinised rural amateurs - such as Plato must have meant to banish (Smith I, p.328). Webbe is similarly concerned about the rabble who have caused poetry to be held in such low esteem (Smith I, p.301), and Harington in an aside refers to the way in which poetry is seen as a trifling thing (Smith II, p.219). Puttenham admits that the poet is despised as 'a *phantasticall*' but goes on to assert that this is an ignorant condemnation, based on judgements (only sometimes deserved) about elements of poetic activity and products. He identifies these in an effort to eliminate them from the poetry of the future (Smith II, p.19). Nashe quotes the standard defence that the part must not be taken for the whole, in a particularly succinct distillation of the time-honoured references to Virgil, Ovid, bees and fables (Smith I, p.332). The defences, then, all appeared to be written in the face of acknowledged 'enemies of poetry' (Nashe; Smith I, p.330) who may be identified in the main as Puritan pamphleteers, of whom Gregory Smith says '[a]s men of the people they spoke only of what interested the people. [...] The defence of Poetry was in the hands of courtiers and scholars who lived beyond the pale of Bohemia' (Smith I, p.xx).

In the climate of the 1590s in England, such questions merge unavoidably with questions of religion, and morals. The rise of Puritanism meant that the need for poets to defend themselves against charges of misleading and tempting to lewdness were developed in two principal ways, which I think colour the new definition of the poet figure that is developed by Sidney and others. These were firstly, attempting to attain a higher degree of stylistic precision, with a view to improving the image of poetry, and secondly, a rhetorical review of the presence of 'lies' and 'licentiousness' in poetry. During this century in England there were a number of new developments. Calvin was writing about the personal relation of man to God; the nation was divided as to the proper way to worship, was uncertain about the truth. The Bible was itself in a state of change, the rights and wrongs of translation were

being fiercely debated, and no one version was definitively accepted over another. The historicity of documents was being established over their oracular status; Lorenzo Valla exposes the Donation of Constantine in the fifteenth century.[42]

I outline these religious questionings and this sense of uncertainty to explain partly the impetus that makes Sidney, or indeed Puttenham, seek to define and exalt - to suggest that this tendency must be a tendency of the time, which manifests itself amongst other things in writing about poetry, which also therefore takes on claims for a divinity all its own. There is a Calvinist strand in the insistence on the personal/divine inspiration of the poet; just as the idea of the poet as a sort of magus or priest purveying wisdom to the masses refers to current debates on the merits of having a priesthood, or a Church. I am not considering here the religious affiliations of Puttenham or Sidney - but merely wish to suggest that these debates contributed to the structure of thinking of the time.[43]

Poetic theory, therefore, becomes bound up with moral questions; and these are couched in terms of Biblical authority, and the instructive value of poetry. Nashe warns that readers should not become so absorbed in classical poetry and the works of Aristotle that they become pagans and atheists (Smith I, p.337). And this idea is frequently reflected in the doubts and demurrings of all commentators on the rights and wrongs of studying the classics, and particularly poetry. There are some examples that a Christian society must not follow, such as the Greek device of cursing in poetry which is forbidden to Christians, who must charitably refer all revenge to God (Puttenham; Smith II, p.59). Harington comments that, to Christians, poetry and other philosophy must seem 'vaine and superfluous' (Smith II, p.197). But if - as Puttenham suggests (Smith II, p.25) - the subject or matter of poetry is or should be instruction, (a view found in the classics), then there is an obvious uncertainty as to what may be learned and what should be shunned. Thomas Hoby, one of the few really serious critics of poetry on religious grounds to be included by Smith, writes about its dangerous closeness to idolatry - poets and images are equally unlawful in the eyes of God: '[a]nd *Tertullian*, an auncient doctor of the Church, called Poets, and certaine Philosophers, the Patriarches of heretiques'. He does allow for some holy pictures and poetry, but then goes on to the familiar charge of wantonness (Smith I, pp.342-43).

Harington writes in a similar way about lewd rhyme (Smith II, p.258), and, as to finding

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[42] Yates, *Giordano* ..., loc.cit., p.160; Burke, loc.cit, p.55.

[43] Weiner, loc. cit., looks at Sidney's Protestantism. See also Weiner, 'Moving and Teaching ...', loc.cit..

lewdness in poetry, he accuses readers of looking for it. They should read as the author intended, seeing fables as moral lessons (Smith II, p.214). Francis Meres would agree: '[a]s some are delighted in counterfet wines confected of fruites, not that they refresh the hart but that they make drunke; so some are delighted in Poets only for their obscenity, neuer respecting their eloquence, good grace, or learning' and 'As *God giueth* life vnto man: so a Poet giueth ornament vnto it' (Smith II, p.312). Interestingly he reverses the idea of the Maker as God, so that here it is God who is poetic. Likewise Puttenham points out that often praise of gods was not in fact praise of men, but abuse of vices - satires, comedy, tragedy (Smith II, p.31). The emphasis is often therefore on the way to read poetry; that is to say, so that good lessons can be extracted from even the lewdest poem. The responsibility is laid with the reader (much as it is in Chaucer's prologue to *The Miller's Tale*), who takes an active role in reading, rather than with the writer for what he writes.

But there is also, as I said, an attempt to select; so the type of poetry (described variously as being pagan or earthly) that is permissible is painstakingly demarcated. It is the charge of lying that stimulates Harington, who writes (still on Agrippa):

> And first for lying, I might if I list excuse it by the rule of *Poetica licentia*, and claime a priuiledge giuen to Poet[s], whose art is but an imitation (as *Aristotle* calleth it), & therefore are allowed to faine what they list, according to that old verse [...] (Smith II, p.200-201)

He quotes a supporting verse on lawyers being allowed to lie as a profession.[44] Plato, says Harington, is averse to verse but allows fables: '*Aristotle*, though rejecting both, yet retaineth still a kind of obscuritie' (Smith II, p.203). He illustrates his point further by referring to how the ancient poets mixed actions and morals as a 'bark or rine' (Smith II, p.201). Sidney's solution is to parade again the usefulness of poetry in teaching virtue, and '[...] of all writers under the sun the poet is the least liar, and, though he would, as a poet can scarcely be a liar. [...] [H]e nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth.' Lying is defined as affirming something to be true which is false (p.123) (as Boccaccio too points out). Harington makes the same point that Sidney does in the *Apology* (p.99):

> But to go higher, did not our Sauiour himselfe speake in parables? ... vsed parables, and euen as discreet Poets vse, where a good and honest and wholesome Allegorie is hidden in a pleasaunt and pretie fiction. (p.205-206)

This view of poetry as the diverting and decorative story which sugars the pill, is a

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[44] He recalls Boccaccio - see Chapter Two, II.iii.

justification that becomes familiar. It functions as an aid to memory: a 'forcible manner of phrase, in which, if it be well made, it farre excelleth loose speech or prose' because of its 'pleasure and sweetnesse to the eare'; he quotes Virgil's poetry on farming (husbandry) to illustrate how a dull subject may be made interesting (Smith II, p.6) - just as Puttenham sees the purpose of poetry to be '[...] to dispose the hearers to mirth and sollace by pleasant conueyance and efficacy of speach [...] the poetical science [...]' (Smith II, p.160-61). As to the second objection that it pleases fools, Harington responds that it pleases wise men too. It keeps, he says, echoing Sidney, the child from play and the old man from the chimney corner (Smith II, p.208; Sidney p.113). And Nashe sees poetry as a hidden philosophy, divine in origin, useful as an instructive tool, which he illustrates with examples from other countries, quoting Cicero on how there were poets before philosophers, to teach wisdom and morals, sweetness and invention. Instruction is more admired in witty fiction than in straight moralising (Smith I, p.328-29). There are morals in fables (Smith I, p.331). Harington quotes heathen and Christian sources for the use of fables as moral instruction : '[...] they looke not to haue their fictions belieued in the literal sense [...]' (Smith II, p.208) He refers to various prophets who were learned in heathen culture before coming to God, and produces a moral and historical interpretation of the myth of Perseus and the Gorgon, also an allegory of man's soul. The point of these different levels is that something may be drawn from the poem, whatever the level of interpretative effort expended, and the story holds the imagination (Smith II, pp.202-203). It is, for example, quite proper to read about the gods of the zodiac if they are interpreted as personifications rather than actual gods, and their personae as gods makes the story more vivid. This was Scaliger's reading, and it was widely used in the Renaissance.[45]

In any case, poetry has its morally acceptable practitioners. When Harvey writes about amorous sonnets, he quotes Petrarch's definition of love with approval, love instead of lust, and gives several examples of ladies from the past to illustrate the difference. 'Aretines muse was an egregious bawd, & a haggishe witch of Thessalia; but Petrarcks verse, a fine loouer, that learneth of Mercury to exercise his fayrest giftes in a faire subiect, & teacheth Wit to be inamored vpon Beautye, as Quicksiluer embraseth gold, or as vertue affecteth honour, or as Astronomy gazeth vpon heauen, to make Arte more excellent by contemplation of excellentest Nature' (Smith II, p.259). Here again is that idea - often reversed - that art is

[45] Seznec, loc.cit, pp.175-78.

improved on by nature.

Puttenham has a revealing chapter heading: 'Chapter XIV *How vice was afterward reproued by two other maner of poems, better reformed then the satyre, whereof the first was comedy, the second tragedie'* (Smith II, p.33). This is a chapter on etymology and purpose, but it does illustrate how moral requirements are becoming fused into a hierarchical structure of art - how morals dictate taste, in other words. This means that:

> The profitable sciences were no lesse meete to be imported to the greater number of ciuill men for instruction of the people and increase of knowledge then to be reserued and kept for clerkes and great men onely (Smith II, p. 46)

This is because of the subject matter which is dictated by its universality:

> And because loue is of all other humane affections the most puisssant and passionate, and most generall to all sortes and ages of men and women, so as whether it be of the yong or old, or wise or holy, or high estate or low, none euer could truly bragge of any exemption in that case: it requireth a forme of Poesie variable, inconstant, affected, curious, and most witty of any others, whereof the ioyes to be vttered in one sorte, the sorrowes in an other, and, by the many formes of Poesie, the many moodes and pangs of louers throughly to be discouered [...] (Puttenham p.46-7).

This universality is emphasised again:

> Right so no kinde of argument in all the Oratorie craft doth better perswade and more vniuersally satisfie then example, which is but the repetition of old memories, and like successes happened in times past. For these regards Poesie historicall is of all other next the diuine most honourable and worthy, as well for the common benefit as for the special comfort euery man receiueth by it [...] (Puttenham p.41).

Poetry is thus seen as a necessary good for all men, and not just for a courtly elite. The elite is only necessary to perfect the quality of the product, which then can be relayed to all men. The intention is always to broaden the scope of poetry (Puttenham; Smith II p.16), to make it a general good. But was the audience as general as Puttenham suggests? He might rather be simply wishing to claim for it an audience as large as humanity itself, in order to increase its importance, while still accommodating the notion of a princely elite.

There are two considerations here: poetry deals with matters that are relevant to all, but at the same time the fact that it is poetry, 'a precious iewell and a diuine gift', is important; a sense arises of the special privileged nature of the poet. It is not just a question

of perceiving or inventing for oneself; clearly the poet is a gifted observer and inventor who can then purvey this vision to others 'for the common benefit'. The capacity to do this lies in the nature of the poet and his 'diuine gift'. Reason is seen as distinctively the property of man, as Campion believes, when he says reason and speech distinguish man[46] - poetry with its 'sweet numbers' raises the mind to a 'high and lofty conceite' (Smith II, p.327). In this way Puttenham, though not the first to do so, provides a systematic thesis, declaring that it was the poets that first drew men from savagery, quoting Orpheus as a symbol of this.[47] He goes on to look on the poet as investigator of nature, as maker of sacrifices, as priest, monk, and prophet. Because of their wisdom poets were the first lawgivers. They devised the first commonwealth (Smith II, pp.5-6) - though Thomas Hoby might not agree with this, as his contention is that the legislator-philosopher (Socrates, in Hoby's example), because he never lied, could not be seen as a poet (Smith I, p.342).

In this section we have seen how the grandiose definitions of the poet, recognisably Petrarchan in style (though not recognised as such by the writers themselves) are developed in an impulse to define amidst an age of change. These claims are, as I said, grandiose; they suggest that there is, or should be, something eternal, or there should be something eternal, about the nature of poets and poetry. They suggest that poetry is something cosmic, and that there is a spiritual scheme, a 'paterne or mould, as the Platonicks [...] phantastically suppose' (Puttenham; Smith II, p.3), beyond this world of temporal change and error. In the next section I shall remain firmly on earth, and, more specifically, on earth in the 1590s in England. I shall look more closely at what this change was about, and examine practical elements, such as the rise of the vernacular, the shaping of a literary language, and the making of rules for poetry writing, and the specific, practical events that required such a reassessment and establishment of the canon.

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[46] Dante too says that animals have no speech - even talking animals do not understand their words - man only has intellect ('De volgare', loc.cit., I.ii). Erasmus too touches on this; see Hoffman, loc. cit. pp.1-2. 'Reason' is a word over-used, perhaps, to describe human intellect, and it needs closer definition. Campion appears to use it here simply to signify consciousness and thought; Puttenham perhaps differentiates it from poetic 'fervour'; Sidney places it as a preparatory stage to the composed work: *ratio* next to *oratio*.

[47] Cicero suggests that poets have this role: Cicero, *De Inventione* , loc.cit., I.ii.2 (pp.4-7).

III. 'THE SWEETNES OF OUR TONGUE': POETIC STYLE

i. *Verba* and *Res*

In the last section I looked at the meaning of poetry; here I consider the language. I make this distinction deliberately; it is one that was made by Renaissance theorists themselves (See II.i). It was a truth universally acknowledged, but one that was just as universally betrayed by the exercise of writing itself. To keep the signifier separate from the signified was part of the campaign for order; the two, however, fused inescapably in the text. Renaissance debates, although not necessarily in these terms, about the relation of the signifying metaphor and its signified meaning relate to contemporary thinking about the relation of the signifying word and its (in)separable meaning.[48] Here too there is a link between definitions of a poetic style and controversies about biblical exegesis and the nature of the scriptural text. Herendeen sees '[...] the most fundamental aspects of epistemology in the Renaissance [as] the relation between language and reality (or *verba* and *res*) [...]' (p.142). Jonathan Bate writes:

> [...] Problematic as Renaissance theoreticians took the relationship between *verba* and *res* to be, they did not share the radical scepticism about *res* which is the characteristic of postmodern literary theory. The functioning of those master-narratives which we call "myths", is of the essence here. The story (Actaeon, Narcissus, Hecuba, Niobe) translates into *verba* the *res* of desire and grief; it may be more or less successful in doing so (that will depend on the art of the translator), but no one questioned the existence of desire and grief as constituent parts of human nature. The modern theoretical disappearance of the *res*, the supposition that desire and grief are solely linguistic constructs, would have been incomprehensible in both classical and Renaissance culture.[49]

This passage pinpoints two conflicting aspects of the relation between language and meaning for Renaissance thinkers. It is seen as 'problematic'; it is nonetheless unquestioningly accepted that the word and the meaning are separate. But it is interesting that despite this

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[48] Dundas, loc.cit, writes: '[Sidney's] definition of poetry may indeed be viewed as a definition of metaphor' (p.269).

[49] Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1993), p.200.

basic premise, much of what was written about poetry reveals a sense, not always consciously voiced,[50] that the two are not so separate as might have been desired; in the poetry and prose of the time, we can read (with twentieth century eyes) the same fusion. For example, Sidney's observation that poetry is suspected of 'with a siren's sweetness drawing the mind to the serpent's tale of sinful fancy' is a rhetorically persuasive phrase, in which form is not easily divisible from content. The nuances are manifold. The phrase 'siren's sweetness', drawn from classical mythology, marries with a reference to the Book of Genesis ('the serpent's tale') to give a compact overview of the historical precedence of the condemnation of poetry. The sibilant music of the words illustrates impressionistically the lure of poetry, so that the whole dense phrase captures well the traditional objections to poetry, in terminology that at the same time illustrates and suggests the magnetism of poetry that Sidney wishes to promote.[51]

Such a reading coalesces *verba* and *res, inventio* and *elecutio*, in a way that might have caused disquiet to a writer like George Puttenham. But it illustrates how there might be a problem with the effort to separate form and content, since there is a latent consciousness that the opaque nature of the subject - language - itself creates its meanings, so that even treatises which attempt to be plain and clear cannot avoid using figurative language (Harington's image of 'the sunne in a basin of water' [p.197-8] is a case in point). If any fusion of the two is seen as corrupt, then the sense that language works by such a fusion is a cause for frustration.

The sense of the uncontainability of language in this period is well documented by critics. Thomas M. Greene perceives in Dante's *Paradiso* (XXVI) 'the mutability, the ungrounded contingency of language' and observes in *De vulgari eloquentia* 'the nature of that mutability which the *Commedia* at once evokes and dismisses'; he points to the origin of these questions in Plato, who in the *Cratylus* tries to place meaning in the phonetic application of sounds, reflecting an anxiety about the unruly arbitrariness of language, and its changeability. Greene roots this deep in Western culture by locating it in the Bible, quoting Montaigne ' "Our language flows every day out of our hands"' (p.6), and continuing: '[t]he disquiet stemming from the historicity of the signifier adumbrates a pathos that is

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[50] Although Nashe does suggest that rhetoric and matter cannot be separated in this way (Smith I, p.334).

[51] Friedman, loc.cit, is presumably thinking of just such a phrase when he writes '[r]ather than pruning and purifying the language of his predecessors, Sidney inflates and obscures it. His is a poetry of glittering surfaces that mask a want of substance' (p.132) - a point negatively made, but one which seems to pick up that fusion of *verba* and *res* that I suggest is an integral part of Sidney's style - and of his argument.

translinguistic, that embraces "mores et habitus", the historicity of culture' (p.8). Rhetoric as a practice, on the other hand, and according to Richard Waswo, 'regards meaning as separable from and prior to the words that clothe it,' but:

> rhetoric never quite recovers from the distrust and scorn that Plato had for the sophists. Even when its prestige is expanded by Renaissance humanists, their revived insistence that the good speaker must necessarily be a good man betrays all the anxieties about the use of words that result in the dualistic exile of meaning from the treacherous medium that expresses it. (Waswo 1994, p.35)

Many of the objections aimed at poetry, for example in relation to symbol, were also aimed at Catholicism: affecting a plainness in clothes is one manifestation of the desire for plainness that is also evidenced in the campaign for plainness of speech, as leading in some way to ultimate (divine) truth, and away from misleading incantation. [52] The aim for precision in meaning must at some point confront the question of whether there is an inherent union between word and meaning. Calvin, for example, sees Christ's deeds in the Bible as both historical events in themselves and as having symbolic meaning (Evans, 'Calvin', pp.35-37). Waswo quotes from Augustine, Book II of *De doctrina christiana*, on how the words of the holy spirit are things, and how God can use things to signify other things, where we can only use words. God becomes the magic to explain the ultimate mystery of the connection between words and things.[53] The question of whether a word actually is, in some sense, what it represents, is closely connected to whether a metaphor is what it represents, whether there is a mystical link between the metaphor and the subject, for example the sorts of questions that are explored in *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*, such as, if man is a 'little' world - is there a magnetic correspondence between his elements and the elements of the world? Would a corresponding member/element react sympathetically to the activities of its counterpart?

But if, as is suggested above, language feeds off itself in ways that defy the divisions and categories sought by its analysts, then this inevitably leads to further questions concerning truth and communication. Questions have to be asked about the possibility of ever conveying meaning directly without misunderstanding; about the elusiveness of historical accuracy; about the wanton (re)generation of stories, assumed to be static. Greenblatt describes

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[52] Thomas, loc.cit. See also Hoffman, loc.cit.: 'the restoration of language in the cultural realm serves an ultimate purpose, the renewal of true religion' (p.2). He talks about Erasmus's understanding of allegorical meaning in the scriptures; 'The tropological allegorical meaning, then, serve as the metaphorical transition between history and mystery' (p.6).

