

English Petrarchism: from commentary on poetry to poetry as commentary

William John Kennedy

A profusion of literary commentary in the European Renaissance defines the period as an age of exegesis. In addition to building upon ancient and medieval modes of textual gloss and interpretive commentary, humanist scholars introduced new modes of philological, historical, rhetorical and intertextual commentary. In Italy their push to excavate authorial meanings from ancient texts came to include modern vernacular texts by Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio. The development of print technology in the fifteenth century spread printed editions of these authors with accompanying commentaries throughout Europe. Through these channels sixteenth-century English poets received Petrarch's *Rime sparse* in richly annotated editions that explicated, commented upon and shaped their models for lyric poetry.¹ In what follows, I am going to argue that these authors in turn produced a body of English Petrarchism imitated by poets who shaped their own poems as critical commentaries upon the work of forerunners. The poets to whom I will refer include Wyatt and Surrey in the first generation of Italian reception, Sidney and Spenser in the next generation of English imitation, and Drayton and Shakespeare in the final generation of English Petrarchism.

Commentators and commentaries

With respect to Petrarch and his Italian commentators, the earliest editions of his vernacular poems include anti-papal, pro-imperial glosses composed by the peripatetic humanist scholar Francesco Filelfo at the despotic Visconti court in Milan during the 1440s (published unfinished in 1476); by the Ghibelline lawyer Antonio da Tempo in Padua (1477); and by the entrepreneurial Veronese publisher Hieronimo Squarzafico who completed Filelfo's commentary in 1484. At Venice in 1501, Aldus Manutius issued a carefully prepared edition of Petrarch's *Rime*, for which he recruited the skills of the humanist scholar Pietro Bembo. The latter subsequently wrote a full-length dialogue in defence of Petrarch in *Prose della volgar lingua* (Writing in the Vernacular, 1525), authorising the poet's archaic Tuscan style as the supreme model for Italian lyric.

That same year, in what would become the most widely reprinted edition of Petrarch's vernacular poems, the Venetian editor Alessandro Vellutello rearranged the accepted sequence of poems to narrate a dramatically coherent account of the poet's life and his love for Laura. Later editors such as Giovanni Andrea Gesualdo in

Venice (1533), Sylvano da Venafro also in Naples (1533) and Bernardino Daniello in Padua (1536, expanded in 1549) would emphasise Petrarch's rhetorical skills in deploying classical myth, literary allusion and poetic figuration. Other editors hospitable to Reformation theology such as Fausto da Longiano in Modena (1532), Antonio Brucioli in Ferrara (1548) and Ludovico Castelvetro in Modena (1582) would foreground Petrarch's scriptural and doctrinal references and his criticism of the Avignon papacy. Taken together, these approaches to the *Rime sparse* mediated Petrarch's reception in England, offering multiple versions of Petrarch as a public figure, poet, lover, scholar and Christian moralist.

Of the 143 editions of Petrarch's *Rime sparse* that appeared between 1470 and 1600 and are catalogued in Cornell University's Fiske Petrarch Collection, three-quarters (108 editions) offer some form of commentary on the poetry. They variously include a biography of the poet, attributions of his classical and medieval sources and analogues, identifications of historical allusions, lexical glosses and concordances of key words, tabulations of rhyme patterns, and other helpful materials.² Except for Aldus Manutius's 1501 edition (which includes an important afterword on editorial procedures, but no textual annotation), the ten commentaries to which I have called special attention are the most detailed, systematic and complete ones, offering poem-by-poem interpretative analysis, whether in the form of headnotes, footnotes or marginal commentary.

The question of which editions reached England is an open one. Catalogues of school, university and private libraries, inventories of books owned by particular individuals and speculation about the circulation of Italian-language books among immigrant populations in London offer some clues. Cambridge University lists an edition of Petrarch's *Le cose volgari* (inventoried between 1550 and 1593, possibly as one of Aldus Manutius's imprints published with that title) and three unidentified editions of Petrarch's *Rime* (inventoried between 1589 and 1593).³ The 1605 catalogue of Oxford's Bodleian Library lists three reprints of the *Rime* with commentaries by Antonio da Tempo and Filelfo (1515), Vellutello (1545) and Gesualdo (1553).⁴ A 1665 inventory of some 4,500 items in the Sidney family library in Kent lists two quarto volumes simply as *Petrarcha 4^o bis* with no identification of publisher, editor or commentator, and no date of acquisition. It also lists a second edition of Petrarch's *opera*, comprising four volumes in one folio without commentary, from the press of Sebastian Henricpetrus at Basel in 1581.⁵ Surprisingly there is no mention of Petrarch in Gabriel Harvey's personal library (192 volumes), nor in inventories of over eleven thousand volumes distributed among 137 estates.⁶ Still, we know that the *Rime sparse* were enthusiastically read and quoted in Italian, were selectively translated into English and were widely imitated by major English authors.

