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Treason in My Breast: Wormwood and *Hamlet's* Petrarchism

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in English

by

Jason Ligon Morpew

2017

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Treason in My Breast: Wormwood and *Hamlet*'s Petrarchism

by

Jason Ligon Morphew

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Helen E. Deutsch, Co-Chair

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T.S. Eliot viewed *Hamlet* as a dramatic failure, because “like the sonnets, it is full of some stuff that the writer could not drag to light.” C.S. Lewis, Harold Bloom, and Alexander Shurbanov agree that the play contains a lyric essence, but they do not trace that essence to its source. “Treason in My Breast” argues that *Hamlet* is a Petrarchan poem, a more fully realized expression of the Italian poet’s influence than Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* or *Romeo and Juliet*. Out of this argument emerges a poetic anthropology of the early modern Human: beginning in Petrarch’s poetry, reaching its apex in *Hamlet*, terminating in the poems of Jonathan Swift.

After explicating in the Introduction the most explicitly Petrarchan document in *Hamlet*—the II.ii letter-poem from the Prince to Ophelia—Chapter One explores the

letter-poem's philologically vexed "etcetera" moment, represented in the Second Quarto of the play as an ampersand, a ligatory symbol invented by Cicero's slave and secretary Tiro. Chapter Two connects the inscrutability of the god Janus to the goddess Diana, the latter of which is significant in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, the former of which makes explicit the "double move" of the Renaissance and of *Hamlet*—compelled toward oblivion while obsessed with the past. Chapter Three looks past the Roman Diana to the tradition of her precursor Artemis, from whom the taxonomical name for wormwood—*Artemisia*—is derived. This mythological etymology, and wormwood's attendant botanico-medical history of use as weaning agent, abortifacient, and vermifuge, is important for appreciating Hamlet's other explicitly Petrarchan moment—"Wormwood, wormwood"—which the Prince utters while watching *The Mousetrap*, and which Chapter Four explores in detail. Wormwood haunts the *Canzoniere*'s bitter-sweetness, especially in one clutch of the book's anachronistically Hamletian poems (206-215). These poems represent autonomous life as a miserable delay, spanning "from the day when I left the breast until my soul is uprooted from me." Chapter Five finds in *Hamlet*'s "To be or not to be" and Graveyard scenes a satiric bridge from Petrarch to Swift, in whose poetry Chapter Six finds the terminus of the Petrarchan mode and, hence, the early modern Human.

The dissertation of Jason Ligon Morpew is approved.

Arthur L Little

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University of California, Los Angeles

2017

DEDICATION

For Matilda and Venice, strong and free

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PREFACE

Wal-Mart Parking Lot, Hot Springs, Arkansas, 1990

A jackhammer slams loudly in the distance.

Author, 18: Wait. You never breastfed me?

Author's Mother, 35: People weren't doing it then. So you swear you will never publish anything that relates in any way to your family?

Author: I swear.

Author's Mother: You think I'm a Christian just because I'm from here, but you could put me anywhere at any point in time and I would still believe in Jesus Christ as sovereign Lord and savior.

Author: Shang Dynasty China?

Author's Mother: Tell me something, son. What's so great about an open mind?

What follows is an archaeological dig, using Petrarchan “lyric substance” as a tool to find an occasion generative for that substance’s existence. “Lyric substance” is Daniel Tiffany’s phrase, taken from page six of his brilliant *Toy Medium*. Though I discuss the phrase in the context of Tiffany’s meaning later in the Introduction, this study appropriates the phrase for its own devices, largely irrespective of Tiffany’s intentions; in this way, my philological method is as indiscriminate as Petrarch’s Laura is faithful to her husband. By “lyric substance” I mean the flash-like, perverse poetic energy that not only binds lyric to satire and tragedy but also pre-dates lyric itself. Lyric brevity models life’s and emotions’ brevity, suggesting that all three are connected, if not somehow the same; this brevity is a chief component of lyric substance, which can anachronistically be understood in contrast to forms it predates: epic, narrative, novel. Rather than subscribing to a nostalgically stable, novelistic view of Early Human—gathered around

the campfire in fuzzy clothing, telling hunting stories in order to craft the world's first meaning—I find it infinitely more likely that Early Human first experienced flashes of a sense of meaning beyond her powers of articulation. This ultimate, inevitable failure of articulation is what I mean by “lyric substance” and is an explicit aspect of Hamletio-Petrarchism. Poetic language is a lunge at transcending/transgressing an elemental inarticulation that precedes speech and thereby infuses it with a mystical foreclosure: words are not enough/I have no words/words cannot begin to describe. There is something under language, something beneath it, a primordial instinct that precedes and is therefore always transmitted via its poetic iterations, even/especially when those iterations are not officially classified as *Poetry*. In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare seems to have discovered that drama—which “harnesses a continual rhetorical anxiety—the fear that language might regain its primordial union with other sounds”¹—is an ideal medium for expressing lyric substance.

T.S. Eliot thinks *Hamlet* fails as a play because it is too much like Shakespeare's successful poems;² Harold Bloom hails the play as a success in his book about the play whose subtitle is *Poem Unlimited*.³ Alexander Shurbanov argues that *Hamlet*'s structure

¹ A.R. Braunmuller, “The arts of the dramatist,” *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama*, p. 67.

² Eliot expresses this idea in “Hamlet,” in his *Selected Essays*. I will further discuss Eliot's opinion in the Introduction.

³ I refer to Bloom's *Hamlet: Poem Unlimited*. A dissertation begs to be written on the topic of why Shakespeare gives foolish, pettily treacherous Polonius some of the finest phrases in a play that teems with some of the finest phrases in the English language. The counselor utters “poem unlimited” in II.ii, in his near-slapstick send-up of early modern generic hybridity.

is lyric in nature.⁴ There is surprising consensus amongst critics that what is widely regarded to be Shakespeare's theatrical masterpiece is not actually a play. If the play works better as a poem—indeed, if it operates *as* a poem—then we should look into the nature of its poetics. The study that follows takes up this challenge and argues that *Hamlet* is a Petrarchan poem, a more fully realized expression of the Italian poet's influence than Shakespeare's *Sonnets* or *Hamlet*'s stylistic and thematic cousin, *Romeo and Juliet*.⁵

This study treats psychoanalytical perspectives on mythology and literature as merely other, late-coming tools. Indeed, this study treats everyone and every creation as if he, she, and it were poetic constructs describing their own construction, constantly seeking to reconstitute the site of their coming into being and their subsequent, inevitable rejection by their creators. Tautological selfhood/Petrarchan machine-hood, always circling back, lyric poem-like, in order to reiterate itself, precludes the possibility of an open mind and proves apt the Author's Mother's rote satire. I use the term *satire* generally to refer to that which seeks to undermine the foolishly and/or uselessly *nostalgic*, the former sharing a symbiotic relationship with the latter whose boundaries are not clearly defined. I take the phrase *Petrarchan machine* from Hamlet's II.ii letter-poem's signatory flourish "While this machine is to him," recognizing in Hamlet's words

⁴ I refer to *Shakespeare's Lyricized Drama*.

⁵ In 1942 C.S. Lewis published an essay called "Hamlet: The Prince or the Poem?" in which he writes, "I believe that we read Hamlet's speeches with interest chiefly because they describe so well a certain spiritual region through which most of us have passed and anyone in his circumstances might be expected to pass, rather than because of our concern to understand how and why this particular man entered it." Though Lewis and others have noticed the extremity of Hamlet's lyric nature, I have yet to encounter a scholar ready to determine the Petrarchan source and nature of that lyricism.

a pre-Cartesian allusion to a post-human energy at the heart of Renaissance Humanism. This project appropriates Hegel’s concept of “infinite subjectivity,” defining and redefining it, finding in the late-coming phrase a ready tool for unearthing Petrarchan foundations embedded in Hamletian terrain. Also key to what follows is *misogyny*, a term frequently deployed to describe Hamlet and Swift, and whose loaded quality can prevent the study of its use as literary device.

Prioritizing discovery, this study cannot afford the luxury of methodological purity and disregards those distinctions likewise. To paraphrase a song lyric, I take what I need and leave the rest,⁶ trusting that the rifts my methodological disregard generates are bridged overarchingly by the wide ouroboric circumference of the project. The ouroboros I have in mind encompasses the world, its spinning motion generating a gravity that compels our sustained connection to fleeting severances—a gravity that suggests something original is still intact enough to exhume.

⁶ I refer to “The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down,” officially written by Robbie Robertson but actually co-written with Levon Helm. (Helm makes a convincing case for co-authorship in his autobiography *This Wheel’s on Fire*.)

VITA/BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

EDUCATION

University of California, Davis
Terminal Master of Arts in Creative Writing (Poetry)
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Yale University
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1993-1995

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English Literature Major (Creative Writing Concentration), Drama Minor
1991-1993 (transferred to Yale)

CONFERENCES

Presented paper “Hamlet’s Limits” at *Entertaining the Idea 3*, Clark Library/UCLA, Spring 2017 (invited).

Presented paper “Hamlet’s Petrarchan Seneca” at *Entertaining the Idea 2*, Clark Library/UCLA, Fall 2016 (invited).

Presented paper “Play Around the Play Within the Play” at *Entertaining the Idea 1*, UC-Santa Barbara, Spring 2016 (invited).

Presented paper “Treason in My Breast” at *W/Shakespeare*, UC-Santa Barbara, Fall 2012 (invited).

Presented paper “Hamlet’s Inarticulacy” at *Early Modern Inarticulacy*, UC-Berkeley, Fall 2011.

POETRY PUBLICATIONS

dead boy (full-length book). Forthcoming from Spuyten Duyvil Publishing.

What to deflect when you’re deflecting (chapbook). Forthcoming from Poets Wear Prada.

“Avalanche.” Forthcoming in the anthology *Undeniable: Writers Respond to Climate Change* from Alternating Current Press.

“How I Came to Stay in The Hague of My Heart” and “John Pugh XI.” Forthcoming in *Big Muddy*.

“Giving.” Forthcoming in *Carbon Culture Review*.

“Thank you.” Forthcoming in *Columbia Poetry Review*.

“My Youth.” Forthcoming in *Storm Cellar Quarterly*.

“Shoes Without Laces.” Forthcoming in *Claudius Speaks*.

“Passion” and “Cocktail Hour.” *Blue Fifth Review*. Spring/Summer 2017.

“Evangelical Christianity.” *The Cortland Review*. Winter/Spring 2017.

“Winery.” *Naugatuck River Review*. Winter/Spring 2017.

“field song.” *Bellevue Literary Review*. Spring 2017.

“Listening to California.” Forthcoming in *Santa Fe Literary Review*. Fall 2017.

“Halogen.” *Third Wednesday Magazine*. Fall 2016.

“Baby in a Blender.” *Venus Magazine*. Winter 2016/2017.

“How to Write a Poet’s Bio” and “against trees.” *Public Pool*. Fall 2016.

“Able to imagine nothing.” *Juxtraprose Literary Magazine*. Fall 2016.

“Erotic System: five poems.” New York University: *Anamesa Journal*. Spring 2015.

“Never Settle.” Claremont Graduate School, Claremont, California: *Foothills*. Summer 2014.

In Order to Commit Suicide (chapbook). *Floating Wolf Quarterly*. Spring 2012.

“John Day,” “The Tradition,” “Balls” (nominated for a Pushcart Prize). *Gigantic Magazine*. Spring 2009.

“We Insult the Dead,” “Fathers,” “Christmas in Arkansas,” “How to Handle Failure.” *Arkansas Literary Forum*. Summer 2008.

CREATIVE NONFICTION PUBLICATION

“Rhoda.” *Outlook Springs*. Spring 2017.

INTERVIEWED

The University of Utah, Salt Lake City: *Quarterly West*. Summer 2012.

Introduction: Hamlet's Inarticulacy

POLONIUS: Now gather and surmise.
 [Reads the] letter.
 “To the celestial, and my soul’s idol, the most beauti-
 fied Ophelia . . .
 In her excellent white bosom, these, etc.⁷ . . .
 Doubt thou that stars are fire;
 Doubt that the sun doth move;
 Doubt truth to be a liar;
 But never doubt I love.
 O dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers. I have not
 Art to reckon my groans, but that I love thee best, O
 most best, believe it. Adieu.
 Thine evermore, most dear lady,
 whilst this machine is to him, Hamlet.”⁸

Hamlet’s intercepted letter-poem to Ophelia teems with Petrarchan conceits. It begins by addressing Ophelia as “celestial,” it quickly moves to mention her “white bosom, etc.”—has there ever been a more tantalizing *etcetera*?—and when it becomes a poem it employs the stars and the sun in order to describe the intensity of the speaker’s passion for his beloved. It not only constitutes evidence to the court of Denmark that the prince loves Ophelia, but it also provides a rare example of Hamlet and Polonius in agreement. Both men—who are similar in their intellectual interests, patrician aesthetic attitudes, in their tendency to improvise pontifications on philosophical problems, in their abuse of Ophelia—here concur that Hamlet is a bad poet.

⁷ This “etc” is a conventional, modern editor’s innovation. The short First Quarto (Q1) of *Hamlet* cuts straight to the poem, with no salutation, and the Second Quarto (Q2)—the much longer “good quarto”—registers the textual moment with &c. The First Folio (FF) elides the moment, ending the salutation awkwardly with a thudding “. . . these.” Hence the modern innovation.

⁸ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, II.ii.108-124. Unless otherwise noted, all citations are from *The Pelican Shakespeare*’s 2001 edition of the play, ed. by A.R. Braunmuller. As if satirizing the Humanities, *The Pelican Shakespeare* series is published by Penguin Books.

But are they wrong? One should never trust a poet's judgment of his own work, and Polonius reveals himself to be a poor aesthetic judge during the Player King's speech following the actors' arrival at Elsinore. Accepting Polonius' negative judgment of Hamlet's poem is different from our wishing the poem were better, a distinction that highlights how we tend to overlook the fact that Polonius raises objection only to the "phrase" *beautified*, which appears not in the body of Hamlet's poem but in his letter's salutation. Perhaps Polonius dislikes the dependent connotation of *beautified*, as opposed to the more independent sounding *beautiful*. Indeed, John Dover Wilson glosses the term as meaning "endowed with beauty."⁹ To consider that Ophelia is not *beautiful* but *beautified* is to consider that Hamlet's current, epideictic work and not Polonius' former, genetic work is responsible for the state of Ophelia's beauty. If Ophelia requires beautification, something must previously have been lacking.

It is this tension between dependence and independence that I am interested in, and, I assert, it is what interests Hamlet not only about Ophelia, but also about Gertrude, about women in general, about what constitutes the human. In his intercepted letter-poem, Hamlet frames his failure at poetic articulation in terms of physical disease—"I am ill at these numbers"—but I wish to deploy Hamlet's inarticulacy at this uniquely Petrarchan moment in order to explore what I argue are overlooked issues of autonomy in the play. I hope this will put us in a position where we can approach the problem of female humanity—of whether women were included in the humanist conversation, if, indeed, women were human—from a new and useful perspective.

⁹ *Hamlet: The Cambridge Dover Wilson Shakespeare.*

I speak of early modern humanism from a post-human position in space and time, where and when the outward behavior that defined the early modern human (courtesy, foresight) has been replaced by considerations of inner biological data, much of which we share with beasts. But when one speaks of the human in the time of *Hamlet*'s original production, one must remember to emphasize that "the word *humanism* . . . is a late coinage, emerging only in the early part of the nineteenth century,"¹⁰ when the fourteenth century poet Petrarch also began to be referred to as the "Father of Humanism." Recent books by Gur Zak¹¹ and Carol Quillen¹² have explored the relationship between Petrarch's reading practices and his scholarly writing, and Giuseppe Mazzotta has written beautifully about Petrarch's "two faces,"¹³ but I have yet to encounter a study willing to fully engage what I view to be the central dilemma of Petrarchism: the serious, the scholarly, the human excludes yet obsessively gestures toward the female.

Mike Pincombe writes that "the Elizabethans inherited from the works of Cicero the notion that *humanitas* was . . . exclusive . . . that some people might, in fact, be more human than others."¹⁴ By "people" Pincombe means "men," and he cuts out the middle-guy in his gloss, since Petrarch's unprecedented study of Cicero provided the Elizabethans with Cicero's term *studia humanitas*—a theory of how to behave, at best, like a divinity, and how to avoid behaving, at worst, like a beast, walking a tightrope of

¹⁰ Mike Pincombe, *Elizabethan Humanism*, p. 5.

¹¹ I refer to *Petrarch's Humanism and the Care of the Self*.

¹² I refer to *Rereading the Renaissance* and to her Introduction of Petrarch's *The Secret*.

¹³ I refer to *The Worlds of Petrarch*.

¹⁴ Mike Pincombe, *Elizabethan Humanism*, p. 7.

ceaseless liminality whose essence is the absence of autonomy. The *Canzoniere*'s unique crystallization of "infinite subjectivity"¹⁵ relies upon an incipient recession of an authoritative, definitive standard (God), one result of which is the destabilization of a standard by which to judge independence. Moreover, the Petrarchan (and therefore Renaissance/early modern) Human is performative; it is determined by how one behaves, how one *acts*, as opposed to being comprised of autonomous, biological fact: beautifying oneself versus arriving beautiful or requiring beautification. These behavioral rules have always been and remain in a perpetual state of definition; their instability, especially at their early modern inception, allow one to more clearly envision how a poet with a subversive gift for the negative sublime might perceive an always already undermined energy at the core of the idea of the Human. The addition of erotic love to this existential quandary seems to have produced the *Canzoniere*.

Women reside above and below men in the late medieval/early modern chain of being;¹⁶ in his seminal text *The Secret*, Petrarch has the character Augustinius chide the character Franciscus for loving Laura, whose status as a woman dictates that she is "nothing but a body that will age and rot, and [Franciscus does] not even see how this puerile infatuation distracts [his] soul from higher things and happiness."¹⁷ In other words, it does not matter how noble Franciscus' love is for Laura—it "can only be

¹⁵ I take this phrase from Section III of Hegel's *The Philosophy of History*, which discusses the philosophical importance of Luther's Reformation. Later I will address the Petrarchan aspects of Luther's innovations, giving credit for the creation of infinite subjectivity to the earlier pioneer of the self.

¹⁶ Please see my discussion of Caroline Walker Bynum's *Jesus as Mother* in Chapter One.

¹⁷ Carol E. Quillen, Introduction to Petrarch's *The Secret*, p. 38.

destructive because it is inevitably and fundamentally physical.”¹⁸ No code of behavior seems to be able to dignify or belittle a woman to the point of her entering the realm of the Human.

This is to say something different than that Augustinius characterizes Franciscus’ love for Laura as “mere lust,”¹⁹ as Carol Quillen has asserted. Squaring Quillen’s assertion would require that Franciscus seek to justify his love to Augustinius by going beyond merely claiming that he loves Laura’s soul. But Augustinius does not seem to care whether Franciscus thinks he loves Laura’s soul or not; Augustinius does not allow for the possibility that Laura *can* be anything but a body. Franciscus never directly confronts Augustinius on this point. Instead, he continues to insist that “Laura . . . is not of this world,”²⁰ and Augustinius continues to dismiss Franciscus’ claims, generating an atmosphere of unresolved, poetico-dramatic ambiguity that would be at home in most any mature Shakespeare play.

I assert that all of those plays are informed by this essentially Petrarchan ambiguity, which pervades the *Canzoniere* and the Elizabethan sonnet cycles. More fundamentally, this ambiguity describes and surrounds the status of the Human. Perhaps the question to ask is: what is “this world” of which Laura is not a part? Quillen is compelling when she writes that “the same conversation that allows Franciscus to aspire to virtue through reading effectively excludes Laura, and through her all women, from

¹⁸ Carol E. Quillen, Introduction to Petrarch’s *The Secret*, p. 37.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

the humanist community.”²¹ It is worth investigating whether Quillen means that the objects of many, if not most, Petrarchan poems could not even read them, but that does not help us understand Hamlet’s intercepted Petrarchan letter-poem—the aristocratic Ophelia would be able to peruse her objectifications, especially given the anachronistic nature of her world. This conjures the miserable scenario of an a-human being with the freedom to explore the many ways she is left out of the humanist conversation—a misery no doubt experienced by countless multitudes, up to this moment. The scope of the present study, however, dictates that I explore why scholars seem reluctant to ask why Laura is in the humanist conversation at all, even as they write that, “By highlighting, authorizing, and questioning humanism all at the same time, Petrarch’s work dramatizes the complexities of this movement.”²²

Bringing women into the humanist conversation undermines it, even negates it, in order to open it to new possibilities—especially when women are brought into the conversation by means of an educated, humanist male speaker’s direct, impassioned address. Petrarch and Hamlet, crafters of lyric speakers, are writers, whose negation, according to Maurice Blanchot

is global . . . it negates the negation of limits. This is why negation negates nothing, in the end, why the work in which it is realized is not a truly negative, destructive act of transformation, but rather the realization of the inability to negate anything.²³

Elsewhere in the same essay, Blanchot asserts that the writer

²¹ Carol E. Quillen, Introduction to Petrarch’s *The Secret*, p. 40.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Maurice Blanchot, “Literature and the Right to Death,” *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader*, p. 374.

is only master of everything; he possesses only the infinite; he lacks the finite, limit escapes him . . . one cannot act in the infinite, one cannot accomplish anything in the unlimited.²⁴

These two related notions provide a useful way of linking Hamlet's rhetorical negativity with his delay in doing the Ghost's murderous bidding—via his status as a writer, and, at II.ii, lines 109-23, he is a writer of the Petrarchan lyricist stripe.

The Petrarchan mode notoriously elides temporal and spatial restraints. Speakers of these poems transcend limitations of life and death—Petrarch wrote hundreds of poems to Laura after she died, prefiguring Hamlet's spontaneous, inappropriate orgy of hyperbole in and at Ophelia's grave:

This is I,
Hamlet the Dane! . . .
Thou pray'st not well . . .
have I something in me dangerous,
Which let thy wisdom fear . . .
I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers
Could not with all their quality of love
Make up my sum . . .
Dost thou come here to whine?
To outface me with leaping in her grave?
Be buried quick with her, and so will I.²⁵

What goes underemphasized, however, is that these poems seek to transcend *all* restraints, via their negation of the intellectual premises upon which those restraints are constructed; the *Canzoniere* repeatedly explore the possibility of human autonomy through the employment of genderless imagery that has too often been misunderstood as overly generalized, lacking the singularity required to effectively evoke a narrowly

²⁴ Maurice Blanchot, "Literature and the Right to Death," *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader*, p. 373.

²⁵ V.i.247-269.

conceived “personhood” of the poem’s subject. In the letter-poem of II.ii, Hamlet engages this misunderstanding directly.

The letter-poem is another play-within-the-play in the sense that in it Hamlet employs both prose and verse in order to perform two roles, in order to speak from two different, yet closely related points of view: that of himself, the letter-writer, framing the presentation of a speech event; and that of the performer, whose rhetoric is more highly-pitched, a poetic-speaker self that he quickly abandons like a mask in order to return to prose. The letter-poem, also like *The Mousetrap*, is an openly acknowledged literary failure, a mocked draft; as such, it possesses the qualities of an abortion, announcing a dramatic performance for which Hamlet admits he is not prepared. In order to draw Ophelia to the stage, he calls her “celestial,” specifies that his “soul” (not his gendered body) worships her, and calls her “beautified.” The first two gestures maneuver around Ophelia’s status as woman—connecting her to an autonomous astronomical body and an unnamed extra-Christian divinity—until the third gesture begins to engage her womanhood, via the suggestion of her lack of autonomy and reliance not on behavior but on physical appearance. Having dipped his toe in the stream, Hamlet plunges in with, “In her excellent white bosom, these”—to what does “these” refer?—before offering the aforementioned, maddeningly inarticulate “etc.”

Horace Howard Furness’ *Variorum* of *Hamlet* is useful on how critics have puzzled over how and why “beautified” is “vile,” especially because, as Furness attributes to Lewis Theobald’s scholarship, Shakespeare uses the term in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* IV.i and would therefore be unlikely here to call it “vile.” Furness also notes Robert Nares’ assertion that “it was a common word in those times,

particularly in the addresses of letters.” Furness cites Thomas Caldecott’s note that Puttenham’s *Arte of English Poesie* uses the term. Most relevant to our purposes is Furness’ mention of Edward Capell’s view that *beautified* is an editor’s mistake and that the term should be *beatified*, “because of ‘its concordance with *celestial* and *idol*.’”²⁶ My point is that Hamlet’s deification of Ophelia rehearses Petrarch’s speaker’s tendency in the *Canzoniere* to conflate Laura with Mary, Diana/Artemis, and other celestial idols, reiterating the worship trajectory of Ephesus—the ancient city where the worship of Artemis was based, and where Jesus’ mother is widely believed to have spent her last days.

Furness cites George Steevens’ gloss on *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* in order to illumine the letter-poem’s “bosom”: “Women anciently had a pocket in the fore part of their stays, in which they not only carried love-letters and love-token, but even their money and materials for needle-work.”²⁷ My project rehearses the motion of this inter-oeuvre explanation when I use the Nurse’s Speech in *Romeo and Juliet* to understand Hamlet’s enigmatic “Wormwood, wormwood.” This leads my study further afield, from the history of wet-nurses into the history of the prehistoric cult of Artemis, “The Great Mother,” famously depicted with multiple breasts in Ephesus, the town where the Virgin Mary reportedly went to die. Clearly, Ophelia’s bosom represents more than a pocket for a piece of paper.

²⁶ Horace Howard Furness, *The New Variorum Shakespeare, Vol. III: Hamlet, Vol. I*, p. 138.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

It is unclear if the letter-poem's "etc." is even Hamlet's—or, conversely, if the "vile phrase" criticism attributed to Polonius in contemporary editions of the play is not actually written by the Prince. Q1 *Hamlet* contains no prose introduction to the poem at all, and Q2 has the entire opening of the letter-poem in italics, except for Ophelia's name, from the word "To" through "etc.," which Q2 figures as &c. In other words, the text contains no notation to signify when Polonius speaks his own words and when he reads from Hamlet's letter. It therefore seems as likely that we are to understand &c. as Polonius' phrase, another of his annoying interjections. This is perhaps understandable, because who knows where that "excellent white bosom" thought about his daughter was going? Gertrude—the other parent at this conference—finds the presence of Ophelia's "excellent white bosom" remarkable enough to express incredulity that it can have been noted by her son: "Came this from Hamlet to her?" she asks, interrupting Polonius, who brushes her question aside. The letter-poem's castle career interests him less than its promise of incrimination. And yet—if we follow the contemporary editions' lead and take "etc." to be Hamlet's, it is in keeping with his letter-poem's abortive project, with his easy embrasure of failure and inarticulacy. "Etc." in this context evokes the infinite in a manner that borders on the satirical, a mode whose border Hamlet stalks throughout the play.

Though I defer to A.R. Braunmuller's and other critics' assertion that the letter-poem's "etc." reflects an early modern epistolary habit of abbreviation, I can find no early modern letters—much less intimate/love letters—between equals, or from social superiors to their inferiors, whose salutations contain an *etcetera*. Many early modern letters, including the first letter in the first volume of the *Collected Works of Erasmus*, do

contain short poems. Indeed, *The Faber Book of Letters* has a missive from May 1599, whose structure mirrors almost precisely that of Hamlet's letter-poem to Ophelia. Neither of these letters, however, features an *etcetera* in the salutation. Hence, Laurie Maguire's more recent suggestion in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment* that the early modern *etcetera* signified many different meanings, including bawdy jokes, seems more relevant to Hamlet's letter-poem to Ophelia. Vitally, Professor Braunmuller himself pointed me toward Maguire's article. Such is the confident generosity of the true scholar.

The textual history of *Hamlet* is fascinating and more mysterious than most introductory Shakespeare courses suggest. Q1 is not only vastly shorter than Q2 but it is also more action-focused, and many of the character names and ages are different. Q1 Hamlet and Ophelia, like Romeo and Juliet, are teenagers—as better befits their romantic situation. The expanded grandeur of Q2 (published a scant two years after its textual predecessor) has suggested to almost every scholar that Shakespeare “answers” or responds to Q1 with Q2. The scholarly question about the two texts concerns whether Q1 results from actors' or spectators' “memorial reconstruction” (the traditional view, based on scholarly speculation) of the play we have come to know, or whether Q1 is indeed the fabled *Ur-Hamlet*, the first draft of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, published years after its theatrical run.

Terri Bourus makes a compelling argument against the former view and in favor of the latter view in her *Young Shakespeare's Young Hamlet*. What no one debates is that the First Folio version—and most, if not all, subsequent versions—of the play seek to reconcile Q1 and Q2. The long-demonstrated need of this reconciliation—as opposed to the identification of a clearly definitive version of the play—convinces me of the folly of referring to Q1 as a “bad quarto.” To be convinced by Bourus’ argument—as I am—is to accept that the traditionally-perceived-to-be-Petrarchan *Romeo and Juliet* was written between *Hamlet* Q1 and Q2. This, in turn, suggests a narrative: Shakespeare, dissatisfied both with his first version of *Hamlet* and with his representation of Petrarchism in *Romeo and Juliet*, revises the former with the latter in mind. The thin, comedy-derived surface area of *Romeo and Juliet*—which gestures toward an infinite abyss not quite realized in the play, except in Queen Mab flashes—becomes, in Q2 and F1 *Hamlet*, more profound.

So far we have not made it past the salutation; when Polonius becomes “faithful” and reveals the smoking gun of Hamlet’s lyric, he presents an almost Delphic riddle, comprised of four imperative yet negative and ambiguous declarations. The speaker of Hamlet’s lyric commands Ophelia to doubt the stability of astronomical bodies: “Doubt thou the stars are fire/Doubt that the sun doth move.” What are stars? What if it is we who move and not the sun? These suggestions undermine fixed ideas of material autonomy; question the reliability of appearances, traditions, and wisdom. The sun and redundant stars are Petrarchan conventions, but Hamlet questions their very natures, and by extension, their existence. If they are at home in Petrarch’s poems because they allow his speakers to enter universal realms of stable, autonomous ideas in order to address unstable, indefinably a-human female personalities—and, crucially, to anchor a female-

gendered a-human entity to something reliable—Hamlet undermines their reliability by encouraging the subject of his Petrarchan poem to “doubt” what they are, what they do. Doubt everything, Hamlet’s speaker says in the first two lines of the poem.

“Doubt truth to be a liar” is a convoluted admonition. Truth is obviously a liar, it suggests; when you doubt that fact, you allow for the possibility that the truth is true. This is either a wickedly witty, almost nihilistic imperative or it is something simpler and direct, an early modern difference in grammar that means: think of truth as a liar. I think of it as both and more, a site of abysmal poetic ambiguity.

The first three lines command Ophelia to perform a negative mental act. They ask her to annihilate the nature of fixed aspects of her world in her imagination, thereby underlining those fixed aspects’ imaginative, unfixed natures. However, the fourth and final line of the poem negatively encourages her to consider that the only autonomous reality in the universe is that the speaker loves . . . what? Whom? The speaker seems to expect the act of addressing and delivering a letter-poem to a particular individual to do work he is suddenly unwilling to perform, just at the moment when it matters most. The letter-poem’s prose salutation eagerly names Ophelia, but this oddly distant, almost non-existent lyric stops short of making that commitment. *Who are you?* it seems to ask.

What are you? What is it that I love?

This draws near to *Que sais-je?* Montaigne’s skeptical influence on *Hamlet* is widely accepted, and rightly so. The critic Alexander Shurbanov has partly attributed to Montaigne’s influence the Prince’s prosaic, persuasive, essayistic mode, though Shurbanov stresses that “we are going to notice again and again how difficult it is to draw

a line between lyrical and essayistic elements and how the two feed into each other.”²⁸ Still, though Shurbanov offers other possible essayistic influences—Bacon, Donne, Machiavelli, the Renaissance “anatomy”²⁹—and though he writes that, “Hamlet is more akin to the speaker of *The Sonnets* than to other dramatic characters”³⁰—indeed, although he writes that, “A mature perspective on life seems to replace the somewhat facile fantasies of lyricism towards the end of . . . *Hamlet*,”³¹ Shurbanov nominates no candidates for Hamlet’s lyric model. It is as if the lyrical Prince emerged innocent on a half shell, unblemished by influence. Of Shakespeare’s plays’ Petrarchan elements Shurbanov has this to say:

What does quite often become the butt of criticism and irony in play after play is in fact not so much lyricism as such, not lyric as a literary kind, but its historically established realization in the Renaissance genre of Petrarchan love poetry. The extremely hyperbolized and hackneyed poses, locutions and images of this tradition are criticized and parodied time and again . . . Its affectations are exposed most effectively by the device of literalization, which exposes the unrelatedness of Petrarchan conceits to actual life . . . Yet . . . as soon as the critics of the lyrical jargon feel the pangs of love, they resort to that language . . . *It is obvious that lyric is an antidiscourse . . .* but, as we learn through our theatrical experience, it offers a uniquely effective instrument for the expression of the hidden self, whose reality in the context of Renaissance humanism is no less important than that of the outside world.”³²

This rich passage, which recalls the poetic vocabulary of the twentieth century’s Adorno and Celan, posits the Petrarchan mode as a kind of Rosetta Stone for Renaissance

²⁸ Alexander Shurbanov, *Shakespeare’s Lyricized Drama*, p. 38.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 255. Italics mine.

lyricism. It also suggests that Shurbanov has either not recently read the *Canzoniere* or, being concerned with English Renaissance manifestations of the Petrarchan mode, he has little interest in the occasion generative of the “criticism and irony.” This is appropriate, for the majority of English “anti-Petrarchans” seemed to have mocked Petrarch’s poems in a manner similarly free from curiosity, indulging not in a Hamletian, infinite skepticism where the joke is already on oneself, but in a finite skepticism whose targets of mimicry are safely pre-sanctioned and thus ultimately self-serving. It is largely a question of optimism versus pessimism, positivity versus negativity, the perceived progress of the new versus the perceived ignorance of the old—an aesthetic, philosophical, and temperamental debate perhaps best summed up in the phrase “Renaissance celebration of the Human,” and perhaps best exemplified in the challenges to that celebration raised in the poetry of Petrarch, *Hamlet*, and Swift.

For what does it mean that the Father of Humanism is also the Father of Antidiscourse? The first entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s definition of *discourse* reads, “The process or faculty of reasoning . . . more fully *discourse of reason*.” Though the *OED* demonstrates that *Hamlet*’s is not the first use of the phrase, it is almost certainly the most notorious example. The Prince utters the words during his first and most suicidal soliloquy in I.ii, the speech that establishes the theme and aesthetic of the play and its lyric “I.” Moreover, Hamlet uses the phrase in order to compare his mother unfavorably to a “beast,” an insult whose sting an early modern audience—conscious of a “great chain of being,”³³ with “Man” above beasts—would have felt more acutely than

³³ For a discussion of this tradition, see Arthur O. Lovejoy’s *The Great Chain of Being* and E.M.W. Tillyard’s *The Elizabethan World Picture*. The notion of an early modern English great chain of being has fallen out of fashion, despite the fact that it seems to

we can: “O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason/Would have mourned longer—
.”³⁴ Here, the poetic impulse—what I call “lyric substance”—merges with beast-like inarticulacy in order to produce antidiscourse, the absence of reason. This partakes of and flips a late medieval tradition, described by Caroline Walker Bynum in *Jesus as Mother*—which I will discuss later—of viewing women as possessed of a peculiarly “ethically irrational”³⁵ ability worthy of male imitation. Petrarch engages in this imitation via his innovatively irrational, unreasonable, willfully antidiscoursal poetry, in praise of a specific woman, whom he telescopes into a tradition of the feminine. In this way, Hamlet’s misogyny cannot be untethered from his bone-deep anti-Petrarchism. To rid himself of the disease of lyric antidiscourse—the Petrarchan machine—the Prince rids himself of the irrationality the Petrarchan mode valorizes. His ironic choice of cure—going “mad” in the most lyric way imaginable—precisely rehearses the pharmacological effects of wormwood, which operates as both poison and cure.³⁶ It is also sends up the Petrarchan mode in a manner infinitely more thorough than a respectably formal sonnet could ever approach.

Shurbanov’s passage invites a refinement of the distinction between the behavior/performance of the Human—which Petrarch re-discovered codified by Cicero, whose ideas then evolved into early modern “courtesy books”—which we might call “the revealed self”—and what Shurbanov refers to as “the hidden self.” Shurbanov suggests

evolve out of a similar, late medieval worldview (such as the one described in Caroline Walker Bynum’s *Jesus as Mother*)—the notion of which has not fallen out of fashion.

³⁴ I.ii.150-151.

³⁵ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 17.

³⁶ I will discuss wormwood’s relevance to this discussion, starting in Chapter Three.

that this revealed self reveals little more than a desire to be perceived as a Human, while the indulgence of lyric antidiscourse reveals a self that, dangerously, may or may not be Human. The hidden self exists to challenge the revealed self. Here, again, a slippage emerges, as if Petrarch's perverse genius demanded that he infuse prosaic, humanistic scholarship (discourse) with the fatal poison of lyric poetry (antidiscourse) at the entire movement's instigation. It makes sense in this context that Hamlet would seek to resolve his dilemma—being commanded to perform the ultimate act of anti-humanity while essentially representing Renaissance Humanism—by entering the lyric mode, indulging lyric antidiscourse. To make himself able to avenge his father's death, Hamlet must cease to be Human; he must talk (and act³⁷) himself out of the Human state, which is what the speaker of the *Canzoniere* does again and again, sometimes speaking himself into literal metamorphoses, sometimes calling himself “mad.”

For example, see Petrarch's Poem 23, where the speaker is, as Nancy J. Vickers describes, “Daphne (a laurel), Cygnus (a swan), Battus (a stone), Byblis (a fountain), Echo (a voice), he will never be Jove (a golden raincloud), and he is Actaeon (a stag).”³⁸ Diana is, of course, the Roman manifestation of the Greek goddess Artemis. It is key that in this poem, the speaker asks, “Alas, what am I? what was I? The end crowns the life,

³⁷ The Prince's killing of Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern seems to be practice for Hamlet's destined regicide, as if they were apprentice poems dashed off in preparation for the masterpiece.

³⁸ Nancy J. Vickers, “Diana Described,” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 8, No. 2, *Writing and Sexual Difference* (Winter, 1981), p. 267.

the evening the day.”³⁹ These tense-shifting iterations of the same question not only inform the entire Human-challenging project of the *Canzoniere*, but they also call, at the dawn of Renaissance Humanism, for the movement’s apocalyptic end. The collapsed vastness of Petrarchism’s lyric sweep partakes of Lucretian atomism, which Petrarch seems to have intuited (see Gerard Passannante’s *The Lucretian Renaissance*) and which Hamlet receives and exploits in the Graveyard Scene.

Nothing in Petrarch’s Poem 244 would sound out of place if spoken by Hamlet:

My ills oppress me, and I am terrified by the worst, toward which I see so broad and smooth a way that I have entered this madness and with hard cares rave to you;

I do not know whether to ask God for war or peace, for the loss is heavy and the shame is cruel. But why languish any longer? It will be with us as is already ordained at the highest throne.

Although I am not worthy of that great honor which you do me, for Love deceives you, who oft makes a healthy eye see crooked,

still my counsel is to lift your soul to that heavenly kingdom and to spur your heart, for the road is long and the time is short.

Because much of the latter part of this study seeks to provide a motivation for this desire to, at the least, challenge the wisdom of the Human’s existence/creation and to, at the most, escape it entirely, I want to make clear from the outset that this schism,

³⁹ Francesco Petrarca, Poem 23, *Petrarch’s Lyric Poems*, trans and ed. by Robert M. Durling, p. 60. Unless noted otherwise, all quotations of Petrarch’s poems are from Durling’s edition.

this Janus-faced⁴⁰ schizophrenia lies at the heart of Petrarchism. It is this essence of Petrarchism/Humanism that *Hamlet* locates and exploits, bringing the mode's implied satire to fruition. *Hamlet* represents the apex of literary expression of Renaissance Humanism because it most successfully and thoroughly undermines the idea.

Shurbanov's passage assumes a familiarity with the Petrarchan caricature, if not quite with knowledge of Petrarchism's dominance over fifteenth and sixteenth century English lyric poetry, whose development "may virtually be plotted as a series of different reactions to Petrarchism."⁴¹ What makes Shurbanov's above passage especially useful is its location of a slippage between what English Renaissance literary artists considered to be "lyrical" and what they considered to be "Petrarchan." Shurbanov suggests/admits this was a distinction with no difference, other than a lack of familiarity with Petrarch's skeptical, philosophical, self-condemning, anachronistically Hamletian poems, in which "love is not love" as often as it is. Despite seeming to agree that Petrarch's poetic aesthetic was the unrivaled model for English Renaissance lyric, Shurbanov ascribes to *Hamlet* an overriding yet namelessly vague poetic quality, due to the dominance of the Prince's lyric-speaker-like perspective and contrarily creative habits of expression. This scholarly blind spot seems to result from the success of the satiric pose (if not many of the poems) of Renaissance anti-Petrarchans. It is as if Shurbanov—like, apparently, many other scholars of English Renaissance poetry and drama—is so keen to appear "in

⁴⁰ I will discuss the Janusian aspects of Petrarchism and the Renaissance in Chapter Two.

⁴¹ Heather Dubrow, *Echoes of Desire*, p. 7. She makes this claim while referring to persuasive, earlier claims by Gordon Braden and William Kerrigan.

the know” about an imagined foolishness or naiveté at the heart of the Petrarchan mode that he misses, in *Hamlet*, its most complete iteration.

To put it another way, most Renaissance English lyric reactions against Petrarch’s influence serve ultimately to reinforce that influence. Ilona Bell writes, “Renaissance love poetry cannot be anti-Petrarchan,”⁴² because Petrarch’s poems use love as a means of discussing everything else, it is perhaps reasonable to elide the word “love” from Bell’s statement. Certainly, attempts at a lyric poetry free from Petrarch’s influence remain vexed to this moment. “Language,” erasure, prose, digital, intention-telegraphed political poetry—to mention a few, recent modulations of lyric form—though they do not often mock the hopelessly in love, can be viewed as continued iterations of anti-Petrarchism, rejections of a particular kind of lyric poem crystallized and exemplified in the *Canzoniere*. English Renaissance anti-Petrarchism shares with these more recent poetic rejections the motion of turning away from what is also, already turning away.

Unconsciously or not, when Shurbanov compares Hamlet to the speaker of the *Sonnets*, he recalls T.S. Eliot’s view that *Hamlet* is a dramatic failure, because “like the sonnets, it is full of some stuff that the writer could not drag to light.”⁴³ Petrarch’s influence on the form of Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* is as axiomatic as knowledge of English literature gets, and the *Sonnets* are only superficially about love. Would there even be a “Petrarchan” sonnet without the “Shakespearean” *Sonnets*? One obvious but, I fear, regularly overlooked aspect of Petrarch’s sonnets is that he wrote them not in iambic pentameter but *endecasillabo*—eleven syllables per line (not ten, as English iambic

⁴² Ilona Bell, “Milton’s Dialogue with Petrarch,” in *Milton Studies*, 28 (1992), 109.