[53] Waswo, loc.cit, pp.32-33). Locke explores this question: Locke, loc.cit., especially IV.iv.

sixteenth-century Catholics and Protestants as trying to demonstrate through retelling their stories how each was 'a demonic fantasy.'[54] This sense that a story exists only in the multiple forms of different tellings is something that Shakespeare addresses in *The Rape of Lucrece* (see Chapter Four).

The effects of this perceived instability in the language had already been for a long time the subject of controversy regarding the translation of the Bible into the vernacular. Greenblatt notes, '[t]here is no translation that is not at the same time an interpretation. This conviction [...was] stamped indelibly in the mind by the fact that men went to the stake in the early sixteenth century over the rendering of certain Greek and Latin words into English' (p.115). Friedman also writes that '[...] Catholics and Protestants alike take up the new cudgel of language to do battle against each other' - tracing this new 'cudgel of language' to Tyndale's *Obedience of a Christian Man* (1528). Tyndale insisted on the 'literal' sense of the scriptures, which should be open to all.[55] McKnight makes a slightly different observation on the same subject:

> Already in the fourteenth century there had begun a revolt from the supreme authority assumed by the church in religious belief and indirectly in all forms of thinking. There was coming into being a belief that authority rested in the Word of God alone. The Wycliffite translation of the Bible had been a consequence. During the fifteenth century the circulation of the Wycliffe translation had been effectively controlled and the zeal for reform held in check.[56]

Greenblatt and Friedman emphasise the ambivalence of meaning in translation; McKnight points out that there is a threat to absolute authority in making an authoritative text available for individual interpretation through translation. Tyndale's ideal of bringing the Bible to every boy at the plough provoked fierce opposition, part of which was the fear of disintegration from a former pristine state. Henry Knighton writes in the fifteenth century : '[t]his Master John Wycliffe translated from Latin into English the gospel that Christ gave to the clergy and doctors of the Church [...] so that by his means it has become vulgar and more open to laymen and women who can read than it usually is to quite learned clergy of good intelligence.

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[54] Greenblatt 1988, p.219.

[55] Friedman, loc.cit., p.133.

[56] McKnight, loc.cit., p.110. McKnight details various translations and versions of the Bible in the sixteenth century (pp.111-112). Alter and Kermode provide a more detailed study of the many versions and attempts at translating a selecting the Biblical canon over the centuries: Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (eds), *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (London: Collins 1987).

And so the pearl of the Gospel is scattered abroad and trodden underfoot by swine.'[57] In 1407 the death penalty for heresy was introduced, which included translating or even possessing an English translation of the Bible (Lampe 1969, p. 393). Tyndale was burned at the stake for his efforts; and the idea of giving the people power to interpret the scriptures was a cause of controversy, in secular poetry as well as the scriptures. Puttenham makes a case for poetry to be brought to all men, but even this poetic evangelism is tempered by the necessity for a 'Courtly Poet' as visionary and mediator, who chooses what the people read and value (Smith II, p.164).

So at the end of the sixteenth century the Bible was still in the process of being translated into an orthodox English version, and as a result the oracular nature of the text must be called into question. The Bible is seen as a collection of historical documents, and its language as fallible, no less than the process of translation.[58] The disputes about exactly how to translate certain words from the Greek, Latin and Hebrew meant that uncertainties about meaning surfaced in contemporary thought. Meanwhile there was no definite authoritative text to call upon, nothing like the fixed quality of Biblical quotation from the Authorised Version of 1611 that was to become part of English literary heritage in later centuries.[59]

Sidney, citing Plato as an example of one of the 'right poets' (p.120), talks about his work, in which, he says, 'the skin as it were and beauty depended most of poetry', meaning his linguistic craft and also his use of illustrative stories 'which who knoweth not to be the flowers of poetry did never walk into Apollo's garden' (p.97). In connection with 'the flowers of poetry in Apollo's garden', it is significant that the word *posy*, or *poesy* or *poysy*, with other variations of spelling, was used almost interchangeably to mean poetry, and in the modern meaning of 'a bunch of flowers'. In fact it is as if they were not really different words, but were, in each case, used metaphorically, to represent each other. A collection of short verses, or 'posies', might be arranged decoratively amidst hangings or other ornamentation, or a 'posy' might be a motto engraved in a ring. Again, a posy was an

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[57] Henry Knighton, *Chronicle*; quoted by G. W. Lampe, *The Cambridge History of the Bible,* vol. 2 (of 3): *The West from the Fathers to the Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1969), p.388.

[58] Kenneth Willis Clark provides an illuminating analysis of the significance of the physicality of books, scrolls, and tablets, in 'Ancient Books and the Biblical Texts', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, vol. 4 (1968), pp.21-37.

[59] Alter and Kermode, loc.cit., especially pp.650-51. Alter and Kermode quote two loci for the translation debate: Tyndale's Preface to the *Obedience of a Christian Man* (1528); and Walter Benjamin 'The Task of the Translator' in Hannah Arendt, ed., *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohen (London 1973).

anthology of poetry, often referred to as a 'posy of flowers',[60] for example in *Astrophil and Stella* (xv.4), and Puttenham's chapter 'Of Short Epigrames called Posies' (Smith II, pp.60-61).

Puttenham repeatedly uses this image of poetry as cultivated flowers, as ornament, as he does the closely connected notion of dressing up. He says '[t]his ornament we speake of is giuen to it by figures and fuguratiue speaches, which be the flowers, as it were, and coulours that a Poet setteth vpon his language of arte, as the embroderer doth his stone and perle or passements of gold vpon the stuffe of a Princely garment.' (Smith II, p.143). He defends poetry in terms of wearing clothes; just as nakedness is mortifying, so poetry too should consist of a separate dress and inner body (Smith II, p.142). Ornament works in two ways, he says, causing a delight in the outward show, and a corresponding inward stirring (Smith II, p.148).

This insistent separation of form and content betrays a certain anxiety to define, and to label; when the material under examination proves elusive and variable, the effort to reduce it to manageable units becomes more pronounced. The impulse behind such an effort is partly the need to restore to the exercise of poetic writing the finesse and cultivated eloquence that was otherwise thought to be found only in the works of classical antiquity. This may doubtless be achieved through an exercise of Puttenham's 'iudgement', which, as we have seen, is to an extent a mysterious faculty, operating somewhere between Nature and Art. '[W]e may conclude', he says, 'that nature her selfe suggesteth the figure in this or that forme, but arte aydeth the iudgement of his vse and application [...] art should be vsed in all respects, and specially in this behalfe of language, and when the naturall is more commendable then the artificiall, and contrariwise' (Smith II, p. 182). This last throws a new light on the nature of the 'posy', of the flowers, or indeed, jewel, of poetry; it is 'natural', in the sense that it comes to the poet as a divine vision; it is cultivated, in the sense that the craft is important. It takes, like a Renaissance garden, elements from nature and 'pollishes' them (Puttenham; Smith II, p.62). The sense of cultivation is often applied to the rules of poetry (Harington; Smith II, p.217) that are so often explicitly aimed for. Puttenham is aware of the absence of a fixed English prosody, contending that writing in English merits one as much as Greek or Latin (Smith II, p.5). Webbe is just as interested in a search for a body of rules - pointing out that rules cannot simply be made and imposed, but that a work is the best example, as the first

[60] OED on CDROM

poets had no rules, but evolved them by trial and error, and English words will do very well if tried. He quotes Horace on the principles of poetry as gospel (Smith I, pp.279, 290).

It is evident, then, that linguistic analyses in this period are inextricably linked to the diversity of expositions of faith. Not only does language prove resistant to neat categorisation into sense and sound, it is also subject to temporal change, and contextual waverings of sense. At a time when there were a number of cultural elements open to question - the nature of faith, the final authorised version of God's word, the standardisation of the vernacular, the clash between imitation and invention - the indefinability of language became a central cause for debate. The differentiation between word and thing is ostensibly the question at stake, but the fusion of the two, even the sense created by language, is inherent to the writing itself. The question shifts and becomes another one. It becomes a question of selecting and refining the language of poetry, and whether or not this is recognised, the words used are of paramount importance, since they create the images they are seen merely to verbalise. The concept is perhaps best clarified by the images used by the critics themselves, the figures of flowers and jewels, images, which, while appearing to relate solely to the outward ornament of an inward truth, undoubtedly themselves suggest a fused whole in which word and meaning are inseparable.

ii. A Well-Wrought Posy

This attempt to refine and select poetic style is self-consciously put in terms of the Englishness of such a style.[61] Concomitantly, attitudes to 'imitation' subtly change. The individual inspiration of the poet (discussed above) had been dwelt on as evidence of the divine nature of poetry; this individual element also became a claim for the individual nature of English poetry - no mere imitation, but developed from native sources.

It has been suggested that the sense these critics had of being at a new forefront of

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[61] Donaworth, loc.cit., writes of 'a new pride in native tongues' - resulting from a new reading of classical theories (p.31).

criticism was a genuine result of living at a changing moment, the famous 'Golden Age' of Elizabethan culture. During the reign of Henry VIII and the dissolution of the monasteries the Church and schools were repressed, and libraries and works of art destroyed, so that the English Humanism of the fifteenth century and early sixteenth was largely lost. By the mid-sixteenth century and the death of Henry VIII, there could be observed in England a general decay of scholarship since the recent past. With the reign of Elizabeth I there was to some extent a regeneration, traceable to the effects of the Reformation and the Inquisition; one in twenty of London's inhabitants were from the continent, mostly Huguenot and Flemish, fugitives as a result of their faith, bringing with them the art and learning of the Renaissance. The four 'characteristic' translators of the period have been cited as Sir Thomas Hoby, Sir Thomas North, John Florio, and Philemon Holland; Italy was a commercial centre of the time and Italian, together with French, had a great influence on English literature, for example, Roger Ascham's *Scholemaster* (1570), and Milton's treatise *Of Education* (1644). John Florio was the tutor of Fulke Greville and married Samuel Daniel's sister. Florio's 'Firste Fruites' includes a section on how to pronounce English for Italians, followed by Second Frutes (1591).[62] There was in England an enthusiasm for foreign and 'exotic attainments', and a renewed burst of energy in these areas, the reaction, it seems, to the intoxicating foreign cultural extravagance. In such circumstances was the 'golden age of English literature' brought into being.[63]

This influx was by no means straightforwardly treated. It becomes in some sense an emphasis on the elucidation of what is characteristically English; a feeling evinced by Sir Thomas Wilson: '[t]he fine Courtier will talke nothing but Chaucer.'[64] Nashe complains that the Italians think England *has* no poets, to which he responds by listing a few, in a spirit of national pride (Smith I, p.318). Puttenham (see Chapter One, I) is not alone in bewailing the poetry that is seen as England's literary heritage, or in seeing it as having become a debased and slovenly art. Harington revealingly observes that to call all verse 'poetry' is to 'bestow the name of a Poet on euerie base rymer and balladmaker' (Smith II, p.197). Nashe too is

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[62] R. C. Simonini, *Italian Scholarship in Renaissance England* (University of North Carolina Press 1952), pp.4-11, 18, 22, 37, 55-60.

[63] Simonini, loc.cit., pp.4-22, 37-60, 101. See also McKnight, loc.cit., pp.121-122; and Friedman, loc.cit., who writes: '[t]he crucial period spanned roughly by the reigns of Henry VIII and James I, engendered an aesthetic revolution no less radical than its more familiar religious and social upheavals'(p.130).

[64] Sir Thomas Wilson, *The Arte of Rhetorique* (1553); quoted by McKnight, loc.cit., p.122.

scathing about 'plodding meeter'(Smith I, p.329), and talks about would-be poets (Smith, p.307), and about the absurd and false English poets (Smith I, p.237), attacking, in passing, women, pseudo-learned writers, balladmakers, malcontents and so on, including a very Petrarchan attack on the rabble (Smith I, pp.223ff.), concluding: '[s]uch is this golden age wherein we liue, and so replenisht with golden asses of all sortes' (Smith I, p.227).

In the move to the vernacular there is a feeling that the rest of Europe had got there first, and there are, existing simultaneously, attitudes of great admiration for continental culture, and of nationalistic satire of such admiration - Donne's Satire I, for example. Nashe in fact blames the Italian influence for the poverty of English verse, being less than admiring of the Italianate Englishman, who writes bad poetry, and whose morals are low and corrupt - obviously, the lack of poetic 'judgement' encompasses a lack of moral 'judgement' too (Smith I, p.321ff.).[65]

The attempt to cultivate poetry grows out of the need to create a refined and characteristically English poetic style. It is in a spirit of criticism and not of praise that Puttenham notes poets who show signs of having imitated someone else - '[our countrymen] of whose works some appear to be but bare translations, other some matters of their owne inuention and very commendable' (Smith II, p.62). Puttenham writes: '*Lydgat*, a translatour onely and no deuiser of that which he wrate, but one that wrate in good verse.' And again '[...] *Gower*, sauing for his good and graue moralities, had nothing in him highly to be commended, for his verse was homely and without good measure, his wordes strained much deale out of the French writers, his ryme wrested, and in his inuentions small subtillitie...'(Smith II, p.64) On the subject of Ronsard's translations of Greek poets, he says: '[t]his man deserues to be endited of pety *larceny* for pilfering other mens deuises from them & conuerting them to his owne vse, for in deede as I would wish euery inuentour, which is the very Poet, to receaue the prayses of his inuention, so would I not have a translatour to be ashamed to be acknowen of his translation' (Smith II, p.172), whereas '[...] the Canterbury

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[65] And Harington echoes 'Cannot an Italian ribald vomit out the infectious poyson of the world but an Inglishe horrel-lorrel must lick it vp for a restoratiue, and attempt to putrify gentle mindes with the vilest impostumes of lewde corruption?' (Smith II, p.259). This is the Italy of Renaissance Tragedy, the home of vice and birthplace of the Borgias. Harvey has yet to observe Petrarch's 'precious tablet of rare conceits, & ... curious frame of exquisite workmanship' (Smith II, p.260), and it shows the opposite view to Puttenham's sense of the 'sweete' influence of Italy on English poetry (Smith II, p.62). This is just one of the examples of the opposing agendas, dictated often by personal relationships, displayed amongst this collection of theorists; Harington (as translator of Ariosto) and Nashe exhibit a satiric disdain for Italianate veneer, while Harvey and Puttenham appreciate Italian poetry for its elegant style.

Tales were *Chaucers* owne inuention, as I suppose, and where he sheweth more the naturall of his pleasant wit then in any other of his workes' (Smith II, p.64).

Thinking in this vein, perhaps, Nashe writes:

> Wherein haue I borrowed from *Greene* or *Tarlton, that I should thanke them for all I haue?* [...] This I will proudly boast [...] that the vaine which I haue (be it a *median* vaine, or a madde vaine) is of my owne begetting, and cals no man father in England but my selfe, neyther *Euphues*, nor *Tarlton* nor *Greene*. Not *Tarlton* nor *Greene* but haue beene contented to let my simple iudgement ouerrule them in some matters of wit. *Euphues* I readd when I was a little ape in Cambridge, and then I thought it was *Ipse ille*; it may be excellent good still [...] but to imitate it I abhorre, otherwise than it imitates *Plutarch, Ouid* and the choisest Latine Authors. (Smith II, p.243)

Clearly for Nashe here it is acceptable to imitate established masters from the past, who have superhuman status, but not permissible, and certainly no longer a sign of homage, to imitate living authors. However, Harington introduces a more questioning and innovative note, when he says of Ariosto: '[a]s for Aristotles rules, I take it he hath followed them verie strictly' and goes through the rules to prove it. Having established the rules, he examines Ariosto's supposed faults, such as breaking off and ending too quickly, defending Ariosto in this by drawing a comparison with Sidney - is these quirks of style are to be found in Sidney, he suggests, then they are allowable. Finally, however, he writes: '[a]nother fault is, that he speaketh so much in his own person by digression, which they say also is against the rules of Poetrie, because neither *Homer* nor *Virgill* did it. Me thinks it is a sufficient defence to say, *Ariosto* doth it' (Smith II, pp.216-17). This is an important new departure. This sentence exactly captures the timid groping towards originality ('in his own person') that seems characteristic of this time; perhaps, he seems to say, we can invent, but at the same time he needs to quote 'great writers' who invent, to lend authority to his suggestion.

So the posy, the flower, the ornamentation, becomes in itself the craft and the end product of poetry. From the starting point - which sees poetic words as merely the 'clothing' of meaning - the image develops into a thing complete in itself, and worth, as the term suggests, cultivating. The purpose of this cultivation is voiced very consciously by critics of the 1590s as being the improvement of the image and substance of English poetry, both at home and abroad. The flower is bred away from the stock to such an extent that a hybrid is produced which is unique. This means that there is a pronounced move away from the traditions of imitation, and there is a political impetus behind the encouragement of invention.

iii. 'When substantiallnes combyneth with delightfulnes'

Linguistic inventiveness, especially in a living language, posed problems for the scholar brought up on imitation of the static classics. Latin had a fixed vocabulary and a style crystallised in a limited number of literary works from the classical past; it was spoken only formally. In contrast, the propensity of English, as the vernacular in widespread use, was to develop and change all the time. The response to this division is an ever greater need to describe and confine. Imitation, and Englishness, were, therefore, two elements in poetry that demanded examination. This is an era when the Greek and Latin classics were considered linguistic models, particularly Cicero, and Latin was the language of learned contemporary writing. Gabriel Harvey wrote, for example, a long treatise on just this aspect in *De Ciceronianus*.[66] But as Ascham wrote: '[h]e that wyll wryte well in any tongue, muste followe thys councel of Aristotle, to speake as the common people do, to thinke as wise men do'.[67] 'The language of the underworld, the original of modern slang, was brought into use. "The Lawyer," says Wilson, "will store his stomach with the pratyng of Pedlars"'.[68] Hence precepts may be taken but adapted to the changing contingencies of history. McKnight, who sees Wilson as a leading proponent of the rise of English, does point out that:

> [...] the doctrine conveyed is not of Wilson's invention. It is doctrine shared with Wilson by his associates in learning at Cambridge, and the precepts applied are classical precepts such as Cicero long before had applied to the Latin of his time. [...] With a fixed body of knowledge handed down by tradition, the most important task of the trained mind had been that of logical interpretation. With the widened outlook, however, of the Renaissance, the situation was changed. With the search for new knowledge and the application of knowledge to secular uses, the important thing came to be the well-stored memory and the ability to give to knowledge effective expression. Both these purposes were served by the study which in earlier times bore the name *rhetoric* (pp.123-24).

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[66] Wilson, loc.cit.

[67] Quoted by McKnight, loc.cit., p.120.

[68] McKnight, loc.cit., p.122.

The promotion of English as a learned language was something that was attempted, but it was for several reasons a difficult project. The shift from Latin to English in the law-courts, for example, was still at a developmental stage.[69] Even the selection of a literary canon from the vernacular was a relatively recent concern. The aim was still to employ a Latin form, for example in what Walter Davis has called 'the quixotic attempt Sidney had inaugurated in the 1570s to adapt the accentual English language to the quantitative scansion and verse forms of Latin poetry.'[70] And not only might English be unsuited to Latin forms, but it was, unlike Latin, still a developing language, a fact of which these promoters of English poetry were well aware.

So in some sense the move to the vernacular ironically develops into the struggle to preserve a central standard, since the shift from a fixed language of learning (Latin) to a changeable living language meant that conventions of form and subject could be continually remade, rather than remaining deferential to a long-established static tradition. Hence there is a concern shown at this time to define a correct English literary language, which Puttenham sees as particularly important:

> This part in our maker or Poet must be heedyly looked vnto, that it be naturall, pure, and the most vsuall of all his countrey; and for the same purpose rather than that which is spoken in the kings Court, or in the good townes and Cities within the land, then in the marches and frontiers, or in port townes, where straungers haunt for trafficke sake, or yet in Vniuersities where schollers vse much peeuish affectation of words out of the primatiue languages, or finally, in any vplandish village or corner of a Realme, where is no resort but of poore rusticall or vnciuill people: neither shall he follow the speach of a craftes man or carter [...] for such persons doe abuse good speaches by strange accents or ill shapen soundes and false ortographie. But he shall follow generally the better brought vp sort, such as the Greekes call *charientes*, men ciuill and graciously behauoured and bred (Smith II, pp.150-51).