Access to reading commentaries on Petrarch in Italian depended upon opportunities for learning to read Italian. Vernacular languages were not part of school or university curricula, but grammar-school training in Latin provided a gateway for foreign language study through self-instruction or private tutorials. Upper-class poets such as Wyatt and Sidney sharpened their skills in Italian and French upon the whetstone of ambassadorial missions. Middle-class merchants and military adventurers could gain language experience through travel abroad. London had long attracted

foreign-born merchants and artisans, and polyglot language-learning manuals emphasised the acquisition of their languages for practical purposes. While the anonymous *A Plain Pathway to the French Tongue* (c. 1575) advertised itself as *Very profitable for Marchants*, William Thomas's *Principal Rules of the Italian Grammar* (1550) presented itself *For the Better Understanding of Boccace, Petrarke, and Dante*.⁷ The latter proved to be the first of twelve Italian handbooks and four Italian dictionaries published in England during the Tudor–Stuart period. John Florio's *The Second Frutes ... of Diuers but Delightsome Tastes to the Tongues of Italians and Englishmen* (1580) augmented the author's earlier pedagogical effort, *First Fruites* (1578), with serious attention to literary expression.⁸ Florio quotes from Petrarch's *Trionfi* and paraphrases passages from Boccaccio, Aretino, Ariosto and Tasso. The same author's *Queen Anna's New World of Words* (1611) provides a list of editions from which its entries are derived. They include the 1533 edition of Petrarch's *Rime* with Gesualdo's commentary *sopra il Petrarca*.⁹

We can identify specific copies of Petrarch's work owned or used by some sixteenth-century poets. George Gascoigne (though without evidence that he used it much) possessed Gesualdo's edition of *Il Petrarca*, which offers the century's most extensive rhetorical commentary on the *Rime*.¹⁰ In *Hekatompathia* (1582), Thomas Watson translates four of Petrarch's sonnets, quoting from their Italian originals with number references that correspond to their placement in the reordered sequence of Vellutello's *Il Petrarca*.¹¹ Ben Jonson, despite his resistance to Petrarchan poetry, possessed a mutilated 1581 Basel reprint of Petrarch's *opera*.¹² Other examples might inform or disappoint us. As will appear below, various poems by Wyatt and Surrey imply a general knowledge of commentaries by Vellutello and Gesualdo respectively, while a couple of poems by Sidney and Spenser refer in specific terms to commentaries by Gesualdo and Fausto da Longiano respectively.

Equally important are the ways in which these English poets comment on the Petrarchism of their predecessors in England. The influence of commentaries on a reader's, writer's or translator's understanding of canonical texts is by no means a one-way street. Readers of commentaries engage in dialogue with writers of them, endorsing some of their insights, questioning others and perhaps as often as not rejecting their interpretations in favour of alternative ones. When such readers are themselves writers, they may create new texts by imitating, borrowing from and rewriting earlier texts from perspectives opposed to those of earlier authors. And so on. Such writers are again in dialogue with earlier authors and commentators, to whom they respond with creative initiative. They have moved from reading poems with commentaries on them to writing their own poems as a form of commentary upon what preceded them.

Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey

The starting point of English Petrarchism during the reign of Henry VIII is Thomas Wyatt, followed by his younger, more deeply pedigreed friend, the Earl of Surrey. Both of them would run afoul of Henry VIII, who briefly imprisoned the former on possible grounds of flirting with Anne Boleyn and ordered the latter to be beheaded

for quartering the royal arms. And both of them – Wyatt, whose diplomatic missions to France and Italy in 1526–27 facilitated his approach to the *Rime sparse*; and Surrey, whose interest in Petrarch's verse dates from the mid-1530s – experimented with translating, adapting and imitating a few dozen of Petrarch's sonnets. Their respective versions of Petrarch's sonnet 140, 'Amor, che nel penser mio vive et regna' ('Love, who lives and reigns in my thought'), illustrate competing approaches to the poem augured by its Italian commentators.

These commentators differ among themselves as to whether Petrarch acts as an aggressive lover who threatens Laura's honour, or as a passive lover who suffers from her rejection. Vellutello, echoing Antonio da Tempo, explains that Petrarch's 'Amor' personifies love as Cupid, and that, because the lover approaches Laura with cupidinous desire, he deserves 'the rebuke that she displayed against his unbridled will' ('il repugnar che M.L. contra il suo sfrenato uoler faceua') (fol. 41r). Wyatt's version of the poem emphasises the lover's brashness, inscribing his action in jagged trochaic rhythms, abrupt turns of phrase and provincial Kentish verb endings in *-eth* that convey his lack of shame or embarrassment: 'The long love, that in my thought I harber / And in my hart doth kepe his residence'.¹³ The prick of Cupid's arrow goads the speaker 'with bold pretence' until the beloved 'with his hardinesse takes displeasure'. Unstrung by love, he comports himself poorly.

Surrey's version, by contrast, offers a more sympathetic view of the lover as a victim of Laura's disdain. This view resonates with the opinion of Gesualdo and later commentators for whom the scornful beloved 'has made him bear in patience his pangs of love' ('portar li faceva patientemente l'amoroso affanno') (fol. CXCVIIIr). Accordingly Surrey's poem comments upon Wyatt's precedent by reinstating Petrarch's decorum. It begins with a dignified personification of 'Love, that liveth, and raigneth in my thought', and ends wittily with the same word 'love', now stripped of personification: 'Swete is his death, that takes his end by love'. Unlike Wyatt's rough-hewn Cupid, Surrey's deity is stately, aristocratic and in full control, elegantly clad in chivalric 'armes' and accustomed to 'raigne' in the speaker's thought (with a triple pun on 'reign', 'rein in' and 'rain'). And unlike Wyatt's bold lover, Surrey's has learned to cover his 'hot desire / With shamefast cloke'. From the start, the speaker retains his composure in regular iambics until the poem's smoothly resolved final line, 'Swete is his death'.