⁴³ T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, p. 124.

pentameter requires). Therefore, every inherited, hidebound conviction about what constitutes English Petrarchism already embraces the idea of lyric substance: an essence, not an imitation, is transmitted, transferred, translated.

As in the *Canzoniere*, the *Sonnets* use love as entrée to subjects as shallow and as deep as physical appearance, social status, and immortality. Hence, since Petrarch's love poetry manifested what English Renaissance literary artists considered to be lyrical, if those artists sought to expand beyond mere mimicry of a foppish pose never actually struck in Petrarch's poems, they were forced to either actually read the *Canzoniere* or to attempt to "drag to light" the vast majority of the iceberg implied by the mimicked tip. This dragging-to-light motion—what we might now call "cultural philology"—describes the central motion of Petrarch's entire scholarly and artistic careers, both of which were born of and partook from the same energies, methods, and preoccupations. Both Petrarch the scholar and Petrarch the poet seize upon persistent objects—texts, bodies, ruins—in order to construct an ontology of an unrecoverable past. Accordingly, this seems to be the main work of the Humanities; such a neutral description of Humanism's project is appropriate if we are to assess its value, free from pressure to nostalgically "celebrate the human."

It is also useful as a means to understanding *Hamlet*. Whether or not Shakespeare read the *Canzoniere* between his composition of *Romeo and Juliet* and Q2 *Hamlet*, the latter play (like the finest of the *Sonnets*) succeeds in dragging to light a sickened sense of the Human, as if the entire idea of the Human were a sham not to be celebrated but derided. In this way, as Shakespeare's *Sonnets* register "the Petrarchan sonnet" form in solidified yet elusive ways that the *Canzoniere*, left to its own devices, never could,

Hamlet sounds the depths of Petrarchan “lyric substance.” I take this phrase from Daniel Tiffany’s discussion of Epicurean poetics⁴⁴ (appropriate for this study, in which Lucretius is vital), in order to describe the essential, atomistic quality of Petrarch’s poems flowing beneath formal, linguistic, temporal, and territorial surfaces, asking for a late-coming artist of sensitivity and power to drag it to light.

Petrarch’s deep admiration for Seneca, and for the ancient Roman point of view, suggest that the poet—like Hamlet—was/is an aspiring, ultimately failed Stoic. Nearly all of Petrarch’s poems negotiate how to resist emotions’ hegemonic power over the self; inevitably, this brings them into contact with self-annihilation. It seems to me that this describes, almost precisely, the spirit of Hamlet’s Delay. The articulation of Hamlet as a *failed* Stoic comes from Gordon Braden in his *Anger’s Privilege*, but I have yet to read anyone suggest that what is truly Senecan about *Hamlet* is not its “bloody revenge” elements but, rather, its vexed relationship with Stoicism, which the play inherits along with its other Petrarchan qualities. Part of what makes Petrarch and Hamlet failed Stoics is their late-coming/Christian openness to Epicurean ideas—a dissipating symptom of the disease of infinite subjectivity—characterized by Petrarch’s fascination with/corruption by Lucretius (which Gerard Passannante, in his *The Lucretian Renaissance*, credits with launching the Renaissance, and from whence Petrarch gathers/receives the concept of bitter-sweetness)—which Hamlet, post-Delay, rehearses in the Graveyard Scene.

My view that the finest artistic output of the Father of Renaissance Humanism—and that *Hamlet*, a widely acknowledged literary apex of Renaissance Humanism—ultimately deride the Human is less an audacious provocation than it is an earnest quest to

⁴⁴ I refer to Tiffany’s *Toy Medium: Materialism and Modern Lyric*.

examine the critique of the Human that *Hamlet* drags to light. This infinite critique is the unavoidable value of indulging in the modern lyric mode, crystallized in the *Canzoniere*. If it is obvious that lyric is an antidiscourse, if Petrarchism equals modern lyricism, then the Petrarchan lyric mode is characterized by a ceaselessly skeptical questioning of its own articulation. Thus, perhaps when Hamlet does Montaigne he is really doing Petrarch.

The stakes of my argument are high: Petrarch is considered to be the “Father” of humanism and the Renaissance, and *Hamlet* the textual highpoint of both movements. In this way, Shakespeare’s play and Petrarch’s poems are already linked, and my dissertation follows a longstanding implication. However, the stakes become even higher when the nature of *Hamlet*’s Petrarchan qualities is made explicit. Indeed, without *Hamlet* sounding the Petrarchan depth charge, the radical implications of Petrarch’s humanism may have remained permanently obscure, his lyrics doomed to be perceived through the lens of narrow caricatures.

Hamlet registers what Janet Adelman calls a “deep mystery,”⁴⁵ something that the Prince does not seem to realize he seeks to understand about women. It is my view that if *Hamlet* registers it Renaissance Humanism registers it, which means that Petrarchism registers it, too. This deep mystery compels Petrarch’s speaker, Hamlet, and, later,

⁴⁵ Adelman uses this phrase often in her chapter on *Hamlet* in her wonderful *Suffocating Mothers*.

Jonathan Swift to probe beyond facts, to deploy the poetic mode against and in praise of the women in their lives, attempting to illumine truths obscured by the logical and prosaic. This poetic confrontation with women complicates the early modern humanist project, which seeks to codify behavior toward women but does not include them in the humanist discussion; as Carol E. Quillen asks, “Can women be humanists?”⁴⁶ By crossing out the *ists* in Quillen’s question, we get at the heart of the dilemma. We approach the deep mystery, calling male-crafted humanism’s bluff: perhaps it is not beasts from which early modern men seek to distinguish themselves, but women. This puts in clearer perspective why not only Petrarch and *Hamlet* but thinkers and artists of the Renaissance, in general, anxiously obsess over origins cultural and personal: the human is gendered male. In turn, this helps to explain why the post-human position tends also to be a feminist one.

Because I agree with those who argue that ours is a post-human moment, and because Petrarch is regarded as the Father of both the Renaissance and Humanism, my project views the Renaissance period as a Career of the Human. I will trace a Grand Narrative of the Human from the headwaters of the *Canzoniere* to the surging tide of *Hamlet*, finding a terminus on the desert island of Swift’s Stella and Excremental poems. I doubt anyone will dispute that these Swift poems reject and/or satirize the “Petrarchan” pressure to praise a female poetic object; in the early twentieth century, at least two prominent literary critics argued persuasively that Swift “was” Hamlet.⁴⁷ Swift’s Stella and Excremental poems find a way to be both erotically apocalyptic and spiritually

⁴⁶ Carol E. Quillen, Introduction to Petrarch’s *The Secret*, p. 38.

⁴⁷ I refer to W.B.C. Watkins’ *Perilous Balance* and to Shane Leslie’s *Skull of Swift*.

vacant at their core; Swift's speakers' enormous intellectual gifts not only do them no good, they nuke the quest for wisdom via erotic love inaugurated by Plato in the *Symposium*.⁴⁸

Methodology

Rejecting historicist methods that seek to situate literary works within temporal contexts that amount to constructed fantasies, this study trains its focus on what remains, what persists. My method of "cultural etymology" embraces traditionally perceived divisions between historical periods in order discern ideas that bind them. That "binding" recalls a method of text production is appropriate, for the persistent text connects, as it is handled and read, one period to another. This connection does not require that the reader constantly imagine the cultural context within which the text was written. Nor does the connection necessitate a belief in eternal truth, changeless across time. The connection is made via metaphor, via lyric substance, whose almost-determined quality allows for a third approach, which tolerates the concept of time as a prosaic means to a poetic end.

⁴⁸ The *Symposium* haunts the *Canzoniere* in the poems' repeated implication that, even though erotic wisdom is an illusion, it is the only game in our earthly town. *Hamlet* is a "machine" running out of the same fuel.

This method values space over time, perceiving that poetic modes are worlds in and of themselves, resisting temporal constraints “almost successfully.”⁴⁹

The two direct methodological antecedents to my project are Thomas M. Greene’s *The Light in Troy* and Michel de Serres’ *Rome: The Book of Foundations*. Greene’s book perceives in Petrarch’s poetry a registry of cultural erosion via metaphor, as if the mighty whole of the classical world were disintegrating before Petrarch’s readers’ eyes. Serres appropriates one of Livy’s origin myths of Rome—Hercules’ stolen oxen’s backward footprints—in order to “trace” the palimpsest of meanings it contains. Both works take for granted that the boundary between the real and the metaphorical exists not in spite of its blurriness but because of it, that determination is negative, confining meaning. In contrast, indetermination—such as that generated by metaphor—is positive, the infinite nature of its possibility suggesting a freedom from spatial and temporal constraints vibrating adjacent to the notorious liberties Petrarch’s lyrics take. *Hamlet*/Hamlet take these liberties as far as it/he can, seeking to abide within indetermination until the Prince must be determined into death.

The foundational premise of this study is that we have overlooked the significance of the Petrarchan moment at II.ii.116-124. The introduction of Hamlet’s Petrarchan letter-poem “stains” the play, not only altering its themes and foundations (Humanism, “Senecan tragedy”) but also, on a structural level, determining the content of all that follows. Polonius posits the document as evidence of the motivation for Hamlet’s recent behavior, problematizing an issue not previously up for debate. The document travels from the space that precedes the play’s action into the midst of that action like the

⁴⁹ Wallace Stevens’ “Man Carrying Thing” begins, “The poem must resist intelligence/Almost successfully.”

sphinx's solved riddle traveling into the midst of *Oedipus Rex*, holding out the promise of deciphering not only to the play's characters but also to its auditors. Before this moment, the court's consensus was that Hamlet was grieving too hard and too long for his father. The case seems to have been closed. Why introduce erotic love into the proceedings?

With *Hamlet* Shakespeare seized upon a chance to explore the Petrarchan mode in a wider and more complete manner than he or his contemporaries had previously attempted. In the character of the Prince, Shakespeare registers an essential Petrarchism more profound than the adaptation of the sonnet form or the setting of a play in northern Italy. Indeed, the Prince's brand of Petrarchism constitutes an intervention in the oversimplified Petrarchan conversation in English letters at the turn of the seventeenth century.

In his sonnets and in *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare participates in the Elizabethan fashion of imitating and satirizing various narrow, "courtly" aspects of the Petrarchan mode: unrequited love, antithetical imagery, elaborate praise, usually in a form that resembles that of the Petrarchan sonnet (a term whose English equivalent is *song-let*).⁵⁰ The letter-poem of II.ii is this kind of artifact, with a difference: Hamlet's poem is in iambic trimeter. Petrarch wrote none of the *Canzoniere*—sonnet, canzone, ballad, or madrigal—in iambic trimeter; Hamlet never utters a sonnet. (No one in *Romeo and Juliet* utters a "Petrarchan sonnet," either—the sonnets are all Shakespearean, a form that is Petrarchan in substance.) Yet many of the scholars who might find it impossible

⁵⁰ *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* deems the term to be a diminutive of the Italian *suono*, or "sound." Thus the term's very origin suggests a Stoically self-annihilating lyric gesture toward silence.

to deem an iambic trimetric lyric “Petrarchan” would likely agree with Alexander Shurbanov, who writes that

“[Shakespeare’s] interest in the traditional aspects of his art lay precisely in their problematic nature, not in their stereotypical force” . . . An interesting distinction of Renaissance attitudes to genre from the classical ones is that [the Renaissance authors] no longer champion the purity of kind but are ready to accept generic mixtures without qualms . . . [such as] these two supergenres, lyric and drama . . .⁵¹

If one can accept the idea that early modern literary artists such as Shakespeare and Marlowe blended the genres of poetry and drama in order to create the complex, hybrid iteration of “lyricized drama” that characterizes the best work of their period, one should have no trouble accepting that this practice of blending not only extends to other aspects of their writing—this blending characterizes their writing, brings it into being, is, in a sense, its reason for being.

No one disputes Petrarch’s dominant influence on late-sixteenth century English poetry, an influence that seems to have steadily increased from the days of Chaucer, achieving escape velocity with the early Tudor, “Native” days of Wyatt and Raleigh. Therefore, any lyricized drama written during the late Tudor and early Jacobean eras would necessarily stand in Petrarch’s shadow—a shadow comprised of Senecan and Augustinian philosophy, biblical and Ovidian poetry, thereby acknowledging an existential tension between the pagan with the Christian, in a lyrico-dramatic form obsessed, ultimately, with what constitutes the human self. The Petrarchan is in large part a *performance* of this tension; its quest for a kind of stationary peace and understanding employs the restive methods of war and confusion in order to accomplish

⁵¹ Alexander Shurbanov, *Shakespeare’s Lyricized Drama*, pp. 44-45; he begins the above by quoting Rosalie Colie’s *Shakespeare’s Living Art*, p. 15.

its aims. This aspect of the mode makes dark implications, suggesting a foundation for the theories of Luther, Machiavelli (who ends *The Prince* by quoting Petrarch), and twentieth-century Italian fascists.⁵² But this is also the method that Hamlet employs, achieving a Stoic resignation at the end of his journey that mirrors Petrarch's speaker's attitude in Poem 366.

English literary scholars' traditional insistence on missing the satirico-Petrarchan essence of *Hamlet* has worked in tandem with our anachronistically hidebound approach to the Petrarchan mode, in general. This disappointing approach perhaps reflects secondary schools' immemorial method of presenting *Romeo and Juliet* alongside Shakespeare's *Sonnets*—the form of the latter of which then are, in turn, contrasted with that of the “Petrarchan sonnet.” It is interesting that, as we tend to misunderstand Machiavelli in much the same way the Elizabethans did,⁵³ we insist on oversimplifying the “Petrarchan” in the dismissively “courtly” manner we imagine the Elizabethans did. When we do so, we resemble those constantly chuckling auditors of Shakespeare plays, intent on demonstrating to their peers that they are in on a joke not being made.

Though English Renaissance “anti-Petrarchan” verse perhaps rightly ridicules the speaker of the *Canzoniere*'s self-pitying tendencies, I hope to demonstrate that at least one late-coming English poet was sensitive to the mode's profoundest implications. But even as I intervene in this discussion of Petrarchism, I am loathe to discourage the continued practice of reducing the mode, of isolating one or two of its most portably

⁵² Later I will discuss Luther's and Machiavelli's Petrarchism in more detail.

⁵³ On p. 109 of his *Selected Essays*, T.S. Eliot writes that “the real Machiavelli [was] a person whom Elizabethan England was as incapable of understanding as Georgian England, or any England, is.” I take Eliot to mean that the curse of Protestant authenticity renders its victims incapable of perceiving the nuance of literary personae.

shallow aspects in order to metonymically declare the whole mode dumb. Dumb readings link us to the past; the enduring cultural impact of narrow-minded, reactionary propaganda, masquerading as “intellectual,” is a way the West remains early modern—perhaps even (anti-)Petrarchan. Half-baked “anti-Petrarchism” is likely a symptom of educating the masses, an Anglo-American experiment that gave us Shakespeare and Marlowe but has also produced today’s climate-change deniers (as well as the author of the current study, born poor in rural Arkansas). This noble experiment seems prone to producing a skepticism half-realized, a skepticism that does not follow through, into a questioning of itself. Fully realized, global skepticism describes the dilemma of the speaker in the *Canzoniere*, of Prince Hamlet, and of Swift’s Stella and Excremental poems. That the consciousnesses at the core of each of these poetries seem always to be reading, always learning seems, in turn, to result from a ceaseless, ouroboric urge to self-question, as if the point of acquiring new knowledge were always to “. . . wipe away all trivial fond records,/All saws of books, *all forms*, all *pressures* past/That youth and observation copied there.”⁵⁴ Central to the Petrarchan mode is a mystical optimism, born of absolute negativity; its speakers seem to take for granted that everything on earth is made of misery and tears—yet the earth is ever changing, and they have not really seen *everything*. Perhaps the next painting, woman, or poem will simultaneously obviate and justify enduring the nauseating lie at the core of mortality.

After all, Hamlet’s vow is unprompted; the Ghost does not ask him to do anything of the kind. As the Petrarchan mode appropriates love for other, philosophical purposes, Hamlet appropriates the Ghost’s command to “Remember me” in order to further his

⁵⁴ *Hamlet* I.5.99-101. Italics mine.

evolution from the “sweet” form of thinker/writer with which he was uncomfortable, into a more bitter, less nostalgic being. How to become increasingly bitter/satirical while also searching out the naïve sweetness of his origins becomes the source of the Prince’s ambivalence, the cause of his paralysis. When he gives up the bitter/sweet dialectic and its attendant quest for knowledge of origins, he frees himself to kill and be killed in the play’s penultimate Duel Scene. In his “There is a divinity that shapes our ends” speech of V.ii., spoken on his way to the Duel, Hamlet achieves something like Horatio’s Stoical perfection—to which Hamlet makes love in the Duel Scene-foreshadowing “heart of hearts” speech of III.ii.

The lie is that earthly life has any essential, *a priori* meaning, independent of the relatively arbitrary “meaning” created between two people: you need me, I need you, and that is what this life means. Hence, an elemental bifurcation between earthly and Christian meaning emerges; this split, helped along by the scarcity of subject-object expressions of joyful eroticism in the Bible, facilitates and helps to explain the Petrarchan mode’s pervasive sense of confusion—the Christ of the Gospels offers no guidance on handling erotic love, no insight into its uses, meanings, or origins. In the context of the current study, Christ’s silence on the topic makes a kind of logical sense: His divinity determines that His pre-conscious memories would include an eternal foreground absent from the experience of mere mortals, for whom the mother’s body constitutes the

absolute beginning. Hence, yet another split forms, separating the focus on Christ's earthly experience from his followers' experience of a mortality unmixed with divinity.

Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" has encouraged us to imagine our infant selves in Christ's position, our souls having no beginning and no end. This move befits the Romantics' chief philosophical innovation, which is the replacement of Christianity with "Nature." However, the poetic practice of pursuing personal origins in order to locate deeper cultural meanings rehearses what this study posits as the essential Petrarcho-Hamletian method—and, by extension, reveals the philosophical gesture at the heart of the Renaissance, an intellectual "ruin" open to visitation and appropriation by succeeding generations. This inherent, essential, philosophical gesture, far more profound than dressing an idea in sonnet form, is what the Renaissance left for Wordsworth to inherit. His great poem carries further down the road the *Canzoniere's* implication that personal origins lie on a spectrum with cultural and spiritual ones. Indeed, it is hard to imagine the Romantics making their turn to paganism without the ancient-world-exhuming efforts of Petrarch and his more immediate heirs. Though Petrarch's skeptical, body-focused poems should take some blame for initiating what became Protestantism, secularism, nihilism, and atheism, that his poems do not espouse the virtues of these subsequent movements should not prevent us from acknowledging how radically new they were and are.

Those radically new poems ask, among other things, what a default Christian (because he has no other theologico-philosophical options) is to make of his presence in default-Christian space and time, among default-Christian objects of desire? How might several earthly decades matter in comparison with heavenly eternity? The *Canzoniere*

often read like experiments in creating a kind of earthly, erotic gospel, an attempt to fill a baffling hole in the Western archive. In this respect, especially, the lyrics are worthy starting guns for the Renaissance, notorious for its shift of gaze from the sacred to the secular, from the holy image to the human body. By tracing the source of the twinned streams *the Renaissance* and *Humanism* to Petrarch, it becomes clear that this shift of focus has less to do with “celebrating the Human” than with questioning it, puzzling at it, doubting it.

It seems that, ironically, doubting the human leads to doubting God, almost certainly independent of Petrarch’s intentions. A hidebound focus on fantasized intentions can obscure how Petrarchism leads to Protestantism, and, via that movement’s invention of “infinite subjectivity,”⁵⁵ to the Death of God.

Hegel coined the phrase “infinite subjectivity” in the early pages of “The Modern Time,” the last section of his *The Philosophy of History*. Hegel’s meaning is elusive; he seems to be circling the idea in hopes that by tracing the Reformation’s motion from the exterior Church to the interior self—what Hegel terms “absolute inwardness”—he will thereby describe the “abrogation of externality [that] imports [Luther’s] reconstruction of all the doctrines, and the reform of all the superstition into which the Church consistently wandered, and in which its spiritual life was dissipated.”⁵⁶ Thus, in an almost

⁵⁵ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. by J. Sibree, p. 416.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 415.

Nietzschean manner, Hegel seems to intend that “infinite” should suggest great power, a state of wholly un-dissipated individual strength.

But, like the work of Luther himself, Hegel’s phrase has come to mean more than he seems to have intended or anticipated. Margareta di Grazia writes of “infinite subjectivity” that it is

critical to Hegel’s history of the emancipation of the consciousness . . . It is impossible to overstate the importance of Hegel’s history . . . the modern is, after Hegel, identified with consciousness, subjectivity . . . individuality . . . The very term *early modern* upholds the teleology of modern consciousness . . . our Hegelian legacy.⁵⁷

What Hegel attributes to his countryman Luther theologically, I attribute to the earlier Petrarch more generally. Though a distinction between Luther’s and Petrarch’s work might easily be said to lie in the difference between their writings’ relationship to the body—Petrarch’s poems focus on it and Luther’s tracts do not—both men “import” the body into their respective, individual consciousnesses, filtering the body’s possibilities through their aesthetic aims. This is, after all, a now-traditional complaint of the *Canzoniere*: they treat Laura’s physical specificity as an ideal, thereby erasing her individuality, her humanity. Never mind that this is a nonsensical complaint—no writer is responsible for realizing his reader’s retroactive goals for his writing; Laura may never have existed; it is more than likely that Petrarch intended for his poems to register the tension that so offends some readers. The complaint has less to do with making scholarly sense that it does with protesting the lazy manner with which the poems have often been read, protesting Petrarchism’s misapprehension as the one, poetic way to praise a lady—

⁵⁷ Margareta di Grazia, “World Pictures, Modern Periods ,and the Early Stage,” *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan, p. 11.

as opposed to expressing that activity's ultimate impossibility, seeking beneath and beyond that activity something ancient and disturbingly alive.

Artistically speaking, Luther's object is God; it is his Laura. Petrarch's biographical status as clergyman is irrelevant to the text of the *Canzoniere*, because he never makes use of that status in the text. Luther is the inverse, accomplishing for his faith the enormous innovation of sanctioned sexual congress with women's bodies, yet neglecting to describe those bodies in his texts. There is something inherently confusing about Petrarch's infinitely subjective treatment of women's bodies, because his readers experience those bodies as daily realities, insignificant memories, the source of all human life, and everything in between. This confusion—seen from one angle, this miracle—seems to be largely what the *Canzoniere* are “about.”

Luther's brand of infinite subjectivity is far easier to grasp, however. This is because no one in the last two thousand years has seen the body of God; no one has physically touched it or exited it through a birth canal, that dark portal that still mystifies medicine. Despite the long theological moment Caroline Walker Bynum describes in *Jesus as Mother*, no one has physically nursed at God's breasts.⁵⁸ One of the wages of Luther's achievement is apparent in everyday Western life, in the guise of Low Church Evangelical Protestantism, where untrained, effusively emoting “preachers” fashion God in a vague, constantly devolving image, fashioning slapdash homilies from right-wing cable news channels and feedings at the local airport Cinnabon.⁵⁹ Luther's and Hegel's

⁵⁸ Bynum's book focuses on the twelfth and thirteenth century, largely Cistercian tradition of worshipping Jesus as a woman.

⁵⁹ On a recent Christmas Eve in a “non-denominational” Low Protestant church in Hot Springs, Arkansas, I heard a sermon that compared the experience of letting Christ “into”

faith in a white, Christian, common man, their belief in Protestant progress, in an “emancipation” has, ironically, freed the common wo/man from expending any significant individual energy on his or her spiritual wellbeing. Why these two mighty thinkers saw clear to suggest that many, if not most of their white, uneducated, Christian peers were inclined to think for themselves is anyone’s guess, but I cannot imagine they came by this conclusion via close observation and personal experience.

On the contrary, Luther paved the way for the state of Low Church Protestantism today, providing high spiritual cover for increasingly base insult to soul and intelligence. This is another way that Renaissance-spotting has erred in its tendency to think positively about the period—Christianity has not soared to increasingly high cultural achievements since the Reformation. It dives infinitely lower. Luther’s anti-authoritarianism has become mere anti-expert-ism, infinite anti-intellectualism. The infinite subjectivity that Luther does not seem to have intended to generate has effectively given up the Christian game to any ignorant charlatan (likely ignorant of the term *charlatan*) willing to claim divine inspiration. In such a vacuum, she who is most shameless prevails, and hypocrisy is power. *Infinite subjectivity*, in practice in the contemporary American moment, stresses not the former half of the term but the latter, accentuating not strength but the

one’s heart to the sweet, gooey sensation that attends eating a 900-calorie Cinnabon roll at Little Rock National Airport. This takes the sacrament of communion/The Lord’s Supper to a new, infinitely, subjectively low place—and not only because the untrained preacher delivering the sermon clearly had no intention of alluding to the communion, The Lord’s Supper, or to Arkansas’ status as the second-most obese state in the nation, also possessed of the United States’ second-worst public education system. My native state is a prime example of Protestant infinite subjectivity, cast infinitely downward, so that the vast majority of Low Church Protestant Arkansans I know are not burdened by the knowledge that they are Protestant. Indeed, because “Satan loves an open mind,” and because authentic low Protestants are not “religious,” ignorance of theological history is preferable to knowledge of it. I leave the condemnation or defense of these phenomena to others who, as likely as not, have not personally experienced them.

conviction that everything, even the nature of the God of all creation is “just, ya know, like, your opinion, man.”⁶⁰

The consideration of this problem elevates Shakespeare’s sometimes-avowed crypto-Catholicism above biographical curiosity, past textual sleuthing, into prescient philosophical profundity. As scholars have noted, Protestantism seems to be one of the anachronistic contagions infecting rotten Denmark, despite/especially because the Ghost is on leave from an unnamed Purgatory, and Hamlet’s reasoning for his decision not to slay the lone-praying (inaudible to any but the audience?) Claudius (“ . . . now a is a-praying,/ . . . And so he goes to heaven . . . ”⁶¹) stems from Catholic theology.

Indeed, the insatiable, Protestant plague of infinite subjectivity seems to be what the Prayer Scene is largely “about,” for Claudius immediately undermines Hamlet’s vicious, hell-focused mercy: “My words fly up, my thoughts remain below:/Words without thoughts never to heaven go.”⁶² This is as black as comedy gets—Hamlet could have dispatched his enemy to hell, after all. However, this grim jape only works if Claudius fails (as he claims) to authentically, inwardly experience his communication with God, carried out alone. Claudius is thereby saved by that he has within which passeth show: a decidedly Protestant inauthenticity. Thus are two spiritual languages speaking past each other in the Prayer Scene—one Catholic (Hamlet’s) and one Protestant (Claudius). I do not mean to suggest that Hamlet is Catholic, or that Elsinore is, despite its gaping portal to Purgatory. However, among possible diagnoses for

⁶⁰ Ethan Coen and Joel Coen, *The Big Lebowski*, p. 39.

⁶¹ III.iii.73-74.

⁶² III.iii.97-98.

Elsinore's overriding disease, Protestantism and its attendant, infinitely low capacity seems a reasonable candidate—especially since an early seventeenth-century Protestant English theater audience would likely have taken Claudius' meaning according to their shared worldview.

I go so far as to lay the original sin of Protestantism at Petrarch's feet. Luther "activated" Petrarch's infectious modernity of the individual consciousness; the latter monk weaponized inwardness in order to inflict maximum societal damage. When Hamlet says, ". . . for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so,"⁶³ he expresses not only a strain of ancient skepticism cribbed from Catholico-Stoico-Epicurean Montaigne—the Prince also describes a darker, more infinite subjectivity, in whose context traditions of thought matter less than does the effect produced by indiscriminately mixing them. Indeed, Hamlet is saying that thinking is not advisable, partly because psychic torment therein lies, and partly for the tautological reason that thinking is subject to the constantly multiplying nature of subjectivity. This reflects the attitude of the Petrarchan speaker of the *Canzoniere*, who says in Poem 127 that

where Love spurs me I must turn my sorrowful rhymes, which follow my afflicted mind. Which shall be last, alas, and which first? . . . although I gaze intent and fixed on a thousand different things, I see only one lady and her lovely face . . . Love maintains me solely with memory . . . I think of that face of more than human beauty, which from afar can make my eyes wet but from close by dazzles them and vanquishes my heart,
where between the white and the gold [of snow struck by the sun] there is always shown what no mortal eye ever saw, I believe, except my own; and of the hot desire that . . . inflames me so that my forgetfulness prizes nothing but becomes eternal: nor does summer change it . . . If my eyes ever saw white with crimson roses in a vase of gold . . . gathered by virgin hands . . .
the blond tresses loosened on her neck, where every milk

⁶³ II.ii.249-250, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*. This line does not appear in Q1 or Q2 but only in FF. Braummuller's edition of the play does not include it.

loses by comparison . . .

Perhaps I thought I could count the stars one by one and enclose
the sea in a little glass when the strange idea came to me to tell in so few
pages in how many places the flower of all beauties, remaining in herself,
has scattered her light

in order that I may never depart from her . . .

This stunning canzone brings together the disparate issues my study seeks to address, as do many of the poems in Petrarch's collection; in this way, Petrarch's poems resemble the DNA sequences of members of an isolated village, infinite in variety while limited in (subject) matter. All of the poems resemble each other, as if born from a single mother, forgotten and "eternal." Do not the widely ranging lines of Hamlet share this distinct yet related quality—as if spoken by many characters in one? The Prince's bounded inconsistency resembles a modern book of lyrics in this way; he might say anything but he will always circle the same obsessions, each of which he shares with Petrarch's and Swift's speakers: attraction and repulsion of the female body; a sense that something eternal radiates within and beyond the female body; an attraction and repulsion of individuality/consciousness; a sense that something eternal radiates within and beyond individuality/consciousness. To say that these obsessions boil down to a state of tortured entrapment between inward retreat and the need for outward contact with other bodies is to describe the dilemma created by the dialectic of Stoicism and Epicureanism. Because both of these ancient philosophical traditions are so intellectually compelling, they suggest the possibility of a modern reconciliation, a late-coming discovery that the dialectic they generate is false.

This quest for reconciliation compounds the torture in a newly felt manner that seems to have been essential to generating the energy required for launching the Renaissance. "Which shall be last, alas, and which first?" distills the trajectory of the

emblematically anxious backward glance, the Janusian swivel of the head away from communal history to the individual death that quickly approaches. Indeed, perhaps one should view the sphinxlike, gnomic Janus not as double-headed but as the kinetic representation of a single head swiveling rapidly backwards and forwards, torn between reflection and action, inwardness and outwardness, history and death.

The infinite, modern, inescapably subjective, simultaneous consideration of “a thousand different things” somehow also conjures a sense of “one lady,” which the framing poems of the *Canzoniere* assure us is the Virgin Mary, an assurance that most every poem in-between destabilizes by suggesting that the “one lady” is Laura, Daphne, and/or Diana. In this infinitely subjective “one lady” way, the *Canzoniere* shares the same “deep mystery” that Janet Adelman senses pulsing at the heart of *Hamlet*: who are these men really in love with, and with whom are they so frustrated, so angry? From whose bodies are they alienated?

Adelman’s *Suffocating Mothers* lives and works within a Judeo-Christian philosophical landscape; for Adelman, no “great mother” seems to precede Eve. Considering infinite subjectivity in the context of the Genesis creation narrative does cast the question of original sin in a different, more poetically ambiguous light than the feminist one to which we have recently, understandably become accustomed. Perhaps the knowledge that Eve seeks represents neither a betrayal nor a lunge for gendered emancipation, but rather a species-wide instinct to know from whence we came. The Adam and Eve narrative, set in a prehistoric garden, can be framed thus: humankind is born, followed quickly by a murder. Yet murder does not qualify as original sin in this narrative—a quest for knowledge does.

But when does Eve's consciousness begin? One can scarcely imagine that she was conscious while being fashioned from Adam's body. Might we not say that her quest for knowledge is the same as Petrarch's: "How did I come here and when?"⁶⁴ If this amounts to original sin, if the searching out of one's origins is the capital crime of Western life, then Hamlet's Delay becomes effortless to understand—he is too keen, too sensitive to accept that murder lies at the heart of it all, as Renée Girard and others have so convincingly argued. Rather, it is the seeking out of origins that is wrong; knowledge of history is bad, regardless of its status as infinitely subjective fantasy; memory is a lie, a crime; since thinking requires memory, thinking is wrong, bad, evil.

This seems to take matters too far too quickly, because it takes matters where Hamlet takes them. And yet the Petrarchan speaker of Poem 127, hedging on his assertion of peerless individuality—"there is always shown what no other mortal eye, I believe, has seen but my own"—proceeds quickly to add that his "hot desire . . . inflames me so that my forgetfulness prizes nothing but becomes eternal." Imagine the later-coming Lucretian Whitman qualifying one of his speaker's grand claims with a similarly-placed "I believe," a phrase that here functions in an almost Hegelian/emancipating manner, suggesting that every individual point of view is unprecedented, by tautological virtue of the individual's will to believe that it is unprecedented. But by invoking this glimpse of individuality in the context of one person's perception of colors reflected from the face of a mountain, Petrarch's speaker presents an infinite subjectivity that is also mundane, insignificant. The speaker's "hot desire" fuels this futile flame, further frustrating his always-twinning focus on history and death, the uniqueness of which here

⁶⁴ I will discuss Poem 126 further in Chapter Three.

veers into a place where it is also common. Hamlet's too readily interpreted comment, "Ay, madam, it is common"⁶⁵—said in response to Gertrude's reminding her son that "Thou know'st 'tis common. All that lives must die . . ." ⁶⁶—here swerves into view. It has never made sense to me to interpret this line as making a satirical comment concerning class and, thereby, a "baseness" in the royal couple's characters. This unfounded reading participates in a well-"meaning" tradition of impatience with the Prince's persistent lyrical ambiguity, built to defy interpretation. Though scholars praise lyrical poet John Keats' discovery of "negative capability" at the core of Shakespeare's strongest work, we often rush to dispel that very quality, perhaps as a result of feeling a need to seem all-knowing to our students. Does any man think his death will occur precisely as anyone else's death has? Does any woman think she gives birth precisely as any other woman has? Yet there are scarcely any activities more "common." This is the central joke that existence plays, making the most "common" inevitabilities seem "so peculiar"⁶⁷ to us.

This paradoxical joke can and must be endured within/Stoically, unmixed with the "hot desire" that results from interaction with other bodies. Once in the grips of hot desire, Petrarch, Hamlet, and Swift marshal writing in order to generate a "forgetfulness [that] prizes nothing" and thereby "becomes eternal." Appropriately, this (yet another) double-move describes what all creative writing does, enacting what Gerard Passannante

⁶⁵ I.ii.72.

⁶⁶ I.ii.74.

⁶⁷ I.ii.77.

calls writing's "simultaneous act of remembering and forgetting."⁶⁸ This, in turn, uniquely positions writing as the liminal activity best suited to entering "the event" of existence. Writing is simultaneously physical and figurative; perhaps more than any other action, it occurs on the boundary between thinking and doing—to write is to desist from thinking or doing, by doing both. It is a delay, an attempt to arrest time in order benefit the self in some fashion. When Alexander Shurbanov writes that, "Poetry does not describe an event, it tries to be it,"⁶⁹ he may be said to be defining Petrarch's energy, always overflowing the bounds of research, flowing into a lyrical quest "to be" that which it describes. This seems especially true because Shurbanov makes this assertion in the context of discussing *Hamlet's* "lyric mode," so intrinsically bound up with what it means "to be"—in opposition to acting on a ghost's suicidal/regicidal command, isolated yet in possession of "that within." Though Hamlet does not seem to author the phrase "To be or not to be" himself⁷⁰--indeed, because he chooses to quote the phrase at the outset of what is clearly meant to be a central, theme-establishing, *lyric* moment of the *play*—being an event rather than describing it precisely identifies the connection between poetry and drama. After all, the Globe's auditors of *Hamlet* would have had little to no experience with a text of *Hamlet*, which was not literature to them but, rather, an afternoon's or evening's live entertainment. *Hamlet* was whatever it was, and then it was gone.

⁶⁸ Gerard Passannante, *The Lucretian Renaissance*, p. 24.

⁶⁹ Alexander Shurbanov, *Shakespeare's Lyricized Drama*, p. 21.

⁷⁰ See my discussion of Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy in Chapter Five.

After telling Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that “thinking makes it so,” the Prince says, “I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams. . . A dream itself is but a shadow.”⁷¹ In the last chapter of *Anger’s Privilege*, Gordon Braden reiterates the aspects of Stoicism that early Christianity imports, emphasizing the two traditions’ impasse vis-à-vis the issue of autonomy: Stoicism seeks independence via the Self, located within one’s physical body, and Christianity seeks it outside the Self, in the body of Christ. Yet for a thinker unbound by epoch-defining chains of his own suggestion, might not Christianity appear as an upgrade of Stoicism, accomplished by removing the means of personal autonomy from even the Self’s “empire” of the body? A freedom from pain (and pleasure) that resides in a place wholly removed from the Self’s ability to feel either sensation advances the cause of mastery over the vagaries of emotion to a great and perhaps final degree.⁷² Once one has made that upgrade, once one has figured the Self in another body, infinitely subjective problems of interiority become simultaneously exterior. Petrarch’s poems seem to me to dramatize and inhabit this Christo-Stoical tension, which partakes also of an Epicurean/Stoical dilemma—in this latter scenario, Christ’s exteriority merges with the notion of the atom, as if He were an atom with a soul. *Hamlet* inherits this philosophical confusion; that is why the Stoical Horatio sees the Purgatorial Ghost before the failed Stoic, often Catholic-seeming Prince does; it is why Horatio is never more distant from his closest friend than in the Graveyard Scene, when the Prince decides to be

⁷¹ II.ii.249-260, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*.

⁷² There is something of the cyborg and the zombie in this formulation of Christianity, which, in turns, suggests a Stoical foundation of those notions.

an Epicurean. One could reasonably argue that infinite subjectivity, fully realized, is what rots in Denmark.

That Petrarch never seeks explicitly to “reconcile” his foremost first-century AD Roman philosophical interests—Christianity and Senecan Stoicism—might well have much to do with his not perceiving Christianity *as* philosophy. The *Canzoniere* begins and ends with penitent expressions of explicitly Christian humility—thereby suggesting that the intervening 363 poems are experiments in escape from the Christian paradigm, the entire Romantic movement anticipated and completed four centuries in advance. Again, Petrarch’s modernity demands to be acknowledged—in contrast to Dante’s masterpiece, Petrarch’s poetic journey unfolds on earth, according to mortal laws. Petrarch’s purgatory is the body.

Yet Petrarch’s Christianity was such that he never seems to have considered its alternative. Rather, his work suggests that he seeks to augment his native philosophical element with ideas more ancient, always by way of thinking about the mortal body. This intense bodily focus is the aspect of Petrarchism that facilitates its uncanny ability to evoke many traditions at once, the three most prominent of which are all vital to, if not born from, first century AD Rome: Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Christianity. Petrarch’s conscious awareness of his affection for Seneca, his access to the sage’s texts, has generated much scholarship, which continues to develop in compelling ways. But no one, to my knowledge, has yet traced the Senecan elements of *Hamlet* via the prism of Petrarch, perhaps because no one has yet acknowledged how Petrarch’s corresponding Epicurean tendencies also inform Shakespeare’s most truly Petrarchan play.

Because it is clear that Petrarch carefully designed the *Canzoniere* so that clusters of poems orbit specifically related themes, it is worth considering his decision to place Poem 127 next to the earlier-discussed Poem 126. I will analyze a key, later group of poems that obsesses over ingestion, nourishment, and the possibility of self-sufficiency. Poems 126 and 127, however, do the opposite—the speaker is able to perceive “a thousand different things” at once; he attributes his never being able to “depart” from his beloved to her having “scattered her light.” Petrarch, in the *Canzoniere* and his prose, seeks consistently to stabilize the essentially unstable, a *raison d’être* it shares with Stoicism. This gesture participates in Petrarchism’s global, radical skepticism, insisting on the significance of a continuous Western culture, thereby flying in the face of a time and space that at times sought to seize Christian teleology as an excuse to indulge a desire for cultural amnesia—itsself a lunge at stability, facilitated less by reactionary contrarianism (as it often is today) than perhaps by widespread illiteracy. By never addressing this problem explicitly—not describing the problem but seeking “to be” it—Petrarch’s evocation of the tension between ancient philosophy and Christian doctrine invites the female-bodied chaos that follows—and subsequent lyric attempts to remove the female body altogether.

Chapter One: &c.

Cicero's freedman secretary Tiro invented the ampersand—which, “read *et*, is Latin and means ‘and’”⁷³—in order to more efficiently record the orations of his employer, the ancient Roman Father of Humanism. Early modern Father of Humanism Petrarch's “first significant [scholarly] discovery [was] . . . Cicero's oration defending the [Greek] poet Archias (*Pro Archia poeta*).”⁷⁴ Rutherford Aris writes of Tiro in *The Ampersand in Script and Print* that

Had he been recording the opening of Cicero's defense of Archias, that sentence . . . might have [used the ampersand in the recording] . . . “Indeed all the arts that have to do with man have a common bond and, as it were, contain within themselves a certain affinity.”⁷⁵

There is no reason to believe that Tiro did not employ the ampersand in the recoding of that famous, humanism-generating sentence. Tiro was a *verna*, a “home-grown” slave of Cicero's household. Tiro's service of Cicero was constant, from slave's cradle to (Roman God-)Father of Humanism's grave. Hence, not only can we place the ampersand at the birth of humanism, but we also find its ligatory use invented by a being comprised of the liminality which seems to have inspired humanism's creation.⁷⁶ Already, from the

⁷³ Jan Tschichold, *The Ampersand: Its Origin and Development*, trans by Frederick Plaat, p. 5.

⁷⁴ Peter Hainsworth, *The Essential Petrarch*, ed. and trans. by Peter Hainsworth, p. xiii.

⁷⁵ Rutherford Aris, *The Ampersand in Script & Print*, p. 4.

⁷⁶ I am thinking of Cicero's use of the distinction between humans and animals in order to define humanity; I am also responding to an assertion Carol E. Quillen makes in the introduction to her translation of Petrarch's *The Secret*: “We still grapple today with the kind of exclusion that the discussion of Laura enacts . . . questions . . . about who counts as human.” Also on my mind, here, is Jeanne Addison Roberts' *The Shakespearean*

start, we find ourselves in a zone where the *and* asks *and what*—as if the ampersand, at its inception, sought out an almost redundant *c.* in order to more completely register *etcetera* and its attendant suggestion of infinity.

Gerard Passannante makes a convincing case for Petrarch's peculiarly poetic reading practice as having given him access to palimpsests of textual meanings obscure to other scholars. Passannante emphasizes Petrarch's discovery of "the rare Latin word *amaror* (bitterness),"⁷⁷ almost certainly in an ancient text's quotation of Lucretius' lost poem *De rerum natura*'s frequent use of the wormwood trope. Petrarch's acutely poetic sensibility seems to have enabled him to perceive the whole of *De rerum natura* from a fragment of the poem, and to model his own fragmented, bitter-sweet poetic collection on that "reading." We are accustomed to accepting that modern lyric poetry generates meaning via illogical, emotional gestures, by associating images and ideas in surprisingly intuitive ways. Perhaps because relatively few modern lyric poets also write criticism, we are less familiar with the fact that most poets read in a manner similar to their creative writing practices, sensing deep affinities in texts that the majority of scholars consider to be essentially dissimilar. Like Lucretius' notoriously seminal poem *De rerum natura*, the ampersand disappeared in the medieval period; when Petrarch found *Pro Archia poeta*, he seems also to have found the ampersand. Jan Tschichold writes that, "During the Middle Ages [a temporal distinction crafted by Petrarch] the Tironian Notes fell into oblivion. Only a few learned monks and notaries continued to use them, the latter as a

Wild, which convincingly posits that early modern Western women constituted a wilderness, an untamed world beyond the boundaries of the human.