In this he had antecedents : Webbe, often resembling an earlier Puttenham, is similarly interested in producing an English prosodia (Smith I, p.302), and wishes to better English written style (Smith I, p.267). John Trevisa in the fourteenth century wrote: '[a]l the language of the Northumbres and specialliche at York is so sharp, *slittynge* and *fiotynge* and vnshape,

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[69] G. R. Evans tells how the trials of Cranmer and Ridley were conducted in Latin and English mixed, and discusses the development of English away from the Latinate as shown in the transcripts of these trials. ' "Thus is it Englished": the Use of English in Scholastic Disputation in the Mid-Sixteenth Century', *Review of English Studies*, vol. 39 (1988), pp.519-22.

[70] Davis, loc.cit., p.xix.

that we Southern men may that longage vnnethe ['hardly'] vnderstonde.' [71] Wilson too writes - 'Emong all other lessons this should first be learned, that we neuver affect any straunge ynkehorne termes, but to speake as is commonly received: neuither seking to be ouer fine, nor yet liuing ouercarelesse, vsyng our speeche as moste men doe, and ordering our wittes as the fewest haue doen.'[72] Puttenham states the anxiety about diversity and the attempt to create a lexicon of terms, which, in *The Arte of English Poesie*, he attempts to do (while modestly claiming ineptitude); Smith calls it a 'general scheme'(Smith II, pp.150-51). The search for a correct English was born of the fact that not long before even literary works written in one county have to be translated for another part (McKnight 1968, p.2); John of Trevisa was troubled by the 'commyxstion and mellyng' of English, 'furst with the Danes and afterward with Normans, in *menye* the *contray* longage ys *apeyred* , and som vseth strange *wlaffyng*, *chyteryng*, *harryng*, and *garryng grisbittyng*.'[73] English was considerably more unified in Puttenham's day than this analysis of fourteenth century English suggests; nonetheless Puttenham's treatise voices the same concerns nonetheless, as does Carew's.

Language is no longer seen as God-given. These writers do not exercise themselves in a Dantean search for God's language which Adam first spoke, a search for the language before Babel. 'Speach is not naturall to man sauing for his onely habilitie to speake, and that he is by kinde apt to vtter all his conceits with sounds and voyses' (Puttenham; Smith II, p.149). In Puttenham's scheme of things, it is not Adam but the Greeks who are the first, so that he sees language in a historical, anthropological way rather than a mythic one. The Greeks were lucky, says Puttenham, because they could give the first names to everything, and they were followed by the Latins, 'cobling many words together' (Smith II, pp.162-63). He follows with a long analysis of how current English speakers and writers are now 'cobling' similarly, which is an argument for using their own, fresh, language. Different metres and structures are appropriate for different languages. There is a sense in which Puttenham is conscious of the newness of his approach; he acknowledges that new introductions are always

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[71] Kenneth Sisam (ed), *Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1921; 1937, 1948); p.150; quoted by McKnight, loc.cit., p.2. McKnight gloss. I quote exactly from Sisam except for modernising relevant medieval characters to 'y' and 'th'.

[72] Quoted by McKnight, loc.cit., p.121.

[73] Sisam, loc.cit., p.148. Translation: *menye* [many]; *contray* [region]; *apeyred* [impaired]; *wlaffyng* [indistinct utterance]; *chyteryng* [chattering]; *harryng* [snarling]; *garryng* [harsh]; *grisbittyng* [gnashing of the teeth]. Translations are from Tolkien's glossary, included in this edition.

treated with scorn - especially in the case of monosyllabic English poetry, where the Greek and Latin feet, depending on polysyllables, seem inappropriate - but Puttenham wants to show how they can be adopted to advantage (Smith II, p.117) 'But after a speach is fully fashioned to the common vnderstanding, & accepted by consent of a whole countrey and nation, it is called a language, & receaueth none allowed alteration but by extraordinary occasions, by little & little, as it were insensibly, bringing in of many corruptions that creepe along with the time ...' (Smith II, p.149). It might no longer be seen in terms of God's first language, but there is still the same attitude as Dante's search for the *oil oc* and *si* etc : the return to the original or master-Italian of which there are too many bastardised versions; only now it is to be created rather than rediscovered.[74]

Perhaps Puttenham's sense of creeping corruptions lies behind Richard Carew's thesis, in which he first describes the requirements of a language, and then goes on to demonstrate how widely they are to be found in English. Language should have elements of '*significancye, Easynes*, [useful] *Copiousnes, & Sweetnes* [pleasing]'. He finds copiousness particularly in English, which has more letters, for example the letter Q, than other languages, and is impressed by the monosyllabic quality of Anglo-Saxon words which means a facility with composition - of exclamations, for example. English is also easier to learn than other languages, having simple grammar and shorter words, for example (Smith II, pp.288- 90). 'Yea, soe significant are our Wordes, that amongst them sundry single ones serue to expresse diuers thinges; as by *Bill* are meant a weapon, a scroll, and a birdes beak' (Smith II, p.288). Carew here sounds rather like Humpty-Dumpty, with his Utilitarian emphasis on making words work harder. But it is not all work and no play, since the sound and elegance of a language is equally important. He finishes enthusiastically:

> I com now to the last and sweetest point of the sweetnes of our tongue, which shall appeare the more plainlye yf, like towe Turkeyes, or the *London Drapers*, wee match it with oure neighboures. The Italyan is pleasante but without synewes, as to stillye fleeting water; the French delicate but ouer nice, as a woman scarce daring to open her lipps for feare of marring her countenaunce; the Spanishe maiesticall, but fullsome, running to much on the O, and terrible like the deuill in a playe; the Dutch manlike, but withall very harshe, as one ready at euery worde to pick a quarrell. Now wee in borrowing from

[74] Donaworth , loc.cit., touches on this sense that language originates in man rather than the divine: pp.1-6, 21-22. She points out that John Dee's belief in a magical relationship between words and things was a rarity at this time in England (p.40). See also Dante, 'De volgare', loc.cit.

> them geue the strength of Consonantes to the Italyan, the full sounde of wordes to the French, the varietye of termi[na]cions to the Spanish, and the mollifieinge of more vowells to the Dutch; and soe (like bees) gather the honye of their good properties and leaue the dreggs to themselfes. And thus, when substantiallnes combyneth with delightfulness, fullnes with fynes, seemelynes with portlynes, and courrantnes with staydnes, howe canne the language which consisteth of all these sounde other then most full of sweetnes? (Smith II, pp.292-93).

English has borrowed from other languages, but this does not make it 'Babellish', he says, 'for so the Greekes robbed the Hebrues, and the Latynes the Greekes' (Smith II, p.290). He also asserts that while some languages cannot always adequately translate others, English can, and mentions the opportunities for diversity in dialogue, and variety of dialects - as a positive point, in contrast to Puttenham and Trevisa (Smith II, pp.291, 292). Similarly, Chapman talks about the number of new words a language may introduce - if Chaucer can have new words, then that is still a permissible practice (Smith II, p.305). It ought to be noted that even here, when these writers see themselves as saying something new, an appeal is made to tradition. Even when the newness of current English is being defined, the old (Chaucer) is appealed to; even when the autonomy of English is argued for, the authority of the Greeks and Latins is recalled.

iv. The 'Courtly Poet' and the making of an English canon

These writers, then, are concerned with a language that is cultivated through borrowing from existing tongues, which are seen almost as a raw material for discriminating appropriation. This language must again be subject to the refinement of poetic conventions, which, as I said, must be created anew for vernacular purposes. Puttenham writes: '[i]t was therfore expedient we deuised for euery figure of importance his vulgar name, and to ioyne the Greeke or Latine originall with them; after that sort much better satisfying aswel the vulgar as the learned learner, and also the authors owne purpose which is to make of a rude rimer a learned and a Courtly Poet' (Smith II, p.164) . The 'Courtly' nature of the poet is significant. The question of an elite is not simply a question of contingency; it had another purpose in the

aggrandisement of poetry. It was very much a part of how these poet-critics saw themselves, and how they laboured to redeem the impoverished image of poetry. By differentiating between good and bad poetry, by prefering certain poetry (necessarily in hierarchical terms) to others, by introducing, in short, a system of 'iudgement', of taste, of quality, an idea could be generated that poetry itself was capable of the greatest heights of effort, and achievement.

By making poetry exclusive, they also made it desirable and revered. Thus we hear of the *great* poets, of *great* styles of poetry, and of *great* works. Puttenham spends some time on differentiating between high, mean, base styles (Smith II, p.155), in a sociological adaptation of the Platonic ladder. Tis is reflected in the varying grandeur of the poems that praise each group: gods are accorded hymns; princes, '*Encomia*'; lesser people, 'other slight poemes' (Smith II, p.158). He explains his philosophy on why a hierarchy is necessary for the smooth operation of a social system (Smith II, p.111). Hierarchy is justified on the grounds of merit because of liberty: not God-given position, recalling the Wife of Bath's sermon on the subject; Puttenham is, after all, writing in a true Chaucerian tradition. Puttenham declares that it is more important for princes to be virtuous, therefore the poems praising good ones are higher art, mostly tragedy (Smith II, p.36); ' [...] continence in a king is of greater merit than in a carter' - because the king has greater power to do whatever he wants, and therefore exhibits greater heroism than someone for whom the temptation is out of range (Smith II, p. 44). This is the test that Angelo fails in *Measure for Measure*, and the point made in one of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*: 'Lilies that fester smell far more worse than weeds' (94.14).

One way of reinforcing this hierarchy, or rather of placing poetry, once it is reinforced, right at the top, is by connecting it firmly with royalty. Sidney talks of 'Sweet Poesy, that hath anciently had Kings, emperors, senators [...] not only to favour poets, but to be poets' (p.131); Harington casually mentions that, in the past, princes have advanced poetry (Smith II, p.195); and Puttenham writes of various kings who always carried poetry with them, and not just for the elegance or flattery of the poetry, but because poets were considered wise (Smith II, pp.17-18). He includes some instances of leader-poets (Julius Caesar, for example). 'So as the Poets seemed to haue skill not onely in the subtilties of their arte but also to be meete for all maner of functions ciuill and martiall, euen as they found fauour of the times they liued in, insomuch as their credit and estimation generally was not small. But in these dayes, although some learned Princes may take delight in them, yet vniuersally it is not

so.' (Smith II, pp.18-19). But others recognise that this is changing, and there is now some Royal patronage, and indeed Royal poets; Vaughan's defence of poetry consists largely of pointing this out. James I is 'a notable poet'(Smith II, p.326). Francis Meres too asserts, in happy ignorance of Puttenham's 'iudgement':

> [...] as Iames the 6, nowe King of Scotland, is not only a fauorer of Poets but a Poet, as my friend Master Richard Barnefielde hath in this disticke passing well recorded,
>
> The King of Scots now liuing is a Poet,
> As his *Lepanto* and his *Furies* show it:
>
> so Elizabeth, our dread Souereign and gracious Queene, is not only a liberal Patrone vnto Poets, but an excellent Poet herselfe [...] (Smith II, p.321)

It is worth noting that Puttenham specifically addresses his work to Elizabeth I, so that the motive of sycophancy must not be discounted; Elizabeth, as did James I, wrote poetry herself. Elizabeth's role as a Godlike poet complements the Godliness of her monarchic position.

I noted earlier that even when making new claims about a new approach, old authorities are evoked to sanction it. Harington writes in defence of *Orlando Furioso* (disliked by some) by comparing it with the *Aeneid,* picking out features and parallel characters (Smith II, p.211). He quotes Dante on how Virgil rescued him from straying '[...] as one writes very pretily, that children do wade in *Virgill,* and yet strong men do swim in it' (Smith II, p.212). Clearly, great familiarity and use and translation of the classics is highly thought of, notwithstanding the emphasis on invention. Classical antiquity is still used as an authority; Hoby's text is peppered with Greek and Latin instances to back up his arguments, e.g. Simonides on painting as lying and poetry as painting, and St. Augustine (Smith I, pp.342- 43). This attitude appears not just in the urge to create a pristine authoritative literary language, but also in the need to create an authoritative list of great writers.

Just as Petrarch and Dante both created frames or lists of great people, Petrarch in his *Trionfi*, well known to the Elizabethans through Lord Morley's translation of 1542 (Mary Sidney translated *The Triumph of Death*[75]), and Dante in the *Divine Comedy*, so there was a tendency to name great poets in England. Petrarch's way of naming great poets (with himself among them) to create a canon, is repeated in England, for example in Meres's fairly laborious itemising of the greatest Classic, Italian and English poets and their works,

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[75] Philip Sidney and Mary Sidney, *The Psalms of Sir Philip Sidney and the Countess of Pembroke,* edited by J. C. A. Rathmell (New York: Columbia University Press 1963), p.xxviii.

comparing and relating them (Smith II, p.314ff.), and in Harvey's list of great British writers (Smith II, p.248ff.). Harvey writes: '[... a]ll posterity honour Petrarck, that was the harmony of heauen, the lyfe of Poetry, the grace of Arte'(Smith II, pp.259-60), together with English masters and examples of this new movement - Ascham and Sidney (Smith II, p.258). Meres, writing on Shakespeare at some length, eulogises thus: '[a]s the soule of Euphorbus was thought to liue in Pythagoras: so the sweete wittie soule of Ouid liues in mellifluous and hony-tongued Shakespeare, witnes his *Venus and Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, his sugred *Sonnets* among his priuate friends, &c.' (Smith II, p.317), and '[a]s Epius Stolo said that the Muses would speake with Plautus tongue if they would speak Latin: so I say that the Muses would speak with Shakespeares fine filed phrase if they would speake English'(Smith II, p.318). Spenser is frequently quoted as the ideal poet, particularly for *The Shepherd's Calendar* (for example by Webbe; Smith I, p.270). These current or recent English poets are often placed in a line following on from past great poets, as by Puttenham (Smith II, p.62). Fraunce, in his definition of the poetic tradition, brings forward Greek and Latin writing and Sir Philip Sidney, as if to link the two in equal and continuing prestige. He also quotes *The Faerie Queene* (Smith I, pp.304-305), then only circulating in manuscript (1588). Carew details the English authors in which the 'vayne' of various Classical writers might be found, concluding with:

> And in a worde, to close vp these prooffes of our copiousnes, looke into our Imitacione of all sortes of verses affoorded by any other Language, and you shall finde that *S^r^. Philip Sidney, M^r^. Stanyhurst*, and diuers moe, haue made vse how farre wee are within compasse of a fore imagined impossibility in that behalfe [...] Will yow haue all in all for prose and verse? take the miracle of our age Sir *Philip Sydney* (Smith II, pp.292, 293).

Nashe similarly writes: 'Apollo hath surrendered his ivory harp to Astrophel.' Nor did translation everywhere suffer disdain; Nashe wishes that translation from Latin was a wider practice - and mentions a few names (Smith I, p.316). Here indeed is an echo of the Petrarchan notion of metamorphosis and tradition, nowhere more clearly, perhaps, than in Meres.

There was certainly a sense of a new beginning - a 'rebirth.' Puttenham declares that before Edward III and Richard II all poetry was barbarous and not at all learned '[...] their names should not be defrauded of the honour as seemeth due to them for hauing by their thankefull studies so much beautified our English tong as at this day it will be found our nation is in nothing inferiour to the French or Italian for copie of language, subtiltie of deuice,

good method and proportion in any forme of poem' (Smith II, pp.62-63). He lists England's great writers of the past:

> In the latter end of the same kings reigne [Henry VIII] sprong vp a new company of courtly makers, of whom Sir *Thomas Wyat* th'elder & *Henry* Earle of Surrey were the two chieftaines, who, hauing trauailed into Italie, and there tasted the sweete and stately measures and stile of the Italian Poesie, as nouices newly crept out of the schooles of *Dante*, *Arioste* and *Petrarch*, they greatly pollished our rude & homely maner of vulgar Poesie from that it had bene before, and for that cause may iustly be sayd the first reformers of our English meetre and stile (Smith II, pp.62-63).

In this passage there is the sense that a new endeavour was being attempted. The Courtliness of the 'makers', and the attendant 'pollish' and 'reform' is a result of foreign influence. Implicitly, if a style is entirely home-grown it is 'rude'; it can only be improved if it is tempered with a style from distant times and places. The originality that is praised is paradoxical; the poets are original in relation to their immediate predecessors in that they imitate the Greeks; they are original Englishmen, in that they take up Classic or Italian influences. There is again a sense of history: the list of poets, past and present, creates the sense of purposeful and definitive shape - a *simulacrum*, indeed, of life. Just as in the time of Dante and Petrarch the learned look to authorities and are ambivalent about the vulgar tongue, so now the same process is taking place in England - except that Dante and Petrarch are now the ancient authorities. This is a subtler form of Petrarchan imitation than merely using the oxymoron and the sonnet. The idea is not consciously entertained, however, that a static tradition cannot be indefinitely maintained, or that the rules in the process of being created will ever be superseded.

There is, however, in this ostensible attempt to lay out an objective or eternal canon, an element of bickering on a personal level between rival contemporary cliques. Nashe's self-defence against accusations of theft (Smith II, p.243) is a document made up more of clever personal insults than of analyses of poetry (*Foure Letters Refuted*). The *Foure Letters* by Gabriel Harvey, were what Smith calls an 'invective against Greene'(Smith II, p.229), written in revenge for what Greene wrote about Harvey's father (and of course Nashe wrote the preface to Greene's *Menaphon*, included in Smith). The conflict is to be seen in these Nashe-Harvey battles, and reveals itself in Puttenham's nervous apprehension that he might be in for some criticism of his own faults, perhaps those of which he accuses others (Smith II, p.151). This dread is not unfounded, since Harington, stung by Puttenham's rejection of

translators, bites back:

> Neither do I suppose it to be greatly behoofull for this purpose to trouble you with the curious definitions of a Poet and Poesie, & with the subtill distinctions of their sundrie kinds; nor to dispute how high and supernatural the name of a Maker is, so christned in English by that vnknowne God-father that this last yeare saue one, viz. 1589, went forth a booke called the Art of English Poetrie: and least of all do I purpose to bestow any long time to argue whether *Plato, Zenophon,* and *Erasmus* writing fictions and Dialogues in Prose may iustly be called Poets, or whether *Lucan* writing a story in verse be an historiographer, or whether Master *Faire* translating *Virgil*, Master *Golding* translating *Ouids* Metamorphosis, and my selfe in this worke that you see, be any more than versifiers, as the same *Ignoto* termeth all translators: for as for all, or the most part of such questions, I will refer you to Sir *Philip Sidneys* Apologie (Smith II, p.196).

Of Sidney he approves, while mocking 'the poore gentleman', author of *The Arte*, who while labouring to prove that poetry is an art '[...] sure in my poore opinion he doth proue nothing more plainly then that which M. *Sidney* and all the learneder sort that haue written of it do pronounce, namely that it is a gift and not an art' (Smith II, p.197).

The general impression is that these men were all intensely involved in a very personal and local battle, with little of the sense of eternity or immortality that concerned Petrarch in his selection processes. But in fact this too is part of a tradition, as they well knew; Puttenham records that in Classical times poets insulted each other by writing verses (Smith II, p.56) - so that Puttenham's stories of Virgil and his lampoons cannot resist the comparison with the likes of Thomas Nashe and Gabriel Harvey, and raises the question of whether this was not in fact considered a necessary and convenient way of proving oneself an equally great writer.

Lord Morley's image of finding Petrarch's poetry like a jewel in a dungheap neatly illustrates the idea that the poem is something contained, precious and precise, in a world which is, as Montaigne maintains in the *Apology for Raymond Sebond*, full of mire and mud. But it must be found in that world. Similar perceptions are there in Petrarch's own sense of the transcendant (for example, *RS* 22). These images illustrate the way in which, when the raw material of language is subjected to selectivity and rules, a particular sort of exclusive, stabilised language is seen as being created. The word 'poesie' with the connotations discussed above, pulls together these ideas. The use of the image of flowers is almost an unwitting recognition of the doomed nature of the task; that 'poesie' is a posy of flowers which attempts to imitate the hardness of jewels, while being prey to growth and decay.