As courtly amateurs for whom poetry was an avocation rather than a profession, neither Wyatt nor Surrey published his work. Their posthumous publication came in an anthology of 271 early Tudor poems assembled at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign by Richard Tottel, *Songs and Sonnets Written by the Right Honorable Lord Henry Howard Late Earl of Surrey and Others* (1557, with eight augmented and revised editions to 1587). This collection includes ninety-seven poems by Wyatt, forty by Surrey and the remainder by Nicholas Grimald, Lord Vaux, John Heywood, Thomas Churchyard and others. Primarily a publisher of books on English common law and property law, Tottel directed his miscellany to students and young attorneys at the Inns of Court, 'for profit of the studious of Englishe eloquence'.¹⁴ The volume makes a distinct intervention in three ways. First, it brought into print aristocratic poets from Henry VIII's era who wrote for an intimate court circle with little or no expectation

of reaching a wider readership. Second, Tottel likely solicited the volume's many 'anonymous' poems from Inns of Court students as responses to and commentaries upon Wyatt, Surrey and their noble confrères. Third, the proliferation of its editions into the later Elizabethan era left a legacy for succeeding poets to imitate, exploit and comment upon well into the next century. Its beneficiaries included members of the aristocratic elite (such as Philip Sidney), of the urban merchant and broadly professional population (such as Edmund Spenser) and of a rising class of professional writers, poets and dramatists (such as Michael Drayton and William Shakespeare).

Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser

Sidney's *Defence of Poesy* (c. 1580) seems to embrace Tottel's estimate of Wyatt and Surrey, but with critical reservations and incisive commentary.¹⁵ For example, it includes Surrey's lyrics (but not Wyatt's) in his pantheon of English poetry, crediting the former with 'many things tasting of a noble birth and worthy of a noble mind'.¹⁶ His own *Astrophil and Stella* (c. 1581–82), however, reverses this judgement by echoing Wyatt's raw energy and wit with an occasional jab at Surrey's high-toned grace and polish. If Petrarchan swagger and panache had led to a bad end for both of them, then why not moralise the risks of their poetic endeavours? From Wyatt Sidney derives the comic self-disparagement of his literary alter ego, the love-stricken Astrophil. Like Petrarch's Laura, Sidney's Stella refers to a real woman, but in ways that are both more direct and less obvious. She was a daughter of the Earl of Essex, Penelope Devereux, to whom the poet had been engaged in 1576 when he was twenty-two years old and she was thirteen. Sidney reneged upon the marriage deal, probably to hold out for a yet more prestigious match but, as the Essex family's fortunes later rose, he came to regret his decision.¹⁷ Sonnet 33 intimates as much as Astrophil complains: 'I might, unhappie word, o me, I might, / And then would not, or could not see my blisse: ... / But to my selfe my selfe did give the blow'.¹⁸ The consequences of the speaker's rash decision colour his persona.

Many, perhaps even most, of the 108 sonnets and ten songs in *Astrophil and Stella* may have originated in various stages of composition but, upon the engagement and marriage of his former fiancée to Lord Rich in 1581, Sidney reflected upon the cost of squandering his once-advantageous betrothal and he designed a narrative scheme to accommodate the older poems to his present misfortune. Like Wyatt and Surrey, he composed his sonnets not for printed publication or broad dissemination but for a coterie readership of family, friends, associates and acquaintances who knew him and his personal tribulations – a coterie whose reactions might well have been forgotten by the 1590s. This readership could laugh with him, not at him, as he recounts in his narrative sequence the missteps and reversals on his road to maturity, and the wiser among them could admire his capacity for witty self-criticism and his potential for growth.

A good example in *Astrophil and Stella* is sonnet 47, 'What, have I thus betrayed my libertie', a poem that clearly echoes Petrarch's sonnet 97, 'Ahi bella libertà, come tu m'ài, / Partendoti da me' ('Ah sweet liberty, how by departing from me'). Petrarch's Italian commentators had focused upon the lover's moral life in

this poem, evoking St Paul's 2 Corinthians 3:17, 'Where is the spirit of God, there is liberty'.¹⁹ Gesualdo imparts a Neoplatonic turn to his discussion in which Laura's 'heavenly beauty' ('beltà celeste') ought to raise those who behold her 'to the status of a Platonic and true lover' ('al Platonico & al vero amante', fol. CXXIXr), while Castelvetro adds that, like the mythic Actaeon, mere mortals 'do not behold a divine being without being harmed' ('non vegga cosa diuina senza danno') (184). Astrophil, however, lacks the emotional discipline and maturity to prevent liberty from collapsing into licence, and the outcome is actually funny as his anxieties leach out in plain view. Defiantly questioning his class-based privileges, he raises self-doubt about his rank and status: 'Can those black beames such burning markes engrave / In my free side? Or am I borne a slave, / Whose necke becomes such yoke of tyranny?' Summoning virtue in the sestet, 'Vertue, awake!', Astrophil rouses himself to reject Stella's seductive allure. At that very moment, his recalcitrant beloved appears before him. On the verge of renouncing her, he suddenly halts. In a comic reversal, one glimpse of her eyes paralyses him: 'Let her go. Soft, but here she comes. Go to, / Unkind, I love you not: O me, that eye / Doth make my heart give to my tongue the lie.' In this unconscious, involuntary moment of weakness, Astrophil ends up acting foolishly.

A striking example of Sidney's contrastive use of Petrarch is sonnet 71, 'Who will in fairest booke of Nature know', with its direct echo from Petrarch's sonnet 248, 'Chi vuol veder quantunque pò Natura' ('Whoever wishes to see how much Nature'). Italian commentators such as Vellutello had responded to Petrarch's sonnet as a self-reflective commentary upon the writer's art and craft. For Vellutello, readers 'would judge his rhymes about her to be deaf and dumb by comparison with her excellence' ('giudicherranno le rime fatte nelle sue lodi da lui, rispetto alla eccellentia di lei, esser mute e sorde', fol. 112v). Astrophil describes his readers as those cognisant of 'How Vertue may best lodg'd in beautie be', and he sets out to improve their understanding of 'those faire lines which true goodnesse show'. He nonetheless fails this critical test as he seriously misreads Petrarch. In the sestet Stella 'does strive all minds to move', but her impact on Astrophil disproves these claims: 'So while thy beauty draws the heart to love, / As fast thy virtue bends the heart to good: / But ah, Desire still cries, give me some food.' As the verse limps with the off-rhymes of *move/love* and *good/food*, the poem's formal effects undermine the speaker's ideal when he abandons it to his own desire.