⁷⁷ Gerard Passannante, *The Lucretian Renaissance*, p. 31.

sort of secret code.”⁷⁸ It is not clear how, in 1471, the ampersand reemerges, now with two dots above it, signifying what Tschichold calls “*etcetera*.” But it seems reasonable to place this reemergence-with-a-difference in the context of the rise of Renaissance humanism, travelling on an intellectual trajectory that resembles the reemergence of the Human and its attendant, primordial bitter-sweetness, all of which Petrarch seems to have discerned and transmitted—explicitly in his scholarship, implicitly in his poetry. This makes *Hamlet*’s use of the *&c.* while discussing the Prince’s Petrarchan letter-poem all the more profound.

With Petrarch’s rediscovery of *Pro Archia poeta*, we have a late medieval poet, born in exile and officially employed as a monk, unearthing an ancient Roman argument against the deportation of a Greek poet. Michelangelo’s *David*’s emblematic looking ever backwards, toward origin, is thus enacted, in a precisely Renaissance manner (fetishizing Roman culture always already fetishizing Greek culture). We will see that first-century AD Romans preferred Greek wet-nurses, and that one hired wet-nurses at the Temple of Janus in the Roman Forum—where one also purchased wormwood, used to wean ancient Roman subjects from both an abstract ideal of original Greek maternity and its physical reality, simultaneously. Indeed, the movement that Margaret Ferguson has demonstrated characterizes Hamlet’s rhetoric—from the metaphorical to the material⁷⁹—can be said not only to characterize the intellectual direction of the Renaissance, in general, but also to describe a particularly Petrarchan mode of thinking.

⁷⁸ Jan Tschichold, *The Ampersand: Its Origin and Development*, trans by Frederick Plaat, p. 20.

⁷⁹ In “*Hamlet: Letters and Spirits*,” in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*.

A shared sense of lost memory—cultural and personal—produces a desire to embody that loss, to make it “real.”

Through *Hamlet*'s reiteration of the Petrarchan lyric aesthetic, this mystico-secular view of the present as ontological proof of an ultimately unrecoverable past has come to comprise what modern lyric poetry is. Hamlet's speech with Yorick's skull⁸⁰ has resonated so powerfully for so long, in part because it is an improvised Petrarchan love poem to the decaying cranium of a dead clown, tossed up from the grave by a living clown. The speech not only parodies Petrarchan love verse, it parodies “anti-Petrarchan” parodies of that verse, in *Memento mori* fashion holding a grinning skull up to those vain enough to believe they have put a dent in “this machine”⁸¹ called Petrarchism. In this way, Hamlet often seems to be engaged in “cultural philology,” as if, unable to embrace Horatio's straightforward brand of Stoicism, the Prince employs Petrarchism as a poetic means toward ends similar to, yet more expansive than, the more strictly defined philosophy of his closest friend. In the Graveyard Scene and elsewhere, Hamlet seems to experiment with applying the Petrarchan lyric mode to other forms of discourse, as if he senses in the Petrarchism a more vexed, complex, and less nostalgic Stoicism than Horatio's. Indeed, Hamlet's seeming embrace of Petrarchism's haunting emptiness, its atmosphere of existential stalemate between Christian and pagan ideologies, points directly to the Renaissance-Human-ending, anti-Petrarchan poetry of Jonathan Swift, which James Noggle has described as taking part in a tradition of the “skeptical

⁸⁰ I will discuss this moment further in Chapter Five.

⁸¹ II.ii.124.

sublime.”⁸² In this context, Swift’s dogged, unquestioning faith in God mirrors Petrarch’s analogous faith in erotic love—and Hamlet, believing in neither, illumines how his textual father and son are to be perceived. I will return to the issue of addressing skulls in a Petrarchan manner in the final chapter of this study.

We perhaps take for granted that most if not all of Petrarch’s work sifts the present for evidence of its origin; this move is the key link between his scholarly writing and his poetry. The *Canzoniere* not only takes part in that intellectual mission, but its focus on interpersonal relationships expands Petrarch’s mission of cultural recovery in order to include original sites surpassing the purview of the ancient texts he was rediscovering. Indeed, Petrarch’s poems often invite their readers to imagine the body as a recovered text, a palimpsest of encoded meanings, looking ever backward, in the manner of the *David*. The *Canzoniere* constitutes an *etcetera* in Petrarch’s oeuvre; it is a repository of the infinite that he seems to have perceived radiating within texts, ruins, mountains, bodies. Rather than Petrarch’s lyrics being a slightly embarrassing anomaly in an otherwise serious body of work, the far-grasping *Canzoniere* contextualizes Petrarch’s other, more confined efforts, like a “new moon,/with the old moon in her arms.”⁸³

⁸² I refer to James Noggle’s *The Skeptical Sublime*.

⁸³ “The Ballad of Sir Patrick Spens.”

In the recently published *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment*, Laurie Maguire’s chapter takes up “the case of *etcetera*” as her topic.⁸⁴ Chiefly focused on typography, Maguire briefly mentions the &c. of Q2 Hamlet’s letter-poem, in order to further a point about &c.’s early seventeenth-century play-quarto use to indicate an interruption. Especially in the context of a fascinating chapter that demonstrates how the *etcetera* “is the ghost character of early modern writing, the site of perpetual exchange between the potential and the actual in knowledge,”⁸⁵ finding that Maguire perceives only the Queen’s interruption in the letter-poem’s &c. is a disappointment. But, as is often the case with richly successful texts, my disappointment blames Maguire for her success. Early in the chapter she explains that the early modern *etcetera*—now used merely for abbreviation⁸⁶—embodies

omission: a material mark for things that cannot be said, or have been said previously but are now omitted or censored, or are interrupted or uncompleted . . . silence or the form of breaking-off known rhetorically as aposiopesis . . . it can embody and direct stage action, inviting continuation of dialogue or listed props . . . it . . . directs the eye to a vacancy . . . its typographical cousins are ellipsis and the dash, features that call attention to what is not there. ‘Etcetera’ plays with possibility, exploits its status as a margin or boundary . . . offers and denies completion simultaneously.⁸⁷

This passage is as edifying as it is rhetorically familiar; Maguire seems to have found in the *etcetera* the typographical embodiment of an early modern quality, generally

⁸⁴ Laurie Maguire, “Typographical Embodiment: the case of *etcetera*,” *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, Race*, ed. by Valerie Traub, pp. 527-548.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 548.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 528.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

considered to be most completely expressed in the Shakespeare corpus, of an infinite potential located between places, bodies, or states of being, which instructors of undergraduate English courses often use terms like *liminal* and *negative capability* to describe. This makes the *etcetera* the perfect means of expressing the early modern double-move, where the classification-focused classical world⁸⁸ is at once constituted and denied. The *etcetera* maintains a distinction between two entities or modes, as it collapses them. This, in turn, suggests an erotic motion at the heart of the early modern gesture, as if Petrarch's poetics crystallize a then-prevalent desire not just to read about the past, and not just to touch it, but also to join with it in the most absolutely thorough way.⁸⁹ There is as little risk in registering this desire as there is in writing a poem about wanting to hold a dead woman in your arms, as do many of the *Canzoniere*. And yet everything is at stake in these assertions, for they propose a current reality bereft of value, impoverished of meaning. Seen from this perspective, the *etcetera* becomes a kind of machine generating nothingness.

“‘Etcetera’ . . . offers and denies completion simultaneously,” Maguire writes suggestively. To demonstrate the early modern tendency to use *etcetera* to embody bawdy omissions, she cites Mercutio in Q1 *Romeo and Juliet*: “. . . Ah Romeo, that she were, ah that she were/An open *Et caetera*, thou a poprin Peare.” Mercutio's use of

⁸⁸ I am thinking of Aristotle's process.

⁸⁹ On p. 41 of *Echoes of Desire*, Dubrow writes: “[Laura's] very body is evoked through absence and emptiness, through a footprint rather than a foot.” This is emblematic of Petrarch's scholarly and creative work, whose impossible “dragging to light” missions determine that they pursue unstable evidence through shifting ontological means (the footprint as ontological proof of phenomenological foot; emotion as ontological proof of phenomenological footprint; poem as phenomenological proof of ontological emotion; dissertation as phenomenological proof of ontological poem).

etcetera runs counter to our contemporary employment of the term, chiefly in the former's indication not of phallic excess—a symbol hanging off the end of a list, suggesting the list's continuation—but of yonic capacity. Maguire's use of Mercutio is relevant to the present study in several ways; he is a “ghost character” informing the dramatic character of Hamlet and, through the Prince, the moral/literary character of Swift.⁹⁰ Mercutio is himself an *etcetera* in the conventionally Petrarchan *Romeo and Juliet*, a coarse spot on an otherwise smooth surface, a satiric and lyric “deep mystery” at the heart of a text whose other characters, though often richly complex, are not mysterious.

When, in his *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, William Hazlitt calls Romeo “Hamlet in love,” he intuits yet does not articulate the concept of Hamlet's Petrarchism. Similarly, Maguire's chapter is full of witty little Hamlet references (including her chapter's concluding phrase: “the rest is &.”), though she only explicitly discusses the Prince's play once, and does not do much with that discussion. At the outset of his discussion of Petrarch, Passannante writes that “the devastation of the plague was perhaps the ultimate test of the idea that cultivated devotion to the literature of the ancients was the best ‘remedy’ to *the slings and arrows of fortune*”⁹¹ Many close readers of early modern literature seem to have absorbed *Hamlet's* embedded Petrarchan &c.; the conventional act of calling Petrarch the “Father of the Renaissance” and *Hamlet* the textual apex of that period implies the argument that this study makes explicit.

⁹⁰ On p. 546, Maguire writes, “Swift uses ‘etcetera’ with . . . parodic effect when he describes the genealogy of critics in *The Tale of a Tub*: . . . ‘Perrault, and Dennis, who begat *Etcætera the Younger*.’”

⁹¹ Gerard Passannante, *The Lucretian Renaissance*, p. 18.

If Hamlet is a kind of gnostic, secular Jesus, whose actions and sayings seem somehow to have been transmitted to us via his disciple Horatio's Prince-mandated recollections, Mercutio is John the Baptist, a forerunning pioneer of Petrarchism's darker implications—for no "one" is harder on the Petrarchan mode than the speaker of the *Canzoniere*, who in Poem 1 describes his ensuing 365 poems as evidence of "youthful error . . . vain hopes and vain sorrow . . . for which often I am ashamed . . ." This is the cry of a victim of his own success; early modern English anti-Petrarchans, when they make fun of Petrarch's poetry, are merely piling on, and Shakespeare's corpus demonstrates a resistance to doing anything merely. Mercutio and Hamlet—and, later, Swift—exemplify a quest to pile on into infinity/sublimity, to surpass with satirical debasement an initially earnest and noble sentiment, to respond to

Now pile your dust upon the quick and dead
Till of this flat a mountain you have made,
To o'ertop old Pelion or the skyish head
Of blue Olympus.⁹²

with

And if thou prate of mountains let them throw
Millions of acres on us, till our ground,
Singeing his pate against the burning zone,
Make Ossa like a wart! Nay, an thou'lt mouth,
I'll rant as well as thou.⁹³

In this call-and-response, push-and-pull motion, we witness not only a sketch of the Renaissance attitude toward the classical past, but also of a satirical mode that will rise to prominence in cultural prestige at the last flash of the Human.

⁹² *Hamlet* V.i.241-244. (Laerte's lines.)

⁹³ *Hamlet* V.i.270-274. (Hamlet's lines.)

Maguire's one-dimensional, interruption-focused reading of the letter-poem's &c. especially surprises in the context of a chapter that addresses &c.'s bawdy manifestations. After all, the &c., and the Queen's interruption, occur directly after Polonius utters the word *bosom*. I have mentioned George Steevens' gloss regarding women's "pocket in the fore part of their stays;" more recently, Alan Stewart reiterates this reading of *bosom*, writing that, "The bosom was, of course, the preferred location for a love-letter, next to the heart."⁹⁴ *Bosom*'s letter-poem-context status as cultural shorthand perhaps explains its occurrence in *Hamlet* II.ii being under-read by scholars, even though Furness cites Hiram Corson as saying, "There is a studied oddness in the letter, as is shown by the superscription."⁹⁵

Indeed, we must turn from "bosom" to "&c." in order to normalize the letter-poem's odd subscription. Anyone who has read an eighteenth-century epistolary novel is familiar with &c.'s then-still-current use as an abbreviation in a salutary list of titles. Maguire cites "Richard Barnfield's *Cynthia* (1595) [which] begins with the heading 'To the Right Honorable, and most noble-minded Lord, William Stanley, Earle of Darby, &c.'"⁹⁶ But were *Hamlet*'s auditors expected to consider "bosom" as a title? That would mean that *Hamlet* employs the intimate Petrarchan mode to satirize not only the stagey yet lazy practice of abbreviating socially significant titles, but that the letter-poem sends up the idea of having titles at all. Is not this precisely the kind of humor in which young

⁹⁴ Alan Stewart, *Shakespeare's Letters*, p. 251.

⁹⁵ Horace Howard Furness, *The New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare, Vol. III: Hamlet, Vol. I*, p. 139.

⁹⁶ Laurie Maguire, "Typographical Embodiment: the case of *etcetera*," *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, Race*, ed. by Valerie Traub, p. 534.

lovers engage? There is a whiff of *Romeo and Juliet* here—lovers from important families, separated by those families, making fun of those families’ pretensions.

All of this avoids, as indeed most scholarship seems to avoid, the obvious: the letter-poem is meant *to be funny*. Polonius’ “brevity is the soul of wit” speech, which leads up to his reading of the letter-poem, cues the play’s auditors that we have entered a comic portion of the drama. Scholars apparently agree that the three primary texts of *Hamlet* should be reconciled so that the Queen interrupts Polonius at the word “breast,” yet no one seems to be willing to hear the comedic gulp in the Queen’s interruption. The letter-poem’s &c. operates as an *interruption* in order to generate an *abbreviation* of a *bawdy* implication, thereby rounding Maguire’s bases and heading for the home plate of infinity. In other words, the Queen interrupts Polonius at the word “breast” because it seems that the foolish toady is about to list the Ophelian body parts where Hamlet intends his thoughts and feelings to be lodged. In this way, the letter-poem’s &c. recalls Q1 Mercutio’s *Et caetera*.

Humor is the English Renaissance poets’ chief contribution to Petrarchism, a kind of cultural *etcetera*. Petrarch’s poems are bitter and sweet and a million combino-gradations therein, but they are not funny. The West seems always to have mocked the most successful of its cultural products, in a passive-aggressive manner that says, “I cannot beat you at your game, nor can I join you, so I will make light of that game.” Of course, the English are not alone in this endeavor—Pietro Aretino’s early sixteenth-century, perverse Petrarchisms deserve consideration as a link in the chain leading from Petrarch to Swift. Still, a distinction should be made between milking the Petrarchan mode for laughs—which Shakespeare does time and again in his plays, almost always via

a would-be poet-character's earnest *failure* to write a successful Petrarchan poem—and the conventional notion of anti-Petrarchism, in which late-coming poets amuse by *successfully* appropriating (then-current notions of) Petrarchan convention.

As Dubrow notes, the Petrarchan mode is “built on a bedrock of writing about failure.”⁹⁷ The mode is preemptively perverse in ways that we have long taken for granted, and for which I suspect English Renaissance anti-Petrarchans subconsciously, actually mocked it. The *Canzoniere* everywhere engages life by rejecting it, valorizing a woman's body in a proto-metaphysical manner that suggests, if not the impossibility of ever really knowing this (or any?) woman's body, a profound ambivalence to pursuing this knowledge. Perhaps what really inspired English Renaissance anti-Petrarchans was an insistence on reading (or not reading) the *Canzoniere* as poems about love, rather than as poems that use love as a key to unlock vaster vistas of thought. In turn, perhaps this is what makes most anti-Petrarchan poems fall so flat today, when readers of Petrarch's poems recognize a dizzying multiplicity of monumental themes and preoccupations.

The *Canzoniere*, Dubrow writes, “includes many characteristics . . . labeled anti-Petrarchan, such as a renunciation of love . . .”⁹⁸ This casts William Hazlitt's observation that “Romeo is Hamlet in love” in a more nuanced light, suggesting that between the creation of these two male protagonist-lovers⁹⁹ Shakespeare had a revelation

⁹⁷ Heather Dubrow, *Echoes of Desire*, p. 25. See also Thomas M. Greene's *The Light in Troy* for an extended discussion of Petrarch's pervasive, late-coming sense of “inferiority,” which he bequeaths to his poetic heirs.

⁹⁸ Heather Dubrow, *Echoes of Desire*, p. 4.

⁹⁹ I refer to Q2 Hamlet; the Q1 iteration of the Prince more or less copies Romeo, thereby suggesting a reappraisal of Hazlitt's sources.

about the profound essence of Petrarchism and sought to represent it. Indeed, considering Hazlitt's enigmatic observation in this way suggests that removing erotic love from Hamlet's emotional profile allows him more direct access to this Petrarchan essence, that by withdrawing the Petrarchan key of love, Shakespeare forces his latter Petrarchan-comedic character to fling himself at the gates of profundity in a more unmediated way.

Romeo and Hamlet both begin their respective plays as Petrarchan speakers in a kind of New Comedy, the ancient Greek genre in which an overbearing father (*senex iratus*) forbids his young daughter from indulging her erotic passion. Early modern English playgoers would have recognized this trope immediately and would have expected soon to witness the overbearing fathers' respective comeuppances, and the young woman's erotic triumph at the altar. Shakespeare manipulates these generic expectations to tragic effect in both plays, allowing the Petrarchan mode to contaminate the purity of the New Comedy form, constituting a kind of new, Petrarchan-theatre genre in the process, in which love is always doomed.

It is commonly acknowledged that the sense of his own failure consumes Hamlet for much of his play. Scholars speculate on the nature of this failure, mostly in the context of discussing Hamlet's Delay. Yet for all the existential vagueness of Hamlet's failure, we have in the II.ii letter-poem phenomenological evidence of one. Hamlet, like Orlando, is a bad Petrarchan poet. He cannot even scan correctly, rendering Petrarchan tropes in a Skeltonic trimeter I read as sly send-up of John Skelton's own Petrarchan pretensions.¹⁰⁰ Thus Hamlet fails in the manner familiar to auditors of Shakespeare's

¹⁰⁰ Skelton was tutor and apparently "poet laureate" to Henry VIII, at a time when the first English Petrarchan poets—Surrey and Wyatt—were prominent. Skelton,

comedies. By removing erotic love from the Prince's list of options, however, Shakespeare forces the Prince to forgo explicitly Petrarchan activity (writing bad Petrarchan poems), in order to "fail better"¹⁰¹ in more profound ways. In other words, removing Hamlet from the realm of erotic love allows him to approach the world in a perversely Petrarchan, always failed manner, without the buffer of Petrarchan poetic form. Shakespeare thus frees the Prince to experience the utter isolation of the Human condition with no filter. Hamlet's Delay, then, can be understood as the Prince's exploration of Petrarchan lyric substance, liberated from Petrarchan lyric form. When he re-enters the world, via the Graveyard, Hamlet's successes begin and thus his Petrarchan experiments in infinite, metaphysical failure end.

remembered today chiefly for his trimetric, satiric, light verse, wrote the Petrarchan-titled poem *Garlande of Laurell*, which begins, appropriately, by confronting the maternal:

By saint Mary, my lady,
Your mammy and your daddy
Brought forth a goodly baby!

My maiden Isabel,
Reflaring rosabel,
The flagrant camomel;

The ruddy rosary,
The sovereign rosemary,
The pretty strawberry . . .

Star of the morning gray,
The blossom on the spray,
The freshest flower of May . . .

As satire haunts Skelton's (apparently) non-satiric poem, an anxiously late-coming satiric impulse haunts every stage of English Petrarchism.

¹⁰¹ I take this phrase from Samuel Beckett's *Worstward Ho*.

The Petrarchan Machine

It is worth contrasting Hamlet's Petrarchism to the most famous anti-Petrarchan poem of all, also written by Shakespeare—Sonnet 130—even if it involves admitting that this poem is unique among anti-Petrarchan efforts:

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

The poem is a formal and thematic success, appropriating Petrarchan conventions in order to subvert them, but if we are likely to laugh it is only when the speaker refers to his mistress' hairs as "wires." Indeed, "wires" recalls Hamlet's letter-poem's mention of the "machine" of . . . what? The Prince's body? The Petrarchan mode? "Wires"¹⁰² suggests that there may be no difference in a modern lyric poem form itself obsessed with forms of physical presence, with parts of bodies. When the Prince says he is "ill at these numbers," he seems to say that he is eager to rid himself of this "machine," that his letter-poem registers a goodbye to formulaic failure, in favor of larger, more substantive explorations of the universe.

¹⁰² *The Oxford English Dictionary of Etymology* notes that since old English times, *wire* has meant, "metal in the form of a slender rod."

But Sonnet 130 stands alone among anti-Petrarchan poems in its thorough success at actually beating Petrarch at his game in one important, aesthetic respect: the object of the sonnet is apparently black. Hence the poem is not satirical in nature; it perversely applies Petrarchan conventions to a poetic object undreamed of in Petrarch's philosophies. In fact, repeated readings of Sonnet 130 suggests that the speaker has chosen to love his mistress in order to reject inescapable Petrarchan notions of erotic beauty, that the "machine" has generated clones all around the speaker, all of which demand that poems be written about them. The speaker of Sonnet 130 wishes death upon the Petrarchan way of seeing the world, as opposed to wishing to make fun of the Petrarchan perspective in a manner that ultimately serves to constitute it, as other anti-Petrarchan poets do. Sonnet 130, by addressing a Black Laura, engages the post-Human in an explicit way at which that the speaker of the *Canzoniere* and even Hamlet only hint. In this way, the *Sonnets*, as a conceptual whole, are more anti-Petrarchan than any one of its poems. Indeed, Shakespeare's speaker's urban promiscuity starkly contrasts the miserably self-exiled chastity of the Petrarchan speaker—where requital of love and/or sexual consummation is obviated by being physically alone.¹⁰³ The *Sonnets* are bound to the *Canzoniere* less by specific rejections and embrasures of generic convention than they are by engagement with a Petrarchan lyric substance whose vexed nature ultimately renders descriptors such as "anti-Petrarchan" insufficient, thin.

¹⁰³ On p. 13 of *Anger's Privilege*, Gordon Braden describes something like Petrarch's speaker's self-inflected insolation: "It is as though the . . . thymos, deprived of its exterior object, turns inward, against itself." This idea also works as a key in Hamlet's post-Ophelia lock.

Dubrow includes Sonnet 130 in a general allusion to anti-Petrarchan satire.¹⁰⁴ I note this in order to call attention to what seems to be a widespread sense that in the *Sonnets* Shakespeare is a satirist, often making snide essayistic arguments in meter. Few scholars seem to consider Shakespeare as a satirist, and yet we feel that many of the *Sonnets* are satirical. Dubrow also relates Sonnet 130 to a more general aesthetic/theme of blackness pervasive in the *Sonnets*, but she does not connect the *Sonnets*' blackness motif to the blond hair/blue-eyed Laura aesthetic Dubrow elsewhere discusses. Shakespeare's satire of Petrarchism is sly, but not to the extent that we cannot recognize the specter of a Black Laura still rising from the *Sonnets*. Indeed, when considered in concert with Swift's overarching anti-Petrarchism, generative of "those stories still current among our country people of Swift sending his servant out to fetch a woman, and dismissing that servant when he woke to find a black woman by his side"¹⁰⁵—Black Laura deserves further study.

While discussing the difference between narrative and lyric time, Alexander Shurbanov's idea that "a poem does not describe an event; it tries to be it,"¹⁰⁶ serves not only as an explanation for why *Hamlet* fails as a play yet succeeds as a poem, and not only points toward understanding how *Hamlet* is Petrarchan, but it also helps to contrast an essential aspect of the Petrarchan mode missing from Sonnet 130 (and many, if not most, of the other *Sonnets*): Sonnet 130 is *controlled* to the point that its emotional effect resembles that of narrative or essayistic prose. The embrace of that which threatens the

¹⁰⁴ Heather Dubrow, *Echoes of Desire*, p. 134.

¹⁰⁵ W.B. Yeats, *Wheels and Butterflies*, p. 24.

¹⁰⁶ Alexander Shurbanov, *Shakespeare's Lyricized Drama*, p. 21.

poetic speaker—ultimately, his own mortality—also explains how the Petrarchan lyric mode expresses Senecan Stoicism. Moreover, Shurbanov’s line suggests an explanation for the entire animating impulse of the Renaissance: dissatisfied with mere study of the past, late-coming early moderns try *to be* that past. This poetic leap, in turn, helps to explain why and how Petrarch the poet “fathers” the Renaissance. He could not have got it going via his scholarship alone.

Sonnet 130 violates a cardinal rule of Petrarchism by actually being more concerned with its stated object than with the speaker’s inner self. Moreover, it, as do many of the *Sonnets*, begins with a thesis statement and then delivers a convincing, supporting argument. The *Sonnets* are so consistently controlled in this way that it makes one wonder what T.S. Eliot means by his assertion that they, like Hamlet, are “full of some stuff the writer could not drag to light.” Eliot, like Lewis, Hazlitt, and Shurbanov, seems to want to say that Hamlet is Petrarchan but he does not dare. Contrast Poem 130’s controlled specificity with another instance of Shakespeare’s use of blackness in order to plum existentially inward depths:

Gertrude: Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted color off,
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.
Do not forever with thy veiled lids
Seek for thy noble father in the dust.
Thou know’st ‘tis common. All that lives must die,
Passing through nature to eternity.

Hamlet: Ay, madam, it is common.

Gertrude: If it be,
Why seems it so particular with thee?

Hamlet: “Seems,” madam? Nay, it is. I know not “seems.”
‘Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
Nor customary suits of solemn black,
Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,

No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
Nor the dejected 'havior of the visage,
Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,
That can denote me truly. These indeed "seem,"
For they are actions that a man might play.
But I have that within which passeth show,
These but the trappings and the suits of woe.¹⁰⁷

With this speech, we straddle the slippage between the revealed self and the hidden self, which I discussed in the Introduction. Indeed, much of the speech seems to amount to a kind of précis of an early modern courtesy book on how to grieve, uttered in order to subvert those manners, to add to them an infinite *etcetera*. Especially when the Prince calls grieving behavior "actions that a man might play," he suggests a critique of the Hu/man, in favor of a genderless inwardness.

But Hamlet is not specific about what he means; he is not in control of his point; he marshals language not to explain but to explore. This distinction will serve as well as any as a description of the difference between discourse and antidiscourse; to look to *Hamlet* for explanations/discourse is to be consistently frustrated. For one thing, Hamlet's speech contains barely any action for a man to play—the Prince's clothes, body language, and facial expression denote not action so much as the outward manifestation of an inward state of being, as if Hamlet wore black inside his body, too. This carries with it an anatomical-theater air: Hamlet wears his insides outwardly, as if he were flayed. The University of Bologna's famous, early, innovative, still-extant anatomical theater—*Momentos mori* carved into every nook and cranny—came into prominence during Petrarch's tenure there as a self-described prodigal and foppish law student. Anatomical theaters dramatized not only the fragmentation of the body but also the act of

¹⁰⁷ I.ii.68-86.

delving inward. Indeed, one can easily imagine how these theaters could be seen to satirize both the practice of fetishizing body parts and considering that there exists a distinct “inside” into which to lyrico-poetically peer. Perhaps accordingly, these theaters were still attracting paying, night-time audiences across Europe when Jonathan Swift wrote in *A Tale of a Tub* that, “Last Week I saw a Woman flay’d, and you will hardly believe, how it altered her Person for the worse.”¹⁰⁸ This sentence, written by a very young Swift, is of a piece with his mature excremental and Stella poems. This is perhaps Swift’s most Hamletian/anti-Petrarchan quality; though Hamlet is excruciatingly specific in his disgust with the female body, this trait/tendency does not contradict the Prince’s global disgust for the physical realm, which includes his own form, towards which he gestures here.

Because Hamlet makes this speech in a space between the composition of his letter-poem and the commencement of his Delay, we can determine that he is already engaged in intense rumination on the concept of action/acting and its relation to being—a relation the Prince will find more vital in a moment, when the ghost of his dead father instructs him to kill his uncle the king, as soon as possible. In this way, *Hamlet* consistently engages in a kind of ontology of acting, searching for acting’s evidence in passive states of being; the play registers this ontological examination via lyric language, always bound up in a paradox of acting and being.

His speech is pure antidiscourse, levied in opposition to “all forms, moods, shapes,” infused with a vast impatience with restraint. Here, the restraint from which Hamlet seeks to free himself is that of the properly grieving Human—even though the

¹⁰⁸ Jonathan Swift, *The Essential Writings of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Claude Rawson and Ian Higgins, p. 75.

Court complains that he indulges this recommended behavior in excess, to an inappropriate and therefore inhuman degree.¹⁰⁹ In this way, Hamlet satirizes the recommended Human code for expressing grief. The Prince is thereby a satirist from the first moment that we see him, which is after he has composed and delivered his comically failed letter-poem to Ophelia. The Prince has moved on as a poet, from trying to be an erotic mode/machine, into trying to be a death he grieves. Both modes of lyric-hood seem to be and seem to have been indulged primarily for their philosophical efficacy—the evidence for this is the absence of a ring on Ophelia’s finger, the absence of a fetus in her womb, and the absence of vengeful action during Hamlet’s Delay. Hamlet, like Petrarch’s speaker, desires sex as much as the next vexed guy, but if each of these textual entities were forced to choose what to rescue from a burning world, it would be the ideas desire inspires, not the consummation of those desires. We can appropriate Laurie Maguire in order to describes this Hamletio-Petrarchan priority as “a vacancy . . . possibility [that] . . . offers and denies completion simultaneously.” This brings us near an almost Heideggerian emphasis on absolute poetic ambiguity, which, when contrasted with the dramatic ambiguity for which Shakespeare’s mature plays are justifiably praised, helps us to better appreciate why *Hamlet* fails from the T.S. Eliot perspective that values dramatic lucidity.

A fascinating paradox of this formulation is that the *Sonnets* contain very little poetic ambiguity. We have come to consider the *Sonnets* as mysterious largely in

¹⁰⁹ From the fact that the ancient and early modern West determined humanity according to accepted/expected Human behavior, we can deduce their determination to be similar to our contemporary notions of the sane or normal. Indeed, given the stigma that attends those our moment deems insane or abnormal, this seems to be a distinction with little if any difference.

biographical terms: Who are they about? Why did Shakespeare write them? When the poems themselves bewilder, it is usually due to their syntactic/grammatical qualities—see Sonnet 20, for example. Surely, we are not expected to reduce consideration of Shakespeare's mighty *Sonnets* to the parlor game of wondering whether or not the poet or the speaker was or is homosexual—this is more, mere biography. The *Sonnets* are formal tours de force, they are biographical teases, but they are not poetically ambiguous. That seems to be their point—and to point toward the inside-out poetic prose/prosaic poetry of satirist Swift, whose work wears its inwardness on the surface and vice versa, like an anatomical dissection run amok.

Hamlet accomplishes his existentially poetic evolution—in which he becomes the poem he previously failed to write—via transference of affection from Ophelia to his father. This move mirrors that of the speaker of the *Canzoniere*, who shifts from addressing a living to a dead Laura as Petrarch's cycle proceeds. Faithful devotion to a dead being raises the stakes on almost every Petrarchan concern: the possibility of present absence, the impossibility of truly present presence, an almost carnal desire to know the vanished past, a Christian veneration of dead flesh somehow also living. Can a dead beloved be said to be? Is decomposition an action? Is the beloved more or less Human in death? Does the obsolescence of the troubling &c. of the beloved female body remove that body's threat to the moral dimensions of the Human? Petrarch's speaker is safe, after Laura's death, to conflate her with the divine—a transfigurational, even dehumanizing fantasy analogous to Hamlet's and to Swift's speakers' respective, satiric misogynies.

However, neither epideictic conflation nor satiric attack resolve these poetic subjects' anxieties over the status of their objects' humanity—and what their objects' status says about the subjects' own Human status, acquired in a strange mix of passivity and action at birth. To put the problem another way: is antidiscourse Human? Can one merely *be* Human, sans action? Writerly antidiscourse would seem the most appropriate possible means of exploring this question, because it straddles the line between being and doing. Moreover, writerly antidiscourse about emotion—and not just emotion, but its absence (“unrequited love”)—is especially suited to wondering not what it means to exist but, rather, if existence is a Human quality. Since neither the personal nor cultural past will ever requite one's love, no matter how hard one thinks, studies, and writes, what is the reflective life worth? Is there anything a lover of that past can do to mitigate his inevitable sense of personal and cultural isolation?

This is the very Petrarchan state of mind Hamlet registers in his first speech. When her son tells Gertrude that he has “that within which passeth show,” he signals to his royal, dramatic, and literary audience that this “that” is vital to his character and to his play. The Prince does not specify *what* he has “within,” and his allusion occurs so early in the play we have every right to expect that the revelation and explication of what “that” is will occur at some late, climactic moment, generating meaning and dramatic satisfaction. That this revelation/explication never arrives not only makes a compelling case for *Hamlet*'s status as lyric poem rather than play, but it also undermines traditional readings of this line, such as Gordon Braden's, who, though he calls *Hamlet* “the . . . troubled drama of what is not being said,”¹¹⁰ reads a “belligerent authenticity”¹¹¹ in the

¹¹⁰ Gordon Braden, *Anger's Privilege*, p. 223.

Prince's correction of his mother. Hamlet's inner grief is so "real," in other words, it cannot be revealed or explicated.

It is easy to see why Braden and Shakespeare instructors from time immemorial have read this moment that way—Claudius, Gertrude, and Hamlet are discussing the Prince's behavior, which the King and Queen assume results from "obstinate condolment."¹¹² When Hamlet describes "shapes of grief," he does so in the context of the regents' assumptions, but he keeps a distance, referring to "the fruitful river in the eye,/the dejected 'havior of the visage . . . actions a man might play . . . the trappings and the suits of woe." The "fruitful river" runs not through "my" eye in Hamlet's telling; it is an action "a man might play." Indeed, to tell Claudius and Gertrude that Hamlet is *truly* grieved inside makes no sense, since the point of the Prince's "I know not seems" speech is to tell the King and Queen they have no idea what they are talking about—which is that Hamlet feels too much grief.

The two verbs—*have* and *passeth*—suggest a simultaneous state of near-passive being (*have*) and action (*passeth*). This denotes not the "bloody" instincts of "Senecan revenge" but, rather, the "distant inwardness"¹¹³ of Senecan Stoicism—the Prince's speech describes what he has so far "within" himself that no one can see it. It is also full of the Stoic's paradox of actively accepting one's already extant situation. This seems to

¹¹¹ Gordon Braden, *Anger's Privilege*, p. 221.

¹¹² I.ii.93.

¹¹³ Gordon Braden, *Anger's Privilege*, p. 3.

me a fair definition what we have come to think of as modern lyric poetry—a performative withdrawal, slightly self-pitying, death-obsessed, lonely.¹¹⁴

Hence we find ourselves, at the outset of the play, in a Stoical bind. The royal court wants Hamlet to feel less, for his own good as much as theirs, and he invokes the “within” in order to suggest that they have no more access to his “authentic” feelings than he does. When Hamlet refers to his “shapes of grief,” it is not to create a spectrum of grief authenticity, on which clothes and crying fall on the weaker side—it is to say the exterior and the interior are disconnected, in much the same way that Epicureanism and Stoicism are disconnected—much in the same manner that Catholicism and Protestantism are split between the outer and inner, which rehearses what Braden deems a key difference between Greek and Roman tragedy (the former emphasizes community; the latter emphasizes the individual). It is to say that “that within . . . passeth show” from the Prince himself; this statement gives Hamlet little choice but to seek out “that within,” and in this way the Prince is engaged in the same search everyone else in the play is: the source of Hamlet’s “madness,” what T.S. Eliot says Shakespeare “cannot drag to light.” That madness is Petrarchism, Humanism, and the Renaissance—the search for origins themselves.

Authenticity is distinct from origins, and from what one has “within.” Petrarch expresses this idea when he writes in *Rerum familiarium libri* 22.2.13 of certain classical texts that

I have thoroughly absorbed these writings, implanting them not only in memory but in my morrow, and they have so become one with my mind

¹¹⁴ As James Ker notes in his *The Deaths of Seneca*, the ancient Roman philosopher-dramatist performed his own Stoical death in largely this manner. The stage came before the world.

that were I never to read them for the remainder of my life, they would cling to me, having taken root in the innermost recesses of my mind.¹¹⁵

An intense act of original ingestion hereby creates an inner reality that now operates independently of the speaker's will. Petrarch does not say he remembers having ingested these texts; he describes their present reality as a part of his inmost being. In his prose, Petrarch seems able to identify "that which within," rather like Hamlet seems to have specific texts in mind when he volunteers to ". . . wipe away all trivial fond records,/All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past/That youth and observation copied there." Indeed, seeing Hamlet's unbidden vow from this existentially permanent point of view suggests that by erasing "that within," the Prince finds another way to express his desire to die, *to be* one with his father, currently ascendant object of the Dane's philosophico-affection.

This reading of Hamlet's vow, in turn, points to a deeper, infinitely more ambiguous "that"—a profound *etcetera* brooding over the boundary between the culturally and personally knowable—for which lyric Petrarchism is designed. This is one way the *Canzoniere* relates to Petrarch's scholarship: it carries his backwards glance into regions resistant to scholarly research. Petrarch's poems—and, by extension, modern lyrics—exist not in spite of knowledge but in a simultaneous state of being both beyond and within accessible knowledge, rather like a tourist wandering through the ruins of the Roman Forum must reconcile what she sees with what she imagines, and with the

¹¹⁵ Trans by Aldo S. Bernardo, 3:212-213; I take this quotation from the footnote on p. 23 of Passannante's *The Lucretian Renaissance*.

nagging, inescapable awareness that her death is ever more imminent.¹¹⁶ Petrarchism hence is the only tool at Hamlet’s disposal for digging toward “that which passeth show.” T.S. Eliot (beautifully) misses the point when he complains that “that” cannot be dragged to light—it is the digging toward “that” which generates the Petrarchan result. In this way, the discipline of archaeology itself is Petrarchan in nature, in so far as it fails to exhume artifacts in a way that can still be deemed successful: “We know that what we search for is not here in any form that we can recognize, but was not the dig a thing of shame and beauty? Did we not learn so much from our continued failure that we have no choice but to count the searching a success?” This Petrarchan cast of mind overlaps with the cathartic benefits of tragedy in a way that Shakespeare seems to respond to via *Hamlet*.

Petrarch has his own “black” lyric in Poem 268:

What shall I do? . . . It is surely time to die, and I have delayed more than I would wish . . .
 Love, you feel how great is the bitter heavy loss . . . I know that you are pained by my grief—
 or rather ours, for we have wrecked our ship on the same rock and in the same instant the sun is darkened for us both . . .
 What skill could ever match in words my sorrowful state? . . .
 I . . . love neither mortal life nor myself . . .
 Remembering that my hope is dead . . . only what Love says to me holds me back from cutting the knot . . .
 Flee the clear sky and greenery, do not approach where there is laughter and singing, my song, no, but where there is weeping; it is not fitting for you to be among cheerful people, disconsolate widow in black garments.

Petrarch’s speaker here provides an explicit link between himself and Hamlet—he calls his song a “disconsolate widow in black garments.” I will address the Prince’s widow

¹¹⁶ In his *The Worlds of Petrarch*, Giuseppe Mazzotta notes Petrarchism’s constant movement from history to death.

qualities in my discussion of what Janet Adelman calls Hamlet's "confrontation with the maternal," but Petrarch's poem bursts with Hamletian aspects. Starting from the beginning of the passage, there is panicked existential confusion, suicidal despair at the delay to commit suicide, the natural world made apocalyptic by the speaker's personal hopelessness, the complaining (and convenient) identification of one last reason not to commit suicide, and, finally, the speaker's admonition to himself to withdraw from the world and its "cheerful" denizens.

Poem 268 reinforces the sense that the English anti-Petrarchans do not seem to have been thoroughly familiar with the source of their mockery, for the poem suggests many (mistakenly?) necrophilic, comic possibilities. Hamlet gestures toward these possibilities in his absurd, almost slapstick farewell to the Petrarchan mode in Ophelia's grave, which I have already quoted. Critics have long worried over the Prince's chilling, amoral moments—his decision not to kill Claudius because to do so while the king prays would send the regent to heaven and not to hell; Hamlet's dismissive attitude toward his killing of Polonius; the Prince's brutal treatment of Ophelia in the "Get thee to a nunnery" speech. Yet there can be no more emphatic proof of Hamlet's indifference to Ophelia than his ridiculously disrespectful moment in her grave. His speech has nothing to do with Ophelia; it lays the shallow narcissism of hyperbolic verbal demonstration bare. It registers a final disgust with the Petrarchan machine that the Prince has achieved in progressive stages, which this study's succeeding chapters seek to map. By so doing, I hope to trace less a progression of the Human than a *digestion*—from its creation, into its textual apex, and out of its textual terminus.

Chapter Two: Janus

I propose to figure the problems and ideas in this section of my study as the double-headed, double-faced Roman god Janus. Indeed, I invite the reader to imagine Petrarch *as* Janus—specifically, as “the two-faced image . . . familiar in everyday Roman life . . . over a long period of time . . . the oldest representation we know of Janus in . . . humanly form.”¹¹⁷ To say that this image registers a transition of the deity into “humanly form” is already to set into motion Janus’ connection to the Petrarchan mode, always redolent with its crafter’s designation as the “Father of Humanism.” *-Ly* and *-ism* highlight a chasm between biology and behavior, between phenomenological and ontological proof, between what is and what does. Invoking the Janus-image brings us quickly into the Hamletian dilemma of identity versus action.

Shakespeare’s play invests heavily in the practice and concept of acting, but it also engages in a kind of ontology of acting, searching for acting’s evidence in passive states of being—for example, Hamlet’s situation at the beginning of the play, and, after encountering the Ghost, Hamlet’s Delay. The play registers this ontological examination via lyric language, which is bound up in a paradox of acting and being. The lyric mode is designed to reconcile this tension incompletely, to generate a space where this tension can abide; the lyric mode in which Hamlet operates is that of Petrarch’s *Canzoniere*, distantly inward and stoical. *Hamlet* is a truly “Senecan” tragedy through this Petrarchan lyric lens.