Finally, the notion of poetry as consisting of ornament and idea, or clothes and body, should be distinguished from the Sidneian notion of using fable and story in different ways, to instruct or inspire. Sidney differentiates between the historian, hunting through mouse-eaten records, and the poet's speaking picture and figuring forth. The stories found in history may be used to convey lessons, and this process may be seen either as a sort of divine instruction implicit in the happenings themselves; or, increasingly, as a use made of stories by poets for moral ends. So Montaigne can suggest that it does not signify if a story is in any sense factual or not - what matters is what can be learned from it. He also says that each time a story is told it changes.[76] This is something of a Ciceronian idea, of history as rhetoric. The concept is of history as the books themselves, so that stories actually happen in a state of artifice. Petrarch wanted to create a 'simulacrum' of himself, a refined self recreated in finished art, as a sort of alternative way out of earthly imperfection, a parallel, maybe, to the notion of the soul attaining perfection in heaven. Shakespeare plays with a similar wish, in both the *Sonnets* and *Lucrece*; this will be the subject of the first section of the next chapter.

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[76] Maryanne Cline Horowitz , Anne J. Cruz and Wendy A. Furman (eds), *Renaissance Rereadings* (Urbana and Chicago:University of Illinois Press 1988), p.20.

CHAPTER 4

SHADOWS OF INFINITE VARIETY: OVIDIAN NARRATIVE AND MYTH IN SHAKESPEARE

All things doo chaunge. But nothing sure dooth perrish. This same spright
Dooth fleete, and fisking heere and there dooth swiftly take his flyght
From one place too another place, and entreth every wyght,
Removing out of man too beast, and out of beast too man.
But yit it never perrisheth nor never perrish can.
And even as supple wax with ease receyveth fygures straunge,
And keepes not ay one shape, ne bydes assured ay from chaunge,
And yit continueth alwayes wax in substaunce: So I say
The soule is ay the self-same thing it was, and yit astray
It fleeteth intoo sundry shapes.

- Golding's Ovid

Whom forbycause *Pygmalion* saw too leade theyr lyfe in sin,
Offended with the vice whereof great store is packed within
The nature of the womankynd, he led a single lyfe.
And long it was ere he could fynd in hart too take a wyfe.
Now in the whyle by wondrous Art an image he did grave
Of such proportion, shape, and grace as nature never gave
Nor can too any woman give. In this his worke he tooke
A certaine love. The looke of it was ryght a Maydens looke,
And such a one as that yee would beleeve had lyfe, and that
Would moved bee, if womanhod and reverence letted not:
So artificiall was the work.

- Golding's Ovid

Mistress, reptile Mistress,
You are almost too large, I am almost frightened.

- D.H. Lawrence, 'Lui et elle'

I. INTRODUCTION

'Imitation' and 'metamorphosis', as discussed so far, are concepts that inform some representations of the female in Renaissance poetry (see Chapter One, II). The following chapter will negotiate Shakespearean manifestations of this, in two sections which look at the question from slightly different angles. The first section will examine aspects of the Petrarchan mistress as she appears in Shakespeare's self-consciously anti-Petrarchan imaging. Traces of her can be found in surprising places. Not only are the Dark Lady and the young man of the Sonnets relevant here, but female characters of the plays also have some bearing on the issue, most notably Cleopatra.

The second section will be principally concerned with *The Rape of Lucrece*, through which I will consider the ways in which myth and history converge and are used to express concepts of autobiography and truth. *Imitatio* illuminates here the telling of stories, or histories; similar topics are treated in some of the *Sonnets*. The word 'history', in Renaissance writing, has several connotations. It is in one sense simply equivalent to 'story'; this is the sense in which the Duke uses it in *Twelfth Night* (*TN*, II.iv.109).[1] There are other definitions of 'history', for example as rhetoric, which will be discussed below (III.iii). These meanings blend in my readings of Shakespeare, since I work from the premise that there is no story without rhetoric. One way of reading 'histories' and their incarnations is to see one element as the skeletal structure, that I shall term the 'plot', which is clothed anew and differently in each telling but itself remains the same. Explicitly, this is a Renaissance theory, but in practice the two elements of rhetoric and plot are not so clearly separated. So, when I look at tellings of stories in relation to *Lucrece*, I consider the language and representation, and the way this actually threatens to change the plot; and I review earlier considerations of Petrarch and the *simulacrum* (see Chapter One).

In both sections, the notion of the female is of central significance, or rather the tension created by the space that is the meeting-place of the (male) poet and the woman he writes to or writes about. The mistress of the sonnet tradition in sixteenth century

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[1]All references to plays other than *A&C* are from William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, edited by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1988).

England owes much to Petrarch, and Shakespeare's poetry alludes to this tradition. This 'Petrarchan' love poetry may be described in grammatical terms, to borrow a Russian Formalist approach, as subject and object, suggesting the grammar of poetry, as well as the subjectification and objectification of feelings.[2] In this 'Petrarchan' poetry, the mistress becomes conventionalised, and hence becomes removed from Petrarch's Laura and the conventions within which he wrote. Laura, with her variety of characteristics, and brief, dissolving presences, is not so easily catalogued and reproduced as is the mistress in so many sixteenth-century English poems.[3] But in some characters of Shakespeare's, the variable, contradictory and transient shifts of mood and nature reappear.

In looking at Shakespeare in the light of Petrarch, I do not mean to suggest that Shakespeare responded directly to particular poems by Petrarch, rather that he wrote against a background of Petrarchan*ism*. This is not necessarily the same thing, since by the time it became popular in the sixteenth century, 'Petrarchan' poetry had been much adapted, acquiring a distinctly neoplatonic flavour, by way of thinkers like Bembo, Ficino and Castiglione.[4] Mortimer suggests that actual Petrarchan translation was rare, while Petrarchanism, often second-hand, was all-pervasive (although drawing on the same few poems) in the 1590s. The 1590s 'Petrarchan' styles took up again a theme that had been virtually dormant since Wyatt and Surrey (p. 31). Even Spenser's 'Visions of Petrarch', Mortimer discloses, were drawn from the French Marot, and are not therefore a direct imitation.[5] Praise was directed towards Petrarch as Harvey does here, saying that Petrarch '[...] exercise[s] his fayrest giftes in a faire subiect, & teacheth Wit to be inamored vpon Beautye, as Quicksiluer embraseth gold, or as vertue affecteth honour, or as astronomy gazeth vpon heauen, to make Arte more excellent by contemplation of excellentest Nature. [...] All posterity honour Petrarck, that was the harmony of heauen, the lyfe of Poetry, the grace of Arte' (Smith II, p.259-60) But even if Harvey did know Petrarch's poetry when

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[2] For a discussion of this grammatical or coded approach, see R. Rawdon Wilson, 'Shakespearean Narrative: *The Rape of Lucrece* Reconsidered', *Studies in English Literature*, vol. 28 (1988), pp.39-59; see especially Note 23 (p.58).

[3] See Chapter One, Note 4, above.

[4] See Chapter One, Note 4, above.

[5] A. R. Mortimer, *Petrarch's Canzoniere in the English Renaissance* (Bergamo, etc.: Minerva Italica 1975), p.21. See also D'Amico, loc.cit: 'Pace non trovo', 'Passa la nave' and 'Amor che nel penser' are among the three most translated in England (p.21).

he wrote this, this was not generally the case; knowledge of Petrarch's poetry was largely based on hearsay, and on the sonnet conventions so widely employed and also satirised at the time. The Ovidian strains in the *Rime Sparse* had been largely left out of this Petrarchanism, and it is when Shakespeare uses Ovid that he comes closest to a Petrarch no longer widely known.

J. B. Leishman sees 'a certain spiritual affinity' between Petrarch and Shakespeare (p.50) - and adds that Petrarch and Shakespeare have ' "spirituality"' (by this he means Christian spirituality) in common, while it is lacking in the pagan writers of antiquity (p.51-52).[6] He goes on to differentiate between Petrarch's and Shakespeare's faith in the following terms: Petrarch actually believes Laura lives on in Heaven - whereas Shakespeare is more sceptical:

> Shakespeare's sonnets, like Petrarch's, are unworldly, but not, like Petrarch's, other-worldly, and they are filled with a sadness different from Petrarch's and resembling that which breathes from so much of the great poetry of the ancient world: an almost overwhelming sadness at the fact of human transience (p.52).

While it is perhaps a little vague to speak of the 'spiritual affinity' between the two writers, Leishman is correct in noticing the similarities between them. But, since Shakespeare probably did not read Petrarch, this 'affinity,' felt but not defined, must be closely analysed.[7] The similarities between them are not, I suggest, any kind of essentialist 'affinity', but arise from their common use of Ovid. Leishman's sense that sadness at human transience is a pagan characteristic felt by Shakespeare but not Petrarch is apt to an extent, but he seems to ignore the true significance of what is, perhaps, shared by Shakespeare and the pagans. There is, it is true, a strong sense of mortality, and of mortal processes - and this is in fact present too in Petrarch - but it is debatable whether transience is the strongest feeling to come out of it. Indeed, in Ovid's work, and certainly in Shakespeare, there is a strong sense of buoyant endurance, of regeneration, and of lasting energetic natural processes - in other words, their play with metamorphosis actually suggests *changing*, not *ending*. In the *Rime Sparse*, however, change does signal a departure from this world,

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[6] Leishman, loc. cit.

[7] 'No convincing evidences of specific Petrarchistic derivation are to be found (although there has been much seeking) in the sonnets of Shakespeare.' Ernest H. Wilkins, 'A General Survey of Renaissance Petrarchism', *Comparative Literature,* vol. 2 (1950), pp. 327-42; p.339.

whereas with Ovid and Shakespeare, the atoms, so to speak, remain in this world, and keep being mutated. They are not transferred, simply translated.[8] Hence the sense of mortal transience is stronger in Petrarch; for Shakespeare the question of earthly permanence has precedence - whether this takes the form of physical regeneration in progeny, or metaphysical regeneration in verse - while Petrarch sees the twin possibilities of heavenly eternity and earthly immortality (in fame). Shakespeare has to have the men to breathe and the eyes to see (*Sonnets*, 18.13-14); Petrarch apostrophises his song itself (for example, RS, 71.106, 72.76, 73.91).[9] But the question is not that easy for Petrarch; anxieties about the propriety of writing about figures from pagan myth and doubts about the truth of his reliance on Laura infuse his work with images of instability. Similar images appear in Shakespeare. Jonathan Bate sees Shakespeare as the Petrarchan imitator *par excellence* - in that he digests and recreates Ovidian myth rather than simply regurgitating it - as he has some of his characters do. [10] The question is, however, why Shakespeare, and indeed his contemporaries, turned to Ovid with such pervasive enthusiasm. There was a renewed trend towards Ovidian poetry, and in some ways this reflects both a need for a change in poetic style and cultural changes at the time. These will be discussed below.

In sixteenth century English poetry, the 'Petrarchan' formula often presents itself as a starting point, which may be adapted or reacted against in various ways. It is clear enough that in the Renaissance it was 'man' and 'his' place in the universe which were predominantly thought and written about, and the structure of society was male. Keith May writes that women in Renaissance literature were 'figures composed by men as part of an attempt to give coherence to the world [...] if the politically dominant sex, including almost all the poets, wishes to make an order through heroic values, the invented woman consolidates those values ... these fictional women have entered into the make-up of

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[8] Cf. Pythagoras in *Met.*, XV.252-258; or, in Golding's translation, XV.276-284. In this Chapter I will quote from Arthur Golding, *The XV Bookes of P. Ouidivs Naso, entytuled Metamorphosis* (1567) (London: Centaur Press 1961), hereafter 'Golding' within the text.

[9] I quote from William Shakespeare, *'The Sonnets' and 'A Lover's Complaint'*, ed. John Kerrigan (London, etc.: Penguin Books, 1986). I have also consulted F. Blakemore Evans' edition of *The Sonnets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996).

[10] Bate, loc.cit. Bate illustrates his argument by looking at Peter Quince's literal-mindedness, as being imitation that apes, does not adapt, does not contain the *disimilitudo* essential in the exercise of *similitudo* (pp.124-143).

women everywhere in the West.'[11] Ian Maclean amplifies this view by describing the male/female opposition in the context of other polarities, locating this binary approach in Aristotle:

> In the distinction of male and female may be discerned Aristotle's general tendency to produce dualities in which one element is superior and the other inferior. The male principle in nature is associated with active, formative and perfected characteristics, while the female is passive, material and deprived, desiring the male in order to become complete. The duality male/female is therefore paralleled by the dualities active/passive, form/matter, act/potency, perfection/imperfection, completion/ incompletion, possession/deprivation.[12]

Culturally, therefore, the female is not present except as a male construct. This is significant to my thesis in that it leaves 'the female' floating free, as a multiply interpretable concept, which can then be used as a symbol. It is self-image as an abstract topic that is of interest here; hence the floating concept of the female can even be used to express general concerns in *Lucrece*. Man is always the subject, everyman, the one who experiences; woman is the experience. Or, in other words, she embodies areas of experience and apprehension that are otherwise ethereal, bodiless, formless. This is clearly seen in the figure of Laura, who reverts, in moments of doubt, to *l'aura*, the air from which she came. To an extent Shakespeare's female figures occupy this male-invented space. The negotiation of gender dichotomies in his plays is reflected in the male and female recipient of the *Sonnets*, and the complications of the stage throw light upon his treatment of the old figure of the feminine ideal. When Shakespeare sees the world as a stage he is aware that the stage is peopled by male actors, who interpret female personae,

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[11] Keith M. May, *Characters of Women in Narrative Literature*, (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press 1981), p.17.

[12] Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p.8. Cynthia Marshall similarly writes about the 'patristic and medieval definitions of the female, as matter (not spirit), sensual (not spiritual), and passionate (not rational)'; Carole Levin and Karen Robertson (eds) *Sexuality and Politics in Renaissance Drama* (New York and Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press 1991), p.205. While this is undoubtedly one way that the gender dichotomy was delineated, I would argue that there is at least one other strand of thinking, evident in poetry, where the woman-figure *is* spiritual, as in the Beatrice figure of the heavenly guide, and, far from requiring male 'completion', is rather the ingredient that completes the male self-image. If, as Keith May maintains, women in the poetry of this period are 'composed by men', they relate more to the male poet's desire-fulfilment, than to a socio-economic recognition of the place of woman in society at this time - such an emphasis threatens to misread the rules and structures whereby the poetry was produced.

just as the male poet interprets them.[13]

However, Elizabethan poets could see at least one woman who was 'politically dominant', as May says of man generally (see above). Arthur Ferguson has written interestingly about the effect of writing in the court of a queen, arguing that (echoing Greenblatt's treatment of patronage and Wyatt's poetry) the Petrarchan love suit was adapted to express career ambitions among courtiers - the cult of Elizabeth was 'vintage *amour courtois*' (p.176).[14] In addition to this, women were beginning to write in their own voices to a greater extent than before.[15] The rise of the pamphlet around the latter part of Shakespeare's lifetime included scope for women's writing, which contained protests from women against being objectified in the love-sonnet tradition, since this does not allow women a voice, and leads to the popular male misconception that women are tempters who lead men to fall in love with them.[16] New Protestant views on the place of woman in marriage also meant that she was beginning to have a more socially responsible role.[17] All these examples mean that woman stops being on the margins of discourse, and, importantly, begins to lose something of her mythic resonance. If woman is no longer so easily the focus for poetic ideals, the symbol of the unknown, then her place in poetry (written by men) can be re-examined, or replaced.

In addition to this change in the perception of women, there were also other more general developments in thinking on the subject of stability and order - the very goals that, perhaps, the Petrarchan lady had come to stand for. Two main strands that affect conceptions of stability are the developing nature of definitions of faith and Biblical authority in the Reformation, and the (related) concerns with translation and English style (see Chapter Three). Then, developments in science and a preoccupation with discovering

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[13] Jacques puts this all-pervading Shakespearean point most succinctly in *As You Like It* (II.vii.139).

[14] Arthur B. Ferguson, *The Chivalric Tradition in Renaissance England* (Washington: Folger Books; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses 1986). Richard C. McCoy draws similar conclusions in *The Rites of Knighthood: the Literature and Politics of Elizabethan Chivalry* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1989), pp.58-60. See also, Greenblatt, *Self-fashioning*, loc.cit, pp.115-157.

[15] For a collection of Renaissance women's writing, and informative introduction and notes, see S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (eds), *Renaissance Drama by Women* (London and New York: Routledge 1996).

[16] Simon Shepherd (ed), *The Woman's Sharp Revenge* (London: Fourth Estate 1985).

[17] Merry E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993), pp.22-25.

the secrets of nature, through such enterprises as those of Sir Walter Raleigh and his circle, had to alter preconceptions about stability, and might explain why flux becomes the lens through which the world is viewed.[18] The fixed spheres of the Ptolemaic universe are a little cracked by now; and the effects that once were termed demon spirits can be renamed the natural essences of things.[19] Images of perfection and stability in the literature of the time are treated in various ways; Desdemona, for example, only awakes in Iago the urge to prove that she cannot exist - she is *too good to be true*, and Othello's inverted Galatean image of her as 'monumental alabaster' (*Othello*, V.ii.5) is after all merely an image of her corpse. Iago takes on the attributes of one of Raleigh's 'natural forces', a demon spirit bent on bringing the waywardness of nature, cruel though it may be, into the serene delusions of a Platonic universe. Othello looks for the devil's hooves at Iago's feet 'but that's a fable' (*Othello,* V.ii.293): the intellectual demarcations of good and evil make no sense in Iago's scheme of things.

In love poetry woman is an embodiment of man's perceptions or goals, but in some poetry the embodiment is less concrete than in others. This reflects the concerns of the poet as embedded in the concerns of his time. So, for example, the fluid nature of the *figura* of Petrarch's Laura reflects his internal conflicts about pagan, earthly love poetry contrasted to Christian, spiritual meditations - figured forth in the *Rime Sparse* and debated in the *Secretum*. In much sixteenth century English Petrarchanism, the sonnet mistress is on the whole regulated, predictable, recognisable - in other words, she complies with a set of conventions, in keeping with stylistic Petrarchistic devices.[20] But in Shakespeare's poetic portrayal of female figures, conflicts again appear, and formlessness and uncapturability are themes once more. In literary terms, Shakespeare is perhaps seeking a new voice, as part of the general sixteenth-century urge towards originality (as discussed in Chapter Three). In terms of writing about women, new developments affect the viability

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[18]John S. Mebane, *Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age: the Occult Tradition in Marlowe, Jonson and Shakespeare* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 1989), pp.73-94.

[19] '[T]he names within the Orphic hymns refer to "natural and divine virtues" not demons': John S. Mebane, Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 1989, 1992), p. 81, quoting from Walter Ralegh's *History of the World* in *The Works of Sir Walter Ralegh*, edited by William Oldys and Thomas Birch (8 vols), New York: Burt Franklin, 1829; reprint; (Book I, Chapter 6, Section 7, 2:181).

[20] See Chapter One, Note 4.

of having idealised, precise, predictable female figures, because women's voices are coming to be heard more than before, and to prove themselves unpredictable, or alien to the established 'female' code in love poetry. Elizabeth I herself caused immense intellectual effort to be expended in mythologising her both as the love poet's lady and as monarch - an acceptable fusion had to be achieved between her 'female' and 'male' attributes.

Woman, as a poetic muse, as the trigger of revelation, and as a chaste/chased guide to heaven, is the figure inherited by Shakespeare as one of the essential ingredients of love poetry. While Shakespeare still seems to use woman in the old figurative style, he also searches for fresh symbols. His treatment of her is equivocal and varied: he revolts against tradition; he rediscovers old material; he is disillusioned; he nevertheless uses female figures to play out concerns central to his poetry. Some relevant and distinct poetic types emerge amongst Shakespeare's portrayals of women. There is the self-sufficient type, who often (not always) significantly dresses as a man to achieve her goal: Rosalind, Viola, Imogen, Helen in *All's Well That Ends Well.* In these portrayals, the travesty role emphasises the contemporary entry of woman into worlds that had been male. Another type is the less vocal, chaste/chased woman: Desdemona, Cordelia, Ophelia, who seem to echo the 'Petrarchan' mistress, and display the uselessness of their values in a world of change - in other words, it is significant that they do not triumph, but are defeated as a result of their virtue. The Dark Lady and Cleopatra, variable, unpredictable, seem to voice more closely the effects of change, knowledge, and uncertainty. Lucrece, through her concerns about the fluidity of her future image, can be allied to these two.