Understood from this perspective, Sidney's poem evokes a strain of criticism pursued by commentaries on the *Rime sparse*. In discussing Petrarch's sonnet 248, Gesualdo points to the moral flaws of Petrarch's all too frail, all too human lover. In the poem's penultimate line, 'my wit [is] overcome by the excess of light' ('L'ingegno offeso dal soverchio lume'), the commentator compares Petrarch to 'nightbirds whose eyesight is assaulted by the bright splendour of the sun' ('augelli notturni, la cui vista é tanto offesa dal chiaro splendore del sole', fol. CCXCIIIr). Astrophil veers in this direction when he figures reason as an 'inward' sun 'from whose light those nightbirds flie'. The avian trope, absent from Petrarch but echoing from Gesualdo's gloss, suggests that Sidney has read Gesualdo and appropriated this embellishment to expose Astrophil's purblind folly.

The unauthorised publication of *Astrophil and Stella* in 1591 prompted other poets to respond by disseminating their own sonnet collections, precipitating a sonnet craze. Samuel Daniel, tutor to Mary Sidney's children, might have assisted in pirating her brother's work (possibly in a misguided effort to please her) since twenty-eight of his own sonnets appeared in the volume. A year later he augmented these poems with twenty-seven others and published them as *Delia, ... with the Complaint of Rosemond*. In a more complicated way, Edmund Spenser followed suit. His juvenile translations of Petrarch's canzone 323 and Du Bellay's *Songe* along with his apprenticeship translation of *The Ruines of Rome: by Bellay* reveal his early attraction to Petrarchism and the sonnet form. Upon the success of books 1 to 3 of *The Faerie Queene* in 1590, he published many of these early poems in a volume named *Complaints* in 1591, possibly to sustain his authorial visibility until issuing the second instalment of his allegorical romance epic five years later. In the mid-1580s he had evidently tried his hand at writing love sonnets, but he withheld them from print at that time.²⁰ In 1595 he published a cycle of love sonnets with the title *Amoretti* with perhaps some of them deploying his earlier efforts at sonnet writing. To them he added his marriage poem *Epithalamion* as a counter to and commentary upon English Petrarchism.

Spenser's *Amoretti* aims at an emergent and diverse readership, a new and upwardly-mobile book-buying public drawn from the mercantile and professional population of an urban middle class.²¹ To all intents marketed for highly literate and sophisticated Londoners, as well as for gentry elites who gathered there, it aimed well beyond the landholding aristocracy. *Amoretti* designs a radically new narrative in which a formerly incautious lover in the Sidneian mode accedes to a reciprocal and now companionate marriage with his beloved.²² As a commentary upon earlier amatory poetry, the first part of the sequence registers all the preferences of an old-style Petrarchan lover bent upon sexual gratification. The beloved's virtue soon tempers his egotism, even as his ardour arouses her interest without compromising her integrity. Whereas Sidney invited a coterie readership to laugh with him and not at him in depicting his alter-ego Astrophil, Spenser pays his more diverse but no less sophisticated readership the compliment of being able to recognise the difference between what he says and what he leaves unsaid in an evolving relationship with his beloved.

The speaker of the *Amoretti*'s early sonnets regards love as a recreational sport. Sonnet 13, 'In that proud port, which her so goodly graceth', endows her with a conjunction of virtues that controls his impulses and solicits moderation: 'Whiles her faire face she reares up to the skie: / and to the ground her eie lids low embaseth, / most goodly temperature ye may descry, / Myld humblesse mixt with awfull majesty.'²³ The poem's model is Petrarch's sonnet 215, 'In nobil sangue vita humile et queta' ('In noble blood a humble and quiet life'), which attributes to Laura a harmonious conjunction of opposing qualities, a 'tempering' of physical beauty with moral virtue. Petrarch's commentator Fausto da Longiano forecasts Spenser's 'goodly temperature' when he concludes that Laura is a miracle of nature: '[Petrarch] terms it a miracle of nature that two opposing qualities are joined in one body with such marvelous tempering' ('Chiama miracolo di natura, due nimiche esser giunte in vn corpo con si mirabil

tempre', fol. 80v). Likewise with Spenser's beloved, flesh unites with spirit to compound perfection and motivates the speaker to mend his worldly ways.

Sonnet 58, 'Weake is th'assurance that weake flesh reposeseth', announces a decisive turning point. As though to signal a disruption, a cryptic headnote prefaces the text as a commentary upon not only the poem but also the course of English Petrarchism: 'By her that is most assured to her selfe'. If we add to the phrase a participle such as 'spoken' or 'argued', it would seem that this poem records the beloved's voice as she rebukes her lover for his misguided importuning. The following poem, sonnet 59, 'Thrise happie she, that is so well assured', ends with the lover's affirmation: 'But he most happy who such one loves best'. It appears, then, that the two poems constitute a dialogue in which first the beloved speaks and then the lover replies. This intrusion of the beloved's voice two-thirds of the way through the *Amoretti* adverts to Petrarch's sonnet 250 at nearly the same point in the *Rime sparse* when Laura speaks to her lover: 'Do not hope ever to see me on earth' ('Non sperar di vedermi in terra mai', sonnet 250). In Petrarch's poem, the beloved's words foreshadow her death. In Spenser's, they foreshadow the lover's moral conversion. She would speak to admonish him against valuing her for a physical beauty that 'devouring time' and 'changeeful chance' will ravage. With her concluding question, 'Why then doe ye proud fayre, misdeeme so farre', she avows her love for the frustrated and as yet unrequited lover, to whom she protests that he is 'most assured' of her fidelity.