The *Canzoniere* does not mention Janus; *Hamlet* does not mention Petrarch. But both works “move” in the manner that Hamlet exits Ophelia’s chamber, “. . . with his

¹¹⁷ Louise Adams Holland, *Janus and the Bridge*, p. 276.

head over his shoulder turned . . . [finding] his way without his eyes.”¹¹⁸ This Janusian tableau emblemizes the entire Renaissance period, whose focus on the past is erotic, characterized by “blind ardor,”¹¹⁹ fragmented/metonymic, absurd in the way that lyric poetry always is (all this work and beauty for nothing/everything). It is this Jano-Petrarchan lyric substance—more than formal prosody, more than geographical consideration—that makes Hamlet a Petrarchan poet.

Janus’ purpose and meaning—the vague and unsatisfying “time and transitions” is a guess—are largely unknown. Holland writes that, “By the Augustan Age he had already become a complex enigma;”¹²⁰ Louise Adams Holland and Lily Ross Taylor write that the god’s “real nature, as Ovid indicates, was an enigma to the Romans.”¹²¹ Taylor’s and Holland’s article places parts of the Fasti (Roman consular records) on the Forum’s Janus Geminus arch, in hopes of proving that Janus was “the god in charge of the consular records—indeed . . . a god of time, a Roman variant of the Greek Chronos.”¹²² This claim is helpful, if neither controversial nor earth-shattering; indeed, the Chronos connection is not convincing, given Janus’ apparently derivative status, which Holland goes on to emphasize nine years later in *Janus and the Bridge*. Of paramount importance to the Swiftian excremental terminus of this study, however, are

¹¹⁸ II.i.96-97.

¹¹⁹ Poem 366.

¹²⁰ Louise Adams Holland, *Janus and the Bridge*, p. 1.

¹²¹ Louise Adams Holland and Lily Ross Taylor, “Janus and the ‘Fasti,’” *Classical Philology*, Vol. XLVII, No. 3, July 1952, p. 139.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 137.

Taylor's and Holland's findings that an *ianus* "can properly be applied only to a gateway . . . which marks a water crossing" and that "Janus Geminus . . . apparently stood over the Forum brook, later walled in as Rome's major sewer, the Cloaca Maxima."¹²³ "Janus and the 'Fasti'," *Classical Philology*, Vol. XLVII, No. 3, July 1952

The Temple of Janus sat in the Forum Olitorium, where ancient Romans not only bought vegetables and herbs, but where they also selected and hired wet nurses, preferably of the Greek variety.¹²⁴ Therefore, the means of suckling (wet nurse) and of weaning (wormwood) could be bought in the same place. Because the ancients and early moderns believed that the essence of a nurse entered the soul of the suckling babe, hiring a Greek nurse must have involved a sense of—if not an outright desire for—communion with a fantasized past. The idea of the Renaissance emerges, here, already bound up with suckling and weaning; this scene at the Olitorium combines the material and the ontological to create a suspended confluence of ancient births and transitions, a "live" archaeological dig upon which the present was constructed. This confluence becomes even more complex in the early modern/Renaissance period, which learned from Petrarch to view the Olitorium as a ruined fragment, ontological evidence of a rich cultural past, a lost presence—in the positive sense of immanence, as well as in the negative sense of that which is neither past nor future.

Scholars generally take for granted that we have lost vital information about Janus' function(s)—but perhaps Janus has always been a kind of divine Western sphinx, presiding over the unknowable, a god who, like his devotees, did not pretend to fathom

¹²³ Louise Adams Holland and Lily Ross Taylor, "Janus and the 'Fasti,'" *Classical Philology*, Vol. XLVII, No. 3, July 1952, p. 139.

¹²⁴ Valerie Fildes, *Wet Nursing*, pp. 17-18.

the mysteries upon which he gazed. Maybe his function was to register a fundamental riddle at the center of existence, an essential unknowability at the heart of Western consciousness, an endlessly disquieting &. As such, one may think of Janus as a kind of ellipsis, an excess standing in for something vital and absent. This makes the god appropriate for discussions of the ancient Rome-obsessed Petrarch, whose work Giuseppe Mazzotta notes is characterized by a

simultaneous thought of history and death . . . Petrarch's lifelong . . . project to redefine the culture and language of his times and . . . his ironic, *negative consciousness* of the finiteness of existence [might seem to be in opposition] . . . But history and death . . . are not to be found at opposite ends of his thinking as merely two antithetical categories. Rather, they appear as *two interlocked questions* that infinitely repeat each other, as the double focus of an imaginary ellipsis around which the boundaries of Petrarch's poetry and thought are inexhaustibly drawn.¹²⁵

Constantly while reading Petrarch criticism, one comes across passages in which one could replace the name *Petrarch* with that of *Hamlet*, if the same sense did not pervade the *Canzoniere*—if it did not so frequently seem that Hamlet could speak Petrarch's poems as soliloquies—this study would not exist. The above passage is no exception, but its Hamletian qualities are also Janusian. The *Canzoniere*'s three-hundred-and-sixty-six poems *gaze*, simultaneously, in multiple directions—at history and death, at a specific female body and her ideal forms, at pagan and Christian traditions, the human and the non-human, at the self and its author. They also move forward through time, haunted by a biblical teleology whose precision they do not seem to trust. They offer not answers but interlocking questions inspired by fragments of bodies and time: “How did I come here and when?” the speaker of Poem 126 asks, watching flowers rain onto Laura's “bosom.” This is the kind of looking that employs eyes in order to “find a way without”

¹²⁵ Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch*, p. 1. Italics mine.

them, hoping to see something deeper, something that reveals, simultaneously, what has happened and what is to come. The past and future thus become interlocked questions whose answer(s) the questioner obviates by moving away, out of earshot, through the questions themselves, into death, whose gnomic inarticulacy carries the radical negativity of modern lyric poetry—as devised by Petrarch—one step further. Indeed, Poem 366 of the *Canzoniere* positions itself as the “last pass” before slipping into death, a gesture the dying Hamlet mirrors when he poetically intones, “The rest is silence,” as if death were a lyric poem edited to such perfection it contained no words.

Inherent in this observation is the *Canzoniere*'s movement towards silence, both as a slanted teleological whole and within its “fragments” (individual poems). Petrarch's book codifies what might be deemed “lyric silence,” constantly closing its poetic discussions of its foreclosed subjects, constantly asserting an essential inarticulacy that betrays a seemingly suicidal instinct for the cessation of speech. This instinct seems suicidal because it briefly is. However, the centripetal energy that brings the Petrarcho-Hamletian speaker into confrontation with “self-slaughter” carries him beyond that moment, into confrontation with the Other, which this study identifies as “the maternal,” “the Great Mother.” The motion constantly repeated is circular, breath-like; the sentence that the opening and closing phrases of the *Canzoniere* forms—“You who hear in scattered rhymes the sound of [my] sighs . . . receive my last breath in peace”—figures poetry as the registry of breath, a mimetic, tautological loop sustaining life. In turn, this invites the lyric poem's auditor to think of consciousness as a series of as breath-fragments, fundamentally circular, rhymed, poetic.

This lyric-silence-as-model-for-consciousness gesture starkly contrasts the epic mode in form and function, not only rejecting the triumphalism inherent in sustained narration—itsself wrapped up in a lie of the sustainability of breath required to tell a long, coherent tale—but also hinting at the lie at the heart of all narration. This lie stems from narration’s central suggestion, which is that a life can be known, that a “life story” can faithfully be told at all, much less in a linear fashion. Janus serves as an apt symbol for this rejection, its vertiginous, ouroboric quality¹²⁶ indicative of a central loop that also encloses romantic love poetry, which travels between subject, object, and back again, generating a tautological energy whose absurd repetition inspires a search for the original.

In other words, in the Petrarchan mode “I love you” slips quickly into, “How did I come here and when?” a question whose inherent, ceaseless unanswerability necessitates that the questioner cease asking. There follows a turn of the page, an intake of breath; then the next poem takes up the same dilemma via different tropes, different imagery, different details, looped in a manner akin to Yeats’ conception of the gyre—until the speaker’s fragmented sighs eventually cease and he joins an even larger, even more inarticulate loop. Indeed, Thomas M. Greene employs the following epigraph for his seminal work *The Light in Troy*: “Hector is dead and there’s a light in Troy—Yeats, ‘The Gyres’.” Hence, though Greene does not explicitly focus on the spiraling/ouroboric motion of Renaissance poetry, when he seeks to invoke an essential poetic energy

¹²⁶ At *Saturnalia* 1.9.12, Macrobius credits the origin of the ouroboros symbol to Janus, writing, “Hence, too, when the Phoenicians fashioned his likeness for their rites they represented him as a serpent shaped like a circle, swallowing his own tail, to make plain that the universe *is fed by itself alone* and moves in a *self-contained circle*.” My italics. Ed and trans by Robert A. Kaster, p. 95.

operating at that period's poetic core, he refers to the vortex generated by Yeats' gyre—which is closely related to Emily Dickinson's "Tell all the truth but tell it slant—Success in Circuit lies"—and to the Jano-Petrarcho-Hamletian formation that concerns this study. Chapter Six further discusses Yeats' significance to this study.

Greene goes on to describe the situation thus:

The imperial imagination of Roman epic, whose vocation was the ordering of history and space, yields [in the *Canzoniere*] to a *private intuition* of natural forces, an intuition entertained no longer by a transparent narrator but by a speaker who is *chief actor and sufferer and mythic center*.¹²⁷

This is the universe and its communal, identifying, *mythic* struggles rendered as isolated and "private," an inhalation and exhalation that lyrically encapsulates rather than epically encompasses, the sound of a suckling baby breathing, "chief actor and sufferer and mythic center" of the world. Elsewhere, Greene writes that, "Humanist pride and humanist despair emerge really as two faces of a single coin. The satisfaction of learning is repeatedly subverted by the confrontation with its tragic limits."¹²⁸ "Two faces of a single coin" conjures nothing so much as Janus; "tragic" appropriately binds all the current, attendant issues together, especially when considering that "learning" is Hamlet's primary endeavor, especially when considering that "the tragic" can, on a basic level, be described as "having to choose between bad or worse."¹²⁹ For the Petrarchan speaker,

¹²⁷ Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy*, p. 117. Italics mine.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹²⁹ I take this description/definition from UCLA professor Robert Watson, for whose Shakespeare class I served as Teaching Fellow.

these two options are not history and space—they are history and death, the communal rendered personally, and back again, repeatedly.¹³⁰

History, in this formation, should not be confused with *time*, as if it were possible for the Petrarchan speaker to fathom the breaths separating Remus' slaying from the speaker's own early modern exhalations, any more than it is possible for Hamlet to comprehend the number of days between his father's death and his mother's remarriage:

Hamlet: . . . For, look you, how cheerfully my mother looks, and my father died within these two hours.

Ophelia: Nay, 'tis twice two months, my lord.¹³¹

Hamlet, speaking to his former Petrarchan object, in a meta-text surrounding a play-text for which he is responsible—a text he is soon to deride in the meta-textual manner of the II.ii letter-poem, also to Ophelia, whose public reading his alluded-to mother also attends—here presents grief as a world in and of itself, independent of temporality. This emblemizes the Petrarchan mode, in which culture and love also exist independent of time. In fact, the Petrarchan mode suggests this a-temporal quality is what makes culture and love worthy of intellectual analysis.

Thus the Petrarchan mode formulates life as a series of linked, unanswerable questions, from which silence/death is the only escape. That the *Canzoniere* links these lyrical silence gestures in a fragmented, teleological manner invites one to contrast it to sustained-narrative genres; Renaissance English poets responded to this invitation by generating “sonnet sequences,” whose inherited/inherent critique on narrative, one

¹³⁰ It is hard not to notice in this movement from the communal to personal the abstract expression of what Martin Luther will do. This is Luther's Petrarchism.

¹³¹ III.ii.121-123.

imagines, would be obvious to a gifted writer simultaneously crafting lyrico-narrative plays and a sonnet sequence of his own. To observe that *Romeo and Juliet* conjoins the sonnet and the play is to observe a clearly delineated distinction between the two forms that ignores the many ways the genres merge, contaminate, and undermine each other; on a basic level, *Hamlet/Hamlet* disregards the distinction between the lyric and the narrative, fusing the fragmented and the sustained in order to construct a more complexly tautological machine. This machine derives its energy from its circular motion, functioning as an ouroborically-spinning drill, cutting through the seen into the unseen, where history and death are lodged.

I have already alluded to how, in “The Problematization of Generic Boundaries” and *Shakespeare’s Lyricized Drama*, Alexander Shurbanov argues that the text of *Hamlet* fluctuates between “lyric” and “essayistic” “modes.” In this analysis, sometimes Hamlet is Montaigne, stating a thesis and logically proceeding to prove or disprove it. At other times, the Prince speaks imagistically, improvisationally, illogically—in other words, like a lyric poet. There simply was—and, perhaps, is—no more “mature perspective on life” than that found in the *Canzoniere*, composed by the “Father of modern poetry;” Shurbanov misses the opportunity to develop his concept of the “lyric mode” when he rehearses the narrow “anti-Petrarchan” attitudes of turn-of-the-seventeenth-century English and French poets who were rejecting metonymic fragments of Petrarch’s metonymic fragments. In this way, English and Continental “anti-Petrarchans” rebel against a foe that does not exist, rather like placing Robespierre’s head in the guillotine when one meant to behead the king.

The Petrarchan demolition of romantic love's experience, objects, and origins into fragments constitutes a unique method of gaining perspective on the tautological nature of romantic love, an intake of breath that lasts long enough to perceive and listen to the loop. After all, though he is likely derivative of the full-bodied Diana, Janus is only ever depicted as twinned or multiple heads. This elision of his body is itself a kind of silence, providing a space in which to reflect upon his double-gaze.

The very calendric nature of the *Canzoniere*—a poem for every day of the year, plus an &.—evokes Janus, god of the *Kalends*, the late Roman word for the first day of each month, from which we derive the term *calendar*. Indeed, Petrarch dates his often *Canzoniere*-like letters—such as the famous *Familiars* 2.9, written to Giacomo Colonna—using the kalends: “XII Kalends of January, that is, December 21.”¹³² This kalend-ric manner of dating is itself Janusian, finding the present via misdirection and a simultaneous pivot from future to past, producing the sense that all time is unstable, preempting the possibility of a present by forcing a subtraction to determine its nature. This calculus of loss operates at the core of Petrarchism, imbuing each passing moment with a sense of its already having passed, producing a temporal atmosphere in which events run even faster, speeding toward the grave—and yet unfold slowly, forever, as if in amber than has not yet quite solidified. This is another way of describing the notorious “double move” of the Renaissance, in which every present action has an ancient analogue, which paradoxically serves ultimately to remind one of her imminent demise. This view posits the Renaissance in almost quantum theoretical terms, as if it were the artistic foundation upon which that scientific idea was formed, as if the classical world

¹³² Peter Hainsworth, *The Essential Petrarch*, Introduction, p. xxvii.

was not so much reborn during the early modern period but, rather, a kind of wormhole briefly opened between that particular past and that specific present. This is merely another way of saying that the classical world “appeared” to the early moderns as it had not to the immediately previous generations. Then it disappeared again, with the vexed eyes of Swift—whom Yeats calls “the last passion of the Renaissance”¹³³—being the last to glimpse its refracted defeat.

Even maintaining a transcendent view of Renaissance rebirth admits a failure at the heart of the system, for the birth goes nowhere; it fades. Holland notes that Janus’ “transformation into a calendar symbol” developed long after the fading of his original powers,¹³⁴ and that

if his origins had been connected with any calendar, it would have been the calendar of ten months, not of twelve. It is questionable whether the Italians were using any fixed calendar at the early time when Janus was already exercising his “peculiar power” . . .¹³⁵

The original, peculiar power to which Holland refers is near to what Macrobius means when he writes

that he is called Janus from the verb “to go” [*ire*], because the universe is always in motion as it revolves, *starting from itself and returning to the same point*: hence Cornificius, in the third of book of his *Origins*, says . . . “Cicero calls him not Janus but Eanus, from *eundo* [“going”].¹³⁶

¹³³ William Butler Yeats, quoted in the chapter *The Words Upon the Window-Pane* in *A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats*, by A. Norman Jeffares and A.S. Knowland, p. 595.

¹³⁴ Louise Adams Holland, *Janus and the Bridge*, p. 265.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

¹³⁶ Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.9.11, ed and trans by Robert A. Kaster, p. 95, quoting Cicero’s *On the Nature of the Gods* 2.67. Italics mine.

When considered alongside Holland's work—which seizes on the etymological overlapping of the late Roman term *arcus* (“arch”)¹³⁷ with *ianus* (“Janus”) in order to argue that “he was ‘a small god, intimately near,’”¹³⁸ the god of water crossings—we enter a place where the *-ism* of *Petrarchism* and the *-ly* of Holland's “humanly” converge. Janus is magical not for his difference from mortals but for his lyric representation of an essential mortal dilemma. Janus' divinity stems not from a height of status but from a depth, from his location closer a core of mortal consciousness, nearer to hell than to Mount Olympus.

I have mentioned the *Canzoniere*'s Janusian affinity with gazing; whatever abstract theories scholars construct around the *Canzoniere*, none can deny that its speaker is always going, always in physical motion. To say that a human is always in motion is to say that a human is biologically alive,¹³⁹ but to register this constant motion in a heightened/exaggerated/poetic manner is to conjure something akin to Thomas Greene's observation of the twelfth century “proto-Renaissance”¹⁴⁰ that

the idea of a renascence into a *living present* of a thing immeasurably removed did not acquire the dynamic power to *move* their civilization. It

¹³⁷ It is worth noting that Petrarch settled and died in the ancient Roman town now called Arcquà Petrarca, in the Veneto region of Italy. *Arquà* is a derivative of the Latin *arquata*, or “arched.” I once looked out at dusk from the second story window of Casa Petrarca in Arcquà and saw in the dark garden my wife Lauren nursing our infant son while removing our two-year-old daughter's excrement from the ground. That tableau describes the scope of this study.

¹³⁸ Holland, p. 276, quoting Nilsson's *Greek Popular Religion* 21.

¹³⁹ I will problematize the life/death formation later in this study, via discussions of Lucretius, Ovid, Petrarch's Poem 23, and *Hamlet*'s Graveyard Scene.

¹⁴⁰ Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy*, p. 84.

could not acquire this dynamic power because the precise understanding of their removal was inaccessible.¹⁴¹

The “removal” that Greene seeks to limn is civilizational, cultural—in other words, it is communal: Petrarch’s work registers a nascent awareness of the loss of the classical world/community. But the “precise understanding” to which Greene refers necessarily involves the comprehension of isolated belatedness, of being alone, removed from a culture felt to be “presently” “alive.” In this way, the Renaissance is a record of loneliness, especially in terms of the Petrarchan, which does not seek to commune with the actually presently alive. The speaker of the *Canzoniere* flees Laura’s (and everyone else’s) presence. Indeed, in *Familiare* VI.4 Petrarch writes that “. . . many would wonder how I could find more pleasure with the dead than with the living.”¹⁴² That is not a cute way for Petrarch to say that he likes to read old books—it is a vital iteration of the Renaissance aesthetic, whose backward glance asserts a negative liberty from the surrounding world. It is a suicidal gesture made as an alternative to committing the act.

Nostalgia for something “better” does not inspire the Janusian backwards glance of the Renaissance. Desire for something compellingly other, something original—and an instinctive knowledge that forward equals death—does. One cannot be further from the end than when one is at the beginning. Here, again, the societal and personal travel on parallel trajectories. Considered this way, it is astonishing that Renaissance poets were able to find so much in the past to sustain their respective, prolonged, radically negative backwards glances. To persist in focusing on a fantasy of the past is to reject the

¹⁴¹ Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy*, p. 85. Italics mine.

¹⁴² Thomas M. Greene, “Petrarch ‘Viator’: The Displacements of Heroism,” *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 12, p. 43.

“real” world to an extent that borders on suicide, with a creative difference. Indeed, the works of the Renaissance register an anti-death gesture inherent in suicide, whose preemptive-strike status seeks to wrest control from the constant threat of death, to transform a passive formulation into an active one.

It is appropriate to consider the Renaissance—whose literary apex is *Hamlet*—in this context. Hamlet’s rhetoric circles the question of “self-slaughter,”¹⁴³ casting in high-relief a chief difference between the Renaissance and the ancient Roman cultural corpse it sought, if not to animate, then to manipulate: suicide was an honorable act in Rome. Suicide haunts the *Canzoniere*, as well. The “vast” cultural “holocaust”¹⁴⁴ that Thomas M. Greene identifies between the Roman Empire and Petrarch’s late medieval moment has also engulfed the honorability of suicide. Now nothing was too insulting to endure. If Petrarch and Hamlet must endure the insulting, dishonorable, present world, they will do so by turning away, their lyric gestures iterating not only last stops before death but also alternatives to self-slaughter. Thus Janus becomes a god of negative survival, of constant movement as simultaneous rejection and ironic embrace of life. To put it in Jano-Petrarcho-Hamletian terms: because escape is impossible, I will seek it.

It makes sense, then, to employ a “macrocosmic” cultural view of the Petrarchan mode in order to understand it in a more “precise,” microcosmically personal manner. My study orbits the idea of what might be called a personal “life-culture” unfolding

¹⁴³ On p. 2 of *Suicide and Despair in the Jacobean Drama*, Rowland Wymer writes, “The word ‘suicide’ itself, latinate and morally neutral, is a product of a new outlook. The first known use of the word is in Sir Thomas Browne’s *Religio Medici* (Part I, sect. 44), written in 1635, and published in 1642. Unlike the older terms, ‘self-murder’ and ‘self-slaughter,’ it avoids the implication of violence and criminality.”

¹⁴⁴ Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy*, p. 3.

within the context of a broader societal culture. If this construct seems overly obvious, it is in part because the “semi-autobiographical” nature of the *Canzoniere* has been taken for granted to the extent that its metaphysical comment on the self’s relationship to society remains overlooked, underexplored. Implicit in the act of constantly fragmentizing/metonymizing the Petrarchan object (Laura’s body) is a view of the Petrarchan subject/self as metonymical, a part representing a whole. The *Canzoniere* does not figure the self as part of a societal whole so much as it figures the self as a collection of jagged fragments in search of correspondingly interlocking spaces in which to fit those fragments. These spaces become what Mazzotta might call “worlds;” the speaker of the *Canzoniere* identifies them in ancient culture and/or parts of Laura’s body. My study asserts that this relationship between the personal and the societal is key to understanding Petrarch’s poetics.

Because Petrarch’s poems make countless, complex double-moves, I began this project’s journey baffled that so many of my contemporary scholars refer to the *Canzoniere* as consisting solely of slightly foolish paeans to unrequited love. I have since come to sympathize with this point of view, understanding that it derives chiefly from two factors: 1) the success and ubiquity of “the Petrarchan” poems of sixteenth century France and England, most of which whittle down the Petrarchan mode into a handily reductive form—which the appropriating poets often proceed to mock, as if the newly reduced form described the original mode; and 2) the *Canzoniere*’s real and repeated reliance on the theme of love, through which, Mazzotta writes, “the mind is mobilized”¹⁴⁵ and which “involves the whole of oneself and impels one to shatter the

¹⁴⁵ Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch*, p. 8.

walls around oneself and discover within oneself new worlds and new, unsuspected states of soul.”¹⁴⁶

Mazzotta makes the above, eloquent observation about love in the context of discussing its intellectual usefulness, specifically in the field of philosophy: “. . . Petrarch’s poetry of love and thought recasts philosophy’s quandary and aims.”¹⁴⁷ Very near this idea—this linking of love with philosophy—Mazzotta notes that

as scholars have long acknowledged . . . [Petrarch discovered] the centrality of the individual . . . [and its attendant] conviction that all events, beliefs, and values have to be refracted through the prism of one’s own subjectivity. Accordingly . . . Petrarch is said to generate an epoch-making transition to modernity. The mark of the modernity he inaugurates lies in the transformed understanding of the self, in his self-projection . . . in his poems, as an autonomous, *isolated* subject who reflects on his memories, impulses, and desires and finds in the consciousness of his individuality, *severed* from all external ties, accidental and preoccupations and concerns, his pure self.¹⁴⁸

Here I would like to intervene, chiefly because many scholars—Mazzotta included¹⁴⁹—seem to view this author-of-modernity aspect of Petrarch’s poems as operating independently from those poems’ tight focus on romantic love. This stems, I think, from a tendency to read Petrarch—because he is regarded as “the Father of the Renaissance”—as a Renaissance-era phenomenon, purposefully crafting a future that will not only locate the centrality of the individual but will also come to “celebrate” it. Petrarch becomes a

¹⁴⁶ Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch*, p. 9.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁴⁸ Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch*, pp. 2-3. Italics mine.

¹⁴⁹ To include Mazzotta in this critique is to complain that someone who has shown you the way forward has not himself already gone there. My study owes *The Worlds of Petrarch* an elemental debt; I seek to take its implications further, to bring Petrarch’s closely related concepts of love and isolation closer to one another.

kind of time traveler in this figuration, trapped in a monolithic Middle Age, unable to get back to a future he has no choice but to create from whole cloth. In the meantime, he falls in love.

But “locating the centrality of the individual” is hardly tantamount to “celebrating the human”—particularly when one considers how terribly alone and “severed” the *Canzoniere*’s central individual is. To perceive a humanistic victory at the heart of the early modern period is to picture Janus morphing into Michelangelo’s *David*--a Renaissance robot/Petrarchan machine, at once pre-and-post-Human—thereby resolving a confusion of the multiple at the heart of the human dilemma, canceling troubling questions by asserting idealized potentiality. David looks in one direction only; he has one threat, one avenue to success; save his anatomical symmetry, everything about him is singular. To view the work as representative of the Renaissance is to idealize the idealization of the human form at work in the monumental *David* sculpture, in order to produce the familiar “triumph of the human spirit” view of the early modern period, which often seems to be code for “triumph of the secular.” Hence, nostalgia for the Italian Renaissance combines with a retrospective teleology of “triumph” in order to produce a self-congratulatory narrative of the human. The human trajectory thereby becomes a kind of comedy—with a beginning, middle, and end—leaving post-human individuals with little choice but to study epochs where their kind belonged. This seems to have been Jonathan Swift’s position, and the end of my study hopes to show that in his radically anti-Petrarchan poems Swift creates a terminus of the human that had not previously existed.

The difference between Petrarchan scholarship and Petrarchan poetry is that the latter enacts a confused muddle between memory and physical sensation, its power deriving in part from its suggestion that this experience is universal—thereby implying that all memory (personal and cultural) is fantasy. Because this fantasy of memory/history is the stuff of which lyric poetry, culture, meaning, identity, and Humanism are made, the stakes of confusion are clear: if all is chaos, if nothing is connected, the Human and the God by which he is measured are delusions. Petrarch's poetry of memory answers his scholarship of history by proclaiming the body as the inescapably undermining agent of any quest to touch/feel a meaning-dependent past. Hence, as his scholarship reaches *out* to other minds, lives, and civilizations, his poetry moves from outward sensation to inward reflection, searching out the effects that lived experience and lived scholarship—combined and muddled in the lyrics—have on the self. Petrarch seems to have experienced his classical scholarship intensely personally, in a manner that Charles Trinkhaus—in *Poet as Philosopher*—stresses was “as a poet.” When Trinkhaus takes for granted that behaving “as a poet” means behaving like Petrarch—traveling incessantly, followed by several carts filled with books—publishing anguished, personal letters to writers of antiquity—in short, trying to “be” the past—he engages in a lyrical anachronism that is itself an aspect of Petrarchism. The mode is a loop that ceaselessly repeats.

Thus does the Father of the Renaissance proclaim his future progeny, at worst stillborn, and at best engaged in a kind of parlor game. This is the case, if we insist on viewing the Renaissance as a “celebration of the Human,” insisting on constantly de-contextualizing Hamlet's “praise of [Hu]man” speech, uttered a mere 169 lines after

Polonius' reading of the Prince's Petrarchan letter-poem—emblemizes this skeptical schizophrenia precisely:

What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how
infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable, in
action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god: the beauty of
the world, the paragon of animals! And yet to me what is this
quintessence of dust? Man delights not me—*nor woman neither* . . . ¹⁵⁰

If the *David* can be said to emblemize the Renaissance, it is in his anxious, backward glance, as if Hamlet's sightless exit from Ophelia's chamber rehearses the sculpture's pose, the Prince's ragged, half-naked appearance satirizing the ideal nudity of the ancient poet-king. In this formulation, Ophelia, and by extension Woman, becomes Goliath, a giant to defeat with slings, if not arrows. Indeed, this generates a hall-of-mirrors-like energy, a neck-craning tangent in which one poet looks back to another looks back to another and so on.¹⁵¹ In physics, *tangent* refers to a point that intersects a spinning, circular form. The constant, anxious, Petrarchan looking back, its Janusian double-focus on the past and present/imminent death, creates a dizzying spinning; early modern works of art intersect this spinning and "fly off," generating an "energy" we admire in the most powerful works of the period. This project seeks a means with which to interrupt this spinning, to locate within the *Canzoniere* a path beyond the loop.

One way in is to consider how and where to situate Petrarch and his achievements—chief among them, perhaps, his "discovery" of the human individual and its attendant, infinitely subjective alienations. The nostalgic tendency to distort prior

¹⁵⁰ II.ii.273-279. Italics mine.

¹⁵¹ Los Angeles' notorious "House of Davids"—a ranch-style home, in the toney Hancock Park neighborhood, which in the late 1990s/early 2000s prominently featured in its front yard nineteen reproductions of the *David* in a row—suggests this chain reaction.

complexities is itself complicated by Petrarch's own tendency to engage in nostalgia for the past. Indeed, given Petrarch's historical focus, nostalgia might be an appropriate means of viewing his "invention of the human," to borrow a phrase from Harold Bloom. Petrarch combines a sense of belated, Middle Ages isolation to a nostalgic perception of ancient Roman community in order to craft *a human* remarkable, recognizable in isolation—as opposed to a "community of humans," remarkable for the power of their shared values. Yet Petrarch's poems' intensity forecloses nostalgia; it transforms nostalgic gesture into the something else that crystallizes what we have considered to be "poetic" since those poems appeared. This is because Petrarch anchored his view of history in multiple ways that have not been fully appreciated.

Most forms of nostalgia are not likely to match the *Canzoniere*'s brilliance and intensity; at its most reductive, the nostalgic line of thinking figures Petrarch as a kind of mental astronaut, making a mighty intellectual leap for mankind while also happening to take small, lyric steps in love. Hence the tendency to praise Petrarch, even while condescending to him, half-suspecting that his astonishing achievement was staged, that the credit belongs to an intellectual animator we have yet to locate behind the scenes.¹⁵² This anachronistic-narrative lens does not give Petrarch "too much credit" for his intellectual achievement so much as it obscures the nature of that achievement—which for all its monumental importance, cannot possibly have been so contrived. We should

¹⁵² My discussions of *Hamlet* confirm this aspect of conventional thinking about the Petrarchan mode, locating the full spectrum of the *Canzoniere*'s provocations on the English early modern stage.

keep in mind that Petrarch is indeed a Middle Ages phenomenon,¹⁵³ and his fourteenth-century work contrasts with that of his geographical and temporal peer Dante in manners more complex than what scholars too often attribute merely to a desire to write against the mighty *Divine Comedy*.

Mazzotta juxtaposes the two poets in several ways, most usefully, perhaps, by showing that Dante “figure[s] a hierarchical, ordered continuity between love and knowledge. Petrarch’s poem[s], by contrast, [are] articulated at the point of intersection between love and thinking . . .”¹⁵⁴ The last phrase of the preceding quotation is as precise a description of “modern lyric” as anyone is likely to conceive, and Mazzotta structures his comparison in order to emphasize Petrarch’s lyrics’ relative disregard for the “hierarchical, ordered.” Mazzotta may have intended this emphasis as an added assertion of Petrarch’s modernity, but it turns out that the latter poet is more “old-fashioned” than the former.

Greene draws parallels between Petrarch’s work and the “proto-Renaissance” of the twelfth century;¹⁵⁵ Caroline Walker Bynum’s *Jesus as Mother* draws a clear distinction between the intellectual preoccupations and sociological transformations of twelfth century Europe—a time and place that Bynum argues generated the “discovery of

¹⁵³ John Freccero goes so far as to write that, though “cultural historians have generally accepted [Petrarch’s] own estimate of himself as the man who inaugurated a new era, leaving behind him what he called ‘the dark ages’ . . . Petrarch’s poetic achievement . . . would appear to be decidedly conservative with respect to the Middle Ages.” “The Fig Tree and the Laurel: Petrarch’s Poetics,” *Diacritics*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring, 1975), p. 34.

¹⁵⁴ Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch*, p. 51.

¹⁵⁵ Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy*, pp. 81-88.

the self”¹⁵⁶—and that of the following, final two centuries of the Middle Ages. Not only did the twelfth century church witness the rise of an “affective spirituality” that emphasized Christ’s intense love and suffering, but it also saw the first efforts to separate the newly minted monk class from the world—and, specifically, from women. At the same time, female preachers—whose “ethically irrational” approach to spirituality was highly prized and thought to situate its bearers both above and below the gifts of their male counterparts—rose in prominence on the Continent. This unique mix of cultural currents helps to place the *Canzoniere*’s essential preoccupations in a specific context, revealing Petrarch the monk to be more a product of the twelfth century than the fourteenth. Bynum’s work here works hand in glove with Jeanne Addison Roberts’ *The Shakespearean Wild*, which argues that Shakespearean women are Other due to their existing beyond the bounds of culture, where the wild things are. This view can be traced back to prehistoric worship of the hunter/moon goddess Artemis, which developed into ancient worship of the hunter/moon goddess Diana. Indeed, this trajectory suggests that culture and rationality originally developed out of a need to pay tribute to a divine female other, so that culture and rationality exist in order to “impress” a female ideal. This sensed or suggested tradition seems to inform Petrarch’s poetic project, which takes for granted its male speaker’s epideictic role vis-à-vis its female poetic object.

Bynum writes that the spiritual focus of the fourteenth century trained itself largely on the wages of sin and the torments of Purgatory. Hence, the *Divine Comedy* is a work in tune with its time—and the *Canzoniere* is a work in tune with the twelfth century in everything but its use of vernacular language. Reading Bynum this way makes

¹⁵⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 87.

answerable those lofty, compelling questions raised at the close of Carol E. Quillen's introduction to Petrarch's *The Secret*:

. . . the same conversation that allows Franciscus to aspire to virtue through reading effectively excludes Laura, and through her all women, from the humanist community. We still grapple today with [this] kind of exclusion . . . [with] who counts as a human.¹⁵⁷

This brings us to a consideration of Petrarch as the “Father of Humanism,” a traditional designation frequently coupled with that of “Father of the Renaissance.” The prevalence of the concept of “Renaissance Humanism” makes distinguishing between Petrarch's twin fatherhoods complicated in ways that are appropriate for the author of the infinitely subjective, dazzlingly multifaceted *Canzoniere*. But Petrarch's two unofficial titles *are* different, in important ways. To say that Petrarch fathered the Renaissance is to say that his achievements serve as a marker, a separation from a non-Renaissance world that preceded them. That is to say, one can only perceive of a “Renaissance” by contrasting it with prior and subsequent non-Renaissances. The Renaissance exists in opposition to other periods.

Similarly, the Human exists in contrast to the non-Human. Petrarch's poems express anxieties about the male's status as human via not only their juxtaposition of men with women and animals, but also by “ouroborically”¹⁵⁸ reversing the male/female distinction, blurring the line between the two distinctions. Petrarch's lyrics father the Human not by celebrating him—none of them do, in a manner that resembles Cicero's

¹⁵⁷ Carol E. Quillen, Introduction to Petrarch's *The Secret*, p. 41.

¹⁵⁸ Frequently in his book *The Great Mother*, Erich Neumann posits the ouroboros as a symbol for universal hermaphroditism, writing on p. 18 that “the uroboros is the ‘Great Round,’ in which . . . male and female . . . elements are intermingled.”

famous human/beast distinctions¹⁵⁹ or Michelangelo's the *David*—but by 1) registering his unearned Human status, and 2) recognizing the instability of that status. I am as inclined as any scholar to make nebulously grand claims about Petrarch's achievements in the realms of subjectivity, in general, but those claims may put the metaphysical cart before the physical horse. It is quite possible that the project of the *Canzoniere* is to explore the disparity between the early modern woman's ontological and phenomenological significance, and her subjugated role in society. The Petrarchan mode registers an &. attached to the Feminine and seeks, if not to define that *etcetera*, to enter into it and mean.

I do not intend to situate Petrarch's speaker—or his intellectual offspring, Hamlet and Swift—as proto-feminists, but I do intend to argue that each of their lyric modes finds its greatest power, realizes its maximum torque, when it enters into discussions of who women are, what women mean. It were overly obvious to suggest that Petrarchism—especially in its reductive English “unrequited love” iteration—addresses a kind of “problem of women.” After all, men wrote these poems “to” women, and these poems are either suicidally vexed or they are satirically dismissive. Their speakers claim either to be inferior to their female lyric objects, or that they are superior to the entire notion of addressing women in verse. The upshot seems to be that connection is as impossible as is deriving any meaning from its impossibility.

¹⁵⁹ I refer to Cicero's *De officiis* of 44 BC, which codifies distinctions between humans and beasts.

But the *Canzoniere*—though its speaker is, as Giuseppe Mazzotta writes, “mobilized by love”¹⁶⁰—operates in a manner that is anything but reductive. Petrarch applies the full range of his considerable intellectual and emotional gifts to exploring his speaker’s problem with Laura, following this explorative instinct into places where Laura symbolizes, conjures, communes with other women—including the half-forgotten women who created, nurtured, and sustained the speaker’s very life, including what one might call *the* woman, the Great Mother, one of whose chief iterations is/was Artemis/Diana. This is simultaneous poetic activation of both the material and metaphysical aspects of the feminine is precisely what none of the reductively “Petrarchan” lyricists do; it is what Hamlet and Swift do in their finest moments, some of which coincide with their most misogynistic moments. These misogynistic moments, which I will address in more detail later, do not merely indulge hegemonically patriarchal instincts—they highlight the vexed anxieties attendant to that hegemonic patriarchy. If that sounds like an apology for privilege, a complaint that amounts to, “Woe is me, I’m in charge”—it should, as it alerts us to the perils of under-reading Western literature’s most feminine-centric modes. For I suggest that that what we now recognize as Humanism’s blind spot—its blithe presumption of white male European superiority—the “Father of Humanism” wrote into the *Canzoniere*, which anticipates and critiques this blind spot at every turn. After all, nothing reinforces societal hegemony more than silence. Why aggravate power at its source? The Petrarch of the *Canzoniere* might be more accurately figured as the “Physician of Humanism,” identifying the Human as an interior male disease that must

¹⁶⁰ Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch*, p. 8.

purged, brought outside, exposed. As we will see in the next chapter, wormwood, and feminine mercy, are the complementary remedies.

The Secret—written in dialogue form, in which Petrarch figures himself as a literary character in what might be successfully produced as a *Waiting For Godot*-like play—constitutes a prosthetic limb to the *Canzoniere*, an anticipatory critical gesture. But Petrarch, so bent on probing the many flaws of “Franciscus,” does not anticipate our belated problem with humanism’s exclusion of women. Bynum’s work on the twelfth century allows us to understand that Petrarch could exclude Laura from the humanist conversation because he thought she was above (and below) it. This tendency to idealize was made possible and compounded by a lack of mundane physical interaction, still current in Petrarch’s fourteenth century. This would serve to emotionally isolate any monk in ever more intensely felt ways as his affections for a particular woman grew. Painful suffering would arise, the nature of which a clergyman would classify in terms of his Christian faith. This, in turn, might lead the agonized clergyman toward identifying with Christ’s sufferings—and, ultimately, toward figuring the female beloved as the Holy Mother. John Freccero writes that “only the most naïve reader would take [the *Canzoniere*] for authentic autobiography.”¹⁶¹ But no matter how *factual* the poems are, they are certainly, authentically autobiographical, in the sense that they employ elements of the autobiograph in order to accomplish their larger poetic aims. Thus it is reasonable to employ Petrarch’s life as a Middle Ages monk to better understand his lyrics’ intellectual underpinnings.

¹⁶¹ John Freccero, “The Fig Tree and the Laurel,” *Diacritics*, Vol. 5 No. 1 (Spring, 1975), p. 34.

The simultaneous above-and-below placement, so alive in the idealizing gesture, serves, to our contemporary sensibilities, as an insufficient explanation for the early modern exclusion of women from the humanist conversation. I suggest that we connect this sense of dissatisfaction to that most idealized visual emblem of the Renaissance, the *David*. I circle around Michelangelo's monumental piece because there is something vitally strange at work in considering *David* the masterwork of Italian Renaissance visual arts. One cannot detach its uniqueness from its high status; it seems to signify a kind of liberation from the predominant early modern visual iteration of the human form: the Madonna and Child. Indeed, the *David* registers nothing so much as autonomy, freedom from the desire to confront the maternal (as the numberless representations of the Madonna do). As such, Michelangelo's sculpture stands at the end of an early modern cul-de-sac, more of an anomaly than a representative emblem—for if we find the discovery of the human individual in the *Canzoniere*, and if we locate the intellectual limits of that human individual in the character of *Hamlet*, we cannot include the *David* in that trajectory. Whatever we may guess that he is gazing at, we cannot claim that the *David* stares simultaneously at history and death. Rather, he seems to turn his head in order to show himself in the most advantageously proportioned manner, as if, with reason, expecting our gratitude.

The *David* is alone but not lonely; he is not “isolated . . . severed.” He casts his long, self-sustaining shadow over Mazzotta's phrase, quoted above, about Petrarch's discovery of not just the “centrality of the individual” but the poet's own “pure self.” This phrase stands out, because Mazzotta's study largely emphasizes the fragmentation at the core of Petrarch's aesthetic—a fragmentation that interlocks in order simultaneously

to suggest and undermine the notion of a unified, “pure” selfhood, as if the self were an ancient Roman mosaic, as if the idea of selfhood were comprised of the atoms of Democritus, Epicurus, Lucretius, and Bohr.

Yet Mazzotta does not directly connect what he perceives to be Petrarch’s notion of fragmented unity with his lyric use of love. It is not difficult to see why this would be—to perceive that the speaker of the *Canzoniere*’s unity of selfhood involves another self—with her own infinitely subjective perceptions—is to complicate the discussion beyond comprehension. This is precisely where a full consideration of Petrarch’s achievement breaks down, where his speaker’s outward gaze at Laura distracts us from connecting his love for her to his “discovery of the self.” Petrarch’s speaker’s discovery of the self—an entity that exists in the *Canzoniere* only in isolation—occurs via the juxtaposition of the self’s isolation with its communal opposite. This communal opposite takes several forms in the *Canzoniere*, but its most relevant, repeated iteration consists of the (re)joining of the isolated, severed self with the female body. In this way, as I have noted, Petrarch’s “discovery of the self” requires his poems’ speaker to be intensely in love, not merely because love “mobilizes” the mind, but because love makes the self visible. This underscores why it is a mistake to figure the modern self like the serenely un-interlocked *David*, as opposed to the Janus, arrested in the act of seeking multiple means of interlocking.