These, then, are the questions to be considered in this chapter. Section One of this chapter opens with an examination of the Medusa myth from Ovid and the delineation of Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra.* Her Ovidian antecedents are clear, and link her more closely with Petrarch's Laura than might at first appear. In order to illuminate this point, Shakespeare's 'anti-Petrarchan' moments in his sonnets and plays will be examined. The history of the Petrarchan lady, from Dante through Petrarch to the sixteenth-century sonnet-writers, has been examined in Chapter One (above), together with Ovidian elements of her that are later forgotten in favour of neoplatonism, but, unintentionally it would seem, revived by Shakespeare. It seems that the sixteenth century Petrarch, remade

in the image of the Elizabethan sonneteer, is a limited, refined Petrarch, altered in reception, and that the revolt against this Petrarch, the embrace of Ovid, and the 'new' emphasis on inwardness and experience is ironically much closer to the actual poetry of Petrarch. Inwardness and Ovidian myth, to which the poets, and principally Shakespeare, supposedly return after rejecting the oxymoron and the pedestalled lady, is already present in Petrarch. This oblique meeting between Petrarch and Shakespeare is traceable and achieved through their separate use of the same sources, principally the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid. The erotic epyllion, which might appear to be a divergence from Petrarchanism, is closer to Petrarch's own poems than was thought by its practitioners; it is a return to something earlier, rather than something entirely new.

In the case of *Lucrece,* the male-female formula is particularly interesting, since the obvious genre of love poem cannot be applied; but it is debatable whether the very pervasiveness of love poetry has in any way affected the image of woman in poetry *per se*, and whether therefore it is significant that Shakespeare chooses the story of Lucrece to consider problems of truth and history. To an extent, she should not be gendered; the concerns are social concerns, social in the sense of pertaining to the aptitude of society to make or hold stories. Such a reading would be supported by the concerns with reputation in the *Sonnets*: how far is Shakespeare bemoaning his own 'outcast state'(*Sonnets*, 29.2) and the ill opinion of others, in the story of Lucrece? However, her sex is significant in relation to the rape, in that her particular dangers of misrepresentation centre round aspects of reputation specific to woman.[21] It is for the power of this situation, it would seem, that this story is chosen. However, the concerns with self-image become generalised beyond this, and are notions that are repeated in many ways in Shakespeare's works, in the *Sonnets* and in the plays. In his exploration of this concern with self-image, Shakespeare chooses to tell the story of a woman precisely because woman is imprecise; once again, her image in poetry has become malleable according to shifting poetic will, and thus she succinctly expresses the plasticity of image itself.

It will be clear that considerations of genre are deliberately transgressed; for my purposes,

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[21] Cynthia Marshall (Levin and Robertson, loc.cit.) deals with the patriarchal aspects of rape in relation to *Titus Andronicus* - the woman, prized possession, ruined and therefore no longer valuable. While this (common) view could obviously be applied to *Lucrece*, my emphasis is different; I explore the concerns with non-gendered self-image illustrated through Lucrece's experience.

division into genre gives a delusory sense of sharp divisions in content. In doing this, I shall reverse what R. Rawdon Wilson does, when he explicitly highlights the dramatic nature of *Lucrece*, and the narrative elements in the plays, linking it in style to the drama, in order to make a case for including *Lucrece* more fully in the Shakespeare canon.[22] I shall instead adopt the Renaissance sense of the words 'poet' and 'poetry', as encompassing what is now divided into genres of drama and poetry. Cleopatra, lady of love *par excellence*, recalls the lady of the sonnets, the mistress of the epyllion, the epic heroine, a mix of the *Heroides* and the tragic play. She draws on all available elements of women in relation to love and in true metamorphic tradition borrows form and substance from creatures that should be strictly divided from each other. The fact that Cleopatra is a character in a play has some bearing on certain aspects of illusion that I shall discuss later.

II. SHAKESPEARE'S DARK LADIES

i. Medusa and Cleopatra

The connection between Medusa and Cleopatra is one that is implicitly made in *Antony and Cleopatra*, and it forms an Ovidian link between Petrarch's and Shakespeare's portrayal of woman. I discussed Medusa in relation to Laura in Chapter One. I will once more draw on the image of Medusa, to illustrate my argument about the meaning of the sonnet mistress, and to highlight the ways in which Shakespeare's Cleopatra seems to sum up the reaction against the love sonnet tradition and his search for an alternative representation of woman - the rejection of a conventional, particularised and therefore limited, mistress for a being full

[22] Wilson, loc.cit.

of variety, and prey to imperfection and potentially damaging to man, rather than purely uplifting. The study of Medusa will also clarify the way in which Shakespeare returns to Ovid, is therefore closer to Petrarch, and rejects the Neoplatonic interval of the two hundred years between them. As I have previously demonstrated, there may be many reasons why Petrarch's poetry and Shakespeare's poetry shared an obsession with change. Taken together, the stories of Medusa, of Laura and Cleopatra, both alter and continue aspects of some of these concerns.

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the Medusa story is not immediately told, since the slaying of Medusa does not involve metamorphosis; what Ovid is most interested in is the metamorphic capacity of the head of the Gorgon once Perseus has obtained it - so that we see the head turning twigs into coral and two hundred men into stone, evincing great potency skilfully controlled by Perseus (*Met.*, IV.744-752, V.208-209; Golding, IV.908-920, V.258-261). But Perseus does later tell the story to his wedding guests (*Met.*, 772-803; Golding, IV.941-979). He tells how, in Golding's words,

> [...] by long crooked wayes unhandsomly he came
> Through gastly groves by ragged cliffes unto the drerie place
> Whereas the *Gorgons* dwelt: and there he saw (a wretched case)
> The shapes as well of men as beasts lie scattered everie where
> In open fields and common wayes, the which transformed were
> From living things to stones at sight of foule *Medusas* heare:
> But yet that he through brightnesse of his monstrous brazen shield
> The which he in his left hand bare, *Medusas* face beheld.
> And while that in a sound dead sleepe were all hir Snakes and she
> He softly pared of hir head [...]
>
> (*Met.*,776-785; Golding, IV.948-57)

Perseus goes on to relate how:

> [...] she both in comly port
> And beautie, every other wight surmounted in such sort,
> That many sutors unto hir did earnestly resort.
> And though that whole from top to toe most bewtifull she were,
> In all hir bodie was no part more goodly than hir heare.
> I know some parties yet alive, that say they did hir see.
> It is reported how she should abusde by *Neptune* bee
> In *Pallas* Church: from which fowle facte *Joves* daughter turnde hir eye
> And with hir Target hid hir face from suche a villanie.
> And least it should unpunisht be, she turnde hir seemely heare
> To lothly Snakes: the which (the more to put her foes in feare)

Before hir brest continually she in hir shield doth beare.
(*Met.*, IV.794-803; Golding, IV.967-979)

The salient points of the story are these: Perseus does not look at Medusa directly but at a reflection of her image in his 'monstrous brazen shield'. He is aided in his enterprise by Pallas Athene, or Minerva, goddess of war and of spinning and weaving, amongst other things - and it is she who destroys Medusa's original beauty and afterwards carries the hideous head upon her shield, to immobilise her enemies. She is allied to Perseus in wishing to harness the power of the Medusa without succumbing to its charms.

Some of the same issues are addressed in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, in particular the relation of the Medusa image to the metamorphic world-view of Ovid.[23] The most obvious element in Shakespeare's play is the snake, which recalls the Medusa's snakey hair. The snake for Ovid has connotations of death, and madness; all his nightmare female personifications are plentifully supplied with them. Tisiphone the Fury, for example, attires herself in a girdle of snakes before going out, and then takes them off when she returns (*Met.*, 481-511; Golding, IV.594-630). The snake image inevitably recurs throughout *Antony and Cleopatra*. Shakespeare might have read in the pages of Pliny's *Natural History*, perhaps in Philemon Holland's complete translation which came out in 1601, about the serpent's power of fascination and its deadliness. Book VIII extensively covers this issue, and talks about 'the basilisk serpent' which has murderous breath, and next to this Shakespeare might have read of the monster at the source of the Nile, and how 'all who see its eyes expire immediately.' There is also some discussion in the same chapter of the asp, and of the crocodile, a species of which can be used as an aphrodisiac as well as a poison.[24] The work undoubtedly gave rise to the tipsy conversation about Egypt between Antony and Lepidus aboard Pompey's ship:

Lepidus. You've strange serpents there. [...] Your serpent of Egypt is bred now of your mud by the operation of your sun; so is your crocodile.
(II.vii.23-26).[25]

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[23] Outlined by Pythagoras in the *Metamorphoses* (especially *Met.*, XV.165-172; Golding, XV.183-92, 276-85); discussed below.

[24] Pliny, *Natural History*, edited by H. Rackham, 10 vols (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann 1940), vol.3, VIII.33, VIII.34.

[25] References are to the New Cambridge Shakespeare edition of *Antony and Cleopatra*, edited by David Bevington (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990).

Antony, in his reply, appears to be parodying the meticulous details of Pliny's history, and at the same time obliquely referring to Pythagoras' doctrine of change and the transmigration of souls in *Metamorphoses* XV:

> *Antony.* It is shaped, sir, like itself, [...] It lives by that which nourisheth it, and the elements once out of it, it transmigrates.
> *Lepidus.* What colour is it of?
> *Antony.* Of it own colour too.
> (II.vii.38-43)

There is an unspoken presence of Cleopatra in this conversation, because of course 'serpent of old Nile' (I.v.26) is Antony's affectionate name for her. She is a focus of that eternal dread, that the initially covetous look will be transformed into the trapped stare of the serpent's victim. Antony is immediately 'hook[ed]'(II.v.8-18); at his first meal with her, Enobarbus tells us, he '[...] for his ordinary pays his heart/For what his eyes ate only' (II.ii.235-36); and Cleopatra herself says:

> [...] I was
> A morsel for a monarch. And great Pompey
> Would stand and make his eyes grow in my brow;
> There would he anchor his aspect and die
> With looking on his life.
> (I.v.30-34)

It is a kind of death to look at this 'enchanting queen'(I.ii.125), and not just in the sexual sense of the word. Looking at her the victim loses all sense of time, as in one of those stories where the wayfarer is caught watching a fairy dance and wakes to find that a century has passed. Cleopatra herself, 'wrinkled deep in time'(I.v.30) and remembering previous generations, seems to have survived many such fascinated observers; and here she recalls another Ovidian figure, the sibyl loved by Phoebus in the *Metamorphoses*, who asks for as many years as the grains in a heap of sand (*Met.*, XIV.101-153; Golding, 121-181). Cleopatra is 'with Phoebus' amorous pinches black' (I.v.29), Phoebus the sun, emblem of time. Phoebus is in love with her, and she seems in control of temporality, steeped in the flux of nature but seems both to transcend it and to personify it, and, like all personifications, she gains a kind of immortality. The stare of the serpent lengthens life.

But there is another snake that Shakespeare knew of, apart from those in Pliny and Ovid - the cunning serpent in the garden of Eden who with Eve brings about the downfall of man (*Genesis*, Chapter 3). Adam as much as Perseus is under pressure to resist the spell,

and Antony has more of Adam in him than of Perseus. Strong men are can do without women, as in Aeneas' desertion of Dido, or use them - as Odysseus does with several, including Circe (*Met.*IV, XIV.281 ff.).[26] Octavius sees Antony as facing a test of this sort, and in danger of failing it, remembering how far he has come from the once hardy soldier, when

> [...] at thy heel
> Did famine follow, whom thou fought'st against,
> Though daintily brought up, with patience more
> Than savages could suffer. Thou didst drink
> The stale of horses and the gilded puddle
> Which beasts would cough at.
>
> (I.iv.59-64)

Now, he says, Antony

> [...] is not more manlike
> Than Cleopatra, nor the Queen of Ptolemy
> More womanly than he (I.iv.5-7)

Antony does try to play the part of Aeneas, and Cleopatra like Dido is once deserted. She is, like Dido, absorbed in the idea of love, so that it takes over life and time itself: 'Eternity was in our lips and eyes/ Bliss in our brows bent'(I.iii.34-35).[27] Antony fails to be Aeneas - instead he espouses Dido's cause, much as Ovid does himself, in the *Heroides*, Ovid who fell foul of this same Octavius Caesar Augustus - possibly for writing *The Art of Love* and the *Amores*[28]. Instead of concentrating on the affairs of state, Antony appears to want to write his own *Amores* with Cleopatra. Their love produces lofty language and grand world-spanning images - 'Let Rome in Tiber melt and the wide arch/ Of the ranged empire fall! Here is my space./Kingdoms are clay [...]The nobleness of life is to do thus [...] ' (I.i.35-39).

Cleopatra appears as the goddess Isis (III.vi.16-18), who is sometimes represented holding at least one asp, and identified with Ceres, or Demeter, the goddess of the earth,

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[26]*Heroides*, VII; *Fasti*, III.545; *Amores*, II.xviii.25. Keith May discusses this view of strong men in May, loc. cit., p.8.

[27] See Keith May, loc.cit, pp.15-17. He writes of Dido: '[s]uch a woman loves with a fine, immoral recklessness' (p.16).

[28] *Met.*, vol. I , Introduction, p.x.

of motherhood, of fertility, of metamorphic nature.[29] It is as this Egyptian goddess that Antony first sees her, later referring to her simply as 'Egypt', and the 'serpent of old Nile'(I.v.26). The Nile itself is synonymous with fertility, and Cleopatra is a mother amongst many other things (III.vi.6-9). Her infinite variety is offset against the Roman world of stable values, of rigid discipline. Egypt embodied in Cleopatra is female, just as Rome contains a system of masculine values.[30] Egypt and Isis contain all the other elements of woman too, such as irrationality, and magic; Isis 'represents the power of the feminine principle (accessible in the minds of either gender)[...]'[31] And Antony pursues this image in Cleopatra like another Golden Asse in search of mystique.

It is certainly an image that Cleopatra consciously promotes - and rightly or wrongly she is regarded with suspicion, as being manipulative, 'cunning past man's thought' (I.ii.141) - man's thought being opposed here to woman's cunning. She is an illusionist, an enchantress, an artful stage designer; in Enobarbus' speech (taken from Plutarch), she depends to a large extent on her accoutrements - even being surrounded by beautiful women and lovely boys so as somehow to take on their beauty. So she stages scenes like the barge at Cydnus (II.ii.200-236) and her death scene (V.ii.274ff.). She uses grand language, is clothed in language and uses the language of clothes. As in Plutarch her stage presence and her wit and garments are more remarkable than her simply passable appearance.[32] Of course Cleopatra is aware that speeches such as the Cydnus speech are being made about her; she knows that '[o]ther women cloy the appetites they feed' so that her mission is to 'make most hungry where most she satisfies' (II.ii.246-248). She knows what men want to see,

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[29] See 'Ceres' in James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, introduction by Kenneth Clark. (London: John Murray 1974).

[30] A point often made, for example in William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra* , edited by Barbara Everett (New York and Toronto: Signet Classics 1963), Introduction, p.xxxi. Margot Heinemann, on the other hand, disagrees with this view. She argues that the passion of Egypt is 'inseparable from the power-struggle for control of Egypt and the world, within which it originates and with which it always remains entangled.' Margot Heinemann, ' "Let Rome in Tiber Melt!" Chaos and Order in *Antony and Cleopatra*', *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* [Weimer], vol. 128:1 (1992), pp.39-48; p.42. David Bevington, after Terence Hawkes, makes another differentiation between Rome and Egypt: 'Rome is a place of words where love and war are talked about, whereas Egypt is a place of actions and voices where love and war are made'. Bevington, loc.cit., p.38.

[31] Stevie Davies, *The Idea of Woman in Renaissance Literature: The Feminine Reclaimed* (Brighton: Harvester Press 1986), p. 9.

[32] Plutarch, 'Life of Marcus Antonius' in *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, extract in Everett, loc. cit., pp.195-96.

and she shows it to them. Cleopatra understands the bargaining power of eroticism, as she intimates when she calls for 'music, moody food / Of us that trade in love' (II.v.1-2). In this way it is notable, again in the words of Enobarbus:

> That she did make defect perfection [...]
> For vilest things become themselves in her, that the holy priests
> Bless her when she is riggish
>
> (II.ii.241, 248-50)

The combined lustfulness and deceptive wiles of women is a Medieval and Renaissance commonplace, and it is shown to be such in the exchange between Menas and Enobarbus

> *Enobarbus.* But there is never a fair woman has a true face.
> *Menas.* No slander, they steal hearts.
>
> (II.vi.98-99)

She exercises a powerful hold on '[t]he noble ruin of her magic, Antony' (III.x.18), as he comes to realise, in the moments when he is most like Aeneas - 'I must from this enchanting queen break off' he says, '[t]hese strong Egyptian fetters I must break,/Or lose myself in dotage'(I.ii.125, 112-13). He refers to the poison of his sojourn at Alexandria, 'when poisoned hours had bound me up' (II.ii.97). Antony, in thrall to the basilisk, loses his identity, and feels himself fade away and become formless like a cloud (I.i.35), his own exclamation, 'Let Rome in Tiber melt' (I.i.35), turned against him; it is Antony not Rome that melts away, and it is the Nile, it seems, and not the Tiber that engulfs him.

On closer examination, however, the destructive Tiber lies behind the Nile, and is more fatal for Antony. Antony loses himself, by looking at the Medusa for too long. But it is not entirely Cleopatra who brings this about. Antony's identity was never his own anyway; it was imposed upon him, and in any case belonged to others: heroes and gods, Aeneas, Hercules, Mars (particularly Mars). Like *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra* too is a play where the protagonists' names are repeated frequently in the text; this is ironic, given the fluctuations in identity that is one of the themes of the play. It is because Antony tries to exchange the identity of Mars for something like the identity of Bacchus that he totally loses the support of the public opinion that gave him his persona in the first place: 'I have offended reputation,/ A most unnoble swerving' (III.ii.48-49). Republican Rome is not as flexible as lascivious Alexandria. Playing at dice with Octavius he is influenced by his own and the Soothsayer's sense of Octavius' comparatively sound public image (II.iii.18-39); his disreputable association with Cleopatra causes his daemon to desert him (IV.iii).

All these images are illusions: Cleopatra is not really immortal, any more than Antony was ever a Colossus striding the ocean:

> *Cleopatra.* Think you there was or might be such a man
> As this I dreamt of?
> *Dollabella.* Gentle madam, no.
> (V.ii.75-93)

These images, powerful in their inventors' rhetoric, are no more than rhetoric, and have to strive against another kind of words, the destructive poison of the gossip at Rome. At the beginning of the play, Demetrius and Philo make clear their opinion of Cleopatra and Antony - Antony 'is become the bellows and the fan/ To cool a gipsy's lust' (I.i.9-10). The damage is done here in the first few words - it changes nothing that Antony and Cleopatra come on and display for us their grand ardour; at the end of the scene the two disgusted soldiers are still there:

> *Demetrius.* I am full sorry
> That he approves the common liar, who
> Thus speaks of him at Rome.
> (I.i.61-63)

Clearly, the lovers' introverted self-image is not as potent as the opinion of the public. The opinion of the public has a certain fictive artifice too, created by 'the common liar'. Thus one created image is pitted against another, and it is a dynamic power-struggle between them, since the subjects, Antony and Cleopatra, will rise or fall according to whose version wins. Antony recognises the importance of controlling public image when he talks about the fickleness of public loyalty; and it is to reclaim 'our slippery people' (I.ii.178) that he first decides to leave Egypt for Rome - 'Much is breeding,/ Which, like the courser's hair, hath yet but life/ And not a serpent's poison' (I.ii.185-87).