Throughout the sequence, Spenser's approach to the speaker's redemption is oblique. The substantial reprinting of sonnet 35, 'My hungry eyes, through greedy covetize', as sonnet 83 in the 1595 edition of *Amoretti* provides an example. Aside from some altered punctuation, the only difference between the two texts is the revision of 'having' in line 6 to 'seeing' in sonnet 83. Whether accidental or deliberate, the reprinting prompts a multivalent reading as the poem's meaning shifts in each context. We could view the revision – if deliberate – as Spenser's self-commentary upon the original poem, upon its position in the sequence, and even upon the status of English Petrarchism. In sonnet 35, the speaker seems to emphasise his restless emotion; in sonnet 83 he shifts to a high-minded concern with the beloved's transcendent beauty.

My hungry eyes, through greedy covetize
 Still to behold the object of theyr payne:
 With no contentment can themselves suffice, ...
 For lacking it, they cannot lyfe sustayne,
 And seeing it [sonnet 35: having it], they gaze on it the more.

In sonnet 83, the substitution of 'seeing' for 'having' cancels some of the speaker's 'hungry', even 'greedy', self-regard. In reference to sensory perception, the active participle 'seeing' directs the action toward the object that the speaker sees, the beloved herself, beyond his own egotistical 'gratification'. *Mutatis mutandis*, in the earlier poem his eyes turn resolutely inward, as the ensuing comparison between his own eyes and those of Narcissus implies: 'In their amazement like Narcissus vaine / whose eyes him starv'd: so plenty makes me poore'.

An analogue to this poem is Petrarch's sonnet 45, 'Il mio adversario in cui veder solete / gli occhi vostri ch'Amore e 'l ciel honora' ('My adversary in whom you are wont

to see your eyes, which Love and Heaven honour'). The 'adversary' is Laura's mirror, which displaces her gaze from the speaker to herself. Bernardino Daniello reads the figure as an emblem of self-regard associated with female narcissism: 'For women take counsel with the mirror' ('Che le donne si consigliano con lo specchio', fol. 35r). A contrasting commentary by Gesualdo identifies Laura's reflected image with the beginning of her self-awareness. She comes to understand that physical beauty is only a shadow of ideal beauty, and this understanding enables her to grow in virtue: 'Whereas self-knowledge is the beginning of knowledge and virtue, so loving oneself is a cause of eternal salvation' ('Onde come il conoscer se stesso è il principio di sapere e di virtute, così l'amare se stesso è cagione d'eterna salute', fol. LXIIv). These readings stand at issue when Spenser's sonnet 35 is repeated as his sonnet 83. It is as though the second version of the poem were commenting on and competing with its first version as well as with earlier examples of English Petrarchism just as Petrarch's commentators had done by offering different interpretations of his poems in competition with one another.

Michael Drayton and William Shakespeare

One year before Spenser published his *Amoretti*, Michael Drayton published his first sonnet collection, *Ideas Mirrour* (1594). A year earlier he had published *Idea, the Shepheards Garland*, a collection of eclogues in homage to and commentary upon the poetry of Sidney's *Arcadia* and Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender*. Drayton's sonnets pay homage to Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* and Samuel Daniel's *Delia*. His prefatory sonnet, for example, proclaims its debt to Sidney by lifting from the latter's sonnet 71 'I am no Pickpurse of anothers wit'.²⁴ Drayton's later references to Sidney and Daniel prove more subtle and nuanced. Sonnet 28 of *Ideas Mirrour*, for example, weaves together an echo ('Some wits there be, which lyke my method well') from sonnet 15 of *Astrophil and Stella*, where Sidney mocks 'dictionary's method' of alliteration, with a contrasting echo ('And say my verse runnes in a lofty vayne') from sonnet 4 of *Delia*, where Daniel resorts to 'humble accent'. Commenting upon both predecessors' espousals of authenticity, Drayton boasts 'Who writes my Mistres praise, can never write amisse' and steps up his claim by expanding the line to hexameter. In a late revision for his collected *Poems* (1619, as sonnet 42), he reverts to a modest pentameter, 'Writing her prayse, I cannot write amisse', and removes any hint of wilful bluster.

Drayton proved to be an inveterate reviser of his own work, issuing and reissuing his poems with additions, deletions and emendations in five subsequent editions (1599, 1600, 1602, 1605, 1619). His broadening field of reference came to include Spenser's *Amoretti* in his 1599 edition, where sonnet 44, 'Whilst thus my Pen strives to eternize thee', recaptures Spenser's eternising motif from his sonnet 75, 'My verse your vertues rare shall eternize'. Drayton's 1619 edition also includes Shakespeare among its models, notably (though speculatively) in its most celebrated poem, sonnet 61 'Since there's no helpe, Come let us kisse and part, / Nay, I have done: You get no more of Me', which can be seen as a rejoinder to Shakespeare's 'slave' sonnets 57–8 and as a commentary upon Shakespeare's renunciation sonnet 87. Commentary here renders its judgement both ways *in utramque partem* as a reversal of servitude and an appropriation of initiative.