L.A. MacKay confirms Janus’ status as “a peculiar and baffling god who ‘ever since he ceased to be an intelligible deity, has been the sport of speculators.’”¹⁶² His

¹⁶² L.A. Mackay, “Janus,” *University of California Publications in Classical Philology*, Vol. 15, No. 4, 1956, p. 158, quoting p. 125 of William Warde Fowler’s *Religious Experience of the Roman People*.

essay then proceeds to argue that Janus—or, in Latin, *Ianus*—derives from *Dianus*, so that the male god is the derivative counterpart of the female goddess, “an abstraction”¹⁶³ somehow connected, perhaps, to the passage from the old moon to the new moon. Hence, via his provenance in the linguistic “body” of Diana—thereby reversing the gender roles of Genesis 2:22¹⁶⁴—Janus becomes even more relevant to a discussion of the *Canzoniere*, whose “traces of Diana are subtly woven into much of the imagistic texture that progressively reveals the composite of Laura.”¹⁶⁵

Janus aptly represents the Renaissance, whose emblematic works of art reiterate a world of unresolved tension, a doomed search for meaning, coupled with a foreclosed search for freedom from that unrecovered meaning. Because both the half-perceived origin and the dimly envisioned freedom from that origin—history and death—lie so far out of sight, the early modern literary mode is most completely realized in states of profound and global confusion. This helps to explain why metagenetic commixtures of many different forms and styles characterize the strongest work of the period.

MacKay’s suggestion of Janus as a god of *passage* interlocks nicely with Mazzotta’s observation that Petrarch’s lyrics are lodged at the “mobilized” intersection of love and thinking, in order to produce the figuration of the human individual as derivative of and dependent on an other’s body, from which he has been severed. In this formation,

¹⁶³ L.A. MacKay, “Janus,” *University of California Publications in Classical Philology*, Vol. 15, No. 4, 1956, p. 158, quoting p. 194 of Franz Altheim’s *History of Roman Religion*.

¹⁶⁴ “And the rib which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.” (1611 King James Version.)

¹⁶⁵ Nancy J. Vickers, “Diana Described,” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 8, No. 2, *Writing and Sexual Difference* (Winter, 1981), p. 271.

Janus becomes a god of restlessness compelled, a divinity of movement made in the anxious service of a higher power.

The restless nature of the *Canzoniere*'s lyrics register this dependent anxiety constantly. Durling's translation of Poem 1 runs thus:

You who hear in scattered rhymes the sound of these sighs with
which I nourished my heart during my first youthful error, when I
was in part another man from what I am now:

for the varied style in which I weep and speak between vain hopes
and vain sorrow, where there is anyone who understands love
through experience, I hope to find pity, not only pardon.

But now I see well how for a long time I was the talk of the crowd,
for which often I am ashamed of myself within;

and of my raving, shame is the fruit, and repentance, and the clear
knowledge that whatever pleases in the world is a brief dream.

Though this lyric features neither classical allusion nor description of a fragmented female body, it is highly emblematic of the poems that follow. In its initial gesture, the *Canzoniere* establishes its three dominant categories of existence, its principal ways of being: 1) scattered/fragmented, 2) severed/alone, and 3) integrated/communal. "You who hear" are the severed speaker's communal audience, down to the eye on this very word, who hear his "scattered rhymes."

The opening "you" also includes the poem's "crowd," a community whose existence crosses time, even as the speaker consigns its "talk" of the *Canzoniere* to the past. Yet this "talk" is not temporary. It is as a-temporal as the "crowd"—talk is what the more or less permanent crowd constantly produces; the subject of the talk is what changes. Petrarch thus constructs a temporal and spatial configuration in which isolated individuals toss fragmented, temporary cultural products into a kind of communal black

hole whose temporary acknowledgement of those fragmented products leads nowhere but to the shamed and severed individual's future, fragmented request for pardon from that same constant, communal hole.

Morris Bishop has noted a seeming affinity between Petrarch's iconoclastic gestures and those of Martin Luther—both published apocalyptically apoplectic invectives against the Church—in order to dismiss the notion, because “Petrarch would have rejected with horror the sixteenth century Reformation.”¹⁶⁶ Though one might respond by saying, “Luther himself rejected with horror much of the sixteenth century Reformation,” these imagined reactions miss the salient point: whatever slightly unhinged qualities the angriest writings of the two men share, Luther's status as Augustinian monk suggests a more fundamental philosophical affinity vis-à-vis the individual's relationship to the community.

I have shown how Carol Walker Bynum draws a twelfth-century line that connects “the individual,” “affective spirituality,” and the idealization of the feminine, in the context of a study she calls *Jesus as Mother*. These nostalgically perceived cultural currents seem to have given Petrarch necessary fuel to power his trajectory into the modern. I want now to pivot from her connections to the Petrarchan cultural implications Luther seems to have received: to really feel one must isolate oneself in the proximity of women. This scenario reverses that of the late medieval Church monk, harkening to an elemental, prehistorically ancient tableau, rehearsed in countless artistic iterations of the Madonna, lactating or otherwise: an individual, really feeling, alone with a life-sustaining woman. The loss of (the rehearsal of) this life-sustaining situation generates

¹⁶⁶ Morris Bishop, *Petrarch and His World*, p. 313.

the Petrarchan speaker of Poem 1, “in part another man from [he is] now.” This is also the Hamlet of III.i.8, who, when Ophelia gives him back all his letter-poems, denies having written them, saying, “No, not I. I never gave you aught.” To be exiled from the relative isolation of sole access to a female body is to be truly isolated, according to the Petrarchan principle.

That the *Confessions*-obsessed Petrarch thought of his age as “Dark” seems to invite contemporary auditors of his work to deal lightly with his historical period—we are on his side; we want to see what he sees. But not only does Carol Walker Bynum’s work suggest that Petrarch’s backwards-facing glance was as near-sighted (the twelfth century) as it was far-sighted (ancient Rome), Petrarch’s notoriety and influence were such that it is not an absurd stretch to suggest that Luther’s gestures are essentially Petrarchan—especially if one considers the importance Luther placed on the rejection of celibacy as a theological response to the issue as presented in the *Canzoniere*.¹⁶⁷ Both men trained to be lawyers but found the vocation repugnant; both men underwent Pauline conversion episodes—Petrarch upon seeing Laura at Sainte-Claire d’Avignon and Luther upon surviving a lightning storm—and both men, of course, joined the clergy.

¹⁶⁷ On p. 60 of *Petrarch and His World*, Bishop writes that “a loose-living young man could find the vow of celibacy rather a convenience than a drawback.” This casual conjecture betrays a sophisticated reading of the *Canzoniere*, whose author’s vow of celibacy informs his autobiographical speaker’s too-often oversimplified “unrequited” status. Indeed, considering that the speaker of the *Canzoniere* has taken a vow of celibacy at the least complicates its poems’ discussion of desire, and at the most undermines it. Again we enter the realm of the infinitely foreclosed.

One has only to look at the closing of Machiavelli's fierce, strength-extolling *The Prince*¹⁶⁸ to appreciate that Petrarch's closer contemporaries viewed the *Canzoniere* as useful philosophical experiments, flecks of light in the void, as opposed to wimpy pleas to an unresponsive belle. Moreover, the *Prince*'s citing of Poem 128 supports the view that, for discerning thinkers, "the Petrarchan" has always transcended the bounds of form. Machiavelli's book presents an isolated Prince against the backdrop of the communities of ancient Rome and of contemporary municipalities; Luther's work posits an individual consciousness in opposition to the communities of the Church and the world at large. The former writer seems to owe much of his figuration of the world as stage to the *Canzoniere*, whose interweaving of the "real" with the obviously-staged autobiographical suggests nothing so much as the author-speaker's canny ability to manipulate events in order to present them to his rhetorical advantage. Luther's concept of the individual alone, "speaking" to and "listening" to God, seems impossible without the cultural intercession of the "Petrarchan split," in which the self (the "I") separates from the author. Indeed, the "inner voice" manifested by modern lyric poetry is distinct from private, silent, Protestant prayer in name only.

Luther and Machiavelli, of course, appear frequently in discussions of *Hamlet*'s theologico-philosophical background; the "Machiavel"'s importance to the early modern stage is undisputable.¹⁶⁹ Yet Luther and Machiavelli are almost always treated as largely

¹⁶⁸ *The Prince* concludes by quoting Petrarch's Poem 128, which envisions Italian unification, now a reality.

¹⁶⁹ As I have noted, in "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca," T.S. Eliot points out that the majority of Elizabethan auditors understood Seneca only a little more than they understood Machiavelli. Our time and space has largely inherited these misunderstandings. Likewise, we misunderstand the "Petrarchan" in largely the same

isolated cultural phenomena. To view Luther and Machiavelli that way pays tribute not only to the respective force of their self-exiling influence, but it also registers a long Petrarchan shadow.¹⁷⁰

Rhyming, sighing, weeping, and speaking are equivalent in the sonnet of Poem 1. They constitute audible manifestations, varied styles of (in)articulating “vain hopes and vain sorrow.” This utterly negative, even “nihilistic” lyrical point of view—which forecloses the possibility of not only realizing one’s hopes, and not only of gaining wisdom from one’s sorrow, but also of expressing them to any avail other than perhaps inspiring, via subtending disclaimer, “pity” and/or “pardon”—remains consistent through most of the *Canzoniere*. It betrays an essentially Petrarchan intellectual “style” that runs across his works, including his *Testament*, likely written around the time of the composition of the bookending Poems 1 and 366, in which Petrarch concludes

the list of the bequests to his friends by saying . . . “As to the smallness of these legacies, let my aforesaid friends accuse not me but Fortune—if if there be any such thing as Fortune” . . . [in] a letter . . . addressed a few years earlier . . . he . . . had come to the conclusion that “Fortune . . . does not exist.” By telling his friends, then, in the *Testament* that they should charge Fortune and not himself for the insignificance of his bequests, he told them in fact that they could not bring charges against anything or anybody.¹⁷¹

way the Elizabethans did. That Petrarch’s work everywhere reflects the poet’s devotion to Seneca and anticipates the Machiavellian is another way of saying that *Hamlet* registers these influences via the crystallizing Petrarchan mode.

¹⁷⁰ Gordon Braden attests to as much in his statement on p. 80 of *Anger’s Privilege*: “. . . we can trace a specific continuity from Petrarch to Machiavelli, and in its new environment the basic Stoic posture opens out into even more unexpected forms.”

¹⁷¹ Francesco Petrarca, *Petrarch’s Testament*, ed. and trans., with an introduction, by Theodor E. Mommsen, pp. 9-10. The letter quoted is *Sen.* VIII, 3.

One might borrow from a cultural fragment of the 1980s and 1990s in order to describe this ouroboric style of rhetoric—where possibilities are suggested in order to demonstrate the folly of considering them—as, “Always be foreclosing.”¹⁷² Because the Petrarchan mode became the dominant modern poetic mode, this always-foreclosing element likewise became an elemental aspect of modern poetry—the 2011 Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to The Sonnet* causally deems the form’s “foreclosure inevitable.”¹⁷³ It is inevitable because Petrarch fashioned it thus.

¹⁷² I refer to p. 12 of David Mamet’s screenplay adaptation of his play *Glengarry Glen Ross*, where regional sales manager Blake admonishes his underlings to “Always Be Closing.”

¹⁷³ A.D. Cousins and Peter Howarth, *The Cambridge Companion to the Sonnet*, p. 2.

Chapter Three: *Artemisia, Wet Nurses, and Weaning*

“For it is harmful to anoint the nipple with some bitter and ill-smelling things and thus wean the infant suddenly, because the sudden change has an injurious effect and because sometimes the infant becomes ill when the stomach is damaged by drugs.”

--Soranus of Ephesus, *Gynecology*, 2nd c AD¹⁷⁴

Though perhaps the most influential writing on the topic in the West, from the ancient period through the early modern epoch, Soranus of Ephesus’ weaning advice seems to have been more honored in the breach than the observance. Samuel X. Radbill refers to the dilemma when—in his chapter “Pediatrics” in the definitive *Medicine in Seventeenth Century England*—he writes that, “The care of the newborn was essentially that outlined by Soranus in the second century, although Soranus was never mentioned by English writers in the seventeenth century.”¹⁷⁵ An early modern, multi-layered spectrality—a “deep mystery”—here emerges: a semi-mythological ancient authority fails to specify what not to do, thereby emphasizing what most people seem to have done for centuries, despite manifestly real concerns about the risk the practice posed to infants’ psychological and physiological well-being.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Soranus of Ephesus, *Gynecology*, trans by Owsei Timkin, p. 118.

¹⁷⁵ Samuel X. Radbill, “Pediatrics,” *Medicine in Seventeenth Century England*, p. 246.

¹⁷⁶ Soranus is a particularly elliptical and ambiguous medical writer, concluding his discussion of abortifacients by saying that “. . . many different things have been mentioned by others; one must, however, beware of things that are too powerful.” On page 48 of *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance*, John M. Riddle glosses Soranus’ comment with a massive understatement: “. . . Soranus’ omissions are also important.”

“Bitter aloes or wormwood were used to wean the child away from the breast,”¹⁷⁷ Radbill writes four pages later, neglecting both to cite the source of this wormwood information, and to reconcile the herb’s apparently universal application with Soranus’ advice against using it. Indeed, though wormwood appears frequently in ancient, medieval, and early modern medical texts, none of them explicitly discusses wormwood’s use as an agent of weaning. The contemporary sense that wormwood was used to wean seems to spring whole cloth from the Nurse’s Speech in *Romeo and Juliet*,¹⁷⁸ which, in turn, guides my reading of Soranus. I have not found another primary text from these periods that refers to wormwood weaning. As Audrey Eccles notes, “It is notoriously difficult to write about the beliefs and customs of ordinary people, since they rarely leave much documented record.”¹⁷⁹ My project finds this “documented record” in the Petrarchan lyric mode, which registers wormwood’s “injurious effect”—the ontological proof of its damage, the groove in stone the water made.

Weaning marks the first major transition a person experiences after birth, the first, forced turn of the head *away* from the elemental female source. Beyond this transition stretches what Westerners seem to have always thought of as “life,” a handful of more or less autonomous decades bookended by brief periods of extreme dependence. Soranus’ decision not to specify the disapproved *pharmakon* in his weaning advice creates a lyrical ambiguity that is typical of ancient, medieval, and early modern iterations of weaning. Wormwood seems to have always been considered a remedy and a

¹⁷⁷ Samuel X. Radbill, *Medicine in Seventeenth Century England*, p. 250.

¹⁷⁸ I.iii.16-48, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*.

¹⁷⁹ Audrey Eccles, *Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Tudor and Stuart England*, Preface.

poison. The earliest known mention, *The Papyrus Ebers* of ancient Egypt, circa 1550 B.C., recommends it as a curative ingredient, while its mentions in the Torah emphasize its poisonous qualities. Subsequent herbals—ancient, medieval, and early modern—speak of wormwood in both senses. Moreover, the specifics of its poisoning and curative powers evolve over time, mirroring the lyric portability of the Petrarchan mode. This lyrical ambiguity creates an &. into which the work of Petrarch, Shakespeare, and Swift enter and mean.¹⁸⁰

This interruption, this “sudden change” creates a constant subconscious desire to seek out ontological evidence of a lost female presence, via the “collapsed” rhetoric of the Petrarchan mode, which notoriously combines opposites in order to generate a heightened, vexed, unified state. This collapse, in turn, generates the portable quality for which the Petrarchan lyric mode is notorious. “The breast” emerges, here, as precursor of this collapsed and therefore portable rhetoric—and also as the rhetorical result of collapsing multiple breasts into one.

No ancient, medieval, or early modern newborn survived that did not breastfeed. From these babies’ physical point of view, the world must have consisted of a dimly perceived multiplicity of female nourishment. Petrarch’s speaker—who in Poem 206 describes his life journey as stretching “from the day when I left the breast until my soul

¹⁸⁰ It is important to note that, though the ancient and early modern practice of wormwood-weaning can perhaps only be construed from the mentions of two authors, one finds descriptions of wormwood’s other uses everywhere in the old herbals and medical texts. The ancient world seems to have viewed the herb primarily as a digestive aid. There is no cause to view wormwood’s use as digestive as contradictory to its use as weaning agent—indeed, the two uses are closely related.

is uprooted from me”¹⁸¹—often seems determined to re-assume this original point of view. The speaker views female body parts as a means of summoning an original, radiant, female presence:

From the lovely branches was descending (sweet in
memory) a rain of flowers over her bosom . . .
this flower was falling on her skirt, this one on her blond
braids . . .
this one was coming to rest on the ground, this one on the water,
this one, with a lovely wandering, turning about seemed to say:
‘Here reigns love’ . . .

I was sighing:
‘How did I come here and when?’¹⁸²

The “rain of flowers” that substitutes for Petrarch’s speaker’s body/point-of-view resonates with critic G.K. Hunter’s observation that “the etymology of *influence* suggests no single link, but rather a stream of tendency raining down upon its object.”¹⁸³ The rain is already “sweet in memory” in its descent, which occurs in the past tense. This suggests that the rain’s provenance is memory itself, memory in the abstract. Clearly, the memory is also sweet for the reminiscing speaker in the present tense; this suggests that the rain of memory is constant, that it is evidence of a tendency, proof of a point of view. Because this remembered rain still falls, it suspends the speaker in a lyric state of confusion, asking “how” he came “here and when.” To sum up, the “inciting incident” of a rain of flowers’ falling on Laura’s “bosom”—which the speaker describes at the beginning of the poem as “her angelic breast”—transform a pleasant moment into a fraught one, charges it

¹⁸¹ I will discuss Poem 206 in detail in Chapter Four.

¹⁸² Poem 126.

¹⁸³ G.K. Hunter, “Seneca and the Elizabethans,” *Shakespeare and the Literary Tradition*, p. 90.

with vaguely fathomed mortality, brings into being a poem of existential origins and destinies, which are always vexed, always dimly perceived.

Of this poem, Durling writes that, “The rain of flowers is a direct reference to the appearance of Beatrice in *Purgatorio* 30.”¹⁸⁴ Both Hunter’s and Durling’s views of the rain in Poem 126 enforce the point I seek to make about influence—it is an extended and nebulous process, as opposed to being confined to a single, epiphanic event. Readers of lyric poems have perhaps grown so used to thinking of them in terms of discreet moments in time—as opposed to narrative, which a reader experiences over a sustained period—that we can overlook the tendency of some poems to orbit particular memories and themes. Among contemporary poets, Gregory Orr’s constant lyrical return to his having accidentally killed his brother when they were boys is a prime example; twentieth-century poet Paul Celan’s work obsessively rehearses his separation from his family during the Holocaust, and their subsequent murders. To read these and Petrarch’s poems is to enter a constant rain, worlds manifestly obscure. These extended lyric moments—these worlds, these permanent storms, like the maelstrom that constitutes the planet Jupiter’s “Great Red Spot”—are built to outlive the effects of narrative, with its beginning, middle, and end. Vibrant matter of the far past, too far back to understand, somehow *has* no beginning or end.

In the case of Petrarch’s book of poems, however, the long rain that falls between its covers becomes mirrored in the extended effect it has on the European Renaissance. This effect goes by the name *Petrarchism*. Hence, a long rain is an apt metaphor for Petrarchism’s cultural career; a chief component of that lyrical storm is wormwood,

¹⁸⁴ Robert M. Durling, *Petrarch’s Lyric Poems*, Introduction, p. 23.

whose influential, physical realities and poetico-magical implications stretch back further than human history records.

The earliest known mention of wormwood—the genus known taxonomically as *Artemisia*—appears in the ancient Egyptian medical text *The Papyrus Ebers*, where the herb is recommended for treating digestive problems,¹⁸⁵ diseased toes,¹⁸⁶ and cardiovascular ailments.¹⁸⁷ The general consensus is that *The Papyrus Ebers* collects information already thousands of years old at the time of the document’s creation, reflecting a “medico-botanical . . . tradition that was old long before the invention of writing.”¹⁸⁸ More recently, *Artemisia* features prominently in Pliny’s, Dioscorides’, Soranus’, and Galen’s ancient medical writings, as well as in the herbals disseminated in medieval and Renaissance Europe.

Because this study asserts a poetic underpinning to all we know personally and collectively, because it suggests that it is reasonable to conflate “lyric substance” with all attempts to touch the past (including the long, evolving stroke known as “the Renaissance”), some understanding of ancient attitudes toward botanical knowledge were appropriate. In his Introduction to *The Papyrus Ebers*, G. Elliot Smith writes

The point that I specially want to emphasize is the fact that there was originally no conflict between the rational and the magical—that the things we call magical to-day were originally inspired by rational considerations for which the people who originally invented these devices [cures described in *The Papyrus Ebers*] believed they had valid reasons for putting faith in them. Just as the early people believed that as blood

¹⁸⁵ *The Papyrus Ebers*, trans from the German by Cyril P. Bryan, pp. 45 and 140.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 130 and 135.

¹⁸⁸ Frank J. Anderson, *An Illustrated History of the Herbals*, p. 2.

was the substance of life and that the virtue in blood depended upon its redness, so that the red colour and any red substance could protect the body from the risk of death, so a vast number of other materials, ideas, and even words, acquired the merit of being life-giving, and therefore were rational means of treating any condition . . . ¹⁸⁹

Of course there has never been an interruption in the conflation of the rational and the magical—rather, what seems rational and magical constantly evolves.¹⁹⁰ The lyric machine of model-constructing speech, employing metaphor and symbol in order to body forth the world—seems always to have been the means by which the rational and the magical are symbiotically sustained. Jerry Stannard, writing about English medieval herbals, describes the poetic link between the magical and the rational in his description of “magiferous plants,” which

are real plants, but under specified conditions they acquire certain properties, and hence therapeutic uses, that they do not normally possess. When such plants were subjected to the magical arts, their properties and uses were altered or supplemented in a magical fashion . . . without a renewal of the magical act, the plant lost its newly acquired properties and resumed its normal role as an ordinary plant in the real world . . . Many common plants, indigenous to or completely naturalized in Western Europe, were classified as magiferous. Among the more frequently cited [is] . . . *Artemisia vulgaris* . . . ¹⁹¹

Petrarch and his like-hearted early moderns sought to alter their respective ordinary plant-nesses, via the magic of the lyric mode, which is tightly connected to botanical magic’s rational rationale.

¹⁸⁹ Professor G. Elliot Smith, Introduction to *The Papyrus Ebers*, trans. from the German by Cyril P. Bryan, p. xix.

¹⁹⁰ I include the Enlightenment and subsequent faith in science in this sweeping statement. Science is magic based on poetry.

¹⁹¹ Jerry Stannard, *Herbs and Herbalism in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, pp. 34-35.

From ancient through early modern times, then, wormwood has served the purposes of vermifuge, digestive,¹⁹² febrifuge,¹⁹³ abortifacient, emmenagogue, contraceptive,¹⁹⁴ (aphrodisiac,) and prophylactic against the plague¹⁹⁵, the devil, and venomous beasts.¹⁹⁶ As a pesticide, it was thought to repel moths, mosquitoes, and—dipped in ink—to keep prevent mice from eating paper.¹⁹⁷ It also cured blindness.¹⁹⁸

Marina Heilmeyer writes that

By the first century B.C., the plant had become known as “the mother of herbs.”¹⁹⁹ It takes its Greek name from Artemis, believed to be the protector of women and facilitator of labor; indeed, this herb was thought to soothe women in pain and assist them in childbirth—besides providing a convenient way out of an unwanted pregnancy.²⁰⁰

¹⁹² David Stuart, *Dangerous Garden*, pp. 44-46.

¹⁹³ John M. Riddle, *Dioscorides on Pharmacy and Medicine* p. 38.

¹⁹⁴ John M. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion* pp. 48 and 56.

¹⁹⁵ F.P. Wilson, *Plague in Shakespeare’s London*, pp. 8 and 10.

¹⁹⁶ Jerry Stannard, *Herbs and Herbalism in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* p. VI 393.

¹⁹⁷ John M. Riddle, *Dioscorides on Pharmacy and Medicine*, p. 89.

¹⁹⁸ *Askham’s Herbal* of 1550 and *Kynge’s Herbal* of 1555 both attest to this cure, which I will discuss in more detail.

¹⁹⁹ Indeed, on p. 19 of his lecture “The Origin of the Cult of Artemis,” J. Rendell Harris notes that in John Parkinson’s 1640 *Theatrum Botanicum*, the English botanist cites the ancient tradition of referring to *Artemisia*/wormwood as “*mater herbarum* . . . the mother of all medical herbs.”

²⁰⁰ Marina Heilmeyer, *Ancient Herbs*, p. 18.

It is Dioscorides and Soranus who recommend wormwood as abortifacients,²⁰¹ thus registering the double nature of the “mother herb,” which, in turn, brings wormwood into a lyric space where everything that is profound is also ambivalent, everything healthy also fatal.

There are roughly three hundred species of wormwood.²⁰² Though *Artemisia absinthium* is the most famous kind of wormwood today—due to its notoriety as the essential, perhaps hallucinatory ingredient in the wildly popular nineteenth-century tippie absinthe²⁰³—Petrarch, Shakespeare, and Swift are likely to have been more familiar with *Artemisia vulgaris*, known in the vernacular as both *wormwood* and *mugwort*. This species has always thrived in wet, marshy areas. Other species of *Artemisia* “native to the Old and New World[s]”²⁰⁴ include *Artemisia abrotanum* (also known as *Southernwood/old-man/lad’s-love*) and *Artemisia dracunculus* (also known as *tarragon*).

Martin P. Nilsson writes that, “Artemis was the most popular goddess in Greece;”²⁰⁵ Lewis Richard Farnell says that her worship pre-dates the development of agriculture;²⁰⁶ David R. West states that, “There seems no doubt that the cults of this

²⁰¹ John M. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion From the Ancient World to the Renaissance*, pp. 48 and 56. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines an *abortifacient* as, “A drug or other agent that causes the premature termination of pregnancy.”

²⁰² *Taylor’s Guide to Herbs*, ed. by Rita Buchanan, p. 271.

²⁰³ This species is also used in vermouth—*vermut* is the French pronunciation of the German *wermut*, or *wormwood*.

²⁰⁴ *Taylor’s Guide to Herbs*, ed. by Rita Buchanan, p. 271.

²⁰⁵ Martin P. Nilsson, *A History of Greek Religion*, p. 28.

²⁰⁶ Lewis Richard Farnell, *The Cults of the Greek States, Vol. II*, p. 427.

goddess reflect the most ancient and primitive strata of Greek religion.”²⁰⁷ Henry N.

Ellacombe writes that

The plant was named Artemisia after Artemis, the Greek name of Diana, and for this reason: “Verily of these three Worts²⁰⁸ which we named Artemisia, it is said that Diana should find them, and delivered their powers and leechdom²⁰⁹ to Chiron the Centaur, who first from these Worts set forth a leechdom, and he named these Worts from the name of Diana, Artemis, that is, Artemisias.”—*Herbarium Apulei*, Cockayne’s translation.²¹⁰

The complex web of herbal sources is dizzying, and general consensus holds that the fourth-century A.D. herbal Pseudo-Apuleius—like the vast majority of other ancient, medieval, and early modern herbals—is based on older medical texts, chiefly those of Pliny and Dioscorides. Still, it is rare to find in one of these fascinating texts an origin tale so plainly stated, and there seems to be no precedent for this account in the older herbals. Pseudo-Apuleius does not tell us who “said that Diana” first found these “worts,” but citation was less of a concern for antique herbalists, for whom nature’s abundance seems to have often provided sufficient evidence of its supernatural origins. Indeed, Frank J. Anderson writes that the earliest extant herbals explain “that herbs were made from the flesh of the gods, who also instructed men in their proper use.”²¹¹ The

²⁰⁷ David R. West, *Some Cults of Greek Goddesses and Female Daemons of Oriental Origin*, p. 59.

²⁰⁸ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *wort* as “A plant, herb, or vegetable, used for food or medicine.”

²⁰⁹ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *leechdom* as “A medicine, remedy;” it defines *leech* as “A physician; one who practices the healing art.”

²¹⁰ Henry N. Ellacombe, *The Plant-Lore and Garden-Craft of Shakespeare*, p. 325. He quotes p. 107 of Cockayne’s 1864 trans.

²¹¹ Frank J. Anderson, *An Illustrated Guide to the Herbals*, p. 2.

best that we can do now is gather as much of this early, un-cited information as we can. As Farnell writes, “We are often obliged to regard tradition as actual evidence of a prehistoric fact.”²¹²

It is in this spirit that, in his lecture “The Origin of the Cult of Artemis,” J. Rendel Harris carries *Artemisia*’s ambivalently maternal connections back as far as possible, finding the goddess’ origins in the plant, rather than the other way around. After establishing Artemis’ twin brother Apollo’s origin in the *apple*—and connecting to Apollo’s ancient cult the *All-heal* herb also known as *mistletoe* (which grows on apple trees)—Harris asks

whether there is any magic herb (magical being understood as a term parallel with medical, and almost coincident with it in meaning) which will rank, either for medicine or magic, along with the . . . *All-heal* of Apollo, the mistletoe.²¹³

Instead of proceeding to plunge into the deep past, however, Harris turns first to a then-contemporary work. His logic seems to be: since mistletoe is still such a prominent herb in folklore, folk ritual, and folk medicine, why would there not be a similarly popular and culturally vibrant plant today, whose roots might be traced to Apollo’s twin? Harris cites Hilderic Friend’s 1891 *Flowers and Flower-Lore*’s

²¹² Lewis Richard Farnell, *The Cults of the Greek States, Vol. II*, pp. 439-440. Though Farnell’s ontology-extolling sentence is easily one of the best I encountered in my research for this study, it should be accompanied by John M. Riddle’s following statement on p. 48 of his book *Eve’s Herbs*: “The plant artemisia was associated with the goddess for good reason. Artemisia has been found to be an effective antifertility agent. In one test in 1979 on rats, 10 mg of scoparone, isolated from *Artemisia scoparia*, were fed to rats on days 1 through 7 after coitus; the result was a 100 percent termination of pregnancies. Artemisia may also interfere with spermatogenesis.” Thus a twentieth century Riddle illumines ancient knowledge.

²¹³ J. Rendel Harris, “The Origin of the Cult of Artemis,” p. 13.

association [of wormwood] with the ceremonials of St. John's Eve (Midsummer Eve) . . . [Wormwood is] known on the Continent as St. John's Herb . . . St. John's Girdle. Garlands were made at that season of the year composed of . . . *Artemisia* or wormwood, different kinds of leaves, and the claws of birds. These garlands . . . were supposed to be possessed of immense power over evil spirits.²¹⁴

In other words, there is a tradition of wormwood's use in Christo-pagan European folk rituals as a "devilfuge" to ward off evil spirits. This use, Harris points out, places the relatively recent use of the plant within the bounds of witchcraft, executed by a female agent who "must be able to cure the disease she inflicts."²¹⁵ This association not only allows Harris to begin his search for Artemis in earnest, it also connects wormwood to original female danger and ambivalence, remedy and poison, to the physical and the metaphysical entwined—all qualities the Petrarchan speaker associates with Laura.

Moreover, this tendency to bestow many names on the poetic object—the material object that resonates immaterially and/or invisibly within one's body—mirrors Petrarch's method of referring to Laura also as *lauro* (the laurel tree) and *l'aura* (the breeze) *l'auro* (gold).²¹⁶ To give a single, poetic object many names is to bestow added poetic power upon it. It is another form of the lyric &., an acceptance of lyric invitation, a determination to fully follow-through on the lyric impulse, crystallized in Petrarchism. The air, like a drug ingested, crosses the body's boundary. It enters the speaker and mixes with his elements. It sustains his life. And when the speaker sees his beloved

²¹⁴ J. Rendel Harris, "The Origin of the Cult of Artemis," pp. 13-14.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17, in a footnoted quote from Oliver Madox Hueffer's 1908 *The Book of Witches*.

²¹⁶ Indeed, on p. 15 Harris places the laurel tree—via the Orphic *Argoanutica*—in Hecate's garden. Scholars think that the cult of Hecate closely relates to the cult of Artemis, and that the goddesses are perhaps one and the same.

manifested in the culturally significant laurel tree, beloved of Apollo, he comes very near to placing Laura in one of the “medicinal gardens” associated with the ancient Greek cults. It is hard to imagine that the laurel tree would not have to be placed in Apollo’s garden, given the god’s rich associations with that tree. Since Apollo is Artemis’ twin, Petrarch’s lyric tendencies lead us into *Artemisia* orbit.

Harris writes that the ancients’

combination of magic with medicine, and the difficulty of imagining them apart in early times . . . [is] the reason for that curious feature in the character of Artemis and her brother, which makes them responsible for sending the very diseases which they were able to cure. It is magic that causes diseases, magic as medicine that heals them . . . If women in actual life have troubles, Macrobius²¹⁷ will tell us that they are Artemis-struck²¹⁸ . . . yet this very same Artemis will be appealed to when the time of feminine trouble is at hand!²¹⁹

This is the double-natured *pharmakon* personified and gendered female. Indeed, in late visual and literary iterations of the goddess, Artemis carries a bow and arrow, with which she ends human female life. Artemis’ function as facilitator and impeder—beginner and ender—of life suggests a female-centric figuring of existence itself as both disease and cure. When we deal with this goddess, we deal with the deepest, most sphinxlike mysteries—gendered female. When we deal with her, we deal with the prehistoric, the

²¹⁷ Harris’ citation: “‘Sat.,’ 1.17, 11.”

²¹⁸ In “Artemis in Homer,” on p. 54 of *From Artemis to Diana*, Minna Skafte Jensen points out that, in the *Odyssey*, “when Odysseus meets his mother’s dead soul in Hades, he asks her: were you killed by illness? or did Artemis hit you with an arrow?” On the same page she adds that, “Eumaeus tells . . . his life-story: . . . in the happy island Syrie . . . people never suffer illnesses, but are killed by Apollo and Artemis when they grow old.” Chapter Five will explore the way that Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” soliloquy adapts Petrarch’s use of the arrow symbol. Because each of the divinities wields the arrow, Petrarch seems to have poetically combined Fortuna, Cupid, and Artemis.

²¹⁹ J. Rendel Harris, “The Origin of the Cult of Artemis,” p. 17.

dimly perceived, that which predates cultural memory, as if we were a collective poetic subject asking Artemis, “How did I come here and when?”

Though Harris does not mention it, wormwood’s connection to Midsummer Eve also strengthens its Shakespearean associations. Ellacombe writes of “Dian’s Bud”—the “liquor”²²⁰ of which Oberon administers and prescribes in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* III.ii and IV.i, respectively, to “take . . . all error”²²¹ from the “Cupid’s flower”²²²-infected sight of Lysander and Titania—that, “It can be nothing but Shakespeare’s translation of Artemisia, the herb of Artemis or Diana, a herb of wonderful virtue according to the writers before Shakespeare’s day.”²²³ The *Early English Books Online* archive contains “several versions of an anonymous herbal probably of medieval origin”—including publisher A. Askham’s version of 1550 and publisher John Kynges’s version of 1555—each of which claim that *Absinthium* “doth awaye the blacke myste in a mans eyes, and clereth the sight and if this herbe be pownded with the gall of a Bull and afterward put into a mans eyes, it putteth away all maner impedymetes of the syght.”

Ellacombe’s philological instincts, therefore, seem to be sound. But it is interesting to note that, though he quotes from Reverend Oswald Cockayne’s 1864 translation of the *Herbarium Apulei* elsewhere in reference to *Artemisia*, Ellacombe fails

²²⁰ III.ii.367, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*.

²²¹ III.ii.368.

²²² V.i.73. Oberon refers to this flower at II.i.168 as “Love-in-Idleness,” which, as Ellacombe points out on p. 196 *The Plant-Lore and Garden Craft of Shakespeare*, is another name for the pansy.

²²³ Henry N. Ellacombe, *The Plant-Lore and Garden-Craft of Shakespeare*, pp. 80-81.

to notice that Cockayne's text twice recommends Southernwood "for sore of eyes."²²⁴ In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, therefore, Shakespeare seems to have utilized an already extant connection between *Artemisia* and eyes, in a freshly poetic manner that reflects the herb's magico-medical background. Indeed, the comedy's strange recipe of herbs, magic, and pagan mythology invites one to view the play as a kind of staged herbal—a dramatic representation of the experience of engaging an ancient medical text.

Recent scholarship has even more tightly connected Shakespeare to the rich textual history of herbals. Botanist and historian Mark Griffiths argues in the May 20, 2015 edition of the British magazine *Country Life* that a portrait of Shakespeare himself—in the guise of Artemis' twin brother Apollo—appears on the title page of the 1597 publication of Englishman John Gerard's celebrated *Herball*. Scholars have long speculated about a possible relationship between Shakespeare and Gerard, since they were neighbors when, in 1604, Shakespeare "took lodgings in Silver Street,"²²⁵ close both to Gerard's London home and to "the Barber-Surgeon's Hall, Gerard's professional headquarters."²²⁶ Because the other three portraits on the 1597 *Herball's* title page appear to represent benefactors and collaborators, Griffiths speculates that Shakespeare and Gerard worked closely together on the *Herball*, a text famous for its lyrical

²²⁴ *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England, Vol. 1*, "collected and edited" and trans by Rev. Oswald Cockayne, pp. 51 and 253. The former reference appears in Cockayne's trans of *Herbarium Apulei*; the latter reference appears in his trans of Dioscorides' *De Materia Medica*. (Both works are contained in *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England, Vol. 1*.)

²²⁵ Mark Griffiths, "Why the fourth man can't be anybody but Shakespeare," *Country Life*, May 20, 2015, p. 132.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

readability. Shakespeare's plays and poems teem with botanical allusions; there is an "uneducated"/"native genius" tradition of attributing his passion for and knowledge of plants to his small-town background. The thrilling possibility that Shakespeare's likeness appears in the *Herball* neither strengthens nor weakens the likelihood that he was intimately acquainted with his lifetime's leading botanical text. The very real chance that Shakespeare was more than a reader and admirer of the *Herball* flows from, rather than into, his works' botanical affinities.

Harris notes that Gerard refers to *Artemisia* as "*Mater Herbarum . . . and Sant Johannis Gurtell,*"²²⁷ and that it "doth properly cure women's diseases."²²⁸ As Harris and Griffiths note, much of the "science" that Gerard writes about this and other plants in his *Herball* is cribbed from a combination of older sources;²²⁹ Gerard's herbal's popular success seems to result from its lyrically conversational "asides," like the one with which Gerard closes his discussion of *Artemisia*:

Many other fantastical devices invented by poets are to be seene in the workes of the ancient writers, tending to witchcraft and sorcerie, and the great dishonour of God: wherefore I do of purpose omit them, as things unworthy of my recording or your reading.²³⁰

A Midsummer Night's Dream employs *Artemisia* in precisely this poetic, pagan, "witchcraft and sorcerie" fashion. It is as if Shakespeare took Gerard's morally restrictive passage as a cue to explore the "other fantastical devices" on the London stage,

²²⁷ J. Rendel Harris, "The Origin of the Cult of Artemis," p. 20.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²²⁹ These are the usual suspects: Pliny, Dioscorides, and Pseudo-Apuleius.

²³⁰ J. Rendel Harris quotes this passage in "The Origin of the Cult of Artemis," p. 21.

as if, out of the bland professionalism of late sixteenth century England emerges another &.—one that engages the magical origins not only of *mater herbarum*, but of medicine itself. Because Petrarchism was ascendant in this space and time among England’s literary artists, it is appropriate to explore that dominant poetic mode’s ethnobotanical connections.

So let us look more closely at these “women’s diseases.”²³¹ I have already mentioned that Dioscorides and Soranus recommend *Artemisia* as an abortifacient, but they also note its effectiveness as an emmenagogue²³² and a contraceptive.²³³ It were difficult not to gather from the way this information is organized that an unwanted child was considered to be a kind of woman’s “disease,” an &. not wished for, a malignant growth. Here we enter a dark nexus of primordial associations, where “unrequited love” takes on a deeper meaning, especially when one considers Artemis’ status as the goddess of both women in childbirth and male babies. This seems to figure Artemis as a goddess of heterosexual situations, heterosexual attitudes. The mythology and the herbals combine to suggest a fluidity in the relationship between mother and son, where the woman holds all the power, can choose to accept or reject the male. This figuration seems to haunt the Petrarchan mode in ways that are perhaps unclear to the poems’

²³¹ Even *Artemisia*’s other, non-“women’s diseases” uses resonate disturbingly. The vernacular term for the plant—*wormwood*—is generally accepted to derive from the herb’s effectiveness at expelling tapeworms. *The Oxford English Dictionary of English Etymology* says the term is “of unkn. Origin; the assim. is due to the use of *Artemisia* as a remedy for worms in the body.” These worms were located in the stomach, or the “womb.”

²³² The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *emmenagogue* as “Agents which increase or renew the menstrual discharge.”

²³³ John M. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion From the Ancient World to the Renaissance*, pp. 48 and 56.

speaker and can confuse his readers. Why does the Petrarchan speaker portray himself to be so helpless, so hopeless? An original heterosexual situation precedes the *Canzoniere*, casts its shadow over those poems; the Artemis/*Artemisia* tradition holds the key to understanding why those lyrics are as they are—and why they resonated so profoundly with so many male artists for so long. They address “the limits of the autonomy the will,”²³⁴ that over which no man has control—his origins. One may exert influence over one’s destiny, but not over one’s origins; as we know, Petrarch was obsessed with origins.

John M. Riddle writes that in the West, before the fall of the Roman Empire, sexual restraint was largely ignored; pagan religion largely did not attempt to regulate sexual activity . . . Abortions were always available . . . The well-known line from the Hippocratic oath regarding abortions²³⁵ was, despite its fame, not generally followed by ancient physicians.²³⁶

Riddle is careful to add that, “The various medical and social sources present little evidence that abortions were routinely employed for birth control.”²³⁷ He immediately qualifies this statement with “a caution” from “Suzanne Dixon . . . [who] observes that all

²³⁴ Allen Grossman, *The Sighted Singer*, p. 209: “The function of poetry is to obtain for everybody one kind of success at the limits of the autonomy of the will.” The defeated nature of this definition of successful lyric poetry, published in 1992, reflects (post-)modern lyric’s Petrarchan stain.

²³⁵ This line has been translated essentially to read, “I will not give to a woman an abortive remedy.” On p. 7 of *Contraception and Abortion*, Riddle translates this original text to read, “Neither will I give a pessary to cause an abortion.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *pessary* as “a vaginal suppository containing an antibiotic, spermicide, etc.” The ancients used many other kinds of abortifacients; Riddle notes that the line has been mistranslated since antiquity, leading to confusion willful and accidental.

²³⁶ John M. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion*, pp. 3 and 7.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

of the negative comments about abortion in antiquity come from ‘the public male attitude.’”²³⁸ I began this chapter by addressing this issue of common practice, registered sub-textually, lyrically. Indeed, no less an authority than Soranus, though he cautions against performing abortions, explains in detail how to carry them out safely, with the aid of *Artemisia*.²³⁹

The obscuring problem, here, is ancient men writing about the practices of ancient women, with a vital slippage: the herbals and the *Canzoniere*, so full of the magical/&.—so concerned with and confused by female bodies—recover those bodies and their practices, if we take care to notice. In other words, the subtextually expressed, especially as it concerns female bodies, connects the ancient and early modern herbals to Petrarch’s poems. This connection seems to make poetry of the herbals and something more “real” of the poems. This relationship was always there; the sustained power of the texts testifies to their rich “tissue of quotations,”²⁴⁰ many more individual examples of which surely await recognition.