Demetrius' forebodings hang unhappily in the air and snide gossip is ultimately seen to have more power than the grandest speeches. We see this happen with Lepidus, whose knell is sounded as soon as he becomes the subject of jibes and laughter (II.vi.36-47; III.ii.6-19). Without the people's confidence, he too (as we suspect) is not long for this world. Pompey is aiming to use this poison when he pronounces his incantation :

> But all the charms of love,
> Salt Cleopatra, soften thy waned lip!
> Let witchcraft join with beauty, lust with both ...
> (II.i.20-22)

Caesar too is aware of this power, so that for example when he feels his sister has been slighted by Antony he must execute swift vengeance or otherwise he too might fall victim to the snickering serpents of the deadly Roman gossip (III.vi). Octavius is the real Minerva-powered Perseus. Just as Pompey wishes to use Cleopatra to enthral and incapacitate Antony, Octavius ultimately plans to parade her through Rome (V.ii), his own captive Medusa, to display his prowess. Like Perseus, Octavius only seems to look at Cleopatra in his 'monstrous brazen shield', in which all he can see is the Gorgon. So confident is he that he fails to keep as strict a watch on Cleopatra as he should, and unexpectedly she is able to evade him, and change the plot we expect.

Cleopatra was never an actress who chose her own parts; they were all roles she plucked from the minds of others, from certain public images, and archetypes. While the image was the great goddess Isis or the seductive queen, she was invincible. But this is a precarious means of existence. She might live splendidly on opinion, but she is living beyond her means. And when that opinion turns, she has nothing else to fall back on. When she is no longer the mistress that fascinates, she becomes, with the entrance of Caesar into her world, a witch, a lustful gypsy. In Antony's words she becomes a serpent, a betrayer, or a whore, and has no choice but to take these images to her. A crack appears in the edifice at that moment when she imagines how future times would see 'some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness/ I'th'posture of a whore' (V.ii.219-220). The extent and success of the illusion is suddenly revealed as it is destroyed, and momentarily we see only the boy actor on stage. For an instant Cleopatra actually disappears, and we glimpse, with her, mortality.

This comes closer as the play progresses, and the images of snakes take on greater significance, culminating in a physical snake that appears like a concretion of the abstract image. Earlier she tells the messenger whose bad news she feared:

> Thou shouldst come like a Fury crowned with snakes,
> Not like a formal man.
>
> (II.v.41-42)

And at last she dreads the coming of this Fury, and the snakes with it, because eventually she must take it to herself. Her motherly aspect too has become inverted - when she says of the murderous asp, 'Dost thou not see my baby at my breast, /That sucks the nurse

asleep?' (V.ii.303-304). At the climax of the play, she wryly acknowledges that she can change the aspect of the serpent with her own words too, ironically parodying the preceding shifts of appearance in different verbal renderings. The Fury she sees is the reflection in other's mirrors, just as when she sees Antony as 'painted one way like a Gorgon/The other way a Mars' (II.v.118-19), it is one of the moments when he has turned away from her, so that it is as if she can see the old misleading image in the 'monstrous brazen shield'.[33] Finally there are too many mirrors held up to her, so that she too, fatally, can see the terrifying reflection just as others see it.

For the Roman world it is not enough to desire and admire; it must acquire, conquer, and destroy. It must eat her up, as Antony does, as Pompey did, as did Julius Caesar; she is the 'morsel for a monarch' (I.v.32), the 'morsel cold upon/ Dead Caesar's trencher' (III.xiii.119-120). She was the snake, holding the prey in her eyes, but ultimately it is the prey that all along was holding her, and that finally devours her. In the end, this image of woman/Eve/Medusa is shown to be *an image*, one to which women themselves are subject and which destroy men (and women), simply because they think it's there. Cleopatra is a victim of the actual being mistaken for the symbol.

Both Cleopatra and Antony in Shakespeare's play, then, would seem to be without persona except in their own and others' portrayals. These portrayals are anchored loosely in the quicksand of changing opinion, and the unfixed self is betrayed by a reliance on created versions of identity. Just as Petrarch is concerned about the treachery of story, so Shakespeare too, in this play as elsewhere, is investigating the endless genesis of representation. He seems to expose, albeit inadvertently, the illusive and uncapturable nature of that coveted Petrarchan *simulacrum*.

In many ways, Cleopatra is the ultimate object of desire, and Shakespeare deconstructs this ideal, examining the linguistic and social (mis)conceptions by which it is fabricated. In doing this, I suggest he grapples with that cold still image of the desired woman, the mistress of the sixteenth-century love-poet, and seems to offer a reinterpretation that questions her jewel-like constancy. To do this he delves for images of change in the

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[33] See Bevington, loc.cit., p.136, note, on the reference here to 'perspective' paintings that produce a double picture through optical illusion.

Metamorphoses, drawing out at the same time fragmented and contradictory images of woman, woman as damaging although magnetic, dangerous although desired.[34] If the mistress of a typical sonnet before Shakespeare was a muse, an image of desired perfection, a heavenly guide, then it is as if, in Cleopatra, Shakespeare suggests that such quests for perfection are themselves delusory, and settles on disillusion in place of fulfilment.

In *Antony and Cleopatra* the attributes and incarnations of Antony and Cleopatra merge, and that particular space of the loved woman, the focus of the poet's search, is partly taken up by Antony. He too, to an extent, is open to formulation, and he recognises this when he searches for himself among disintegrating clouds (IV.xiv.1-20). Cleopatra's own femininity is called into question in that reference to the boy actor.[35] In this, it seems, Shakespeare is addressing the issue of finding an idealised figure that need not necessarily be female, but, as the quotidian place of woman is located more precisely, so, conversely, the status of the ideal, the unknown and the strange, can be conferred equally upon man.

The delineation of Cleopatra, then, is an experiment with the idealised woman of the sonnet. But there are other moments where Shakespeare plays with inherited poetic (and indeed 'Petrarchan') conventions, and some of these will be examined below. Sidney's Stella is portrayed with an anti- 'Petrarchan' stance, and Shakespeare's observations on loved women seem to reflect the same resistance to traditional poetic protocol.

ii. An 'inward touch'

When Sidney writes, in Sonnet 15 of *Astrophil and Stella,*

> You that do dictionary's method bring
> Into your rhymes, running in rattling rows;
> You that poor Petrarch's long-deceased woes
> With new-born sighs and denizened wit do sing:

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[34] Marshall, in Levin and Watson, loc.cit., quotes from Freud about male fear of female, in relation to Lucrece; p.205.

[35] See Madelon Sprengnether, 'The Boy Actor and Femininity' in Norman H. Holland, Sidney Homan and Bernard J. Paris (eds), *Shakespeare's Personality* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1989). Sprengnether is interested in the female sexual threat, and in gender equivocations (see especially pp. 202-205). She argues that 'the boy actor is fundamental not only to Shakespeare's stage but also to his equivocal representations of feminity, allowing him to represent women as both "other" and "not other"' (p.192).

> You take wrong ways, those far-fet helps be such
> As do bewray a want of inward touch [...]
> (*A&S*, 15.5-10)[36]

he is complaining of too much Tuscan *imitatio* and not enough Athenian *mimesis*. In the final lines he suggests - 'Stella behold, and then begin to endite' (*A&S*, 15.14), just as elsewhere he writes - ' "Fool", said my muse to me; "look in thy heart, and write!"' (*A&S*, 1.14). Ostensibly, he evinces a weariness with the dryness of a bookish approach to the emotions; the attention, so focussed on collecting words and phrases as evidence of learning, fails an 'inward touch'. Yet Sidney chooses to rebuke poets in this way from within the sonnet framework; Stella herself, the star, is an extension of Petrarch 'i duo mei dolci usati segni' (*RS*, 189.12), the uncounted 'stars' of Wyatt's translation (XXVIII.12). Sidney's emphasis on inward experience recalls the Elizabethan critical contention that the exercise of art is necessary to aid judgement, while the first attention is primarily paid to nature. Of course the notion of writing in a limbo - without reference to previous poetry - is not possible, and poets are simply looking for a new trend, not working from a *tabula rasa*.

The effect is like that of Shakespeare's own, in the sonnet 'My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun' (*Sonnets*, 130.1), where he mocks the sonnet conventions from within a sonnet; and this is extended in his many references in the plays, where he further dramatises the absurdity of the conventions, as in Olivia's list beginning '*item*, two lips, indifferent red' (*TN*, I.v.236), or in the exchanges between Romeo and Mercutio (for example *R&J*, I.iv; II.i). Here, as with Sidney, Petrarch is 'long-deceased' (*A&S*, 15.7), kept alive artificially long after he should be allowed decently to die. His stylistic devices in the hands of others are 'stol'n goods' (*A&S*, 15.11), artifice, shallow, and irrelevant to the particular case - '*I* think my love as rare...' says Shakespeare, the emphasis on the 'I' experience, whose 'inward touch' relays emotion in poetry (*Sonnets*, 130.13). This is of course also a part of the new interest in 'invention' in the period, and the connotations, perhaps new, that the word had for the Elizabethans (see Chapter Three).

In the backlash against the conventions of 'Petrarchan' poetry at the end of the sixteenth

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[36] All references are to Duncan-Jones, loc. cit.

century, the woman herself is to some extent punished for her high position, in portraits such as Marlowe's Hero (ll.9-44)[37], and in Shakespeare's own scene in *Richard III*, where Richard woos and wins Anne over the body of her dead husband:

> *Gloucester.* Thine eyes, sweet lady, have infected mine
> *Anne.* Would they were basilisks to strike thee dead.
> *Gloucester.* I would they were, that I might die at once,
> For now they kill me with a living death.
> Those eyes of thine from mine have drawn salt tears,
> Shamed their aspects with store of childish drops.
> [...] thy beauty is proposed my fee,
> My proud heart sues, and prompts my tongue to speak. [...]
> Look how my ring encompasseth thy finger;
> Even so thy breast encloseth my poor heart.
> Wear both of them, for both of them are thine.
> And if thy poor devoted servant may
> But beg one favour at thy gracious hand,
> Thou dost confirm his happiness for ever.
> (I.ii.149-54, 157-58, 191-96)

He employs stock Petrarchan phrases and she succumbs, in marked contrast to the sonnet mistress.[38] The ways in which those conventions of the chaste/chased lady, are subverted in this dialogue reflects the ways in which Richard has upturned the traditional notions of monarchy and honour. It is also significant that the familiar conventions of the sonnet are employed in a context which suggests their fallibility; this scene is characteristic of the Shakespearean response to the conventions he inherits. The wooed woman is won, and won too easily, since she capitulates to the temptations of a cynical villain, whereas her ancestors would not respond even to the truly devoted poet (leaving aside the debates that suggest this was a persona assumed for the purpose of seduction; or that the poet is really more interested in his own anguish than in the woman; or that the devotion is purely a result of wanting what cannot be had). With the emphasis on personal experience, Shakespeare and Sidney do not see themselves any longer as simply mastering conventions and writing in the impersonal and universal fashion that the sonnet conventions seem to demand. The desired object of the sonnets is no longer allowed to be contained by convention. Instead, she must

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[37] 'Hero and Leander', in Christopher Marlowe, *Complete Plays and Poems*, edited by E. D. Pendry (London: Dent 1976).

[38] 'Anne, like Hypollitus, is confused and uncertain; to wield a sword against Richard is not to enact justice but to actualise a Petrarchan fantasy.' Miola, loc. cit., p.85.

possess variable attributes, and have individual character.

Hence she becomes the Dark Lady of the Sonnets, a woman treated with rage and resignation, recognised as being entirely flawed, as is man, but now without any attempt to transcend that flaw:

> O, love's best habit is in seeming trust,
> And age in love loves not to have years told.
> Therefore I lie with her and she with me,
> And in our faults by lies we flattered be.
> (*Sonnets*, 138.11-14)

In a more secular age, reverence itself is clouded, and everything becomes more secular, whether this is hope of human nature, or of the soul's achievements. This in part lies behind the rejection of the lady of the sonnet tradition. Of course this 'inwardness' is actually present even in the *Vita Nuova*, and from there finds its way to Petrarch and his continual investigations of his motives and reactions, and states of mind. Petrarch's Laura, metamorphosed so much in later 'Petrarchan' models, was always both angelic and cruel. Her antecedents, too, possessed this capacity for variable representation (see Chapter One, II).

iii. Master-Mistress Metamorphoses

I have been attempting so far to describe the genesis and confines of the lady who becomes the conventional mistress of the sonnet tradition in Renaissance England, who is reduced to a target by Sidney and Shakespeare. She is a Neoplatonised Galatea, the perfect statue that fuses all variants into the ideal.[39] The whole discussion above might best be illustrated in this sonnet by Samuel Daniel:

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[39] Roe, 'Pygmalion ...', loc.cit.

Fayre is my love, and cruell as sh'is fayre;
Her brow shades frowns, althogh her eyes are sunny;
Her smyles are lightning, though her pride, dispaire;
And her disdaines are gall, her favours hunny.
A modest mayde, deckt with a blush of honour,
Whose feete do tread greene pathes of youth and love;
The wonder of all eyes that looke upon her:
Sacred on earth, design'd a Saint above.
Chastity and Beauty, which were deadly foes,
Live reconciled friends within her brow:
And had she pitty to conjoyne with those,
Then who had heard the plaints I utter now?
O had she not been fayre, and thus unkind,
My Muse had slept, and none had known my mind.[40]

Daphne, through Petrarch, lies behind this icon, Daphne who epitomises chastity and is also the laurel wreath. She, the object of sexual desire, comes to represent the abstinence from sexual desire. This desire and abstinence may be read as the impulse to achieve what is just out of reach; because it can never be achieved entirely, it continues to haunt and inspire. Sexual love is a convenient metaphor for this universal urge, because it too is something that impels universally. George Puttenham recognises this:

> 'And because loue is of all other humane affections the most puisssant and passionate, and most generall to all sortes and ages of men and women, so as whether it be of the yong or old, wise or holy, or high estate or low, none euer could truly bragge of any exemption in that case: it requireth a forme of Poesie variable, inconstant, affected, curious, and most witty of any others, whereof the ioyes to be vttered in one sorte, the sorrowes in an other, and, by the many formes of Poesie, the many moodes and pangs of louers throughly to be discouered [...]'(Smith II, p.46-7).

This lady might, then, be traced, from Dante, through Petrarch, to the fixed sonnet-writing conventions of the sixteenth century. She endures, without a doubt, far beyond the sixteenth century and Shakespeare's quarrels with her. She is one of the strands of Petrarch's work that filters through later poetry, and Shakespeare, reacting against what is by now tired and over-used, writes: 'My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun' (*Sonnets,* 130.1). But to renounce the angelic lady causes a search for a replacement, and Shakespeare writes, as if searching for this alternative:

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[40] Samuel Daniel, Sonnet 6 of 'Delia', from *Elizabethan Sonnets,* edited by Maurice Evans (London, Melbourne and Toronto: Dent 1977).

What is your substance, whereof are you made,
That millions of strange shadows on you tend?
Since everyone hath, every one, a shade,
And you, but one, can every shadow lend.
Describe Adonis, and the counterfeit
Is poorly imitated after you;
On Helen's cheek all art of beauty set,
And you in Grecian tires are painted new.
Speak of the spring and foison of the year;
The one doth shadow of your beauty show,
The other as your beauty doth appear,
And you in every blessed shape we know.
In all external grace you have some part,
But you like none, none you, for constant heart.

(*Sonnets*, 53)

The sonnet draws its imagery, of course, from Plato's shadows, seeing the beloved as the Ideal Form, after which all other beauty is 'poorly imitated', mere shadows.[41] The beloved is the Michelangelian glimpse of the divine, which results in the comparatively poor works of art; the image also recalls Ficino (see below, III.iv), for whom, after Plato, everything beautiful is merely a trace of supreme beauty. The 'shadows' themselves are charged with suggestion. The Neoplatonic mimetic view sees art as imitating nature. But this mimesis is not itself a secondary process; it uses Nature as a hint, a glimpse of the divine, and thus the mimetic art produced exceeds the imperfect Natural world (Sidney's Brazen/Golden opposition in the *Apology*). But since all that can be seen is the Natural world, the divine or Ideal world remains hidden, even while the poet intuits it. Hence while the loved object of the sonnet remains the unknown ideal, the hints or signs of this ideal in Nature are seen as shadows. Shadows, part of Nature, richly suggest the ungraspable quality of those signs of the ideal. They can only hint and inspire; their Ideal Form remains a matter of guesswork, seen 'in a glass darkly'.[42] So the signs of Nature inspire the poet with visions of the Ideal, but this inspiration and this vision remains dark, transient, shifting - shadow-like.[43]

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[41] Plato, *The Republic*, translated by Paul Shorey in two vols. Vol. II (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press and London: William Heinemann Ltd. 1935),VII.i-iii.

[42] 1 Corinthians, 13.28-30.

[43] An analogy may be drawn with the Renaissance magus, who, as Mebane writes, 'as the supreme artist, is in love with the reflections of God which he sees in earthly creatures, and his love impels him to redeem those creatures by freeing them through his magic from all impurity': Mebane, loc.cit, p.47.

Hence the Ideal Form itself is here in question; the beloved, as so often in Shakespeare's sonnets, is really indescribable. 'What are you?' the poet asks, at a loss after generations of the fairly standard Petrarchan mistress; no longer is this mistress quite so clear. Ovidian in style, she shape-shifts into indistinct blurs, leaving only doubtful shadows and multiplicitous possibility in her place. This imaging is of course reminiscent of Petrarch's Laura/l'aura. After the sixteenth century conventions, Shakespeare searches for alternative definitions, variably imaging the 'constant heart'. One alternative is the perfect beauty of the youth to whom many of the sonnets are addressed - just as Adonis in Venus and Adonis has been seen as the neoplatonic ideal for Venus, after his death, in much the same way as the lady of the sonnet tradition assumes the ideal form after death.[44]

This might be linked, as I have suggested, to the uncertainties of language and theology at the time; the English language is in a state of flux, and the Authorised Version of the Bible is still to be produced. The Petrarchan lady, dependent as she is on a Neoplatonic, Christianised universe, suffers as much from this change of scene as because she is a worn-out device. Woman, no longer unknown and revered, but heard and participant, can serve no more as a remote half-understood ideal. If it is no longer appropriate to figure the ideal as female, then gender can be shifted; since the whole point (as with Ficino's God) of the ideal is that it is ultimately secret and unknowable, then the search for a proper symbol of this ideal may be broadened, and thus too the unknown can be male. 'You, the master-mistress of my passion', Shakespeare writes, locating precisely this shift of reverence. The lovely boy of the sonnets suggests Apollo, no longer wooing Daphne, but being wooed by the Daphne-poet, both fleeing, changing, pursuing. Shakespeare's sense of women, earthly, individual, treated in psychological depth, which we can see in his plays, makes it possible for him to take on supposedly female traits, and allows him to perceive anew the masculine as strange.

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[44] William Shakespeare, *The Poems*, edited by John Roe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992), p.21. I quote from *Lucrece* in this edition; hereafter as line references within the text.

III. METAMORPHOSES OF HISTORY AND THE RAPE OF LUCRECE

i. The truth about Lucrece

Although the ultimate source for Shakespeare's poem is the *Fasti*, the tales within tales[45] in *Lucrece* echo the *Metamorphoses* more, and that work seems to impel Shakespeare in his decision to relate this tale. If, as Charles Martindale suggests, the fictiveness of myth is an awareness to be found already in the *Metamorphoses* itself, this awareness naturally transfers itself to the Ovidian imitations of the sixteenth century. He sees the tales within tales of the *Metamorphoses* as 'rais[ing] questions about the nature of story-telling', and suggests that Ovid is aware of the playfulness of mythic story-telling - not seeing them as a 'mirror of reality' as the Greek tragedians did.[46] The question here is whether the emphasis is more on the fictiveness of myth or on the ways in which it is represented as 'true'. Ovid might be seen to operate metamythically, and this same operation can be found in *The Rape of Lucrece*. In other words, although the Ovidian source in terms of story is the *Fasti*, the *Metamorphoses* provides Shakespeare with the theory or methodology that he applies to his telling of the tale. [47]

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[45] Ovid, *Fasti,* with an English translation by Sir James George Frazer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann 1931). R. Rawdon Wilson, loc.cit., talks about the 'metafictional [...] playfulness' of the text (p.49), and 'narrative reflexivity as a narrative' in 'his narrative craftiness' (p.50) relating this to the many narrative versions of the same event in *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Lucrece*. Wilson sees this as showing Shakespeare's narrative self-consciousness; although he notes Lucrece's and Cleopatra's fear of a 'hostile narrative' (p.51), this is not the main thrust of his argument. He talks about Shakespeare's interest in 'a self-conscious retelling of an inherited story: its implicit claim to be regarded as a masterpiece' because it is 'the intricate narrative poem with which, in 1594, he made his public claim to literary mastery' (p.55).