In 1609, ten years before Drayton's final version of *Idea*, Shakespeare's *Sonnets* emerged in print after a long gestation in manuscript.²⁵ Its earliest poems are sonnets 127–54 which concern the speaker's adulterous relationship with a Dark Lady, and seem to have been composed in a spirit of parody at the height of the sonnet craze during the early 1590s. Sonnets 104–26 reflect social currents around the turn of the century with some topical references to events in 1603–4. Sonnets 1–103 largely concern the speaker's association with a self-centred Young Man, and they likely belong to a period between 1594 and 1596 with subsequent revisions in the first sixty or so poems.²⁶

An example from the Dark Lady group is sonnet 128 ('How oft, when thou my music music play'st').²⁷ The poem depicts the beloved's performance on a spinet-like keyboard, 'that blessed wood whose motion sounds / With thy sweet fingers', which the speaker regards with a mixture of annoyance and jealousy. An Elizabethan precedent is sonnet 54 of Daniel's *Delia* (1592), 'Like as the Lute that ioyes or els dislikes'.²⁸ Daniel's poem depicts the profound effect of the beloved's lute-playing upon an attentive speaker: 'O happie ground that makes the musique such, / And blessed hand that giues so sweete a tuch'. Its Italian analogue is Petrarch's sonnet 167, 'Quando Amor i belli occhi a terra inclina' ('When Love bends her lovely eyes to the ground'). Here Cupid acts as a maestro who directs a musical performance by Laura which ravishes the speaker: 'I feel my heart sweetly stolen away' ('Sento far del mio cor dolce rapina'). For Gesualdo, the music 'restrains his great desire' ('affrena il gran desir', fol. CCXVIIIr). For Bernardino Daniello, Laura's music echoes the harmony of the cosmos in which, according to Plato's myth of Er in book 10 of his *Republic*, each note contributes to 'a song in praise of the deities' (un canto in lode de gli Dei, fol. 98v).

Shakespeare's sonnet comments upon Daniel's poem by bringing the beloved's music back down to earth. Addressing the Dark Lady as 'my music', the speaker portrays her as a creator of dissonant and discordant notes, inducing the speaker's discomfort with 'The wiry concord that mine ear confounds'. He hyperbolises the proximity of the Lady's fingers to the wooden keyboard – 'How oft ... / Do I envy those jacks that nimble leap / To kiss the tender inward of thy hand' – and as he jumps from one verse to the next, the enjambment of 'leap / To kiss' mimics his distracted humour. Measured against Daniel's poem and commentaries on Petrarch's analogue, the Dark Lady's digital promiscuity disturbs him 'Whilst my poor lips, which should that harvest reap, / At the wood's boldness by thee blushing stand'. The contact of her fingers with the keyboard arouses the speaker's jealousy and frustrates his sexual desire.

The tonalities of sonnets 1–126 prove more varied and complex. Petrarchan echoes there revert not to the *Rime sparse* nor to Italian commentaries on it but rather to precedents in English poetry and specifically to the poetry of Sidney and Spenser. Sonnet 17, 'Who will believe my verse in time to come', negotiates echoes from both poets in a complex form of commentary upon Elizabethan Petrarchism. The poem's opening lines and prevailing argument evoke Sidney's sonnet 71, examined above as Sidney's rewriting of Petrarch's sonnet 248. Astrophil's assessment of Stella's virtue through the act of 'reading [poetic] lines' generates in Shakespeare's poem the

speaker's effort to 'write the beauty' of the Young Man's excellence 'in fresh [poetic] numbers'. So Shakespeare's sonnet argues that any reader might be pardoned for doubting his claim that 'Such heav'nly touches ne'er touched earthly faces'. The argument overturns Astrophil's diffidence about the effect of Stella's virtue upon him, which itself inverts Petrarch's argument that Laura brings forth virtue in everyone who encounters her. In this circuitous way Shakespeare registers Sidney's imitation of Petrarch's sonnet as a betrayal of it while presenting his own sonnet as a simulacrum of Petrarch's original, though with no guarantee that he had ever even read it.

In the same poem we find important echoes from Spenser. Sonnet 5 of Spenser's *Ruines of Rome* indirectly evokes Petrarch's sonnet 248 by translating Du Bellay's imitation of it in sonnet 5 of his *Les Antiquitez de Rome*: 'Who lists to see what ever nature, arte, / And heaven could doo, O Rome, thee let him see'.²⁹ Here the poet compares modern Rome to its ancient counterpart 'like a corpse drawne forth out of the tombe'. The line reverberates in Shakespeare's sonnet with the poet's comparison of his verse to the Young Man's qualities: 'It is but as a tomb / which hides your life'. Spenser's sonnet 32 in *Ruines* later turns to Rome's artefacts that endure 'not in paper writ'. The phrase reverberates in Shakespeare's sonnet with the speaker's reflection upon 'my papers, yellowed with their age'. The final injunction of Spenser's sonnet 32 in *Ruines* to 'Cease not to sounde these olde antiquities' emerges in Shakespeare's sonnet 17 with its derogation of the 'stretchèd meter of an ántique song', dismissively associated with 'a poet's rage'. We may perhaps find here a distant reference to Spenser's sonnet 69 in *Amoretti* whose speaker abandons poetic *furor* in favor of a carefully honed craftsmanship and skill, 'Gotten at last with labour and long toyle'.