The Petrarchan mode repeatedly registers abortions and abandonments. As I mentioned in the Introduction, when Hamlet aborts the mission of his Petrarchan lyric to Ophelia halfway through its composition, he underlines this tendency of the mode, writing that he is “ill at these numbers.” When he closes his letter-poem by vowing, strangely, to be Ophelia’s “evermore . . . as long as this machine is to him,”²⁴¹ Hamlet

²³⁸ John M. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion*, p. 10.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

²⁴⁰ Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” *Image-Music-Text*, p. 146.

²⁴¹ II.ii.123-4.

figures the human body as a predictable system whose ailments can be treated, one much the same as another. Though this Cartesian idea is burgeoning in the late sixteenth century, it mirrors the concept put forward on every page of every herbal dating from ancient Egypt: if x is wrong, y will cure it. The Petrarchan twist on this formulation—the twist of the Petrarchan machine—is that the speaker’s particular form of love, his Petrarchism, constitutes a disease that inflicts not only his beloved but also himself. Petrarchism is a “women’s disease,” requiring that the female Petrarchan object reject it. It is also a women’s disease in that it runs, heterosexually, from male Petrarchan subject to female Petrarchan object. Hence, because neither the herbs of Apollo’s nor Artemis’ gardens can heal the Petrarchan subject, Petrarchism is a severely isolating condition. It strands its sufferer at the edges of the Human, in the Human’s blind-spots, where the most vital truths remain misunderstood.

Poem 23 both describes and attempts to treat the condition:

In the sweet time of my first age, which saw born and still almost unripe
the fierce desire which for my hurt grew—because, singing, pain
becomes less bitter—I shall sing how then I lived . . . what happened to
me . . . I have become an example for many people . . . a thousand pens
are already tired by it, and almost every valley echoes to the sound of my
heavy sighs which prove how painful my life is. And if here my memory
does not aid me . . . let my torments excuse it . . . for it holds what is
within me, and I only the shell.

There is much to say about the *Canzoniere*’s incessant bitter/sweet juxtaposition—and I will say it in the next chapter—but for now let us focus on the strange nostalgia the speaker has for the “sweet time” when his bitter agony was “born.” The speaker figures his Petrarchan “desire” as having a birth and then a youth—and then a maturity where it leaves the body that gave it life, wandering “every valley” in pain. “Singing” constitutes the birth pangs, the treatment for those pangs, and the ontological evidence of the life of

the desire. Indeed, singing and its repercussions, its reiterations as “torments” throughout the speaker’s world, become a collective body constitutive of the fruits of the speaker’s self. The opening stanza of Poem 23, therefore, imagines the speaker as a woman, now “only the shell” that produced a tormented life that wanders far and wide, alone. The speaker and his/her “torments” seem to have mutually abandoned the other, in an extended act of mutually assured prolongation of conflict, like a parent estranged from a child. Perhaps Petrarch would not recognize the Petrarchan poems of late sixteenth century England to be related to the *Canzoniere* at all, so promiscuously, incestuously estranged did the poems born of his peculiar “mode” become. The Petrarchan machine’s constant updates have been most successfully made by the most prescient and irreverent practitioners of the mode—Hamlet and Swift, especially.

The stanza’s mixture of bragging about the fame of the *Canzoniere*, expressing something like shame for their notoriety, and matter-of-factly describing the poems’ popular success mirrors the peculiar nature of Petrarchism, in which basic biological functions such as physical attraction and erotic loss take on broader cultural significances. When Petrarchism is dismissively misunderstood, it is usually because someone fails to recognize not what is complicated in the lyrics but, rather, what is combined in them. Their cultural impact resulted and results from their ability to conjure shadowy specters in the Western psyche. In this way, it is appropriate that Petrarchism continues to be misunderstood. Were the *Canzoniere* merely a collection of heartbroken paeans to a blond woman, their reputation would rest upon the skill with which their maker crafted his pleas. This is, of course, what the casually initiated believe Petrarch’s poems to be. The first stanza of Poem 23, however, finds a way to figure the

speaker as a mother to his sorrow, and to his sorrow's productions' success, as if he took revenge on Laura by becoming a kind of lyric female. Petrarch experiments with the Human at the onset of Humanism, anticipating Shakespeare's lyrically blurred explorations of gender's boundaries by more than two hundred years. Indeed, the *Canzoniere* makes the case that Humanism *is* experimenting with what a Human is—a far cry from the “celebration” of the Human that we have been taught the Renaissance avers via Michelangelo's *David* and Hamlet's soliloquies.

Poem 23's first stanza, rather, calls to mind an icon of the Romantic era. There is something anachronistically redolent of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in the lines, something like the narrator of that novel in the speaker's mixture of alarm at and resignation to the fact he has unleashed a monster of his own creation on the world. Frankenstein's monster and its twin, Byronism, are direct descendants of Petrarchism and its iterations of alienation—from the self, from the species, from the Human. That alienation maintains its powerful hold on powerful imaginations via its original nature as unremembered, misunderstood. Indeed, the Petrarchan mode seems to suspect that alienation is that from which its speakers really spring. The question Petrarchism and its offspring ask, again and again is: Where did I come from and when?

A remarkable clutch of thematically related lyrics in the *Canzoniere* offers an answer. Poems 206-215 are particularly “Hamletian”—their speakers are passively suicidal, trapped by fate, alienated from others and themselves: “Within myself I am often amazed at myself.”²⁴² Two of the poems (206 and 207) repeat the *Canzoniere* motif of the arrow, which Hamlet employs in his most famous soliloquy. In Poem 207,

²⁴² Poem 209.

which I will discuss at length in Chapter Four, the speaker has been exiled from the body of his beloved and must “seek here and there some nourishment for my short life.” The speaker’s undesired autonomy thereby rehearses the situation of the weaned infant, as if the speaker existed in a state of suspended infancy, his poems flaming arrows shot in darkness toward an unrecoverable, female-bodied target. This tableau of displacement describes Hamlet’s unreasonable anger at Ophelia, which so closely resembles his rage at Gertrude.

In Poem 214 the speaker says that he has “sought through the world . . . if verses or precious stones or juice of strange herbs could one day make my mind free.” Then, uniquely in the *Canzoniere*, Poem 215 makes explicit what the lyrics’ frequent references to that perhaps most famous of Petrarch’s rhetorical devices—bitter-sweetness—constantly implies:

Love has joined himself with . . . her, with natural beauty
gracious habit, and gestures that speak in silence,

and I know not what in her eyes, which in an instant can make
bright the night, darken the day, embitter honey, and sweeten
wormwood.

The speaker knows not what, indeed. In *The Lucretian Renaissance*, Gerard Passannante asserts that Petrarch invents the Renaissance out of his use of the Virgilian-cum-Lucretian metaphor of honey smeared on the rim of a cup of medicinal wormwood. As Lucretius’ poem *De rerum natura* frequently reminds us, this bitter-sweet trick was played upon ancient children afflicted with intestinal worms; it serves as a darkly symmetrical satire of the life-sustaining nourishment gained from suckling, and as a comment on the knife’s edge that separates love’s enervating energy from its power to destroy, to eat away from within. Though he does not apply his findings to the

Canzoniere, Passannante's point is that when Petrarch rediscovers the wormwood trope from Lucretius' then-lost text, the cultural re-birth of Western society begins. My point is that, since wormwood already embodied the trick of female-bodied erotic loss, that loss is what the Renaissance is "about"—in the sense of moving about a theme, orbiting an idea. Petrarch's lyrics figure immemorial knowledge as a female body, the loss of which strands and starves; his speaker—our "early modern Human"—must recover that knowledge via love.

Wet Nurses

Soranus recommends feeding the newborn "honey moderately boiled" on the first day of her life; it is not until the second day that she should be fed

with milk from somebody well able to serve as a **wet nurse**, as for twenty days the maternal milk is in most cases unwholesome . . . Furthermore, it is produced by bodies which are in a bad state, agitated and changed . . . dried up, toneless, discolored, and . . . feverish as well.²⁴³

Wet nursing seems to have played a vital role in the economy of ancient Rome, but it certainly did in the economies of medieval and Renaissance Europe—especially in Tuscany. Valarie Fildes writes that, "From the eleventh century onwards, the use of wet nurses by the wealthy apparently increased, and this may be one reason for the increased

²⁴³ Soranus, *Gynecology*, trans by Owsei Temkin, pp. 88-89.

fertility among the European aristocracy, which also dates from this time.”²⁴⁴ Indeed, Jutta Gisela Sperling describes wet-nursing in this period as “the most remunerative of women’s unskilled labor. Peasant women from Florence’s *contado*, who were employed by wealthy patricians as domestic nurses in the city, earned enough money to settle their own infants with lower-paid wet nurses in the countryside.”²⁴⁵

Exile²⁴⁶—another thread that connects Petrarch, Hamlet, and Swift—perhaps dictated that the infant Petrarch suckled at and was weaned from his mother’s breasts.²⁴⁷ However, it is as likely that his family’s precarious situation determined that his mother was forced to serve as a wet nurse for either a local patrician or an absent, higher-paid wet nurse, on loan to the city that had just bitterly rejected his family from the nourishment of its culture and society. This would force Petrarch to share his mother’s life-bestowing body with another person—a direct analogue for the situation the speaker describes repeatedly in the *Canzoniere*.

Indeed, the prevalence of professional wet nurse culture in medieval and Renaissance Tuscany evokes a many-layered multiplicity of fraught connections to female bodies that Petrarch’s poems constantly engage. The *Canzoniere* can be read as an attempt to reconcile a world of multiple sources of bodily nourishment—each source

²⁴⁴ Valerie Fildes, *Wet Nursing*, p. 38.

²⁴⁵ Jutta Gisela Sperling, *Medieval and Renaissance Lactations*, p. 10.

²⁴⁶ It is key to remember that in *Romeo and Juliet*, the Nurse weans Juliet in Mantua during an earthquake. When Juliet’s husband Romeo is later exiled from Verona, he takes up residence in Mantua, thereby in absence engaging Juliet’s vexed, erotic, doomed autonomy.

²⁴⁷ Petrarch’s father was exiled from Florence shortly before Petrarch was born just south of the city, in Arezzo.

possessed of multiple sources of that nourishment—with the loneliness of being sole, one. This, in turn, reflects Petrarch’s belated “Father of Renaissance” scholar’s dilemma when fathoming the past: he must spontaneously imagine the entire scopes of both ancient Greece and ancient Rome, the latter founded on a myth of multiples suckling at multiple (animal) breasts. That, in Rome’s origin myth, Romulus and Remus suckle at a she-wolf’s teats is especially compelling in light of the ancient belief that the soul of the nurse enters the baby via her milk. Hence, an anxiety about the human/beast distinction, so central to Humanism, can be found at the very foundation of Rome/Western civilization.

As I mentioned earlier, Petrarch charts the scope of his life as being “. . . from the day when I left the breast until my soul is uprooted from me.”²⁴⁸ Soranus haunts Petrarch’s line, whose linear A→B formation suggests that the soul that will be “uprooted from” the speaker was placed within the speaker by the penetrating breast. The speaker’s soul is the damage done by the “drug” of female nourishment. He will spend the balance of his relatively autonomous days seeking, being rejected by, and then himself rejecting an isopathically erotic cure.

Petrarch, like Soranus, writes “the breast,” not “*my mother’s* breast,” or “my nurse’s breasts.” “The breast” is anonymous, universal, portable. Though Petrarch might have suckled at multiple women’s breasts, only one was required for weaning. Hence, “the breast” is also allegorical, metonymical. The Italian late medieval/early modern period saw not only the rise of a vibrant wet nurse economy but also the increased frequency of the depiction of the lactating breast in visual art.

²⁴⁸ Poem 206.

Jutta Gisela Sperling writes that

One of the characteristics of the proliferation of breastfeeding imagery in medieval and early modern Catholic discourse was its stress on the transfer of maternal love onto others for the purposes of creating community and transcendental meaning . . . Charity, mother of all allegories, emphasized the movement of metonymy as the primary source of significance in the life of a Christian. The allegorization of Charity, and the lactating breast as its sign, thus represented the process of signification itself . . .²⁴⁹

Sperling then explains that

In ancient rhetoric, allegorization, that is, the process by which abstract concepts were presented as female embodiments, was theorized as the attempt of attributing speech to the voiceless. Allegories were thought of as “other speech,” a different way of expressing abstract notions . . . [that] might result in “shrouding” truths, and rendering verbal communication too ambiguous by evoking female, or otherwise “terror striking” imagery.²⁵⁰

Sperling glosses “terror striking” by citing ancient Greek orator and literary critic Demetrius of Phalerum: “Any darkly-hinting expression is more terror striking, and its import is variously conjectured . . . by different hearers.”²⁵¹ I cite Sperling (and one of her sources) at such length because these passages, considered in the present context, usher us into the realm of Alexander Shurbanov’s “lyric mode.” One could describe the effects of the lyric mode using the same terms that Sperling and Demetrius employ—indeed, early modern allegory’s lyrical proximity, female essence, and breast-specific visual incarnation seem to have contributed to a cultural atmosphere that profoundly inform Petrarch’s poems’ use of the breast image. This imagistic vocabulary constitutes

²⁴⁹ Jutta Gisela Sperling, *Medieval and Renaissance Lactations*, p. 7.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

an overlooked aspect of Petrarchism, an important demarcation of the self and the human that the poet's intellectual offspring inherit and employ.

When Sperling writes of transference “of maternal love onto others for the purposes of creating community and transcendental meaning,” she speaks within a Christological context, a late medieval/early modern version within which Petrarch also always spoke. But, because Petrarch sought to forge a community with the ancient world, he must necessarily have been forced to transcend the “transcendental,” regardless of the Christological teleology of his day. He seems to have wanted to wean himself from the world, or to cause the world to wean itself from him; he exiled himself to rural locations, living alone, writing scholarship in Latin in an apparent attempt to commune with the learned dead. This constitutes a typically Petrarchan double-move, a weaning from the present while simultaneously seeking to fuse with the past. The double-faced [Janusian] male thus interlocks with the many-breasted [Artemisian] female, connecting original sensuality to infinitely subjective confusion. The confrontation of the maternal becomes, in Petrarchism, a kind of multiple, interlocking confrontation.

Janet Adelman sheds light on Petrarchan conceptual vocabulary when, while discussing Shakespearean womb imagery, she writes that its

disembodiedness marks the source of its power: because it is not embodied in any individual woman in whom it might be contained and controlled, the maternal malevolence of . . . [Shakespeare's] plays invokes a primitive infantile terror derivative of the period when the mother or her surrogate was not seen as a whole and separate person, when she—or the body—had the power to make or unmake the world and the self for her child.²⁵²

²⁵² Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p. 4.

Because Adelman uses the term *seen*—and because vision is the last sense a baby develops (and even then at least a month after birth)—her thinking, here, works more appropriately in the context of breast imagery. In the early modern period, because every baby was breast-fed, the breast—seen up close, perhaps from slightly below—is likely to have been the first focused image a person ever saw. Even the premise of Adelman’s work—that many of the male characters of Shakespeare rehearse the “infantile terror” of maternal/surrogate suffocation—seems better suited to the early modern epidemic of “overlaying,” in which a woman falls asleep while nursing and suffocates the baby.²⁵³ This were weaning at its most absolute, a treason in the breast more complete than the mere application of wormwood to the “dug.”²⁵⁴ It not surprising, then, that Adelman quickly proceeds to discuss wet-nursing, writing that

even when it was most successful, the fact of wet-nursing in itself might be reconstructed by the child or adult of maternal abandonment. Wet-nursing merely gave the child two psychic sites of intense maternal deprivation rather than one: first, the original maternal rejection signaled by wet-nursing itself; and then the weaning—routinely by the application of wormwood or another bitter-tasting substance to the nipple—and abrupt separation from the nurse-mother he or she might have known for two or three years.²⁵⁵

Stephen Guazzo’s 1581 *Civile Conversation* depicts a child speaking “bitterly” to his mother thusly: “You bore me but nine months in your belly, but my nurse kept me with

²⁵³ Fildes writes on p. 62 of *Wet Nursing* that, “Fifteen per cent of deaths at nurse [in Renaissance Florence] were attributed to suffocation by nurse or, rarely, her husband. The Florentine Biagio Buonacorsi lost two children this way.”

²⁵⁴ *Romeo and Juliet*, I.iii.26, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*.

²⁵⁵ Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p. 5.

her teats the space of two years . . . So soon as I was born, you deprived me of your company, and banished me in your presence.”²⁵⁶

The view that breastfeeding and weaning were foundational sites, fraught with the risk of “injurious” effects, seems to have been common and constant in the ancient and early modern periods. Much as Soranus discourages the common practice of using wormwood as a weaning agent,

Pliny, Plutarch, Tacitus, and Aulus Gellius, all of the second century AD, were strongly in favor of mothers of all classes feeding their own babies . . . and, in addition to the physiological advantages of maternal breastfeeding, they emphasized that if children were given to a wet nurse, then the bond of affection and love between mother and child would wither, possibly building up problems in later life.²⁵⁷

When a wet nurse performs the weaning, the interruption of the discovery of the whole becomes compounded, multiplied. The Petrarchan mode is the problem “later in life.”

Weaning

To lyrically explore the “limits of the autonomy of the will” can be shifted culturally to describe the early modern Human, stranded from the life that was on an increasingly belated bank and shoal of time, struggling to express how and why. In this cultural formation, the medieval period serves as “the sudden change” that traumatizes, a bitter weaning whose “injurious effect” inspires and forecloses attempts to recover and transcend the ghost-memory of its having happened. Because the weaned object must

²⁵⁶ Quoted on p 106 of Lawrence Stone’s *Family, Sex, and Marriage*.

²⁵⁷ Valerie Fildes, *Wet Nursing*, p. 15.

take the fact of his being weaned on faith—because this important first betrayal must necessarily be learned, rather than consciously recalled—the process of discovering the reality of one’s being weaned resembles the early modern subject’s recovery of his cultural heritage. Weaning is another way of thinking of the cultural “rupture” to which Thomas M. Greene repeatedly refers in *The Light in Troy*,²⁵⁸ the bitter medieval period separates the human from the Human, severs the neutral parasite from the sweetness of the host. Wormwood is the weaning “drug” that links the ancient period to the early modern era, thereby serving as a lyrical talisman, a means of bridging the rupture.

Attempts to recover lost Western Human sweetness has taken different forms, ranging from the literary to the musical to the visual. Contemporary educators have tended to blur the lines between these forms, crafting for their pupils an idealized vision of “the Renaissance” whose symbols are Michelangelo’s *David* and Botticelli’s *The Birth of Venus*, highlights of a linear progression toward a happy ending that “celebrates the Human.” However, the Renaissance is a tragedy of unresolved material loss, in which the Human, if she is celebrated, is celebrated in parts, which are lost and must be “recollected.” In this way, physical and figurative ruins of lost civilizations symbolize the material and ontological “ruins” of lost caregivers. Petrarch’s poetic methodology—the glue with which he fastens disparate parts together—is the “bitter-sweet” style of opposition for which he is notorious. His poems’ dogged determination to iterate the nebulous—the ghostly—describes the Petrarchan mode and should make obsolete the flattery/insult dialectic of Petrarchism/anti-Petrarchism. Indeed, when an early modern

²⁵⁸ On p. 10, Greene writes, “We cannot remember all as individuals because our memories are mercifully selective, because the critical years of infancy are somehow blocked from retrospection and because most of the formative past preceded our birth.”

poem is identifiably flattering, it is as anti-Petrarchan as its insulting counterpart. *Hamlet* exists, in part, to contradict this burgeoning, turn-of-the-seventeenth-century bifurcation of the Petrarchan mode, this decoupling of the bitter and the sweet. Nonetheless, this bifurcation will accelerate in English letters throughout the seventeenth century, until it reaches its terminus in the excremental and Stella poems of Swift.

In *The Great Mother*, Erich Neumann points out that abstract art is no modern creation but is, rather, the mode of the earliest artists. The works of these artists, created in prehistoric, matriarchal (what Neumann says may have been matrilineal) periods, frequently represent females with exaggerated breasts and stomachs. According to Neumann, this is because the breasts and the womb represent the “deep mystery” of all origins and were venerated from the earliest times. Especially in periods that pre-date the discovery of the male role in reproduction, images of the breasts and the womb represented an all-significant outer/inner nexus, an expression of a universal dependency, a universal need. The old herbals’ and medical texts’ emphasis on wormwood’s usefulness in treating maladies of the belly—including the herb’s effectiveness as an agent of abortion—has perhaps taught us to neglect its parallel use as a weaning agent. Though I will emphasize the latter use in order to “correct” this neglect, the former use is equally significant, to an almost co-dependent degree.

A more fitting visual representation for the long Petrarchan Renaissance is the sixteenth-century fountain *Diana Efesina* of Villa D’Este, in Tivoli, Italy. This many-

breasted water feature alludes to the original Artemis of Ephesus, whose temple the *Artemision* was one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. The uniquely Egyptian character and pose of Artemis of Ephesus, coupled with archaeological findings that suggest that she was worshipped on the site of the *Artemision* as early as the Bronze Age, place her seminal importance beyond the conscious parameters of the Renaissance; she is the dimly perceived origin of origins, haunting every succeeding present moment.

Artemis was the goddess of childbirth, hunting, and the moon, “‘a kind of a witch with a herb garden,’ and had her arrow poison. She was patroness of medicine and magic, ‘artemisia’ (wormwood) being one of her most powerful charms.”²⁵⁹ T. Clifford Allbutt writes the preceding sentence after demonstrating that second-oldest poisons of the ancient world were those of vegetable provenance, applied to the tips of arrows.²⁶⁰ Hence, the many-breasted Artemis is the namesake not only of the herb used to wean ancient, medieval, and early modern infants, but also of the vegetable used to poison the tips of arrows. Hamletian imagery—portable, lyrical, yet limited—hereby coalesces.

Artemis’ arrows, here, carry on their tips a poison more fatal than that found at the end of Eros’/Cupid’s weapons in the *Canzoniere* (where the speaker mentions arrows repeatedly), something more poisonous than the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” of *Hamlet* III.i, [which are—confusingly—often glossed to refer to Fortuna’s Wheel, which seems never to have featured slings or arrows.] *Hamlet* III.i’s and Petrarch’s arrows allow one to remain alive, at least. Artemis’ deadly shafts are to be

²⁵⁹ T. Clifford Allbutt, *Greek Medicine in Rome*, p. 353.

²⁶⁰ “It appears that poisons were taken into use first from venomous animals,” Allbutt writes on p. 347 of *Greek Medicine in Rome*.

found in the juggled poisoned blades of *Hamlet* V.ii, in Laura's death from the plague, and, eventually, in black-hooded Esther Johnson's gun.²⁶¹

Indeed, *Artemisia* was used as a prophylactic during the plagues of Petrarch's and Shakespeare's lifetimes,¹ returning us, again, to her witch-like status as disease-bestower and disease-remover. This doubled nature is also present in her capacity as the ender of female life, since she was also the goddess of childbirth. Artemis' particular brand of high-stakes double-ness produces a tautological "hair of the dog" quality in her atmosphere. This closely resembles the notoriously Petrarchan tendency of the lyric speaker to attend to/treat his own suffering by indulging it, by exploring it, by following it to its lyric destination. The entire lyric turn, here, becomes a *pharmakon*, remedy and poison.

Petrarch performs this double-move in reverse with the *Canzoniere*, looking up from his books of ancient wisdom in order to behold present beauty. He wrote his love lyrics in "vulgar" Italian, thereby constructing a metageneric, dialogic tension between his academic learning and his public persona that his intellectual heirs' best work (literally) dramatically exploits. Each of my three chosen textual entities need to speak to "the groundlings," to commune with the living—regardless of disgust with the present world, scholarly impressions of the glory of the ancient world, or nihilistic intimations of the brevity and meaninglessness of life. For the speaker of the *Canzoniere*, for Hamlet, and for the Stella and Excremental poems of Swift, the vulgar world possesses an elemental sweetness that vexes bitter rhetoric. Indeed, when these bodies of work hardest to reject the world's sweetness, they emphasize it. It is as if my chosen speakers have the flavor

²⁶¹ I will discuss the "pistol" anecdote in Swift's "On the Death of Esther Johnson" in Chapter Six.

of wormwood permanently in their mouths; they will apply it rhetorically to the female bodies of their moment in order to reject *them*.

The bitterness of *Hamlet/Hamlet* does not determine its tragic nature—in fact, it ends on several sweet notes. Seen from a simple, obvious angle, the play is a tragedy because it does not end with Hamlet marrying Ophelia. Indeed, the play's use of the familiar New Comedy trope of the overbearing father who forbids his daughter to marry the object of her desire not only suggests that Ophelia should be destined to wed Hamlet, but it also frustrates that generically comedic expectation in a way that resembles that other, closely related Petrarchan experiment in tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*. That genres and traditions are in dialogue in the finest plays of late sixteenth-century England—when Petrarchism was at its peak there, when those fine plays were being written by lyric poets steeped in the Petrarchan mode—attest to this inborn, uniquely Petrarchan, tightly knotted tension. The tragedy of the Renaissance lies less in its everybody-dies-ness than it does in this suspended tension, this ultimate refusal not only to answer vital questions, but also in its unapologetic inability to ultimately determine what the questions are or how they should be posed. On the latter side of the medieval rupture, the early modern artists find themselves not separating and classifying (as the ancients did) but combining their (re)discoveries, collapsing them in a manner that defies resolution. Though Petrarch did not invent this coiled, vertiginous suspension, he crystallized it for the belated British artists. Much of the genius of *Hamlet* lies in its ability to deconstruct this collapsed crystallization, to find the Senecan in the Petrarchan. I will have more to say about Seneca shortly.

Hamlet's Weaning

When Hamlet speaks at his rhetorical best, he collapses the metaphorical and literal—a conceptually antithetical formation, a linguistic juxtaposition that suggests that the distinction between the literal and the metaphorical were as tenuous as the distinction between body and world. “I have that within which passes show” is a tautologically rich example of this coiled move, this Janus-like employment of differences that cannot be separated. By compounding this conceptual collapse with the unspecific, darkly hinting “that,” Hamlet strikes a lyrical terror in his meaning-frustrated auditors and suggests that he, too, can only guess at what he has within him. Hamlet is fundamentally confused. This erudite, articulate, lyrical, absolute confusion is another means of being Petrarchan.

Hamlet's line's denotative banality reinforces its effectiveness in an almost isopathic manner, as if repeating a curse canceled it, as if he seeks to reapply an essential bitterness to sweetness that *his mother* offers when she implores him to “cast thy nighted color off.” The Prince makes his inward claim despite the fact that no character in his play is likely to have thought that Hamlet does not have something inside him invisible to the eye. We return, here, to the territory of the soul-damage in the belly that will be “uprooted” at the body's demise. Hamlet makes his enigmatic statement before he receives his marching orders from the Ghost, whose information therefore cannot constitute what the Prince has within him.

Whatever else he has inside, a profound sense of betrayal certainly lives within Hamlet—it is the thread that runs through the nature of his character from the beginning of the play to its end, when Hamlet feels he must remind his closest and “common” friend to tell the story of the Prince's life. For Hamlet, everything happens within the

context of betrayal; his life is a series of acts that register variously on betrayal's spectrum. This pervasive and therefore dimly perceived sense of betrayal "passeth show" as much from him as it does from the other characters. This is why Hamlet "must hold" his "tongue"²⁶²: he does not fully grasp the source and scope of his fundamental sense of being wronged. Saying he must hold his tongue registers his treasonous dilemma orally, thereby invoking the baby-breast relationship. Indeed, Hamlet says he must hold his tongue before the Ghost entreats him—twice—not to blame anything/everything on his mother, even though the Ghost refrains (in the Second Quarto, First Folio, and combined texts) from either implicating or exonerating his mother in or from Old Hamlet's murder. "Never mind your lyrical origins," the Ghost is really saying, "or you'll never get around to killing Claudius." However, if Hamlet does not defy the Ghost and consider those lyrical origins—if he does not flout his vow to erase "all forms, all pressures past/That youth and observation copied" in his memory—there is no play. Likewise, if Hamlet were conscious of what "youth and observation" had "copied there," there would be no play. Because he does not understand the "forms" and "pressures past" to which he refers, he cannot know what to forsake. The play charts Hamlet's searching out these pressures past, in a lyric fashion that recalls the speaker's paradoxically wandering-while-paralyzed journey of self-examination in the *Canzoniere*.

After all, Hamlet's Ghost does not interfere with Hamlet's Delay, except briefly in the Chamber Scene, that moment so redolent with the vast suggestions of mother-son physical attachment. It is as if the Ghost's true purpose were to inspire Hamlet's Delay via the murder directive, as if the Ghost has come now to observe Hamlet getting close to

²⁶² I.ii.159.

the mark. When he tells Hamlet he has come “to whet thy almost blunted purpose,”²⁶³ that “conceit in weakest bodies strongest works,”²⁶⁴ the Ghost acknowledges the atmosphere of breastfeeding and weaning. The Queen conjures Janus’ multiple, disembodied mouths in her reference to “the very coinage of” Hamlet’s “brain/This bodiless creation . . . ,”²⁶⁵ and the Prince directs his mother, “Lay not that flattering unction to you soul,/That not your trespass but my madness speaks.”²⁶⁶ Wormwood as “unction” rubbed on a weaning woman’s breast haunts the meaning of this line; for the weaned object to connect weaning to flattery renders this Hamletian moment a wormhole to both the anti-Petrarchan rejection of epideictic rhetoric and the anti-Petrarchan instinct’s attendant Swiftian satire. Indeed, Hamlet’s directive is another way of saying, “Absent thee from felicity a while,” the line that W.B.C. Watkins deems to be the expression of Swift’s essence.²⁶⁷ I will say more on this line in Chapter Six.

Entering the state of paralysis that this seeking out of origins produces is part of the goal, a primary impulse of the Petrarchan. The speaker of Poem 37 says that “. . . the hours are so swift to complete their journey that I have not enough time even to think how I run to death.” His poetry searches out and connects the “tranquil” ports of breasts and bosoms with the grass from which civilizations emerge and to which they eventually

²⁶³ III.iv.111. The line puns on *wet* and alludes to the sustaining female breast/body as a baby’s “purpose.”

²⁶⁴ III.iv.114. “Weakest bodies” ironically refers to infants’ bodies.

²⁶⁵ III.iv.137-138.

²⁶⁶ III.iv.145-146.

²⁶⁷ W.B.C. Watkins, *Perilous Balance*, p. 1.

return. When Petrarch's cataloguing of female body parts annoy us, as if those parts were as or more important than the entire woman to which they belong, we neglect to notice that his speaker seeks to remake the process of discovering the female body, itself always in the process of congregation or dispersal, always in transition. A "true," whole "image" haunts the fragments in the poems, as it haunts the fragments that are the poems, as if they are meant to resemble the ancient Roman ruins that he seems to have been the first to effectively imagine in an ontological manner—less as old pieces of rock than as evidence of life and glory.²⁶⁸

The portability of the Petrarch's poems' body parts reflects the portability of experience, the "lovely wandering" that weaning forces on the lyric subject. The ubiquity of the body parts remind the speaker's "soul" that he seeks to "return" to them "naked." It were as reasonable to be annoyed by a nature poet's only mentioning one kind of flower, instead of them all. Profoundly dependent connection to female bodies constituted a physical knowledge that every Western person up to Petrarch's day had known; as his scholarship seeks to recover the knowledge of the ancients, his poems seek to recover this physical wisdom. But even deeper than the tautological pleasure promised by the recovery of this wisdom, a sense that the search for wisdom distracts from the race to the grave haunts the Petrarchan mode. The act of seeking out the origins of the self suggests that there is ample time to find them. The fantasy that they exist at all is tantamount to imagining that a moment really can be captured, which is the foreclosed aim of the early modern lyric and therefore of the Petrarchan mode.

²⁶⁸ I refer to Petrarch's *Familiare* II.14.

A traditional demarcation between Dante's and Petrarch's poetry has tended to run along the border separating the divine from the terrestrial—Dante concerns himself with the former, this thinking suggests, while Petrarch concerns himself with the latter. As I stated earlier, Durling emphasizes this division when he argues that the flowers of Poem 126 allude to the flowers that attend the appearance of Beatrice in *Purgatorio* 30: “Petrarch's flowers are natural,” Durling writes, “as opposed to angelic . . .”²⁶⁹ But Petrarch's speaker calls Laura's breast “*angelico*.” Perhaps a less distracting way to view the difference between the *Divine Comedy* and the *Canzoniere* is to consider Petrarch's focus on origins, as opposed to Dante's focus on destiny. “I was really there,” Petrarch's poems say repeatedly, “and she really was, too.” The need to iterate this mutual presence shares a shadow-essence with the poet's imagined-yet-intensely-experienced breast-feeding career—a career that Radbill, Fildes, Stone, and Adelman agree typically spanned an average of three years, long enough to form an intensely profound attachment to the body of a nurse or nursing mother.²⁷⁰ Rehearsing the female body's untouched aspects—from which the speaker is repeatedly, physically weaned, and from which he then must repeatedly, lyrically wean himself—serves as ghost-nourishment, spectral feeding.

Another useful way to figure the Dante/Petrarch dialectic is in terms of comedy versus tragedy. As in Swift's day, there was no public outlet for the considerable gift for tragic dialogue that much of Petrarch's work displays. Indeed, his astonishingly constant

²⁶⁹ Robert M. Durling, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*, Introduction, p. 23.

²⁷⁰ On p. 5 of *Suffocating Mothers*, Adelman writes that “many [infants] would have experienced a prolonged period of infantile dependency, during which they were subject to pleasures and dangers especially associated with nursing and the female body.”

journeying—written near death, his *Testament* instructs his ultimate caretaker where to bury him if he dies in Padua, Arquà, Venice, Milan, Pavia, Rome, or “anywhere else”—coupled with his gift for lyrically dramatizing his suffering and triumph along the way, casts Petrarch as an ideal model for the notion that “all the world’s a stage.” Durling has something like this in mind when he says of Poem 126 that it employs

a characteristic Petrarchan paradox [that] . . . focuses the problem of the relation of outer and inner, of form and content: it is resolved by the poem’s being dramatic, of *representing* the simultaneity of love and poetic inspiration as *in process*.²⁷¹

This brings us into a wider consideration of the nature of drama—it is less a narrative construct than it is a process of representation. This, in turn, reveals drama’s essential overlap with the lyric. Seen this way, Shakespeare, writing ambitious lyrical drama in an overtly “Petrarchan era,” could not have avoided exploring the limits and fundamentals of Petrarchism. Durling finds a resolution in a paradox—the poem’s existence testifies to a victory of something-ness over nothingness; its creation amounts to a comedic outcome. This view, however, evacuates the meaning of the something that is comedy, particularly the one Petrarch’s contemporary Dante employs in the *Divine Comedy*. To ask “How did I come here and when?”—to perversely turn toward origins, forsaking the pressure to focus on a teleological destiny—is to doom oneself to an arbitrarily stumbled upon fate, “anywhere else” than the destiny suggested by one’s present circumstances. It is to willfully embrace teleological chaos, that essential component of tragedy, that messy phase through which comedy ultimately must pass. Comedy views transition as itself a transition. The paradox of early modern comedic, happy endings is that they seem to

²⁷¹ Robert M. Durling, *Petrarch’s Lyric Poems*, Introduction, pp. 21-22.

acknowledge that their happiness arises out of a generically determined cessation of narrative *in media res*, at a wedding—before comedic characters' stories have truly finished in their deaths (which more likely than not cannot be tragic). In this way, comedies resemble lyric poems more than do tragedies, because comedies disrupt narrative. They defy apocalyptic teleology, an inevitable communal destiny that lyric poems also interrupt. Yet Petrarch's poems are tragic in that, though they constantly seek communion and transcendence, they never consider the possibility that transition has a terminus. Their prescribed, restless, solitary autonomy will not allow themselves the luxury of considering the possibility of even momentary rest.

Chapter Four: Wormwood, wormwood

Play Around the Play Within the Play

Janet Adelman points out that *The Mousetrap* concerns itself not with catching the conscious of the king, but with exploring the psychology of the Player Queen, who, in lines Hamlet likely composed, says, “Such love must needs be treason in my breast./In second husband let me be accursed!/None wed the second but who killed the first.” Playwright/audience member Hamlet then says, “That’s wormwood.” The First Quarto has Hamlet exclaim, “O wormewood, wormewood!”; the Second Quarto renders the line, “That’s wormwood”; the First Folio compromises with “Wormwood, Wormwood.” Contemporary editions of the play have the line as either, “Wormwood, wormwood!” or, as Braunmuller does, “That’s wormwood.” I find the Q2 rendering—“That’s wormwood”—whether it be Shakespeare’s or an editor’s revision of Q1’s “O wormewood, wormewood!”—to be over-determinative, a prosaic flattening of a richly poetic and ambiguous moment. Q1’s rendering is immediate, grammatically unfiltered, open—in a word: lyrical.

Two recent, authoritative versions of the play gloss Hamlet’s gloss, respectively, as “a bitter herb,”²⁷² and, slightly more verbosely, “i.e., How bitter. (Literally, a bitter-tasting plant.)”²⁷³ I have always found this widely accepted interpretation of Hamlet’s enigmatic non sequitur to be profoundly dissatisfying—chiefly because it makes no sense. There is a motivation problem with taking Hamlet’s comment to mean, “That’s bitter,” or, “Bitter, bitter.” To read it that way suggests that we should take the Prince to

²⁷² I refer to Albert R. Braunmuller’s 2001 *Pelican*/Penguin edition.

²⁷³ I refer to David Bevington’s 2008 *The Complete Works of Shakespeare, Sixth Ed.*

mean that it is bitter for the Player Queen to refuse to remarry. But Hamlet's outrage at Gertrude's re-marriage never wavers, remarkable in a play determined to destabilize moral absolutes. We could detach "That's bitter" from its immediate context in order to read it on a more general and surface level, making Hamlet's comment mean that killing one's first husband is a bitter thing to do. This reading is stranger still. In the conflated/First Folio (F1) text of the play, neither Hamlet nor his father's Ghost ever suggests that Gertrude had any knowledge of Claudius' plan to murder the King, much less that she is personally responsible.

We might, therefore, read "That's bitter" on an even more surface level—as a very casual, even throwaway remark, referring solely to the discrete world of *The Mousetrap*, disconnected from any wider, symbolic meaning to "the play around the play." In this reading, Hamlet resembles a teen nudging the person seated to his left and saying, "Harsh, brah." The problem with reading it that way is that the Player Queen intends her statement as a vow of loyalty that transcends death. Nothing about the Player Queen's sentiment resembles bitterness. Her statement is, in fact, the essence of sweetness.

Yet wormwood's most notorious quality—from the ancient world until the nineteenth century²⁷⁴—was its bitterness. Therefore, it seems that the most reasonable way to square conventional wisdom with Hamlet's wormwood aside is to read it as a vividly pregnant allusion, cultural shorthand an early modern audience would immediately understand. Hamlet's wormwood aside operates on the text—changing the

²⁷⁴ The popularity of absinthe in nineteenth century Switzerland, Germany, and France transformed wormwood's reputation. Through a strange confluence of pseudo-science and moralistic propaganda, wormwood came to be thought of as a hallucinogen in that period. This led to its widespread ban.

words around it—as opposed to redundantly reinforcing an idea expressed in *The Mousetrap*, or insanely emoting about the general state of the Prince’s affairs. Dorothy C. Hockey agrees with the strange critical tradition that seems to read Hamlet’s herbal exclamation as a billboard registry of “his bitter disillusion and sorrow.”²⁷⁵ This reading is tantamount to having Hamlet holler, “Angry!” when he appears in I.ii, or “Sad!” when he discovers that Ophelia has died. This figures the Prince’s rhetorical skills as those of the Incredible Hulk. There *is* something Hamletian about the Hulk, something about his environmental contamination, his spectacularly doomed attempts at Stoicism, something about the relevance of the inward/outward nexus of emotion and authenticity. But the Prince is more articulate.

Hockey goes on to write that

herb lore . . . formed an important part of English common knowledge from the eighth century on . . . [Shakespeare,] then, well acquainted with herb lore, addressed an audience to whom the medicinal “vertues” of herbs were of practical concern.²⁷⁶

Thereby, despite her initial, apparently more hidebound instincts, Hockey senses that something more profound is going on in Hamlet’s aside. She opens *Banckes’s Herbal* of 1525 and finds that,

The juice of [wormwood], if properly prepared, was considered “good for worms in the womb” (a word usually meaning “belly,” but sometimes also meaning “womb”) and for “worms in a man’s ear” . . . Thus, Hamlet’s murmured reiteration comments on the bitterness of the Player Queen’s lines—the “worms” in the ears of Claudius, Gertrude, and Hamlet himself, as sickening as an infection. It is almost as “leprous” a “distilment” as that poured into the “porches” of King Hamlet’s ears by Claudius . . . The

²⁷⁵ Dorothy C. Hockey, “WORMWOOD, WORMWOOD!,” *English Language Notes*, March, 1965, p. 175.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 175-176.

wormwood allusion, then, reminds us of the elder Hamlet's account of his own murder as he speaks to his already grieving son, and in so doing binds together two crucial moments of the play—both moments of revelation for Hamlet. It also plumbs the depths of Hamlet's disillusioned despair—the corruption of the womb that bore him—the “worms in the womb.” This deep repugnance to his mother is to emerge in a following scene in an explosion of violence . . . “Wormwood, wormwood!” then, in Hamlet's riddling way comments on both disease and cure . . .²⁷⁷

This passage, published in 1965, is the earliest example I can find of a reader sensitive to the bristling richness of Hamlet's wormwood allusion. Ernest Jones, though he does not notice Hamlet's wormwood moment, does include in his *Hamlet and Oedipus* a chapter called “Tragedy and the Mind of the Infant,” one sentence of which reads, “As a child Hamlet had experienced the warmest affection for his mother, and this, as is always so, had contained elements of a disguised erotic quality, still more so in infancy.”²⁷⁸ This fascinating point of view—seeing Hamlet not so much as a “real” person than as a real psychological phenomenon—seems to partake in (rather than in a quaintly patriarchal and old-fashioned style of discussing literature) a “mad,” radical, and reasonable view of lyrical constructions as real as anything or anyone else. I have never quite understood why or how some textual analysts, who argue that what is on the page is all there is of literature, also insist that what the page generates is not “real,” as if only criticism and not the criticized exists. This point of view misunderstands the history of poetry, from which all we know has been crafted. A world crafted from an original criticism—a Talmud before the Torah—would look different, perhaps vastly more beautiful, less tethered to the tiresome pressure of authenticity. Yet here we are.

²⁷⁷ Dorothy C. Hockey, “‘WORMWOOD, WORMWOOD!’,” *English Language Notes*, March, 1965, pp. 176-177.

²⁷⁸ Ernest Jones, *Hamlet and Oedipus*, p. 91.