[46] Charles Martindale, *Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1988), Introduction, pp.16-17

[47] R. Rawdon Wilson, loc.cit., surveys some Ovidian techniques found in the *Metamorphoses*, and used by Shakespeare and others (*a propos* of internal split monologues used by Shakespeare and originating in Ovid), p.47 and Note 18.

The Rape of Lucrece, while deriving from the *Fasti*, draws heavily on at least one other narrative thread, this time from the *Metamorphoses*; the story of Philomela and Procne. It has often been noted that this story is a source for *Titus Andronicus,*[48] but it also lies behind *Lucrece*. While Shakespeare cuts out the tapestry in *Titus Andronicus*, or reworks it as transient marks in the sand, it reappears in *Lucrece*, inserted by Shakespeare alone, and is not to be found in any of his known sources.[49] Lucrece herself refers to Philomel - 'Come Philomel that sings of ravishment' (l.1128) - and this is not just an incidental apostrophe; the poem is full of references to this story. There is animal imagery surrounding the rape in both cases, which, as Anthony Brian Taylor notes, is a sign of social order breaking down, both in Ovid and in *Titus Andronicus*.[50] Tarquin in Shakespeare recklessly desires Lucrece, even at the cost of a kingdom - just as Tereus desires Philomela at such a cost (*Met.,* VI.463-464). Equally Philomela speaks of the taint as Lucrece does, and is seen as a lamb - just as Lucrece is described (*Met.*, VI.527, 540-41, 553-54). Philomela feels she has wronged Procne, just as Lucrece feels she has wronged Pallatine (*Met.*, VI.537-38). I would suggest that these Ovidian allusions are entirely deliberate on Shakespeare's part, and designed to point up his implicit use of the *Metamorphoses*.[51] By referring so often to the *Metamorphoses*, while the story of Lucrece is primarily from the *Fasti*, Shakespeare signals his ongoing commitment to the notion of changing form and the multiplicity of tellings. In this, he unwittingly refers back to Petrarch's negotiations of the *Metamorphoses*, in which he too considers the same problematic conceptions of representation.

In the previous section I noted Cleopatra's subjection to continuous reshapings of her self. Lucrece's main grief in Shakespeare's poem is her dread of future distortions of her tale. Her history, in the moment of becoming history - that is, when it becomes a story in the

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[48] For example in Anthony Brian Taylor, 'Shakespeare's use of Golding's Ovid', *Notes & Queries*, vol.35 (1988).

[49] See *Fasti,* loc.cit., II.721-852; and Geoffrey Bullough (ed), *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; New York: Columbia University Press 1957), vol.I.

[50] Taylor, loc.cit.

[51] See Bullough, loc.cit. For example, Ovid's and Chaucer's Lucrece falls modestly so as to remain covered: this is an echo of Polyxena in Ovid (*Met.,* XIII.480, p.263).

hands of multiple tellers - also becomes fluid, to be reshaped at the will of every poet. In the Livius/Painter version, the point is explicitly made that Lucrece refuses to yield until Tarquin threatens to murder her and a slave and arrange their bodies together in a suggestive pose. In this scenario it is clear that she feels she has an element of responsibility that is not explicit in Shakespeare's telling, since she chooses rape rather than death and infamy, so as to have the opportunity to clear her name afterwards. Her tragedy is not so much the rape, as the impossibility of making sure the truth is told: thus for Shakespeare there is again a shifting definition of truth. It is not so much objective truth that is rendered obscure by the mind that searches for it (as it might be in Petrarch) as a personal truth that cannot be grasped by others as they can by herself.

Shakespeare considers this problem in the *Sonnets* too. In the first poems Shakespeare bemoans the inefficacy of art by itself to pass on the image of his friend: 'Who will believe my verse in time to come [...]?' (17.1); but as the poems progress there is an increasing and optimistic sense that such art will be effective, so that death is defied by the immortality achieved in verse, culminating in the triumphant

> Nor marble nor the gilded monuments
> Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme.
>
> (55.1-2)

A readership is implied and required, but the readership evoked is ambivalent in its judgement: the opinion of the contemporary world is judged treacherous and unfriendly, and the lover becomes a refuge from the world, not a means of establishment in it, most notably in the sonnet 'When in disgrace [...] Haply I think on thee'. Here is the same tendency to retreat into the *stanza* within the stanza of the poem in isolation with the mistress which we see in Donne.[52] The dependence on the opinions and memories of others is deeply problematical, and is further discussed in *Lucrece*, where the process of retelling history is watched.

Lucrece meditates on the tapestry depicting the Trojan war - here she can relive the anguish of Hecuba, 'a face where all distress is stell'd' (1444), the type of distress.[53] The tapestry is the means whereby Hecuba's story is remembered, and Lucrece's living grief is

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[52] For example in Carey, loc.cit.: 'The Canonization': 'We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms' (l.32); and 'The Sun Rising': 'Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;/This bed thy centre is, these walls thy sphere' (ll.29-30).

[53] For a summary of critical views on the Ekphrasis, see R. Rawdon Wilson, loc.cit.

the means through which it is relived. The Ekphrasis is an instance of Shakespeare's cross-Ovidian reference; it recalls, of course, Philomela's tapestry in the *Metamorphoses*, whereby she lets her sister know she has been raped, although she has been immured and deprived of her tongue and therefore cannot speak her story. The use of an artistic medium to speak is thus powerfully evoked (*Met.*, VI, ll.571-86).[54] But there is another dimension to Lucrece's perceptions:

> And therefore Lucrece swears he did her wrong,
> To give her so much grief and not a tongue.
>
> (ll.1462-63)

Lucrece has a tongue, and can tell her story eloquently and successfully, quoting Tarquin's words which the poet has already quoted to us. The court believes her:

> At this they all at once began to say
> Her body's stain her mind untainted clears;
> While with a joyless smile she turns away [...]
>
> (ll.1709-11)

She, however, recognises that in the record of history reinterpretations may distort the story, as Tarquin has already threatened to do. She finally resolves that only an indisputable fact, the fact of her suicide, can speak clearly about her innocence. This indictment of language as a vehicle for truth is reflected throughout *Lucrece* in the tales within tales, as first Tarquin then the narrator alternate to re-shape events with their own particular motive and bias.[55] It again recalls the story of Philomela and Procne: Procne is struck speechless on seeing the tapestry from Philomela - unlike Hecuba's vocal grief in Ovid. Lucrece therefore chooses to be Procne rather than Hecuba - she chooses silence even after she has tried speech, aware that even Hecuba's grief in Ovid has been inserted by a poet.[56] In

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[54] Like the indirectness of Petrarch's poetry: Petrarch too uses indirectness in his poems as a means of highlighting the indirectness of the form itself, as opposed to direct speech. This might, therefore, highlight a certain anxiety about the veracity of artistic media.

[55] Wilson, loc.cit., sees the plays as 'conceptual spaces in which stories are told' borrowing from current narrative theory to do this (p.41).

[56] Lavinia, in *Titus Andronicus*, has been called 'the emblem of the voiceless woman.' Cynthia Marshall, in Levin and Watson, loc. cit. quotes Toril Moi 194 ' "it is not unproblematrical [...] to try to speak for the other woman, since this is precisely what the ventriloquism of patriarchy has always done."' The article does all you could want in terms of Freudian feminist readings of *Titus Andronicus*: the male fear of woman; punishing sexuality; silencing her; and so on. I do not, however, wish to stress the gender imbalance of power - my interest in the significance of female personae in debates is limited to the way it provides a powerful symbol for general

Renaissance historical writing, there was a proliferation of 'topoi' - set pieces, orations before battle, descriptions of battles - which the writer could invent, in the Livy style of history writing. Speeches were seen as a useful device for the historian to set out his interpretations of a character's motivations.[57] In such devices we can see the genesis of history plays as a genre; something invented, and yet supposedly not invented.

Hecuba is described in Ovid as a howling dog in her grief, and perhaps it is because of this that Lucrece ultimately refuses to wail her story aloud and chooses silence that speaks. If such licence to invent is given to the historian, how can it be ensured that the right speech will be given to Lucrece? It is finally her dead body which establishes Tarquin's guilt, not her spoken relation of the crime:

> They did conclude to bear Lucrece thence,
> To show her bleeding body thorough Rome,
> And so to publish Tarquin's foul offence [...]
> (ll.1850-52)

The only way in which she can substantiate her story convincingly is by sacrificing her life, 'speaking' in action where words can be held in doubt. She thus ensures that the poet we read will tell her story as it happened to her, and that his words will repeat Tarquin's words as she repeated them. Her immortality, which was threatened by the prospect of misrepresentation, is preserved at the cost of her immediate life. The event is the only eloquence, and the incomplete action of the rape opens up unfixed opinion, requiring the act of her suicide to close it, to fix it. The concerns of *Lucrece* prefigure the tragedy of reputation in *Othello*, and serve to emphasise the extent to which, for Shakespeare, individual life depends upon its reception in society. [58]

Even art itself may come to have Protean aspects - as in the translation questions of the period (see Chapter Three). Paradoxically, however, truth seems to be most closely

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concerns. See also Bullough, loc.cit.

[57] Burke, loc.cit., pp.106, 117.

[58] Wilson, loc.cit., mentions Othello in relation to Lucrece, but his brief points are not the same as this one. He links Othello and Lucrece on basis of a hero who 'like Lucrece, elects to die upon a story' (p.40), and links Othello and Tarquin as 'two warriors, both men of honour and also criminals' (p.47). Interesting in this context is the idea of 'invention' (discussed above, Chapter Three). This word included all the notions of imagination that it carries now, although perhaps not quite yet Dr Johnson's definition - it carries a considerable connotation of art and artifice (art/nature). The exercise of the writer's craft was acknowledged; skill and execution were as important as ideas, though often seen as separate (the familiar idea of writing as garments).

maintained in art, where identity is transferred, than in chronicle, where it is merely preserved, and open to distortion: the greater the detail, the more chance of manipulation. Also, one must take an active part in shaping one's history, and be aware of how it may be distorted. This is the Petrarchan concern with the *simulacrum*: to choose to shape it, rather than leave stories to be rewritten by others. Shakespeare's 'poesy' refers to past and future through physiological details and a refusal to be precise; it is not so much a jewel here as a flower, Montaigne's 'posy of other men's flowers.'

Lucrece, then, draws upon the *Fasti* and the *Metamorphoses* to express anxieties about the changing shape of tales in the hands of different bards. Just how this is effected will be explored in the next sub-section.

ii. The uses of Ovid

More than one Ovidian source can be traced in Shakespeare's poem. For the basic story, Geoffrey Bullough writes: '[i]t has been proved by Ewing and Baldwin that [Shakespeare] probably used an edition of Ovid's *Fasti* with Latin annotations by Paulus Marsus of which there were many reprints from 1588 onwards.'[59] Ovid's texts used in the Renaissance include the *Amores* and the *Fasti*, but by far the most marked influence is of the *Metamorphoses*, so that the image of Ovid becomes associated with metamorphosis, whether or not this was the text used by a particular poet. George Sandys translated the *Metamorphoses* in 1632, a version which Laurence Lerner sees as an imitation that absorbs the imitated text, much like Francis Meres' image of the soul relived in succeeding poets (Chapter Three, III.iv). Lerner locates this alertness to sources in the sense that Shakespeare's sonnets seem to refer to a story the reader already knows - or is not going to be told (the autobiography). He quotes the *Amores* 3-4 (15-16) 'Be wise as thou art', but suggests that where Ovid is explicitly sexual, Shakespeare is more rhetorical. Marlowe

[59] Bullough , loc.cit., p.179.

translated the *Amores* in 1600, but Shakespeare might have read it in manuscript. Lerner sees Chapman's *Ovid's Banquet of Sense* (1595) as a Renaissance neoplatonic text, rather than Ovidian in spirit, since the senses are seen as the first step to spirituality, rather than being celebrated on their own.[60] Colin Burrow sees the *Metamorphoses* as purporting to be about a history of the world from the beginning - but it has no 'causally coherent account of how the creation with which it begins became the Empire with which it ends'. There is no sense of *natural* mutability or generation :

> The poem is an extraordinarily tense mixture of the generative and the perverse. And Ovid is not interested in reconciling them. ... These sorts of reading provide, in potential at least, the interpretative framework for a recognition of the full paradox of Ovid's poem: how man simply does not fit in with what Charles Tomlinson calls 'this universe of fecund change'.

This, Burrows suggests, is not what concerns Renaissance poets; for them, Ovid simply stands for wit and love - not so much for metamorphosis.[61]

The *Metamorphoses* of Ovid, whether or not metamorphosis was seen as a focal issue, was one of the texts that came in for moralising exegesis of various sorts over the centuries (see Chapter Two). Niall Rudd has traced these developments through examination of the responses to the story of Daedalus. The *Ovid Moralise* in the fourteenth century sees the story as a warning - as does Gower in the *Confessio Amantis*. Rudd also quotes a troubadour song where Daedalus claims he was Christ, and also that Daedalus was associated with Simon Magus. Later interpretative fictions were added, including the detail that he flew up in a demon-drawn chariot - or with wings; Saint Peter and the Norseman Wayland from the Edda are also drawn into the story. The death is seen as punishment for the attempt to fly.

> In all such cases the writer asserts that what has happened recalls or illustrates or recreates the original, archetypal, myth. In the case of such material there is no point in asking whether art imitates life or *vice versa*. For both life and art return to the myth, and draw meaning and sustenance from that [...] The story of [the] success and failure [of Daedalus and Icarus] is not fact. But provided we know what we are doing, we still have

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[60] Laurence Lerner, 'Ovid and the Elizabethans' in Charles Martindale, loc.cit, pp.121-136. For a discussion of rhetoric in *Lucrece*, see Shakespeare, *The Poems*, loc.cit., Introduction.

[61] Colin Burrow, 'Original Fictions: Metamorphosis in *The Faerie Queene*', in Charles Martindale, loc.cit, pp. 99, 100.

a right to call it true.'[62]

Rudd makes a useful point here; the stories, myths, archetypes, are put to use by each succeeding age, which, through allying itself with these 'archetypes', claims absolute authority. Jesus, Icarus, and Daedalus all belong to an undifferentiated past. The same principle can be seen at work in those forgeries and inventions of myth which were then passed off as history, such as the Donation of Constantine. Similar questions must attach to personal history, of forms of autobiography remade along universal, meaningful, mythical lines. Petrarch's *simulacrum*, freed through artifice from earthly imperfection, is a sort of parallel to the incarnation of the perfect soul in Heaven. An analogy may be drawn with Augustine's self in the *Confessions* - his individual soul becomes a type, an investigation of any soul. This was Petrarch's alternative purification, so that both the 'I' of the poem and the act of writing take on a purified being. Here I might colonise the term 'self-fashioning', using it in a rather different sense from the one in which Greenblatt uses it. My argument would not be that each identifies self in relation to an internally created other perceived as objective, but that the creation takes place in a metaphysical quagmire of tussles with concepts such as 'truth' and 'stability', in an intuitive grasp of the hidden and the fluid. This is what happens in *Lucrece.*

There are further subtleties in this particular use of the Graeco-Roman myths in the late sixteenth century. The stories at this time no longer have the dangerous claims to an alternative theology that they perhaps had in the time of Augustine, claims which they carried with them into the time of Petrarch. They have instead the advantage of whimsical indulgence. In sixteenth-century treatment of the stories, there are veils within veils, and claims and counterclaims about the 'truth' attaching to these myths; several contradictory messages are being sent. In the case of Marlowe and Shakespeare, the two gods in the Ovidian romances, Venus and Neptune, are apologists for a type of behaviour not considered by the conventional system - in Venus' case roles of gender, in that of Neptune aspects of sexuality, in a complex game of fact and fantasy which ultimately relies on the fictiveness of myth. The formula is traced thus: firstly, Venus is merely a pagan goddess

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[62] Niall Rudd, 'Daedalus and Icarus (i): From Rome to the End of the Middle Ages' and 'Daedalus and Icarus (ii): From the Renaissance to the Present Day' in Charles Martindale, loc.cit., p.35.

and so displays behaviour a Christian woman would not indulge in; secondly, Venus is a myth - she is by definition *untrue - the way things are not*; but thirdly, Venus is indubitably there, before our mind's eye. Because of the first and second point she has a licence to act in a way that no woman could, but at the same time suggests, because of the third point, that perhaps she can and does.[63]

Venus pinpoints the paradox of myth - its truth and simultaneous untruth (here used to bypass censure - or censorship). On the one hand she is just a fancy; on the other she is a hypothesis. She may also be a report. Myth here has a twofold and to some extent conflicting role; it is on the one hand, in this age, not seen as even remotely an alternative system threatening the orthodox one; yet on the other hand it explores issues otherwise forbidden or underground - just as fairy tales were used in Stalinist Russia. It is in the powerful position of having no obligation to be truthful. It is a game, a whimsical, marginal, artificial, alien form. It is thus outside the grasping hands of definition - as surely as Petrarch's Laura/l'aura ever was.

To quote the name of Venus, therefore, has an almost punning quality - in that it highlights the associations that multiply around words: Venus, a being without a concrete signified, has to emphasise the significative quality of speech, in a pure form. In that sense punning simply illuminates the ordinary function of language, which is to bring forth associations. So, in writing about myths, where the actual existence of the events and people is called into question, a poet is of necessity thrown into a collusion with or emphasising of language.[64]

These moral lessons are not the same as those in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where the reader is waltzed through tales of anguish and death, to be told at the end, 'and that's how the leopard got its spots', *Just So* stories deeply connecting nature and morals, the significance and meaning of the book of nature. The Elizabethan uses of Ovidian myth, evidenced for

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[63] Roe, *The Poems*, loc.cit., Introduction.

[64]Gillian West quotes Sigurd Burkhardt on punning that is, 'by its very directness, revolutionary and anarchic. It denies the meaningfulness of the linguistic currency on which society depends.' Gillian West, 'The Second-Meaning Pun in Shakespeare's Emotional Verse,' *Studies in Philology*, vol. 90:3 (1993), p.47. Cf. Chapter Two (above). Shepherd (loc.cit) also talks about puns, in relation to women pamphleteers in the seventeenth century, and how they 'perform a function similar to repetition - they make us aware of the words we are reading. They break our perhaps uncritical involvement with the argument and force us to notice the choice of language' (p.115).

example in the erotic epyllion, are activated after the tradition exemplified by the *Ovide Moralise*. This is not necessarily to give the same authoritarian messages, but uses myths in the same way for political ends: when Marlowe writes about Neptune or Shakespeare about Venus there are political connotations in the writing. It is also possible that this tradition of moralising and mythic writing became a part of the image of Ovid in the sixteenth century, so that the image of Ovid as writer of myth (however it is afterwards used) tinges the history (the *Fasti*) that he also writes. In other words, it is significant that Shakespeare chooses Ovid to play out his concerns about stories, since Ovid has come to be known as a writer who lends himself to such interpretations and concerns, over the centuries.

ii. 'Words reported againe'

In sixteenth century usage the word 'history' is related to 'story' in meaning, and to some extent replaces it during this period; that is to say, it can mean a fable or a chronicle, and has a wide variety of meanings, not all of them current today. The ways in which the meanings attaching to the word 'history' and the word 'myth' redefine themselves in the light of linguistic and cultural changes at the end of the century can be illuminated by looking at certain Shakespearean uses of the word and the concepts, for example in *Lucrece*.