Other examples of Shakespeare's debts to Spenser occur in the 'eternising' topos of sonnets 55, 60, 63–5 and 81. The first of these poems, 'Not marble, nor the gilded monument / Of princes shall outlive this pow'rful rhyme' (sonnet 55), announces this topic by expressing the speaker's confidence in his 'pow'rful rhyme' to guarantee the Young Man's immortality. The poem interweaves two classical antecedents, first from Horace's ode 3.30 ('I have made a monument more durable than bronze' ('Exegi monumentum aere perennius')), and the second from the conclusion of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (15.871–9), directly echoing Arthur Golding's 1567 translation of these lines.³⁰ Another Ovidian echo marks the end of its second quatrain, 'Nor Mars his sword, nor war's quick fire shall burn / The living record of your memory'. While 'sword' and 'fire' call up Golding's translation of Ovid in which 'Nor sword, nor fyre ... / Are able too abolish quyght' (15.985–6), the phrasing 'Mars his sword' evokes Spenser's archaising syntax. The 'living record of your memory' likewise summons the eternising power of verse from sonnet 32 of Spenser's *Ruines of Rome*: 'Hope ye my verses that posteritie / Of age ensuing shall you ever read'.

I will close by returning to Philip Sidney as Shakespeare himself returned to Sidney across the arc of his poetic career. The group of sonnets 78–89 about the speaker's literary rivals situates the poet in a literary milieu that he interrogates. In relation to English Petrarchism, sonnet 76 prefaces that group with a reflection of the speaker's regard for Sidney. The second half of its first quatrain, 'Why with the time do I not glance aside / To new-found methods and to compounds strange', recalls Astrophil's indictment of 'dainty wits' and 'Pindar's apes' who 'with strange similes enrich each

line' (*Astrophil and Stella*, sonnet 3). Astrophil's criticism aims at the style of Ronsard, master of extravagant neologisms and compound word-formations, a feature that Shakespeare's speaker imitates in his own compound-formation of 'new-found methods', which glances at Astrophil's criticism of 'new-found tropes' (sonnet 3). Astrophil denounces *Pléiade*-style Petrarchism only to adopt his own version of it without quite acknowledging the model that it refers to.

Similar evasions haunt Shakespeare's second quatrain, which begins 'Why write I still all one, ever the same, / And keep invention in a noted weed'. Short of repeating the same formulaic diction, it might seem impossible for any poet to write 'all one, ever the same' as Astrophil professes to do at the end of his sonnet 90, 'Since all my words thy beauty doth endite'. Yet Shakespeare's phrase 'noted weed' limits the possibility of endless iteration. As a distinctive ('noted') garment and a 'knotted weed', it refers to a crabbed style that the speaker has cultivated. Even the curious 'That every word doth almost fell my name' in the 1609 Quarto (whose ending most editors emend to 'tell my name') comments on this style. In relation to the garden metaphor implied by 'weed', the speaker's literary reputation ('my name') might seem a tender growth that his excrescent words 'fell' or strangle. The eccentricity of his verse can only 'tell' or reveal the author's identity in every turn of phrase, 'Showing their birth, and where they did proceed'. The protean, radically changeful style of *Sonnets* challenges the claim that it is 'all one, ever the same', by promoting multiple shifts of meaning within the poem.

It turns out, then, that as commentaries on the sonnets of Sidney and Spenser, the sonnets of Shakespeare and, to a lesser extent, Drayton re-enact the kinds of critical commentaries on Petrarchan sonnets that illustrious predecessors had attempted. Sidney had approached Petrarchism as a courtly phenomenon spurred by the earlier achievements of Wyatt and Surrey, and he designed the narrative frame of *Astrophil and Stella* as an exemplary tale about the lover's fecklessness and narcissism. Spenser approached Petrarchism from an urban, mercantile, gentry and middle-class perspective by designing his narrative frame for *Amoretti* with an ageing widower's discovery of companionate marriage as an antidote to courtly excesses. In their contrastive ways both Sidney and Spenser reflect upon the courtly and anti-courtly attitudes articulated by Wyatt and Surrey in their translations of Petrarch. The latter in turn had confronted Petrarch in dialogue with at least some Italian commentaries on the *Rime sparse*. Coming at the end of a literary cycle obsessed with Petrarchism, Drayton and Shakespeare engaged their skills as poets to reflect upon the English development and variation of this poetic mode. In their hands poetry and poetic commentary became one.

Notes

- 1 Italian editions with commentaries to which I will refer and quote from are A. Vellutello, *Le volgare opera del Petrarca con la esposizione di Alessandro Vellutello da Lucca* (Venice: Giovanni Antonio Nicolini da Sabbio e Fratelli, 1525); S. Fausto da Longiano, *Il Petrarca col commento di M. Sebastiano Fausto da Longiano* (Venice: Francesco di Alessandro Bindoni e Mapheo Pasini, 1532); G.A. Gesualdo, *Il Petrarca colla spositione di Misser Giovanni Andrea Gesualdo* (Venice: Giovanni Antonio Nicolini e Fratelli da Sabbio, 1533); B. Daniello, *Sonetti canzoni e triomphi di M. Francesco Petrarca, con la*