Though Hockey trains her focus on the term's early modern English herbal relevance, she identifies in the non sequitur not only a baby/original Hamlet²⁷⁹ but also one that bears a poetico-rhetorical resemblance to the tapeworms that wormwood expunged from early modern "wombs." She thereby anticipates what Janet Adelman will call Hamlet's "confrontation with the maternal body."²⁸⁰ Though Adelman does not mention Hamlet's wormwood "ejaculation,"²⁸¹ she repeatedly refers to what she calls the "deep mystery" of the play, in which

In an astonishing transfer of agency from male to female, malevolent power and blame for the murder [of King Hamlet] tends to pass from Claudius to Gertrude . . . in [*The Mousetrap*,] Hamlet's version of his father's tale, the murderer's role is clearly given less emphasis than the [Player] Queen's . . . her protestations of love motivate . . . the dialogue of the playlet . . . while the actual murderer remains a pasteboard villain, the [Player] Queen's protestations locate psychic blame for the murder squarely in her. "None wed the second but who kill'd the first," she tells us . . . In her formulation, remarriage itself is a form of murder: "A second time I kill my husband dead,/When second husband kisses me in bed" . . . We know that Hamlet has added some dozen or sixteen lines to the play . . . and though we cannot specify them, these protestations seem written suspiciously *from the point of view of the child* . . .²⁸²

²⁷⁹ Or, as Colin Burrow quips in another context on p. 176 of his *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity*, "Hamlet . . . has his moments of being a little ham." It is worth noting that on this page Burrow also detects in Hamlet's reference to his "firm bosom," before entering Gertrude's chamber, an allusion to Senecan, "marble-constant" Stoicism. The metaphors/themes of Stoicism, autonomy, and weaning are never far from any idea expressed in *Hamlet*.

²⁸⁰ Adelman entitles the first chapter of her book "Man and Wife is One Flesh: *Hamlet* and the Confrontation with the Maternal Body."

²⁸¹ Dorothy C. Hockey, "'WORMWOOD, WORMWOOD!'," *English Language Notes*, March, 1965, p. 175.

²⁸² Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, pp. 24-25. Italics mine.

From this discussion, Adelman moves quickly on to the Chamber Scene, her speed and emphasis on Gertrude mirroring, she notes,²⁸³ the Prince's. Hamlet, on his way to his mother's chamber, stumbles onto Claudius—alone—praying for forgiveness. It would seem from this spectacle that *The Mousetrap* has produced the incriminating result Hamlet the playwright-director said that he desired. However, instead of avenging his father's death, the Prince offers a chilling—and, according to Eleanor Prosser, an unprecedented—curse.²⁸⁴ Prosser describes her reading

the medieval mystery cycles, and . . . over a period of years . . . [working] up to 1610, reading every play that might be relevant [to Hamlet's hellish reasoning regarding not taking murderous revenge on Claudius when he has the chance] . . . My survey revealed not one example of a noble revenger who sought the damnation of his victim . . .

Hamlet's cruel innovation should be relatable, even amusing, to a late-twentieth-century/early-twenty-first century Western suburban bourgeois demographic, much of which was raised by stepparents with little emotional attachment to their wards. It is also, of course, a rich dramatic moment, partaking yet again in infinite subjectivity: Hamlet avoids committing the crime and sin of murder by imagining something worse, thereby complying with earthly laws by offending the laws of heaven, solely and purely in his mind.

Then Hamlet quickly moves on, speaking to himself not about what he has just witnessed of Claudius, but how he should behave during his meeting with his mother. It is as if Shakespeare addresses the dramatic problem of his avenging hero's refusal of

²⁸³ Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, pp. 31-32. Adelman goes so far as to call the Prayer Scene "a lapse, an interlude that must be gotten over before the real business can be attended to."

²⁸⁴ Eleanor Prosser, *Hamlet and Revenge*, pp. xi-xii of the Introduction.

opportune revenge by crafting—via Hamlet’s curse—the most extreme motivation for that refusal imaginable. Again and again in the play, as Adelman observes, plot serves as “cover-up”²⁸⁵ for ineffable meaning, a phantom, even spectral culpability Hamlet is determined to identify in his mother.

Though Hamlet says he intends the performance of his rewritten version of the *Mousetrap* as a means “to catch the conscience of the king,”²⁸⁶ once the “play within the play” begins, the Prince—via his comments on the play—improvises other uses for the spectacle, broadening the piece’s dramatic, thematic, and narratory functions, even as he undermines them. Indeed, Hamlet’s undermining takes part in the process of deepening and broadening. The Prince’s ouroboric tendency to undermine his and others’ efforts at determining clarity and meaning have, understandably, been read as amounting to nihilism. But Hamlet is not Jacques, crafting mental cul-de-sacs in the wilderness, eager to avoid the central action. Hamlet is “a king of infinite space,”²⁸⁷ and he seeks to travel past surface to the heart of its meaning—a meaning apparently unknown to every character in the play, except for the Ghost, who will only say part of what that meaning is, and who pleads with Hamlet not to discover the rest.

If no one alive in Denmark knows what is really going on, every attempt to discover meaning must be experimental in nature; it must conjure a ghost of meaning stirring in what happens before the characters’ and *Hamlet*’s auditors’ eyes. Claudius and Polonius engage in meaning-seeking experiments as fatal and foolish, if infinitely less infinite, as

²⁸⁵ Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p. 20.

²⁸⁶ II.ii.544.

²⁸⁷ II.ii.255, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*. Braunmuller’s edition of the play does not contain this phrase.

Hamlet's. But experimental improvisation characterizes the Prince's movement throughout the play: he follows an instinct and acts, teases out that action's implications, aborts that action, and moves on. The II.ii letter-poem to Ophelia emblemizes this process, embarking on an ambitiously Petrarchan mission, only to give up and the game halfway through, undermining itself via comments on and around the text of the poem. In this way, the letter-poem is both an abortion and a sex act—or an abortive sex act, a forfeiture on the brink of bodily intimacy whose verge Swift's speakers will sublimate in de-eroticized ways, the foregone impossibility of sex serving as their transgressive passport. Hamlet repeats the letter-poem's meta-textual process of self-critique during the performance of the *Mousetrap*, mocking a play for which he is largely responsible.

Hamlet staging a play he partly composed and does not respect mirrors his sending the letter-poem to Ophelia, anyway, explicitly described aborted failure and all. The execution of these documents demonstrates that the Prince values the process of failed improvisation, not because it obviates meaning, but because the tautological structure of improvisation—instinct, attempt, failure—resonates with Janet Adelman's "deep mystery" stirring in Elsinore's foundations. Indeed, the self-written poem that Hamlet derides is tautological in the extreme, locating a rhetorical knot in the universe's core: stars are fire are stars; if the sun moves or does not move, what does it mean to move; if the truth lies, how does one avoid lying?

This is existential tautology as lyric performance, outside of which spins Hamlet's nauseated marginalia: "I am ill at these numbers." Just outside that illness spins Polonius' pre-emptive strike, a criticism of the letter-poem's salutation's use of the term *beautified*: "Vile phrase." These concentric circles are drawn with the ink of the

Canzoniere, absorbing the “shame” of Poem 1, which carries out its own pre-emptive strike on the book it introduces, pointing out the speaker’s “youthful error” amidst the “brief dream” of “the world.” But what is the significance of a youthful error in a world that is a dream? How does a specific, individual failing relate to a communal flaw in the fabric of existence?

On a basic level, Poem 1’s rhetorical movements emblemize the *Canzoniere*’s self-undermining bent of mind—Petrarch’s apologies are not apologies any more than Hamlet’s disavowals are disavowals. This undermining, pre-emptive strike against the lyric self, obviating a linear/narratory progress, determining a constant ouroboric circling back toward origins—emblematic of the Renaissance mindset—also characterizes Hamlet’s rhetoric and trajectory. Petrarch thinks and writes in this manner up to the end of his life, writing in his *Testament* regarding the possessions he was leaving to his friends, “As to the smallness of these legacies, let my aforesaid friends accuse not me but Fortune—if there be any such thing as Fortune.”²⁸⁸ Petrarch’s friends, reading his *Testament* when its author does not exist, are thereby encouraged to blame something that the non-existent author suggests does not exist. This is another way of averring that the world and all its intellectual and cultural traditions amount to but a “brief dream.” Taken in concert with the “To be or not to be” soliloquy’s “what dreams may come,” Petrarch clarifies Hamlet’s statement: death is a dream because life is a dream; therefore, there is no difference between life and death. The *Canzoniere* and *Hamlet* suggest this idea constantly; this idea vibrates at the core of the Hamletian suggestion that meaning does not exist. Because the *Canzoniere* and *Hamlet* are foundational Renaissance Humanistic

²⁸⁸ Francesco Petrarca, *Petrarch’s Testament*, trans and ed. by Theodor E. Mommsen, p. 9.

texts, we are remiss when we do not consider that meaninglessness is a central tenet of the Renaissance Humanist movement. To celebrate the Human is to celebrate the absence of meaning. This is not a controversial claim to make, if one remembers the commonplace observation that the Renaissance aesthetic involves a turn away from God, toward earthly concerns. This is a move away from infinite objectivity toward infinite subjectivity, whose ultimate effect is meaninglessness.

In a simple, essential way, both Petrarch's speaker and Hamlet say, time and again, "In a world as disgusting—and mad—as this, does it really matter how disgusting and mad I am?" Both of these lyric "sites"—Petrarch's Speaker and Hamlet—provide ample opportunity for the already nihilistic-minded to conclude that the poetry these sites produce seeks to undermine itself at every turn. "What's the point of going on?" these lyric sites ask. "To think and to make more poetry," they seem to answer themselves. That is a rather empty situation, especially for a Renaissance period we are told to think "celebrates the human."

Nor do they amount to nihilistic dead-ends, subtending further reflection. They are tautological machines, skeptical of skepticism, constructed to produce answers beneath the questions' terms, to generate meaning beneath and beyond meaning. Likewise, the *Mousetrap* spins around itself on multiple trajectories, at multiple speeds. The Dumbshow forms a kind of inarticulate inner coil.

I echo Giuseppe Mazzotta's observation that Petrarch's work registers a "simultaneous thought of history of death,"²⁸⁹ because I want to place Mazzotta's observation alongside Hamlet's letter-poem. To read "this machine" in the closing of the

²⁸⁹ Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch*, p. 1.

letter poem as referring merely to Hamlet's mortal coil is to disregard the phrase's context, which is a Petrarchan letter-poem, a lyric plunge into life's deepest mysteries, itself couched within the context of romantic love. "This machine" means "this method;" an interpretation of the letter-poem's closing might go something like, "As long as I see everything through this Petrarchan lens, as long as I'm fundamentally confused but sense that romantic love brings me closer to understanding, I'm yours."

One might call this Petrarcho-Hamletian device the *History and Death Machine*. It runs on energy generated by simultaneously looking toward the past and the future, and it looks like the double-faced Janus, of whom Macrobius writes "that he is said to have . . . two faces because he both knew past events and foresaw the future."²⁹⁰ But does not every mortal also possess this ability? Most everyone remembers some past events clearly; they "know" other past events more dimly, only perceiving those events' shadows. One might offer ancient Rome or one's own birth as examples of past events so vaguely perceived that they cannot be fathomed *as* events but, rather, as worlds in and of themselves, reiterated via perception, existing as long as they are perceived. Likewise, most everyone foresees the future for themselves and everyone they know—all must perish from the earth. Thus, again, Janus emerges as a "small god, intimately near,"²⁹¹ magical not for his difference from mortals but for his lyric representation of an essential mortal dilemma.

To replace the above paragraph's use of *mortal* with the term *human* is to recall Cicero's seminal distinction between beasts and humans—that humans have a sense of

²⁹⁰ Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, trans and ed. by Robert A. Kaster, p. 93.

²⁹¹ Louise Adams Holland, *Janus and the Bridge*, p. 276, quoting Nilsson's *Greek Popular Religion*, p. 21.

the past and plan for the future—from the Roman Senator’s *De officiis*. Petrarch seems to have heeded Cicero’s suggestion that this simultaneous past/future focus vibrates at the heart of what it means to be human, a fundamental humanistic tenet Hamlet employs throughout his eponymous play.

The maternal body is a text, which, like *De rerum natura* for Petrarch and his peers, is sensed everywhere yet lies just out of reach. In first-century B.C. Lucretius’ seminal, epoch-defining-and-creating *De rerum natura*, the poet repeatedly compares his poem to the “honey-rimmed cup of wormwood” given to then-contemporary children to cure them of tapeworm. Gerard Passannante has recently argued for a *Lucretian Renaissance*, in which *De rerum natura* brings the period into being via Petrarch’s digestion of Lucretius’ spectral wormwood trope; Adelman stresses the deep psychological significance of the belly in relation to issues concerning origins—which are, after all, what the Renaissance is all about. From Richard III’s sense of himself as a kind of disease expelled by his mother’s womb,²⁹² to the view of the Belly espoused in *Coriolanus*, to Timon’s ravings “before his cave,” and more, Adelman has shown how fundamental the belly/womb symbol is to Shakespeare’s work. Indeed, Adelman notes that

²⁹² This idea haunts the Introduction of Janet Adelman’s *Suffocating Mothers*. Adelman launches her argument from Richard’s *in utero* deformation speech from *King Henry VI, Part 3* III.ii, which begins, “Love foreswore me in my mother’s womb”

What we know of the actual conditions that shape infantile fantasy suggests . . . that many would have experienced a prolonged period of infantile dependency, during which they were subject to pleasures and dangers especially associated with nursing and the maternal body . . . If the child had had a difficult and prolonged infancy, the culture provided him or her with plenty of directives about who to blame: for many, the actual conditions of infancy would have intersected with cultural representations of the female body to mark that body as the site of deformation and vulnerability. Fortune was traditionally represented as a disappointing or unreliable nurse . . .²⁹³

T.S. Eliot's most notorious theory of disliking *Hamlet* is useful when considering the importance of the Prince's wormwood comment. Eliot writes that

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked . . . The artistic "inevitability" lies in this complete adequacy of the external to the emotion; and this is precisely what is deficient in *Hamlet*.²⁹⁴

But what if the objective correlative predates a dramatic subject's memory?²⁹⁵ Weaning is the "treason in my breast" that, though still felt, cannot be recalled. The subject spends the balance of his life experiencing the repercussions of weaning, in an enforced state of relative autonomy, though he cannot recall the bitter way this autonomy began. The inwardness inspired by this chain of events is profound indeed—too profound for conscious understanding, unless triggered by the semi-consciousness of lyric poetry, where Petrarch's lyric explorations of wormwood and weaning live.

²⁹³ Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p. 5.

²⁹⁴ T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, p. 125.

²⁹⁵ My project overlaps, here, with Freud's *Hamlet* criticism in his *The Interpretation of Dreams*—when Freud connects the character Oedipus' "dream-material of immemorial antiquity" to Hamlet's Delay's "lack of cause of the motive," he posits not only a hidden "objective correlative" but also an openness to other deep, erotic, pre-memory anti-motivations.

No one, to my knowledge, has stepped back from Lucretius' wormwood trope long enough to reflect that it, too, comments on the vexed problem of origins. Lucretius tells us that he composes his poem in order to disillusion us from belief in the gods and that belief's attendant fears of death and an afterlife. In other words, Lucretius means his poem to serve as a vermifuge, expelling the tapeworm of superstition from the very centers of our being. But one era's superstition is a past era's truth, and Lucretius' poem dedicates and re-dedicates itself to the memory of third-and-fourth-century B.C. philosopher Epicurus. Lucretius' ouroboric double-move parallels the perversity of the Renaissance literary artists', turned toward a past they revere in order to reject a past they despise. In this way, the Renaissance is less a rebirth than it is a crystallization, an editing that figures itself as a mother expelling an unwanted child.

Because weaning predates a subject's conscious memory and thus resides in the subconscious, it is apt for that mode's means of expression: a lyric subject seizes a conscious occurrence in order to explore her subconscious, seeking to recover essential knowledge lodged there. This essential, subconscious knowledge constitutes the &. of the Petrarchan lyric mode, and it always concerns the feminine.

The different temporal natures of the conscious/subconscious distinction are crucial to understanding the difference between the two modes: consciousness occurs in the forward-facing present; the subconscious springs from a sense of the past, a turning back to recover something lost. As Petrarch's speaker derives his subjectivity from the

sustained consideration of his object Laura, Janus derives his simultaneously multiple points of view from the older, more powerfully ubiquitous Diana. Both derivative sites of masculinity seem to exist in order to regard the originally feminine, to seek out and examine an elemental female presence that precedes the masculine tribute-maker. When Petrarch's speaker enters Sainte-Claire d'Avignon, Laura is *already there*, assumedly surrounded by images of the Virgin Mary, who was considered to be an incarnation of the Ephesian Diana. Petrarch's speaker receives these cultural transmissions and connects them subconsciously, lyrically.

The subconscious of an individual constitutes a kind of culture of that person, a constantly reiterated tradition of behavior known as "identity." When an individual consciously recovers something from her past—a childhood habit of playing tennis, for example—a kind of conscious personal renaissance occurs, in which past forms are resurrected in unpredictably new ways. This conscious recovery generates subconscious reverberations, the recovery of each of which, in turn, generates new subconscious repercussions. Indeed, the conscious act of returning to a game played long ago cannot help being affected by subconscious forces, both personal and cultural. Conscious behavior is the whale fluke above the water; the heavy motion is unseen.

This temporal relationship points the way to understanding how personal experiences, vaguely recalled, might combine with shared cultural memory, in order to produce a work like Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, a collection of closely related poems in which the speaker takes an encounter with a married woman named Laura and uses it to repeatedly ask, literally and figuratively, "How did I come here and when?" The lyrics' speaker invokes personal memories and cultural heritage—often simultaneously—in

order to address that central question. This seeking out of origins, grasping simultaneously toward an individual and a communal past, via present innovation—*being turned both ways*—is what I mean when I refer to the “Petrarchan mode.” It bears repeating, with a difference, that if it sounds like I equate the Petrarchan mode with “the Renaissance” it is because I think the latter unfolds in the context of the former. Rather than think of Petrarch as a “father” of the Renaissance and Humanism, I propose thinking of his mode as the double-facing atmosphere of the early modern period, a prevalent mental “form” transcendent of prosodic considerations.

That the nineteenth-century construct “the Renaissance” was crafted in the same period that taught itself to venerate Shakespeare as the height of literary achievement has gone underexplored—especially when that century’s patriarchal paternity tests identified the father of this new “Renaissance” as Petrarch. It can be no coincidence that Petrarch deserves praise for many of the same reasons we praise Shakespeare, particularly in the latter poet’s “Hamletian” mode, which is the mode the nineteenth-century taught us to prefer to all other manifestations of “the Bard.” Petrarch’s poems crystallize the tension between Christian and pre-Christian intellectual traditions; they celebrate the self by lacerating it-self; they audaciously blur the distinction between autobiography and fiction, thereby suggesting that nothing is “true;”²⁹⁶ they are Senecan (in either/both senses of the term), experimental, tragic, and melodramatic. Scholars accuse Petrarch of lacking a sense of humor, yet they figure the *Canzoniere* as an anti-*Divine Comedy*, failing to notice that Petrarch’s great, earth-focused corpus *satirizes* the hubris of Dante’s

²⁹⁶ Or, as Katherine Eisaman Maus writes on p. 1 of her *Inwardness and the Theater*, “Hamlet’s conviction that truth is unspeakable implicitly devalues any attempts to express or communicate it.”

celestially sexless hymns. Petrarch loads every lyric line with ore; he seems to use every tool at his disposal in order to craft infinitely interpretable “fragments” that teem with allusions and references, yet always remember first to be emotionally effective. His lyrics are meant for the masses as much as they are meant for the massively learned.

And yet scholars have traditionally located English Petrarchism’s beginnings in the short and narrow Wyatt/Surrey translations, which Thomas Greene’s *The Light in Troy* convincingly demonstrates to be largely innocent of their models’ depth and complexity. Shakespeare’s Sonnets and his *Romeo and Juliet*—the two of his works traditionally associated with Petrarchism—demonstrate an underlying frustration with and rejection of hidebound notions of form and genre, an intellectual restlessness that Petrarch anticipates in the broad formal and thematic variety of the *Canzoniere*. Indeed, Shakespeare’s Sonnets are acutely self-conscious, their dazzlingly exact formal performances more closely related to Montaigne’s essays than to Petrarch’s looser lyrics. In the Sonnets, Shakespeare’s speaker rarely “lets go;” he rarely experiments in the imagistically associative manner of Hamlet at his most lyrical. Similarly, scholars have overlooked how the only Shakespearian character who ever utters the name *Petrarch*—Mercutio—though he resides in a medieval Italian text rife with love sonnets—iterates neither a hidebound English Petrarchan nor a narrowly defined English “anti-Petrarchan” ideal. Mercutio, nihilistic forerunner of the 1601 Hamlet, satirizes his fellow “Petrarchan” characters’ narrow lack of imagination by indulging the subconscious lyric mode in a more truly Petrarchan way than they can. Mercutio and Hamlet constitute a “real” anti-Petrarchism, insofar as that mode was and is misunderstood. Shakespeare seems to have created Mercutio and Hamlet in order to explore the first modern lyric

mode's implications, to translate Petrarchism's poetico-philosophical gestures in order to transcend constraining notions of constrained literary forms.

Indeed, Mercutio and Hamlet—notoriously rebellious spirits—reject the strict literary forms of the text around them as much as they flout the societal norms that those texts conjure. Mercutio's blank verse fantasy of Queen Mab is textually as unlike any other moment in *Romeo and Juliet* as is its equally significant counterpart the Nurse's Speech; Hamlet only stops experimenting with literary form when he dies, having displayed his skill in the crafting of iambic trimeter lyric, dramatic heroic couplet, and royal letter forgery, not to mention a wide range of intellectual and emotional, extemporaneous performances in blank verse and prose. Similarly, when Petrarch took up the sonnet form in the *Canzoniere*, it was anything but a standard way of expressing love. For Petrarch, the sonnet was a new form, a means of experimentation,²⁹⁷ and, at any rate, it is but one of five poetic forms his book deploys.²⁹⁸ We have been taught by generations of high school English teachers to equate the endlessly restless Petrarch with a single poetic form—the “Petrarchan sonnet”—and thereby to box all of Shakespeare's Petrarchan gestures into the sonnet form. Such are the perils of success, and hence we return to revising a sequence of literary events in order to suit roughly two hundred years of ascendant cultural Shakespearian prioritization. If Shakespeare's contemporaries viewed Petrarch in a similarly reductive way—and it seems they did, minus our faint Bardolic praise—we cannot know precisely why. We can, however, bemoan our

²⁹⁷ As A.D. Cousins and Peter Howarth write on p. 1 of the *Cambridge Companion to the Sonnet*, “Sometime in the mid 1230s, at the Sicilian court of Emperor Frederick II, Giacomo da Lentini created” the sonnet form.

²⁹⁸ The other poems are canzoni, sestine, ballads, and madrigals.

repeating their mistake, and not learning from Shakespeare's correction to that reductive mistake, otherwise known as *Hamlet*.

Though Petrarchism crystallizes several ancient, Christian and pre-Christian philosophies, it is less philosophy than atmosphere, an anti-philosophy, a skeptical impulse constantly evolving in order to foreclose itself.²⁹⁹ Indeed, Petrarch's importance lies chiefly in his mode's negativity, which is the fuel powering the Petrarchan machine. The sense in Petrarch's writing of everything being always already undermined, gone to seed, ontologically and phenomenologically *ruined*—this is what scholars delight in dubbing “modern,” and it is. Taking Jeanne Addison Roberts' central argument in her *The Shakespearean Wild* a step further, there is perhaps a connection between the weeds/vegetation of a natural/wild environment and a prolonged/lifelong infant's sense of a wilderness of naked breasts—if women are “wild,” outside “culture,” surely their life-sustaining body parts are even further removed. In this way, the multiplicity of the breasts of Artemis of Ephesus represents a maximum wilderness, a site of origins from time immemorial, à la the wolf suckling Romus and Remus. In order for culture to be created and/or embraced, the weaned subject must move further and further from that wilderness, always haunted by his or her origins. This makes the Virgin Mary's latent dominance of Ephesus all the more appropriate—culture ouroborically circles back on its wild origins; it returns to the site of its birth to die.

²⁹⁹ A.D. Cousins and Peter Howarth write on p. 2 of their Introduction to the *Cambridge Companion to the Sonnet* that, “Its internal turns of thought involve anticipating and pre-empting a response—to oneself or by another—in a space whose smallness make foreclosure inevitable.”

However, no one to my knowledge has made the connection between Petrarch's ruined intellectual atmosphere and his traditional "father of the Renaissance" status. This cannot be because scholars imagine that Petrarch's move was somehow "successful," that Petrarchism's perverse turn toward the past somehow resulted in the past's actually being somehow recovered. It is more likely that we have always subconsciously connected the speaker of the *Canzoniere* to the brooding, past-obsessed-yet-memory-deficient, failed Petrarchan poet Prince of Denmark, taking our cue from canon-manufacturing crafters of the Renaissance, who seem to have been manufacturing and crafting in a similarly subconscious way.

Like Hamlet, Petrarch's conscious, vexed desire for communion with the past constitutes his truest unrequited love, and every lyric in the *Canzoniere* mirrors that hopelessly doomed relationship. There is much to say about how Rome and Laura intertwine in the *Canzoniere*, but my study seeks to delve deeper, exploring Petrarch's lyric subconscious & in order to trace a tradition he seems to have sensed, but of which he seems to have been consciously unaware: the global, prehistoric practice of worshipping the "Great Mother," manifest in the literary tradition of the wormwood trope.

Situating contemporary problems in terms of the past is how the Petrarchan mode works, along with its speaker's tendency not to allow misunderstanding the full range of a problem's origins to deter him from exploration. Indeed, Petrarch's speaker's brave, undeterred explorations gave rise, in the hands of lazier English "Petrarchan" practitioners, to the notion of the Petrarchan speaker as weak and foolish. Though it is perhaps always foolish to be brave, the Petrarchan speaker—lone, relentless, ingenious—is anything but weak. When he finds he has a problem with a woman, he seeks to

contextualize her within the intersecting nexus of his personal experiences with women and his culture's shared heritage of the feminine. This carries his speaker on a journey from Laura through a dizzying array of feminine myths and passionately half-comprehended emotions about women, a journey that necessarily ends with Poem 366, spoken late in the speaker's life to the "Beautiful Virgin . . . queen of Heaven." This trajectory mirrors that of the denizens of Ephesus (home of Soranus), whose worship of Artemis/Diana morphed into that of the Virgin Mary.

Cultural historians agree that the Mycanean and Greek goddess Artemis crystallized a tradition of worshipping a "Great Mother" that was already at least millennia old. This deep mystery, however, runs deeper; scholars of ancient culture agree that the Eden of Genesis is a later iteration of what Erich Neumann calls the "Vegetation Mysteries,"³⁰⁰ whose

primordial world is also a world of . . . the Great Mother; she is the protectress, the great hunter, who feeds man with fruits and tubers and grains, but also poisons him and lets him hunger and thirst in times of drought, when she withdraws from living things.³⁰¹

Who is this Great Mother? Neumann writes that

Her names are innumerable—Britomartis and Dictynna, Cybele and Mâ, Dindymene and Hecate, Pheraia and Artemis, Baubo and Aphaia, Orthia and Nemesis, Demeter, Persephone, and Selene, Medusa and Eleuthera, Taeit and Leto, Aphrodite and Bendis. And Hathor and Isis . . . In naming all these, we are practicing an age-old rite. Such lists . . . are a form of ritual worship. The abundance of manifestations is a characteristic of the archetype, and the plethora of names by which her powers are invoked among all peoples is an expression of their numinous ineffability.³⁰²

³⁰⁰ Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother*, p. 82.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 275.

Neumann repeatedly asserts that this “numinous ineffability” attempts to describe a subconscious cultural memory all people share: the global, prehistoric, matriarchal stage of human cultural development, before the male role in procreation was discovered. Our species spent this long stage in “the garden,” where the Great Mother ruled over vegetables, beasts, and men. Though Neumann does not figure it this way, viewing contemporary patriarchy as the result of a loin-cloth *coup d'état* helps to explain the deeply vexed (male) Humanist anxieties vis-à-vis beasts and women—not to mention Humanism’s exclusion of women, which Carol E. Quillen suggests in her Introduction of Petrarch’s *The Secret* constitutes a kind of final frontier for Humanist studies.³⁰³ Indeed, the Humanist tradition’s ancient, medieval, and Renaissance exclusion of women from Human consideration/conversation rests awkwardly alongside contemporary university curriculum debates. Old-school hard-liners who would resist what they view as trendy feminist innovation should perhaps “own” Humanism’s exclusionary tradition in order to more accurately defend anti-diversity positions. In other words, if the Renaissance Humanism upon which colleges and universities base their Humanities departments apply only to Renaissance males, then perhaps the scope of Humanities studies should be altered accordingly; perhaps schools should house Women’s Studies programs in Post-Humanities departments.

Since wormwood is known taxonomically as *Artemisia*, the relatively late iteration of the Great Mother as Artemis chiefly concerns me in this study. Neumann dares to speculate that the goddess’ name derives “from the verb *artamein*, ‘to

³⁰³ Carol E. Quillen, Introduction to Petrarch’s *The Secret*, p. 38.

slaughter,”³⁰⁴ a reference to the practice of animal—and likely human—sacrifice done in her honor by the Minoan and Greek people. Pseudo-Apuleius writes that the herb—an abortifacient as well as weaning agent—was named in honor of the fierce goddess’ role as protector of women in childbirth.³⁰⁵ The name connotes violence and expulsion, an exploration of motherly origins in the face of widespread “failure of memory.” Janet Adelman goes so far as to attribute Hamlet’s

collapse [to his] mother: . . . her failure of memory . . . defines Hamlet’s task in relation to his father as a task of memory: as she forgets, he inherits the burden . . . of idealizing and making static the past; hence the ghost’s insistence on remembering (1.5.33, 91) and the degree to which Hamlet registers his failure to avenge his father as a failure of memory.³⁰⁶

It as if Hamlet’s Delay were a Dark Age of his own person culture, where he erases the tables and seeks to forget his origins, in rebellion of the motion and energy of Petrarchan Humanism to which he was so in thrall before the play began, evidenced by his letter-poem.

Bitter-sweetness

Here is another way that anti-Petrarchism has been misunderstood: the Petrarchan machine runs on the fuel of the bitter/sweet opposition, in a rhetorically collapsed manner that confuses its two opposites, so that even when Petrarch is being

³⁰⁴ Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother*, p. 276.

³⁰⁵ *Herbarium of Apuleius in Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England*, coll. and ed. by Rev. Oswald Cockayne, Vol. 1, p. 107.

³⁰⁶ Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p. 13.

“Petrarchan,” he is being anti-Petrarchan. The Petrarchan mode generates itself by being contrary to itself, by inhabiting a zone that Poem 37 describes as “savage sweetness,” an antithetical world of “icy fire” that Stephen Minta has noted is the most prevalent (because it is the most ready-made and portable) characteristic of Elizabethan Petrarchism.³⁰⁷ It is less a matter of the bitter not being able to exist without the sweet than it is an exploration of what the difference is, how the difference is, and, if the difference is, where the boundary lies. Because it lies at the wormwood-covered breast that predates memory and thus has entered the subconscious, the boundary is blurred. Yet because it determines the weaned poet’s vexed attitudes regarding the female body, the poet cannot resist seeking the boundary out—seeking bitter-sweetness.

Petrarch’s lyrics’ style of transgression is best characterized by their focus on what the speaker of Poem 129 calls the “*dolce amaro*,” or the bitter-sweet. This focus transgresses Petrarch’s medieval forebears and models—the *Divine Comedy*, especially—by refusing to resolve the tension combined opposites create. As Durling puts it, “Petrarch represents the experience of love in terms of . . . oppositions, but he does not resolve them.”³⁰⁸ Petrarch’s speakers employ bitter-sweetness, a juxtaposition that somehow lyrically is not, in order to describe the state of physically desiring an absent woman. Indeed, in the poems, bitter-sweetness comes to constitute the presence of the desired female body, as if to resolve the tension were to cause and suffer a death. This, in turn, suggests that the complex nature of bitter-sweetness—opposites combined in order to generate a unified condition—constitutes a love experienced in an especially

³⁰⁷ Stephen Minta, *Petrarch and Petrarchism*, p. 12.

³⁰⁸ Robert M. Durling, *Petrarch’s Lyric Poems*, Introduction, p. 20.

intense manner. When Petrarch's speaker continues to generate this condition after Laura has died, as if the speaker's tortured sense of bitter-sweetness kept his beloved alive, the poems fully realize a tragic spectacle. The lover must torment himself to maintain the only thing left of his beloved's life.

I propose reading bitter-sweetness not as a rhetorical end in itself but, rather, as a lyrical hieroglyph to translate into a deeper understanding of the Petrarchan mode. Indeed, "bitter-sweet" perfectly describes an early modern subject's experience with women's breasts. For as long as three years of the subject's life, breasts were sweet,³⁰⁹ and then—suddenly—one became the first bitter experience of the subject's life. Because the Petrarchan mode suffers from the reality of having a body and needing to fuse with another one, the physical is the source of all trouble. Indeed, the abortive process of Hamlet's Petrarchan letter-poem (composed in a temporal space preceding the beginning of the play) seems to have liberated him from the hope of finding relief in the arms of another—his first soliloquy's opening, quietly horrifying suicidal idea ("Oh, that this too, too sullied flesh would melt") expresses the inverse of the notion Hamlet utters later in the same speech, where his mother's "increase of appetite/had grown by what it fed on."³¹⁰ Hamlet's passive fantasies here indulge an ouroboric cannibalism, as if the Prince seeks to disappear/devour his body in order to escape being devoured by his mother, whose body created his. That his mother constitutes the obsessive focus of the

³⁰⁹ Babycentre.co.uk explains that, "Your baby's sense of taste first starts to develop when she's in the womb . . . By the time you're nine weeks pregnant, your unborn baby's mouth and tongue have formed and she has her first tiny tastebuds . . . Once your baby's born, her new tastebuds are very sensitive. She can recognise sweet and sour tastes, but prefers sweet. This is one reason why she loves the taste of your breastmilk."

³¹⁰ I.ii.129-145.

Prince's cannibalistic appetite tells us all we need to know about his subsequent Delay: regardless of who slayed Old Hamlet, his mother is to blame for the only crime that matters to Hamlet. Because the details of the king's murder are as obscure to Hamlet as are the details of his mother's original betrayal, the Prince experiences his father's assassination as if it were a symptom of his mother's larger crime. Lyric poetic ambiguity, as formulated in Petrarch's wounded expressions of elemental female bodily betrayal, here combines with the betrayed subject's "failure of memory" in order to suggest a vast conspiracy theory in which the subject's original host-body is to be blamed for everything that subsequently occurs. Hamlet's madness is not so much a madness as it is a Petrarchan neurotic response to dimly recollected maternal rejection. This rejection constitutes the real unrequited love of the Petrarchan tradition.

Hamlet's wish that his body resolve itself into a dew closely resembles the obsession of the speaker of Petrarch's Poem 207, who finds nourishment only from Laura's looks, who promises to starve if forced to live in her body's absence, where no nourishment can be found:

Her gentle eyes, from which I am wont to take life, were of their high,
divine beauty so generous to me at the beginning that I lived like a man
who is helped, not by his own wealth, but by hidden aid from outside . . .
Now . . . I become annoying and importunate; for a wretch who is starving
sometimes commits actions which, in a better state, he would have blamed
in someone else. If envy has closed to me the hand of pity, let my
amorous hunger and my powerlessness excuse me.

For I have sought more than a thousand ways to find out if any mortal
thing could keep me alive one day without them . . .

and as a bird on the branch . . . I steal now one, now another glance, and
by them I am both nourished and set on fire.

I feed on death and live in flames: strange food . . .
if I seek here and there some nourishment for my short life, is she wishes

to call it theft, so rich a lady ought to allow someone to live on what is hers if she does not miss it . .

Who does not know on what I live and have always lived since the day when I first saw those lovely eyes that made me change my life and ways . . .

Love . . . it does not befit a lord to be so stingy. You have your arrows bow; let me die at your hand, not from this yearning; a good death honors one's whole life.

A hidden flame is hottest, and if it grows it can no longer be hidden in any way . . .

O my strong destiny . . . The fault is yours, mine the loss and the suffering.

If ever there were evidence to prove Hazlitt's strangely backwards claim that "Romeo is Hamlet in love," Poem 207 is it. Hazlitt's claim seems backwards because it works against chronology (*Hamlet* Q2 comes after all known iterations of *Romeo and Juliet*) and because it starts from the strange assertion that Hamlet is not in love, despite Polonius' success in convincing the court of Denmark that the Prince's love for Ophelia explains his recently aberrant behavior, despite the love letter-poem of II.ii, despite the love for the Ghost and Gertrude that compels Hamlet's Delay. Also, though the Romantics might have viewed Romeo's character as suggestive of depths comparable to those that Hamlet sounds, mid-early twenty-first century auditors of Shakespeare's plays tend to find that Romeo pales in comparison with Hamlet's complexity. This would seem to be a paradoxical conundrum for my study, which argues, per Mazzotta, that love activates/actualizes the philosophical imagination. However, by viewing Hazlitt's statement to mean that Romeo literally *is* an earlier iteration of Hamlet—that the two characters are not distinct but are, rather, versions of the same idea—we come to an understanding that Hamlet is a more complex version of Romeo. The Hamlet of the

Delay is Romeo bereft of even love, left to his own devices. In this way, Hamlet can be viewed as a stop on the journey to Lear, from whom Shakespeare tears even more away. If we can say that Hamlet as a discrete personality is possessed of infinite faculties, that infinite quality resides less in his personhood than in that personhood's prosthetic Petrarchan &, what this project posits as the Petrarchan machine. For example, Petrarch's Poem 203 pairs "Infinite beauty and little faith," a phrase that could serve to summarize not only Petrarchism but also the Renaissance it generated.

The Prince's "To be or not to be" speech is Poem 207 bereft of erotic ardor and, hence, bereft of love's ability to nourish the suspended infant's betrayed hunger. Poem 207 is shot through with desire to join with/become the beloved object's body, as it acknowledges the suicidal nature of this desire. Indeed, 207's body-combining instinct burrows beneath suicidism, into an implicit acknowledgment that the only real "joining" of flesh occurs after death. This basic, mundane knowledge is only a scandal if a poetic subject has a fundamental sense of being physically betrayed in early, vulnerable life, lied to in an original, life-threatening manner that he cannot quite remember, so that the distinction between life and death becomes not only blurry but is also drawn precisely at the border between one body and another. It is as if sex (and the hope of it) rehearses this initial betrayal, holding out the promise for complete physical union that is itself only a fleeting glance at such a possibility—and one that points toward an assured inevitability of physical union in the indiscriminate loam. This (anachronistically) Hamletian sense of life as a prolonged, sensuous trap from whose only hope of freedom is death produces the heightened state—the Petrarchan machine—that generates Petrarchan speech.

In Poem 207 the speaker-addressee dynamic takes the form of the speaker's exile from his beloved's body. He seeks "here and there some nourishment for my short life." Separation from his beloved's body is causing him to starve. The poem abounds with the language of physical dependence/suckling: "her gentle eyes, from which I am wont to take life"; "a man who is helped, not by his own wealth, but by hidden aid from outside"; "let my amorous hunger and my powerlessness excuse me"; "from her lovely face I steal now one, now another glance, and by them I am . . . nourished." Because Poem 207's speaker cannot "feed" on his beloved's body, he must feed on "death . . . strange food," an idea and attitude that foreshadows Hamlet's "diet of worms" obsession/motif, as well as the Prince's early, *Ars poetica*-like statement describing Elsinore's two most recent banquets: "The funeral baked meats/Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables."³¹¹ The flipped/perverse expression of temperature in these lines is pure "icy fire"-style Petrarchism. Read retrospectively from the Prince's subsequent obsession with corpses being eaten by worms, these lines invite us to imagine the wedding party as worms feeding on the still-warm corpse of Old Hamlet. This couplet constitutes an *Ars poetica* for Hamlet because it collapses his obsessions into a unified idea: nourishment, erotic love, maternal betrayal, and death. Hamlet's Horatio-directed observations in the Graveyard Scene seem designed to realize the vision glimpsed in Hamlet's I.ii banquet couplet.

³¹¹ I.ii.179-180.

Petrarch's Poem 207 speaker even invokes a myth³¹² about a race who are said to receive their nourishment from odors—" . . . one man lives by odors . . ."—then he reminds us that his spirits are "starving" and are forced to soothe themselves with primitive, somehow here even masturbatory "fire and light." It as if the speaker were admitting that he writes his lyrics while looking into the mirror of his ardor, that his poems are portraits of the fragmented visage he glimpses alone in flickering light. He starves cannibalistically on himself.

The speaker is forced to steal light from his beloved's twin, symmetrical eyes in order to live, as opposed to her freely giving him her light. Laura's here-colorless "eyes from which I am wont to take life" become life-sustaining breasts. This rehearses the arrested infant's weaning moment, after which he is forced to steal erotic encounters as if he were an indigent stealing food in order to sustain his life. The adult male and female erotic affinity for suckling adult female breasts is as mysterious as everything erotic should be. However, since female breasts sustain human life, and since all adults begin life as infants, it were unreasonable not to consider that something of existential origins were not involved in this lifelong erotic attraction. In other words, when an adult absurdly/erotically suckles a female's breast, he or she lyrically "steals" something of the

³¹² On p. 358 of *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*, Robert M. Durling glosses this reference as an allusion to "a race said by Pliny to live beside the Ganges." Swift's focus on the sense of smell in his excremental Poems is hereby anachronistically fore-referenced. Those Swift poems, as well as Book IV of *Gulliver's Travels*, also live on odors. It is interesting to note, also, that Lucretius' speaker describes a anachronistically Swiftian misogynist problem with foul odors—Book 4, lines 1180-1182 of *De rerum natura* run, "yet let [the lover] enter [his beloved's house], and if one single whiff [of his beloved]/should meet him, he'd look for good excuse to leave,/forgetting the ballad he'd learned" (trans by Frank O. Copley). "Forgetting the ballad he'd learned" would make an apt alternative title for this project.

nourishment he or she received in infancy. The experience is like visiting an ancient ruin or searching an old church library for a lost text.³¹³ Every time this erotic suckling move is executed, Janus buries his double-face in the multiple breasts of Artemis of Ephesus, the Renaissance is repeated into an anachronistically prior infinity, and the loneliness of adult autonomous life, the destabilized sense of being borne forward ceaselessly into the future, is momentarily interrupted. Of course, the interruption reiterates what is interrupted; in this way, to suckle a breast is to suckle death, *Memento mori* effortlessly engaged and observed.

When Poem 207's speaker says, "You have your arrows and bow; let me die at your hand, not from this yearning," and "he dies well who escapes from sorrow," and "it is dishonor to die fleeing," he invents the passively suicidal pose of Hamlet Delay. When he says his "heart is overflowing with sweet poison," he invokes the bitter-sweetness of the wormwood *pharmakon*, as if the speaker had overdosed on the weaning, which only works when it is "applied" to the site of nourishment, thereby generating an infinitely traumatic now that generates a quest for other-than-now-ness, also known as "Renaissance." The idea of re-birth begs this consideration of infancy and weaning; no person or culture is re/born mature. It is as if the early moderns sought less to blithely "revive" traditions of ancient forebears than they sought to, like the speaker of Poem 207, steal some life, here and there, from the past, like a lover kissing a woman's breasts. When encountering art products of the Renaissance, I often experience a sickly sweet sensation akin to entering an amusement theme park, as if we post-moderns are expected to believe that early moderns actually engaged in a culture-wide project of re-creation, a

³¹³ Under no circumstances should either of these comparisons be made during the act of love.