For Douglas Burke myth is 'fiction passing as fact' (p.7) ; the muse of myth is the muse of history, and it is Sidney's famous differentiation between the poet and the historian that marks the divergence of the two. The bard (once poet and historian in one) can no longer operate unselfconsciously, since the two identities clash and throw up new dynamics, so that the very question of bardic cohesion becomes part of the exercise of telling a tale. The time-honoured identification of poetry with myth means that this must become part of the equation. The concept of myth is connected with concepts of history, certainly in the sense of rhetoric. In certain Renaissance schools, the Ciceronian, for example, history is seen as rhetoric, form elevated above content; 'the dignity of history' was a phrase often

used. History, in other words, must be concerned with what is judged to be great and glorious, so the finished piece of craft is the main preoccupation.[65] Written history must be elegant and graceful, for example in language and naming; much the same claims are being made for poetry (see Chapter Three). Spenser has been seen as the last poet who could unselfconsciously combine history and myth in an allegorical signification of the past and the present.[66] And if the poet is differentiated from the historian, then the reasons for the separation become provocative, whether the requirements of the historian are those of truth-telling, of rhetoric, or of moral instruction; and, if they are, how these characteristics differ from those of the poet. The differentiation evokes again in an altered form the old concerns with truth and lies that I have previously considered. The uncertainties provoked by the consciousness that it is the phrasing and the individual bard that decides what and how and why things truly happened is a common theme in Shakespeare. A way of writing history which centralises the form itself, rather than seeing it as a report of events that 'actually happened', is central to *Lucrece*.[67] The poem contains a large amount of reported speech, and the whole tragedy is made to occur because of the power of words to misrepresent. This is important because of the concern with the preservation of a self as desired by the self, for projection to posterity. What is perceived as history rather than being perceived as myth - when do myths become myths in the sense of fiction? The Greek myths were once seen as historical, almost in the sense that the book of Genesis was.[68] Moral lessons are looked for from history, so that fables, chosen solely for moral lessons, become part of what is seen as history.[69] This view of the lessons of history is found everywhere, from the *Mirror for Magistrates* to Francis Meres's examples of divine

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[65] Burke, loc.cit., p.105

[66] See Chapter Three, Note 27.

[67] Wilson (loc.cit.) writes: 'Whatever the story seems to have been about, that which has traditionally filled the foreground in other narrative versions (malignant intent, violence, rape, suicide, revolution), *Lucrece* concerns essentially itself: its own language, its rhetorical command, its comments on historiography, its act of narration, and the distance between itself and the ground of its potential in the mere story. This narrative narcissism manifests itself everywhere' (p.53). John Roe includes a discussion of Renaissance rhetoric in his Introduction to *The Poems* (loc.cit.).

[68] In the sixteenth century there was an increasing tendency to see the Bible as history, together with seeing allegorical readings as deluded papacy. Burke, loc.cit., p.3.

[69] Minnis and Scott, loc.cit., p.118.

retribution in *Palladis Tamia.* It is, moreover, related closely to poetry; as if poetry and its world is designed as a lesson not just in content but in the lifestyles surrounding it - possessing an almost supernatural quality:

> 'As Iodelle, A French tragical poet, beeing an epicure and an etheist, made a pitifull end: so our tragicall poet Marlow for his Epicurisme and Atheisme had a tragicall death. You may read of this Marlow more at large in the *Theatre of God's judgements,* in the 25th chapter entreating of *Epicures and Atheists.*
>
> As the poet Lycophon was shot to death by a certain riual of his: so Christopher Marlow was stabbed to death by a bawdy Servingman, a riual of his in his lewde loue' (Smith II, p.324).

This passage evinces a sense of history's repetition, and the sense that history is poetic, in that it consists of moral lessons, intermingling text and context, text and life, poet and poem. History therefore becomes another book of divine instruction, parallelling the books of nature and of the Scriptures. Thus there are two truths - '[h]istorical accuracy and exemplification' and 'art as the handmaiden of theology'; the 'seven liberal arts can elevate the soul to be fit for heaven'.[70]

If history is of moral fabular use, then too the question of what may be put into 'history' is important. Burke writes about Renaissance debates on the subject of history, such as the need to refer only to things that ancient history has in common with modern - somehow only precedent legitimises what is seen to have happened; can, for example, modern technological warfare such as guns be included in a historical account, when they do not already exist in a past account? '[...] here again one see the values of the humanists working against historical truth: they are trying to pretend that modern history is really just like ancient history, though Valla's sense of the history of language will not permit him to do this'.[71] Burke suggests that there is a sixteenth-century shift in motivation from the outlook of Polybius from that of Livy, who wanted history to be *pragmatikos,* useful and dealing in bare facts, not embellished with speeches and other ornamentation. History is no longer as it was in medieval times, when the Bible was an oracle, not written in time, and history was visualised in rather Marxist terms such as 'four empires' or 'six ages' (e.g.

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[70] Minnis and Scott, loc.cit., pp.116, 124, 125.

[71] Burke, loc.cit, p.119.

Villani's *Florentine Chronicles*), and went, like Dante's grand scheme, towards illuminating some great divine truth and laws were fixed and eternal.[72] The story of Lucrece itself has, as John Roe points out, 'exercised fascination from its occurrence at an early formative point in western history', and is an illustration of the way in which stories from history are used to convey moral lessons.[73]

One way of defining history would be as chronicle, which assumes a linear progress through documented years; another way is not to differentiate between different periods in the past, but instead telling mythic stories about it, filling the vacuum that the past would otherwise be - a vacuum that would close up the past, bring yesterday close up to today, with no space between them. Burke talks about the *pensee sauvage* of Levi-Strauss, where there is no sense of past, no change, oral tradition, mythification (which *is* history). In the fifteenth to seventeenth century new ideas of chronology emerge - for example in Scaliger, and the speculation about dates for Christ's death. Valla exposes the Donation of Constantine in the fifteenth century on the basis of anachronistic language, and Valla's writing show the connection of philology and history. Hence an analysis of the Koran and the Bible as historical documents is possible. The Renaissance is a time of 'new awareness of evidence'. Hence Machiavelli writes on how Fortune *can* be affected. Porphyry sees the Bible as a historical document, checking it against other sources. Herodotus is 'aware that religion had a history' (for example, Greek gods after Egyptian), but this awareness was 'unusual in his time' (p.139). History, coming to be seen as secular, is seen also as cyclical.[74] These Renaissance theories of history indicate the important place of history in debates of the period. In Shakespeare the main focus would seem to be on the way stories are told. Shakespeare's Lucrece herself is aware of the uses to which stories are put, when she wants to make sure her story will not be used as an excuse for wantons. This point is noted by Wilson, when he writes 'The internal variations upon the inherited story indicate

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[72] Burke, loc.cit., pp.3, 16, 124, 139.

[73] Shakespeare, *The Poems*, loc.cit., p.35. Roe investigates the sources, and finds that while the tendency in treatments of the Lucrece story in the past had been to look at the political or social responsibilities of the individual, so that the individual story becomes subservient to wider significances, in Shakespeare the emphasis is more on the individual conscience. Wilson writes about previous versions of the Lucrece story, and notes Shakespeare's much longer version, and then goes on to discuss how Shakespeare, using the narrative mode, expands and alters the original story. Wilson, loc.cit., pp. 42-43.

[74] Burke, loc.cit., pp.55, 76, 80, 87, 138, 139.

that Shakespeare was fully aware of how it, like any other story, could be told.'[75]

The idea of poetry as consisting of ornament and idea, or clothes and body, may be compared to the Sidneian notion of using fable and story in different ways, to instruct or inspire. Sidney differentiates between the historian, hunting through mouse-eaten records, and the poet's speaking picture and figuring forth. The stories found in history may be used to convey lessons, and this may be seen either as a sort of divine instruction implicit in the events themselves; or, increasingly, as a use made of stories by poets for moral ends. Hence Montaigne can suggest that it does not matter if a story is in any sense factual or not - what matters rather more is what can be learned from it. He also says that each time a story is told it changes. This is something of a Ciceronian idea, of history as rhetoric, and it is one which, I think, Shakespeare exercises in *The Rape of Lucrece*. Montaigne in 'On Physiognomy' maintains that any story can be used for a 'moral/didactic purpose', whether or not it is 'true'. Words are only misinterpreted by others, never by the subject as s/he her/himself speaks them: 'words reported againe have as another sound, so another sense'.[76] So any story can be used to serve any moral, or in this case immoral, purpose - in any case, in order to substantiate or affirm a particular interest. One thinks immediately of Iago, who can tell Desdemona's story with subtle inflections so as to picture her a whore; people like Othello, and Brutus and Cordelia, who stick coldly to facts, and trust others to do so as well, are inevitably deceived. The emotive use, linguistically controlled, of situations are what guarantee success, as Iago, Goneril and Regan and Tarquin recognise only too well. Of course there is a sort of faith that 'truth will out', but that is not the tragedy that Shakespeare is interested in, not, that is, the tragedy of lying - but the tragedy of not being aware that lying is possible, that motives and representation vary according to each person, and that each person can shift the world so as to represent it according to their own particular internal world; in other words, integrating with humanity is seen as a question of juggling with conflicting internal worlds that each one attempts to impose on the external world. Tragedy arises when characters assume that there is a stable world that is held in

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[75] Wilson, loc.cit., p.52.

[76] Michel de Montaigne, *The Essayes of Michael Lord of Montaigne*, translated by John Florio, edited by A. R. Waller (London: J. M. Dent and Sons; New York: E. P. Dutton [no date]), vol.3, p.399.

common by everyone, to which everyone refers. The tragedy is consummated at the moment when the innocent, 'truthful' character who so believes, is brought to a sudden realization of the fallacy of the belief.

These concerns with a threatened self-image, and a reliance for recognition, almost for communication, on a posterity that might itself prove treacherous, repeat again in the *Sonnets* and *Lucrece* Petrarch's interest in exile and self-creation as discussed in Chapter One. Retreating to Vaucluse, Petrarch engages in a controlled sculpting of himself, making sure that no other contemporary hand can shape the image of himself. Investing in posterity, the poet has to be sure that the marble, the jewel, will not decay or metamorphose, and to do this, we are reminded in Lucrece, any immediate cost will have to be paid.

iii. 'Thou shouldst print more, not let that copy die'

In the *Sonnets* Plato and Ovid are brought together and used to explore anxieties about the self and posterity. When Diotima clarifies her theory of immortality in the *Symposium*, she asserts 'the aim of love is the perpetual possession of the good' and argues that - 'procreation is the nearest thing to perpetuity and immortality that a mortal being can attain.' In the first seventeen of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* reproduction is urged as a means of living on:

> This were to be new-made when thou art old,
> And see thy blood warm when thou feelst it cold
>
> (2.13-14)

Living on in others is offered as a persuasive means of eternal life, while there is little suggestion of an afterlife. - 'No longer mourn for me [...] that I am fled/From this vile world, with vilest worms to dwell [...] When I perhaps compounded am with clay' (71.1, 3-4, 10). Shakespeare emphatically lives in this world, not rejecting his earthly form, but rather celebrating it; it is the lover's physical beauty he sees fade and which he desires to

increase. His advocacy of propagation implies a reliance on the processes of nature, choosing nature over art in the contemporary debate. Shakespeare differs from Sidney in his reservations about Platonism; in these sonnets, art can only survive through a compromise with nature - which, blind and insentient, is ironically the one enduring force. He must form an alliance with it in order to survive. Again and again in Shakespeare there is a basic reliance on things of the physical world over that of the word, acts, eyes, tongues, not words, for example in the Falstaffian question, 'What is honour? - a word.' Thomas More talks about the separation of nature and man in his debate about Reason and Sense in the *Utopia*: reason as the Aristotelian part of man's nature, and nature as separate from man. Here More is allied to Sidney in the concept of the divine part of man. But in Shakespeare there is less of a sense of man's being separate from nature. The transition, begun in Petrarch, is from the separate concepts of soul and body and nature as part of it. Sonnet 8 uses the images of music to make the offspring argument, seeing nature as a harmonious process of which man is a part. The changing quality of experiential reality is also evoked:

> As fast as thou shalt wane, so fast thou grow'st
> In one of thine (11.1-2)

Petrarch fastens on the aspect of decay inherent in the notion of change. For Shakespeare the process equally implies birth and development. The phrasing is suggestive of the phases of the moon; the Apollo-poet, seeing the moon that he will light, recognises nevertheless that it requires its own regenerative capacities to provide the basic material.

Similarly, the grief of Lucrece's father is expressed in terms of the necessity he now has, in the absence of a 'copy', to face his own mortality. There is something of the same theme explored in *The Winter's Tale* and *Pericles*, where the long state of mental anguish endured by Pericles and Leontes is healed when they find their daughters, in whom their wives are reproduced. But here, as in the sonnets, the immortality desired is for the loved person, not for the self; the beloved is seen as nature's template,

> She carved thee for her seal, and meant thereby
> Thou shouldst print more, not let that copy die.
> (11.13-14)

The idea of copies being continually printed off (an image impossible in Petrarch's days before the printing press) widens the scope for identification and hence immortality through

others. In each of these cases, where the beloved is urged to reproduce, the beloved, standing as s/he does as the muse or inspiration for the poet, is required to be present so as to allow the writing to take place. Hence the beloved ensures the survival and continued productivity of the poet - thus finding echoes of divinity in earthly things; earthly things are the trigger. This is an idea Ficino discusses, for example in his letters: 'Thus when the soul has received through the physical senses those images which are within material objects, we remember what we knew before when we existed outside the prison of the body. [...] Regaining the memory of the true and divine beauty by the appearance of beauty that the eyes perceive, we desire the former with a secret and unutterable ardour of the mind. This Plato calls 'divine Love', which he defines as the desire to return to the contemplation of divine beauty; a desire arising from the sight of its physical likeness.'[77] This relates, for example, to the *Phaedrus*, where Plato says there is the memroy of a past pre-birth life within everyone, and, while the recollection of true beauty fades, we are reminded of it at the sight of earthly beauty.[78] This sense of unknowing within the lover's desire is essential to Shakespeare's as well as Petrarch's poetic search, and the ways in which they see themselves as relaying images to posterity; Sonnet 18 is particularly relevant to this point. In this sonnet, the beloved is throughout not so much described as suggested, although it is ostensibly a description by comparison, and particular characteristics are diffused, 'a summer's day' offering a multiplicitous range of associations, but nothing specific in terms of a description. The result is a very strong but very general impression; it suggests a feeling, a state of being, closely linked with a person, rather than an actual person invoked (rather as Petrarch struggles with his control and lack of control over Laura, whose identity as his beloved as well as her own unknown identity fuse and clash within the poet's poem-mind: see Chapter One).

Yet, rather paradoxically, Shakespeare asserts that he gives immortality to the beloved through the poem - 'So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,/ So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.' The continuity of humanity must be evoked, to effect the immortality. The thought is repeated in Sonnet 55, 'You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes' (l.14). The sense is of tapping in to the continuing emotions of humanity, through

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[77] Kristeller, *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, loc.cit., p.44.

[78] Cary, loc.cit.

verse, and by access to it allowing posterity a similar sense of continuity. The description of the beloved is deliberately general, since what is seen as permanent is the state of being in love - the beloved's position will be endlessly repeated in posterity's re-enactment of the same story; just as in the Petrarchan scheme each succeeding poet is necessary to keep the poet-chain alive. The poet in a sense makes himself eternal simply by virtue of his nature, partaking of the ongoing stream of life, and a repeated pattern of experience. The immortality Shakespeare shows us here frees itself from the struggles of the individual, always menaced by potential obscurity, and offers the vision of a collective cultural continuum.

In this section the concerns of reproduction and immortality in *Lucrece* and the *Sonnets* have been examined in relation to the two means of survival: physical and poetic regeneration. The two seem to complement each other; the child of the loins becomes an image for that other 'child,' the fruit of the artist's labours. Cleopatra's asp becomes a hideous image of this 'child' that she is destined to produce for posterity, the serpent image that her self has become.

To evoke the reliance on progeny for continued life is a way of highlighting how the life of the individual is deeply implicated in the workings of earthly life; it acts as a supporting motif for the sense that life in story is only possible by virtue of continued generations of society. There is no sound without a receptive ear. In other words, for a story, or a poem, to exist, there must also exist a fluid generative culture, language and people. This is not in itself a stable concept; generation inevitably engenders change too, and this (unresolvable) equation is a question that Shakespeare treats in *Lucrece* and the *Sonnets*, imaging it in his use of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined Ovidian myths of metamorphosis, as they are treated in the work of Petrarch and Shakespeare, with reference to the poetic theory of their times. *Imitatio* was a practice followed by both poets, and I focused on their imitations of the *Metamorphoses*. I have argued that the subject and the technique are closely related. I have focussed on five main topics: the role of the sonnet mistress; the pursuit of an ineffable ideal; the transmutation of the self into the artefact; the disreputable image of poetry; and the tension between innovation and tradition. In their treatment of these points, the writers of fourteenth century Italy and sixteenth century England have much in common.

In Chapter One I began my analysis of Petrarch's *Rime Sparse* and letters, and his use of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. I argued that Petrarch's poetry is absorbed in the difficult task of capturing intangible vision, imaged in the trope of the lover wooing his elusive mistress, Laura, who is also 'l'aura' (the breeze). I examined his sense of period, and his co-existent sense of mortality, and demonstrated that the poem for Petrarch becomes the vehicle for an expanded mode of being that can span stretches of time, and the effort is to recreate the self in art. I examined Petrarch's unavailing pursuit of Laura, and his urge not just to possess but to become her, and I argued that Laura becomes emblematic of his elusive goal of perpetuating selfhood in verse. The chapter explored the varied representations both of Laura and of Petrarch in these poems, so that the myths of metamorphosis aptly express the way in which forms change when embodied in different words.

Chapter Two continued an examination of the *Rime Sparse* and the letters, this time in the context of poetic theories of fourteenth-century Italy. It explored Petrarch's engagement with, on the one hand, the image of secular poetry as sinful and, on the other, his evident sense of the creative power of poetic language. The two conflicting views merge in the figure of Apollo, who in Petrarch's time has acquired two traditional readings, the Graeco-Roman image as god of poetry and the later Augustinian appellation of demon. I argued that Petrarch, though aware of and often troubled by his culpability as secular poet, gracefully parries the attack by celebrating linguistic creativity. The intimate connection between secular poetry and the vernacular was also explored, and I posited that Petrarch exhibits often conflicting beliefs about writing in the vulgar tongue. On the one hand he is engaged with refining an Italian poetic style for the greater glory of the Italian language; on the other he is distressed by the way in which poetry in the vernacular is accessible to a

broad range of undiscriminating would-be poets whom he sees as sullying his attempts at a pure and complex style.

Chapter Three analysed the work of a number of poetic theorists in 1590s England, particularly Philip Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* and George Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie*, and picked up the themes of Chapter Two. I argued that the idea of poetry as deceptive and sinful is still present, but that a stronger sense is of the need to rescue it from its degraded image, particularly that of poetry in English. Since most of these works were written as defences of poetry, I examined the motives behind the need to defend. The visionary role of the poet is once again reinforced in these defences, while the promotion of secular poetry emerges as a nationalistic enterprise. I argued that the creation of an English poetic style is theorised in terms of *imitatio*, and debated as a departure from tradition. Elizabethan theorists were seen as groping towards an ambition to be inventive, although still adhering to the imitative style.

Chapter Four discussed Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Rape of Lucrece* and the *Sonnets*. It returned to Chapter One, and examined Shakespeare's negotiation of the fragility of selfhood in multiple representation, viewed once again through the use of Ovid, of myths of metamorphosis, and of *imitatio*. Cleopatra was examined as a creation that is an 'anti-Petrarchan' revolt against the sonnet mistress in some ways, but is in others, and unintentionally, Petrarchan. The sonnet mistress was examined in the changing forms Shakespeare gives her, including the young man of the *Sonnets*. Lucrece's concerns in *Lucrece* are particularly compelling because hers is a story already with a history of retelling by the time of Shakespeare, and thus has an inherited history of multiple versions. Against this backdrop, Shakespeare develops Lucrece's concerns that her story will not be told in words as she wants it unless she intervenes with acts. I argued that this is Shakespeare's main preoccupation in this poem, as it is in *A&C*. In the *Sonnets,* I argued, he is once again confronting the problems of (mis)representation in stories, and that in these poems he employs techniques designed to ensure the longevity of the individual through reference, in the tradition of Petrarch, to the past and the future and the way in which a fresh reader/writer causes the old writer to be reborn. Throughout, I argued that *imitatio* is seen in the work of both poets as a form of metamorphosis, and that hence Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are aptly employed to express their concerns.

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