- sposizione di Bernardino Daniello da Lucca* (Venice: Pietro e Gianmaria Nicolini da Sabbio e Fratelli, 1549); and L. Castelvetro, *Le rime del Petrarca brevemente sposte per Lodouico Castelvetro* (Basel: Pietro de Sedabonis, 1582), p. 184. For an account of these major commentaries, see W.J. Kennedy, *Authorizing Petrarch* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 25–113. Subsequent quotations from Petrarch refer to *Canzoniere*, ed. M. Santagata (Milan: Mondadori, 3rd edn, 2008), with translations from R.M. Durling, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).
- 2 Cornell University Library Catalogue of the Petrarch Collection Bequeathed by Willard Fiske, compiled by Mary Fowler (London: Oxford University Press, 1916), pp. 71–111.
 - 3 E.S. Leedham-Greene (ed.), *Books in Cambridge Inventories: Book Lists from the Vice-Chancellor's Court Probate Inventories in the Tudor and Stuart Periods*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), vol. 1, pp. 100 and 120.
 - 4 J. Thomas, *The First Printed Catalogue of the Bodleian Library, 1605: A Facsimile* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 368.
 - 5 J.L. Black, W.R. Bowen and G. Warkentin, *The Library of the Sidneys of Penshurst Place, circa 1665* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), p. 280.
 - 6 V. Stern, *Gabriel Harvey: His Life, Marginalia, and Library* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 193–225; and R.J. Fehrenbach and E.S. Leedham-Green, eds, *Private Libraries in Renaissance England: A Collection and Catalogue of Tudor and Early Stuart Book Lists*, 5 vols (Tempe: Medieval and Early Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1992–98).
 - 7 See the facsimile reprint of *Plain Pathway* by R.C. Alston (Menston: Scolar Press, 1968) and of *Principal Rules* by R.C. Alston (Menston: Scolar Press, 1968). For a survey of such foreign language manuals, see my “Les langues des hommes sont pleines de tromperies”: Shakespeare, French Poetry, and Alien Tongues”, in Z. Lesser and B.S. Robinson (eds), *Textual Conversations in the Renaissance* (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2006), pp. 91–111.
 - 8 See the facsimile reprint of *Second Frutes*, with an introduction by R.C. Simonini Jr (Gainesville: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1953). For Florio's contribution to linguistic study, see M. Wyatt, *The Italian Encounter with Tudor England: A Cultural Politics of Translation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 157–204.
 - 9 See the facsimile reprint of *New World*, with an introduction by R.C. Alston (Menston: Scolar Press, 1968), sigs ¶5v–¶6v.
 - 10 Gascoigne's autographed title page of a 1553 reprint appears as the frontispiece of C.T. Prouty, *George Gascoigne: Elizabethan Courtier, Soldier, and Poet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942).
 - 11 G.W. Pigman III (ed.), *A Hundred Sundrie Flowres* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), reports that the volume, now in the library of Loyola University, Chicago, shows no sign of active use (see note p. 465).
 - 12 T. Watson, *The Hekatompathia*, with an introduction by S.K. Heninger (Gainesville: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1964).
 - 13 Now in the Folger Library; see C. Martin, ‘Retrieving Jonson's Petrarch’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 45 (1994), 89–92. As mentioned above, this reprint presents no commentary on the Italian poetry; my inspection of the Folger copy revealed that it lacks many folio leaves and offers no definite evidence of Jonson's personal annotation.
 - 14 Quotations from Wyatt and Surrey refer to their first publication in *Tottel's Miscellany*, ed. A. Holton and T. MacFaul (London: Penguin Books, 2011) as poems 42 and 6 respectively.
 - 15 See the incisive study of its contributors and readership by J.C. Warner, *The Making and Marketing of Tottel's Miscellany, 1557* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011).
 - 16 For a de-idealising view of Sidney's poetics, see C. Bates, *On Not Defending Poetry: Defence and Indefensibility in Sidney's 'Defence of Poesy'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). The following paragraphs are adapted from the chapter on Sidney in my *The Site of Petrarchism: Early Modern National Sentiment in Italy, France, and England* (Baltimore, London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), pp. 163–249.
 - 17 Quotation from *The Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. J. van Dorsten and K. Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 112.
 - 18 See K. Duncan-Jones, *Sir Philip Sidney: Courtier Poet* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 230–41.
 - 19 Quotations refer to *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. W.A. Ringler (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).
 - 20 Quotation from *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition*, ed. L.E. Berry (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).
 - 21 See A. Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 240–2 and 313–20.

- 21 M. Murrin, *Trade and Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), pp. 207–25.
- 22 The following paragraphs are adapted from my chapter on Spenser in *Authorizing Petrarch*, pp. 195–280.
- 23 Quotations from *Amoretti* refer to *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. W. Oram, A. Dunlop et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).
- 24 Quotations from Drayton refer to *Works*, ed. J.W. Hebbel, K. Tillotson and B. Newdigate, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931–41).
- 25 For dating, see A.K. Hieatt, C.W. Hieatt and A.L. Prescott, ‘When Did Shakespeare Write *Sonnets* 1609?’, *Studies in Philology*, 88 (1991), 69–109, and the succinct account in W. Shakespeare, *Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. C. Burrow, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 103–11. For dramatic modes of poetry represented in them, see R. Lyne, *Shakespeare, Rhetoric, and Cognition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 207–20, and B. Boyd, *Why Lyrics Last: Evolution, Cognition, and Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); for dramatic situations framing their narrative, see N. Rudenstine, *Ideas of Order: A Close Reading of Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014).
- 26 The following paragraphs are adapted from the chapter on Shakespeare in my *Petrarchism at Work: Contextual Economies in the Age of Shakespeare* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2016), pp. 219–312. For the attraction of Shakespeare’s sonnets to elite literary coteries, see C.S. Clegg, *Shakespeare’s Reading Audiences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 22–50.
- 27 Quotations from *Sonnets* refer to *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, edited with analytic commentary by S. Booth (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).
- 28 Daniel lightly revised the poem for his *Works* in 1601, where it retains the same number from its previous printing; quoted from Daniel, *Poems*, ed. A.C. Sprague (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930), where it appears as number 47.
- 29 For the influence of *Ruines* on Shakespeare, see A.L. Prescott, ‘Du Bellay and Shakespeare’s Sonnets’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare’s Poetry*, ed. J.F.S. Post (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 134–50.
- 30 See S. Booth’s endnote on the poem’s sources, *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, pp. 227–30.