Renaissance Faire on tour from Italy to England. Nothing of their writings suggest the early moderns engaged in such a limpid, empty project. Rather, it seems obvious that they sought to experience, in small flashes of connection, a lost weaning from a forgotten cultural heritage—thereby reconstituting both the connection and the severance, their hearts overflowed with poison. “Let my amorous hunger and my powerlessness excuse me,” Petrarch’s speaker says, linking both states of being, precisely describing Hamletian hell, where a subject must decide between two miserable choices.

Orality and death obsess the speaker of the *Canzoniere* in the clutch of poems between 203-215. My discussing this group of poems out of chronological order but according to their thematic relationships honors, I believe, the stacked ouroboric quality of Petrarch’s poem-cycle, which really consists of multiple cycles spinning at once, as if foreshadowing Yeats’ modernist notion of the spiral structure underpinning the intellectual history, present, and future of the West. Petrarch’s speaker envisions Laura’s death in Poem 203:

This ardor of mine, which matters so little to you . . . could perhaps yet
inflame thousands;

for in my thought I see, O my sweet fire, a tongue cold in death and two
lovely eyes closed, which after us will remain full of embers.”

Widespread, if not predominant, among early modern English scholars at the present moment, persists the view that the *Canzoniere* consists merely of epideictic paeans to a mute/powerless cipher of an idealized female.³¹⁴ This seems to be a slight revision of previous generations of scholars’ view that Petrarch’s book amounts to an expression of

³¹⁴ I suspect that this view is at least partly based on the predominance of the term *epideictic* in Joel Fineman’s influential study of Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*, called *Shakespeare’s Perjured Eye*. We early modern English scholars are often guilty of seeing everything through Shakespeare’s eye.

unrequited love—which perhaps unintentionally confers more agency to Laura than to her devotee. (Laura, after all, never speaks in the *Canzoniere*.) Inherent or latent in both points of view seems to be the idea that Petrarch’s speaker has retreated from his beloved and the world because he either considers Laura not to be his intellectual equal, or because she truly is not his intellectual equal—the learned speaker retires to the country to consider his uncontrollable desire for an unlearned city woman. I acknowledge the absurdity of this statement; almost no one could have possibly been Petrarch’s intellectual equal; I also acknowledge the Hamletian quality of this Petrarchan dilemma: no one’s in Elsinore, save perhaps that of Claudius, compares to Hamlet’s mind. Elsinore is not the country but is a kind of retreat—it is akin to an island in a horror movie, removed from the normatively protecting mores of a “straight” world. The sexual tension between Hamlet and his mother reinforces this sense of being beyond normal moral bonds. Ophelia, like Laura, lacks any real voice—her assertive “madness” consists of snatches of songs, other peoples’ (probably men’s) words. This is the chief difference between *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*: Juliet’s mind stands atop the former world’s intellectual hierarchy; Ophelia’s mind, whatever its potential, kneels unexpressed near the middle or bottom of Elsinore’s world.³¹⁵

And yet in Poem 203, not only does the speaker confer agency/voice upon Laura by stating that his “ardor . . . matters so little” to her, he also imagines that in death Laura’s tongue is equal in importance to her constantly vaunted eyes. Moreover and

³¹⁵ I am indebted to a conversation with Professor Paul Kottman on April 29, 2017 for this Juliet/Ophelia comparison. He and I participated in a UCLA/Clark Library conference entitled *Entertaining the Idea: Shakespeare, Philosophy, and Performance: Conference Three: First Philosophy, Last Judgments: The Lear Real*.

most movingly, he imagines that his beloved's death-cold tongue and eyes will contain embers "yet [to] inflame thousands." This bespeaks a love less one-sidedly intellectual or unrequited than it does secretive. Petrarch's speaker seems to expect that his retreated monologues will suggest Laura's voice, Laura's presence. Otherwise, why suggest connections between his beloved and Diana and Mary? The Renaissance is in large part a quest to reconcile the absent gods with the present ones (also physically absent)—praying to an absently present Laura with lyric speech partakes in this tradition. If our choice of loved one reveals what we think we should improve in ourselves, Petrarch's speaker's choice of a married Avignon woman—especially when one considers Petrarch's constantly asserted dislike of all things Avignon—like Romeo's choosing Juliet and Hamlet's choosing Ophelia reveals a poetic speaker, a construction of poetic speech, with little interest in actually getting the girl. It is less that these Petrarchan speakers consider their objects to be unworthy of speech than that erotic love is bound up with a suicidal sense of autonomy with one foot always in the grave. For the Petrarchan speaker, physically embracing a woman amounts to physically embracing death, the step beyond adult autonomy. In this way, the *Death and the Maiden* artworks seem less concerned with discouraging young women to be vain—what purpose would that serve?—than it is with expressing a male anxiety about mothers, wet nurses, weaning, and sex. In other words: what will the beloved female body wean me from next? Life itself? Since the artistic impulse can be understood in terms of its perverse impulse to reverse received/perceived convention, representing the life-generating female body as *Death* affirms a male terror of female agency—rather than an assertion that females should not nor do have agency.

A similarly perverse assertion is at play in Poem 206. If Poem 207 depicts a miserable autonomy, its immediately preceding poem—also in the form of Provençal—expresses horror at the prospect of physical autonomy:

If I ever said it, let her hate me by whose love I live, without which I would die . . . if I said it, let every star be armed against me . . . If I said it, let Love use all his golden arrows on me and the leaden ones on her . . . if I said it, let her who with her blind torch sends me straight to death still stay as she is wont and let her never show herself kinder or more merciful to me either in act or speech!

If I ever said it, let me find this short and harsh road full of what I least desire . . . if I said it, let her speech become harsh, which was so gentle the day when I gave myself up as vanquished; if I said it, let me be hateful to her whom I would be willing, alone, closed in a dark cell *from the day when I left the breast until my soul is uprooted from me*, to adore . . .

But if I did not say it, my she who in my young age opened my heart to hope still steer this weary little bark of mine with the tiller of her native mercifulness . . . ³¹⁶

Petrarch employs the language of nourishment obsessively in the *Canzoniere*. A severed self ingests and expels fragments in reliance on and tribute to a communal other. The speaker is, of course, the severed self; the fragments consist of perceptions (physical or figurative) of Laura and lyrics about those perceptions; the lyrics constantly imply an immanent (re)integration into an other's body or into a body of others. Perhaps what we perceive to be astonishingly modern in these poems is less their "discovery of" an isolated "self" than their corresponding suggestion of a real community, a possible wholeness against which the isolated, late-coming self defines itself.

Poem 206's desperate, anguished speaker has been accused by his beloved of saying something he swears he did not say. The speaker's unprecedented and unrepeated

³¹⁶ Italics mine.

panic in this poem seems to be triggered by an outrageous offense to the nature of his lyric construct/Petrarchan machine—where what matters is already embedded, hidden—and which is here rendered obsolete when thought to have uttered something it actually did not. Nothing can be embedded in nothing; a lyric autonomy, derived from sources/influences, though paltry, is what separates a lyric entity from being and non-existence. To misattribute speech to a precisely crafted speech construct born of ambiguity is to disarm that construct in its war against “a sea of troubles”³¹⁷ and to nuclearize its beloved, oft-cited stars “against” him. The speaker’s sly omission of the offending statement—which of course invites his auditors to imagine what the statement was—transmits in lyric substance form the increasingly elusive style that Hegel and others perceive characterizes Shakespeare’s mature drama.

By obscuring the occasion generative of the poem, Petrarch demonstrates what Giuseppe Mazzotta describes as “two interlocked questions that infinitely repeat each other . . . the double focus of an imaginary ellipsis around which the boundaries of Petrarch’s poetry and thought are inexhaustibly drawn.”³¹⁸ Here, the interlocked questions are *I* and *it*³¹⁹—the speaker repeats so often that the boundary between them blurs. The poem implies that the speaker is what he says, which is literally true: these poems are the only evidence we have of the speaker’s existence. The *Canzoniere* is only what the speaker says. Seen from this perspective, it is key that 206 frames its language-as-reality dynamic in negative terms: “I never said it.” The poem’s mania provides a

³¹⁷ *Hamlet* III.i.60.

³¹⁸ Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch*, p. 1.

³¹⁹ Both are registered as “i” in Petrarch’s Italian: “i . . . dissì . . . “

glimpse into a misattributed oblivion from which even the lyric abyss—comprised, as Barthes tells us, of an indiscriminate “tissue of quotations”—cannot rescue the speaker.

Indeed, Poem 206’s nausea seems to describe less a literal/specific misquotation than the misattribution of a tissue of quotations; its symbolism is consistent with the rest of the *Canzoniere*, despite the unhinged strategy of that symbolism’s deployment. The stubborn insistence on sun, arrows, etc. motifs reasserts the continued presence of the Petrarchan “tissue.” The poem facilitates the space into which the Hamlet of III.i.98 can claim of his Petrarchan letter-poems, which Ophelia now hands back to him, “I never gave you aught.” It is not that Hamlet’s physical hand did not write those Petrarchan letter-poems—it is that that machine is no longer to him. He has re-applied the Petrarchan tissue of quotations, has deployed it meta-generically against Elsinore, which has no ear for poetry. Hamlet has no choice but to tip the balance of the Petrarchan machine/tissue away from the biographically adjacent *I*, toward the satirical *it*, where Swift anachronistically paces, waiting for a mode into which to force an infinitely unmoored sense of betrayed indignation.

Mooring is relevant to Poem 206’s speaker’s reference to Laura’s steering his “weary little bark.” The speaker’s insistent assertion of Laura’s control over their interpersonal dynamic undermines contemporary views that the *Canzoniere* depicts a male speaker with agency engaging in a kind of linguistic assault on a voiceless female. Hamlet again, because he is born of Petrarchan cloth, is useful in helping to understand the Petrarchan speaker’s dilemma:

Why, what an ass am I! . . .
That I . . .
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words
And fall a-cursing like a very drab,

A scullion!³²⁰

Laura's silence is her power; the speaker's logorrhea is his weakness, his shame. For literary scholars to view the expression of lyric poetry as a site of power is to cast the lyric tradition in their own, perhaps aspirational image. It is also to misread the *Canzoniere*, *Hamlet*, and Swift—the former two of which constantly engage in embarrassed self-laceration as a result of their self-imprisonment in a lyric mode, the latter of which, through the culturally-degraded, anti-Petrarchan laceration of fantasized female objects and their ontological radiances, springs the lock. Laura's silence, in a pre-Reformation, early modern world, gathers an Artemis/Diana/Mary-like power. She is in control, receiving the speaker's futile, ultimately inarticulate tributes, never answering his myopically self-obsessed prayers, like the Delphic Oracle. The Petrarchan speaker's fearless depiction of his gifted shallowness presages modernity as much as does any other aspect of the *Canzoniere*. Perhaps the Petrarchan mode's embrace of its own shortcomings has determined each succeeding generation's position toward that embrace; perhaps to say *Petrarchism* is to say *anti-Petrarchism*; perhaps when I write against earlier scholars' narrow views of the Petrarchan mode I merely misunderstand prior epochs' attempts to appreciate it. Shakespeare's *Q2 Hamlet*,³²¹ because it seems to have existed since 1601, constitutes my claim to, if not a Petrarchan timelessness, a specific Petrarchan trajectory, heretofore unexplored.

³²⁰ II.ii.545-550.

³²¹ Again, *Q2 Hamlet* comes after the *Q2* version of the more standardly Petrarchan *Romeo and Juliet*; the *Q2* versions of each play are the ones with which we are most familiar. *Q2 Hamlet*, almost twice as long as the *Q1* version of that play, introduces the Delay.

At the height of his existential crisis, Poem 206's speaker marks the beginning of his life, not at his birth, but at the moment of his weaning: ". . . from the day when I left the breast until my soul is uprooted from me." "From the day when I left the breast" has a catchy, colloquial ring to it, but I have not been able to find the phrase anywhere else. It is an astonishing idea, as if, once weaning is accomplished, a man is on his own. In a nutritive sense, it is true—weaning marks the end of open and welcome physical dependency on a host's body. It constitutes perhaps the most physically explicit split between dependency and autonomy, a kind of rehearsal of Adam's and Eve's banishment and sentence to toil. That the poem begins by stating that the speaker is physically dependent on his beloved ("without which . . . [he] would die") makes this later mention of weaning doubly poignant.

Poem 206's life-defining designation is significant in the context of the present study, in part because of the way it, Mazzotta-and-Janus-like, interlocks with the Nurse's speech in *Romeo and Juliet* I.iii:

Marry, I remember it well.
'Tis since the earthquake now eleven years,
And she was weaned—I never shall forget it—
Of all the days of the year, upon that day.
For I had then laid wormwood to my dug,
Sitting in the sun under the dovehouse wall . . .
When it did taste wormwood on the nipple
Of my dug and felt it bitter, pretty fool,
To see it tetchy and fall out with the dug!
"Shake!" quoth the dovehouse. 'Twas no need . . . ³²²

³²² I.iii.24-35, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*.

The Nurse here describes treason at the breast in detail, “marry”-ing “it” to an earthquake that historical records suggest actually occurred in the Verona/Mantua region in 1570, via an endlessly rich speech that slays all semblance of dramatic momentum, at the moment when Lady Capulet is eager to announce to Juliet that she will be wed to Paris—which is the occasion generative of the comi-tragedy that ensues. In other words, the Nurse’s speech launches Juliet’s defiant autonomy by reminding her of her initial, unasked-for plunge into physical independence, attended by an earthquake, no less. Were it not for the Nurse’s speech, wormwood’s early modern import would likely be lost to us; it shows us how wormwood shook early modern infant subjects into physical division from female host bodies, into whatever physical negotiations lay beyond shocked, betrayed severance from the original life-sustaining “dug.”³²³

Of plant poisons, Edward Tabor writes, “They precipitate plots, as in *Hamlet*; and they culminate plots, as in *Romeo and Juliet*.”³²⁴ Tabor’s use of *plots* in this context problematizes his intended meaning of “narrative” or “narrative device,” conjuring a sense of the term that is closer to “plots of earth,” where weeds grow. Plant poisons, lyric-like, corrupt narrative, defy linear teleology; they initiate a radiant moment to be interpreted by their survivors and auditors in infinite ways. They grow wild; they do not behave not as “plots” behave, a view underscored by the fact that Tabor does not mean to refer to wormwood at all and yet botanically connects two seemingly dissimilar plays.

³²³ Interestingly, at V.ii.168, of Osiric Hamlet tells Horatio, “A did comply with his dug before a sucked it.” Juliet’s specter haunts *Hamlet*, perhaps more than does the ghost of Romeo.

³²⁴ Edward Tabor, “Plant Poisons in Shakespeare,” *Economic Botany*, 24:1 (1970), p. 81.

Plant poisons “indicate Shakespeare’s knowledge of plant lore,”³²⁵ which the playwright seems to have viewed as tightly interwoven with his attendant knowledge of lyric love poetry. The textual affinity shared by the Nurse’s Speech and Hamlet’s “Wormwood, wormwood” moment recalls the relationship between Petrarch’s Poem 206 and his nearby Poem 215, which ends with “*l’assenzio*”—wormwood. Petrarch’s explicit wormwood poems proclaim the *Canzoniere*’s bitter-sweet theme at its crucial midway point, just before Laura’s sustaining absence in life metamorphoses into a sustaining presence in death—a shaking of the earth that reorganizes atoms but cannot alter love.

One of the most fascinating articles I read in my research for this study is “Juliet, the Nursling of the Nurse,” by Mitsuo Shikoda, which argues that from

the idea that the child partakes of the nature of a nurse through her milk [which] must have been generally believed in the sixteenth century . . . we can deduce that, when the audience heard the Nurse’s bawdy prating, they had misgivings as well as interest in the character . . . who had been reared by the ‘wet-nurse’ of this sort . . . Juliet has been raised sucking . . . ‘wisdom’ from the Nurse’s teat . . . Juliet . . . being counseled to choose Paris . . . discards the Nurse and cuts the tie with her. *This is a reenactment of the weaning*, which was first done by tasting wormwood applied to the Nurse’s teat, and it is also the ritual of her establishing independence. But it is different from the former weaning in that this is a spiritual weaning.³²⁶

³²⁵ Edward Tabor, “Plant Poisons in Shakespeare,” *Economic Botany*, 24:1 (1970), p. 81.

³²⁶ Mitsuo Shikoda, “Juliet, the Nursling of the Nurse,” *The Shakespeare Society of Japan’s Shakespeare Studies*, Vol. Twenty-Five, 1987, pp. 30-36. Italics mine.

Shikoda thereby suggests that not Romeo but Juliet is Hamlet in love, and she opens up a vital field of additional inquiry beyond the scope of the present study—into Juliet’s Petrarchism. If, when addressing post-human females, early modern male weaned subjects are in a double bind—autonomous and not, ultimately, wanting to be—the early modern female weaned subject is even more bound, bereft of the luxury of regretting her free agency. Ophelia is Romeo in love, if Romeo were female, both characters demonstrations of lyric substance abuse. The difference between how male and female victims of such abuse register their situations remains to be mapped.

Petrarch scholar Peter Hainsworth’s observation that the poet rarely mentions Laura’s “breast”—and when he does he uses “the more Latinate ‘petto’ or ‘seno’ which can easily take on a metaphorical sense . . . ³²⁷—impresses Heather Dubrow so much that she refers to in her *Echoes of Desire*. Hainsworth’s decision not to refer to Laura’s plural *breasts* suggests a vast field of under-recognized meaning, and supports his point that for Petrarch Laura’s breast/s is/are metaphorical. There is something ridiculous about discussing distinct body parts as if they were one, as if the body’s symmetry suggests not a multiplicity of possibilities but, rather, an imperfect monolith. We cannot blame Petrarch for the tradition of discussing not a woman’s “right leg” but her “legs,” though he would have to rate high on a list of modern perpetrators of this practice.

³²⁷ Peter Hainsworth, *Petrarch the Poet*, p. 121.

Hainsworth makes his breasts observation in the midst of a discussion of Laura's idealized essence. He writes that, "Nothing in Laura suggests comedy, aggression, irregularity or an obtrusive sexuality."³²⁸ I believe that this is the only mention of the lack of comedy in the *Canzoniere* I have come across in my research. That Hainsworth connects this lack of comedy with a lack of sexual/bodily specificity suggests a refinement of our understanding of what comprises the satiric thrust of anti-Petrarchism. Certainly, the Hamletio-Swiftian brand of anti-Petrarchism becomes increasingly specific about female bodies, until all that is left is Swift's allusion, in "A Panegyric of the Dean," to female excrement washed away by the Cloaca—the "great sewer" of the ancient Roman Forum, which ran directly beneath the Temple of Janus, and was either named for or is the source of the name for the Roman goddess Cloacina—who reigned over marriage and sewers. This is not far from Shurbanov's assertion that Shakespeare's plays generate anti-Petrarchan comedy by literalizing Petrarchan conventions, forcing characters to attempt to live by Petrarchan codes. Though people make love to ideas all the time, it amuses to see that failed attempt portrayed and carried to its bodily conclusion, whether in a *Playboy* cartoon, a London theater, or an excremental Poem. There is a terrifying edge to such comedy, however; *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* ram their comedic energies toward tragic capacities. Swift, for whom tragedy was not a viable option, is free to explore the terrifying edge from a purely satiric angle, as if the latter poet pried loose for his poetic purposes the savagely satiric mode Hamlet tends to indulge in Elsinore's hallways.

³²⁸ Peter Hainsworth, *Petrarch the Poet*, p. 121.

Much of what I have written is predicated on the significance of Petrarch's references to Laura's breast/s, and the sound thematic sense it makes to refer to that body part in "a metaphorical sense." Though I take Hainsworth's point regarding the gauzy lens through which Petrarch sees his prime poetic object, I see no reason why everything in a lyric poem should not be metaphorical. Indeed, there is something in Hainsworth's choice to single out Laura's "breast" as an under-discussed, over-metaphorized body part that suggests that critics of Petrarch's poems sometimes neglect the fact that they are discussing poems. This is not because the critics in question are not talented and diligent—to the contrary, Petrarch's innovative and successful blend of autobiography, vernacular speech, with traditional poetic devices disarms his readers in ever-renewing ways. Hainsworth is an excellent, sensitive reader; if he wants to hear more about those breasts, I take him at his scholarly word and trust that he is onto something.

In my earlier discussion of Michelangelo's *David*, I sought to subvert its status as Human-celebrating symbol of the Renaissance, arguing for its being reappraised as an outlying symbol of vexed autonomy. I did this by contrasting it with the far more prevalent and representative Renaissance image of the Madonna and Christ. Indeed, the *David's* sense of vexation—registered in his backward glance, as vulnerably searching as it is confidently confrontational—suggests an autonomous male subject suddenly conscious of a missing body. It is as if the *David* turns to find the missing Madonna's breast.

Hainsworth notes that, "It is Laura's hair which is most particularized: for Laura has blond hair . . ."³²⁹ Even the most casual saunter through almost any Italian museum

³²⁹ Peter Hainsworth, *Petrarch the Poet*, pp. 120-121.

that houses art from the late medieval and/or Renaissance period will reveal that the Virgin/Madonna was generally depicted with blond hair and blue eyes, and that her representation dominates the era's visual art. We do not seem to want to see physical dependency in the Renaissance, though that dependency overwhelmingly persists in its visual artwork, and in Petrarch's poetry. In this way, the *David* partakes in the individual/communal, Protestant/Catholic, Roman/Greek conversation; he and the Virgin/Madonna constitute "both sides of the coin."

Chapter Five: To be or not to be/Graveyard Scene

Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy will be familiar to anyone who has read this far. However, Petrarch's Poem 29 is almost certainly less familiar:

. . . And if at times my soul arms itself to complain—for it lacks all counsel when its torment draw it into doubt . . . the sight of her makes every disdain sweet.

For all that I have ever suffered for love and am still to suffer until she who wounded my heart makes him whole again, that rebel against mercy who still makes him yearn, vengeance shall be taken; as long as pride and anger do not close and lock against humility the lovely way that leads to her . . .

No tear, therefore, that I may pour from my eyes for those arrows which in my left side make bloody him who first felt them . . .

My thoughts have become alien to me: one driven like me once turned the sword upon herself . . . all other paths to Heaven are less straight . . .

Kindly stars that accompanied the fortunate womb when its lovely fruit came down here into the world! for she is a star on earth . . .

I know well that to enclose her praises in verse would vanquish whoever put the worthiest hand to writing: what cell of memory is there that can contain all the virtue, all the beauty that one sees when one looks in her eyes . . .

Nearby Poem 36 runs:

If I thought that by death I would be lightened of this amorous care that weighs me down, with my own hands by now I would have consigned to earth these burdensome members and that weight;

but because I fear that it would be a passage from weeping into weeping and from one war to another, still on this side of the pass that is closed to me I half remain, alas, and half pass over.

It would be time for the pitiless bowstring to have shot the last arrow, already wet and colored with blood;

and I beg Love for it, and that deaf one who left me painted with her colors and does not remember to call me to her.

In the *Canzoniere*'s ultimate Poem 366, the speaker considers that, "I am perhaps in my last year; my days, more swift than an arrow, have gone away . . . and only Death awaits me." In these poems, which seek a kind of middle path between Fortunas/Cupid, arrow-centric Roman mythology and subsequently Christian sin-lore forbidding self-slaughter, Petrarch's speaker free-associates nearly every preoccupation we have come to associate not only with Hamlet but with the Renaissance, in general.

Poem 29 is baldly heretical, in the arrogantly wounded way that modern lyric poetry generally dares to acquit itself of being. The speaker alternately links his suffering and his beloved's earthly incarnation to Christ, and he links his male-gendered self to a female-gendered person who killed herself with a sword. The poetic logic at work here is instinctual: the speaker suffers for love, as did Christ; he divides his loving devotion between Laura and Christ, which reinforces a poetic sense that he shares a deeply emotional essence with Christ—who, in turn, seems to share an essence with Laura via her semi-divinity. Hence, Petrarch shares an essence with Laura. In this way, and by mentioning the sword-woman, Petrarch's speaker again invites his reader to associate him with the female. The idea of the female radiates on a plane that includes Christ and all profound suffering for and with love, as if poetic subject and object have collapsed into a genderless God come to complete all gods, via suffering for love.

This has the cumulative effect—as much of the *Canzoniere* does—of sexualizing Christ's love, of merging devotion to Christ's absent mortal body to Laura's absent mortal body, in life and in death. As I have noted before, the speaker's devotion to Laura's absent body in life and in death effectively blurs the distinction between life and death, via love. This resembles the Christian's devotion to a living God whose destroyed

mortal body has vanished. The Stoical motivation for this poetic construction is clear: love defeats, or at least dulls, death's sting—as long as that love is not required, consummated. This suspended state of *erotic* devotion—as opposed to spiritual devotion—effectively results in a kind of anti-Christianity, an antidiscourse of love that appropriates Christ's affection for the world and sexualizes it.

Petrarch's speaker, in an uncannily, culturally anticipatory/determinative “Hamletian” manner begs, “Love . . . you have your arrows and bow; let me die at your hand, not from this yearning: a good death honors one's whole life.”³³⁰ Because the male Eros'/Cupid's arrows are not deadly, Petrarch's speaker here seems to invoke Artemis/Diana, as if her status as chaste (a late innovation, and one that likely developed alongside the rise of the worship of Christ's virgin mother Mary) female bestowed upon her a new mythology, in which she were the goddess/patron saint of unconsummated desire. Chief among the stultifying aspects of Petrarchism as it has been perceived since the late sixteenth century is the phrase “unrequited love.” The term *love's* vagueness dooms this dull, passive phrase to perpetuity, but the *Canzoniere* can be more accurately described as the exploration of a state of exquisitely prolonged blue balls—or spiritually beneficial blue balls. In this figuration, Artemis/Diana's status as chaste—or impossible to bed—goddess becomes Laura's divine iteration.

Indeed, Lewis Richard Farnell writes that early worship of Artemis

was especially concerned with the loss of virginity and with child-bearing . . . maidens of marriageable age did honours to Artemis . . . orgiastic and lascivious dances and the use of phallic emblems [were used in her worshipping] . . . ritual . . . We have . . . abundant evidence, both from cult and myth, that the primitive Greek did not necessarily conceive of Artemis

³³⁰ Poem 207.

as a virgin-goddess . . . it would be hard to show why a goddess of a primitive hunting and pastoral tribe, a divinity of the fertilizing waters, who fostered the wild growths of the earth and the sucklings of the beasts of the field, should have been naturally regarded by them as a virgin . . . on the other hand . . . there is the well-known Actaeon story . . .³³¹

F. Elizabeth Hart connects Artemis' metamorphosis from divinity of earthy, promiscuous health to remote, isolated virginity to the prominent early modern Protestant focus on Acts 19, and "to a kind of popular literature in which Diana was represented . . . in Ephesus, her priesthood, and the 'mysteries' associated with her Ephesian cult."³³² Hart's article orbits *The Comedy of Errors* and *Pericles*, which explicitly involve Ephesus; a pervasive, implicit, Artemisian thread runs through the Shakespearean aesthetic.

The ultimate incomprehensibility of the concept of the Holy Trinity endorses this conflation of mortal bodies and extreme states of emotion, bound up fundamentally with ghostly fatherhood, a genderless animating spirit, and frank mortality. Petrarch's speaker's erotic love allows him to defeat death by generating a delayed, half-dead state ("I . . . half pass over . . .") where gender and physical presence matter less than devotion to an embodied idea whose requisite absence determines that this devotion ultimately amount to a preemptive rejection of that body and its potential pleasures. Or as Gordon Braden writes

Stoicism's central strength is its calculus of adaptation to unchangeable realities . . . The desires that involve us in the life around us are made

³³¹ Lewis Richard Farnell, *The Cults of the Greek States, Vol. II*, pp. 444-446.

³³² F. Elizabeth Hart, "'Great is Diana' of Shakespeare's Ephesus," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 43, No. 2, pp. 350-351. Hart's title alludes to Sigmund Freud's article "Great is Diana of the Ephesians," which makes plain the case for Ephesian transfer of worship from Artemis to Mary.

subject to something prior . . . The calculus leads progressively inward, redefining individual freedom as a state of mind; the Stoic's inviolable privilege is simply his attitude toward the incontestable fate which has its way with him.³³³

Stoicism is an antidiscourse in search of lyric poetry's anti-articulation. For the Petrarchan/early modern lyric poet, the prior fact of death—the prior fact of the death of the entire classical world, whose beauty no “cell of memory can contain”—renders all discourse, physical and verbal, private and public, foolish, ill advised, even meaningless. For such a poet, the challenge becomes how best to render this meaningless. The antidiscourse of explicitly Petrarchan lyric poetry gives way eventually to tragedy, which gives way to satire, as each succeeding generic iteration wears out its cultural prestige.³³⁴ Poem 36 not only relates arrows to suicide, but it also contains a “what dreams may come” stanza: “but because I fear that it would be a passage from weeping into weeping and from one war to another, still on this side of the pass that is closed to me I half remain, alas, and half pass over.” Petrarch's lines could be inserted into contemporary performances of the “To be or not to be” speech with little notice.

Shakespeare's pioneering meta-theatricality is notorious, *Hamlet's The Mousetrap* being perhaps its most notorious example. Could the “To be or not to be” soliloquy register a meta-theatrical satire of Hamlet's Delay? W.G. Bebbington, in the Thursday, March 20, 1969 edition of *The Times Literary Supplement*, writes of “To be or not to be” that

³³³ Gordon Braden, *Anger's Privilege*, p. 17.

³³⁴ On page 316 of *The Skull of Swift*, Shane Leslie writes that Swift “had once called Life 'a ridiculous tragedy, which is the worst kind of composition.' His own words were on him and worse, for the remainder of his existence became a ghastly decomposition.”

If we study the other soliloquies in *Hamlet* . . . we may have disturbing second thoughts and wonder whether the most famous example in our drama, the classic Eng. Lit. model, has not been wrongly spoken even by the best actors under the direction of the best producers . . . the speech is completely out of character . . . First, Hamlet is not alone . . . Polonius and Claudius are watching him and listening . . . Hamlet is not Polonius. He is not didactically repetitive, learnedly euphuistic . . . ‘It exists,’ one editor writes for himself and his colleagues, ‘independently of the play like a poem’ . . . Shakespeare . . . was writing not a soliloquy but the very thing that has made the speech so notorious and so separable . . . it is . . . an imitation, if not a *parody*, of a series of aphoristic, even platitudinous, meditations on life, death and suicide . . . In other words, almost all, or perhaps all, that Hamlet says in the speech is being read from a book. For what is he doing while he walks . . . “four hours together, here in the lobby” (II.ii.160-1)? Gertrude herself answers our question only a few lines later (II.ii.168): “But, look, where sadly the poor wretch comes reading.” And Polonius is soon to be baffled by the “Word, words, words” of the “satirical rogue.”³³⁵

In *Hamlet without Hamlet*, Margreta de Grazia refers to “Hamlet’s unidentified satirical book”³³⁶ of the lobby/fishmonger scene with Polonius (II.ii), which is likely to be the same book from which the Prince reads “To be or not to be.” However, by refusing to identify this satirical book when Polonius asks, “What do you read, my lord?”³³⁷—especially after erasing “all trivial fond records from the table” of his memory—Hamlet invites not only speculation as to the contents of the book but he also invites that book’s composition. Swift accepts Hamlet’s invitation, the latter satirist’s motto *Vive la bagatelle* a kind of vow to replace Hamlet’s missing “trivial . . . records.”

³³⁵ W.G. Bebbington, “Soliloquy?”, *The Times Literary Supplement*, March 20, 1969, p. 289.

³³⁶ Margreta de Grazia, *Hamlet without Hamlet*, p. 92.

³³⁷ II.ii.182.

In other words, “To be or not to be” satirizes the solemn, humorless demise of (anti-)Petrarchan cultural prestige. Bebbington notes that

Ophelia and Hamlet, decoy and prey, [are] both reading [in the “To be or not be” scene] . . . The words will not help . . . [Hamlet], of course . . . He reads it, however, precisely because . . . he wishes to reject it.³³⁸

Bebbington here acknowledges the Hamletian tendency towards Petrarchan antidiscourse, as the scholar helpfully reminds us that Ophelia is reading, too. Because Hamlet and we will learn that Ophelia carries on her person (in her “bosom”?) an entire collection of the Prince’s Petrarchan letter-poems, this Petrarchan study-hall tableau is significant. The scene is a statement on textual rejection and how it relates to physical rejection. Bebbington continues:

So Hamlet reads . . . he may also be making his own few and brief comments or ejaculations . . . “To die, to sleep” are probably Hamlet’s own words . . . But that is all . . . The poetry is in the parody . . . [It is] difficult to believe that Hamlet of all people does not read it in at least a semi-mocking way, for in his best intelligence no less than in his confusion he knows that it is only another parade of “words, words, words” whose author was another . . . “rogue” . . . Perhaps Claudius’ “remark” [“See where he comes poring upon a book”] was really stage-business.³³⁹

Though Bebbington is not interested, here, in the nature of Hamlet’s poetics, he takes for granted two things that scholars of the play take for granted without seeking to reconcile them: Hamlet is a lyric poet and Hamlet is a satirist. His character realizes Petrarchism’s potential to self-detonate; he embodies the tragedy of the Human, doomed by its self-consciously vexed parameters. It will take Swift, in a post-Civil War/post-apocalyptic

³³⁸ W.G. Bebbington, “Soliloquy?”, *The Times Literary Supplement*, March 20, 1969, p. 289.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

era where tragedy has lost its cultural prestige, to reconcile Hamlet's conflicting generic statuses.

By arguing for Hamlet/*Hamlet's*³⁴⁰ Petrarchan essence I have not meant to suggest that the Prince is what we could call a “fan” of Humanism's father. Petrarch haunts Hamlet like his other dad, resulting in ambivalent vexations similar to those inspired by the assassinated king. Modern lyric's latent status as antidiscourse—it seems unlikely that Shurbanov would have perceived the antidiscoursal aspects of Petrarch's poems as he was writing them in the mid-1300s—inspires its devotees ultimately to reject it. Those who reject poetry via new poems are lyric poets; those who leave modern lyric behind will likely bear a Petrarchan stain on their point of view, highlighting the bitter in the sweet and vice versa. Hamlet does not seem interested in washing off the stain at all. Indeed, his complaint with the Petrarchan mode seems to be that it perceives the sweet in the bitter. Hamlet aspires to be all bitter, all the time; his anti-Petrarchism comes to consist of a rejection of the sweetness he fails to articulate in his letter-poem to Ophelia. This is demonstrated by his extreme reaction to Ophelia's returning of his entire oeuvre to him.

³⁴⁰ Shurbanov, Bloom, Eliot, and C.S. Lewis all make clear that there is perhaps no other English Renaissance play so totally dominated by its protagonist. Or, to reverse twentieth-century American movie poster logic, *Hamlet is Hamlet*. All three scholars either explicitly or implicitly acknowledge that this dominance of perspective is among the play's most lyric poem-like aspects, as if the entire play is delivered from Hamlet's lyric “I.”

Though I have never witnessed the moments linked in scholarly discussion, III.i's "Get thee to a nunnery" scene directly refers to Hamlet's II.ii letter-poem to Ophelia. It is even likely that the II.ii letter-poem numbers among the "remembrances" that Ophelia seeks to return to their author. When Hamlet responds by saying, "No, not I. I never gave you aught,"³⁴¹ he is in earnest in two ways: 1) the Prince's current "I" has changed; he is no longer the explicitly failed Petrarchan poet who wrote the letter-poems Ophelia seeks to return to him; and 2) Hamlet does not think of those documents as "remembrances," a vexed term for a consciousness seeking simultaneously to recall an original treason and to forget it—via erotic love. At any rate, because Hamlet wrote them in the throes of passion, the letter-poems do not register nostalgic reveries but, rather, emotion experienced in the act of composition. Whatever else we may accuse Hamlet of being, he is certainly a writer; Ophelia's relegating of his poetic efforts to quaint markers of a former era³⁴² would seem an aggressive and provocative move for her to make, if she were not performing this letter-poem-return, at least in part, for the observing king and her father. Considering that this fearsome phalanx of patriarchal authority watches, "remembrances" seems less aggressive than dismissive, meant to convey that the affair between Hamlet and Ophelia was but a bagatelle.

Seen through the prism of Mazzotta's history-and-death construction, moreover, "remembrances" is more accurate than Ophelia likely intends it to be. The Petrarchan mode seizes upon erotic love in order to combine *Memento mori* with a quest for origins

³⁴¹ III.i.98.

³⁴² Indeed, one can read "remembrances" to refer to the Petrarchan mode, as in, "I return to you your textual remembrances of a shopworn mode of expression whose time is past."

personal and eternal. Modern lyric poetry as crystallized by Petrarch is antidiscourse because it wants to forget what it seeks to recall. It cancels itself out, as if by rendering suicide redundant even the desire to be Stoical is stoically elided. Petrarch seems to have intuited lyric poetry's capacity to realize ancient philosophy and ancient tragedy's tautological implications; Shakespeare seems to have intuited Petrarch's intuition. Because locating the site of this elusive realization in the lyric poem genre is tantamount to consigning that realization to oblivion (lyric poetry has never been "caviar to the general"),³⁴³ appropriating this lyrical realization for the commercial theater insures a failure already intended. In this way, the act of writing *Hamlet* is itself an act of antidiscourse, even an act of suicide, in the manner that the composition of lyric poetry is suicidal. We have come to accept that for Petrarch writing was self-therapy, taking professionalized/nostalgic view that his radical experiments were benign.³⁴⁴ We have similarly made nostalgic death-hungry lyric poetry written since Petrarch via our institutional absorption of the canon. Correcting Wordsworth, in the institution poetry is recollected in tranquility.

Something in rebellion against this nostalgic spirit is alive in Hamlet's reaction to Ophelia's return of his "remembrances." Having removed "from the table of . . . [his]

³⁴³ II.ii.377-378.

³⁴⁴ The expectation that academic scholars be professional has resulted, it seems to me, in a tendency to read all writers as if their work was composed for similar purposes, in similar conditions. However, Petrarch seems to have withdrawn from every pressure to behave professionally; his rejection of what we might deem a "corporate-friendly" existence seems have comprised a large measure of his self-therapy. As Gordon Braden's *Anger's Privilege* makes clear, for the Stoic, ultimately, self-therapy is self-annihilation.

cloth? Is not she woven into the scheme? Might not Ophelia be saying, “These texts did have a real interlocutor, as real and as complicated as *you*”?

Before discussing Hamlet’s misogynistic raving, I want to explore an over-looked link between the letter-poem of II.ii and the “remembrances” of III.i. Ophelia tells Hamlet in III.i to, “Take these again,” an admonition that echoes the II.ii letter-poem’s salutation, which Polonius reads, “. . . In her excellent white bosom, these, etc.—“ before Gertrude interrupts him. To what does the letter-poem’s salutation’s “these” refer? If it refers to these *lines*, it places the letter-poem “in” Ophelia’s body. Even if we allow for the previously discussed reading of “bosom” to refer to a pocket in the front of a woman’s dress (which, it seems to me, figuratively combines/collapses sexual/ized female body parts), Hamlet’s erotic text crosses a physical boundary; it not only addresses but penetrates its object.

After all, at II.ii.104-107 Ophelia has already assured her father that she behaved as he “did command/I did repel his letters and denied/His access to me.” Distantly inward texts seem less to prepare a path for their writers’ subsequent, physical entry into their recipient’s/readers insides than to seek to enter the reader, as if antidiscourse and sexual intercourse were merged in the Petrarchan mode. In this Petrarchan calculus, the body’s articulacy equals poetry’s ultimate inarticulacy. Though Petrarch’s poetry is not comedic or satirical, it is ironic in the sense that its speaker knows he sings at length about his desire to cease singing and to make love to Laura. *Hamlet* carries the Petrarchan notion of the frustrated erotic lyric, transcendent of time and space, to its illogical conclusion: the lyric itself has sex with its object, via the object’s eyes, ears, mind. This is not only evidence of the folly of thoughtlessly associating Petrarchism with

unrequited love, and it not only expands the notion of how sexual penetration can occur, but it also collapses text and body. This collapsed form can rightly be deemed the “Petrarchan machine”; the Petrarchan text touches past, future, and present bodies in myriad ways, in a manner comparable to the *David*’s collapse of the Torah with Renaissance Italy, via an undeniably erotic impulse to conjoin. The overwhelming presence of the Renaissance machine that is the *David* is such that it is nearly impossible to exit Florence’s Accademia Gallery without feeling vaguely post-coital, glancing jealously at one’s wife, reflecting that Michelangelo has had his way with millions of bodies that have passed in proximity to his strange, erotic time machine.

In his discussion of the line and its relation to the tradition of medieval and early modern maids keeping love letters in “the ornamental breast covering . . . under the lacing of their bodices,” Alan Stewart writes that, “But while a love-letter might be properly stored by its recipient next to her heart, to *deliver* a letter to a white bosom is another matter entirely . . . In *Hamlet*, the superscription works . . . [as a] physical and sexual assault . . .”³⁴⁹ Stewart’s reading of the difference between delivery and storage is useful, even if his interpretation of Hamlet’s letter-poem delivery as a “sexual assault” makes the unwarranted assumption—invited by Ophelia’s mandated performance as a passively-beloved in the spied-upon hallway where she returns Hamlet’s letter-poems—that the letter-poems’ delivery was not consensual.

This contemporary-sounding configuration of the stakes (*consensual* is not an early modern term) is supported by Claudius’ question to Polonius after the reading of the

³⁴⁹ Alan Stewart, *Shakespeare’s Letters*, pp. 251-252.

letter-poem: “But how hath she/Received his love?”³⁵⁰ Claudius’ profound question tends to go unappreciated in studies of the play, and of his character. It is essentially a Petrarchan question, bound up with questions of un/required love. Since Gertrude requites Claudius’ love, the question ultimately challenges the advisability and quality of required love—and, by extension, the question supports the advisability of inarticulacy/antidiscourse.

How *does* Ophelia receive love? The play’s male characters cram her with lines—she is an overused Petrarchan machine, an abused receptacle whose eventual “madness” consists of her physically overflowing with words, like a collapsed kaleidoscope or a jukebox with an electrical short. This short results from the corruption of her inserted files—she has been stuffed with a diseased selection of obsolete cultural artifacts, otherwise known as “love poems,” “folk songs,” and “wisdom.” In this way, Hamlet admits a crime when he writes that he is “ill at these numbers,” as if the act of perpetuating an obsolete, self-skeptical, Human-generating machine disturbs even his patrician conscience. “Just do not doubt that I have feelings,” his letter-poem essentially concludes, seeking to slide out from under the weight of the machine it borrows, bereft of an alternative vocabulary with which to articulate the feelings it demands that Ophelia take for granted. The rest is silence, indeed.

The Petrarchan dilemma, its restless insistence that erotic love cure the malady of original and unasked-for autonomy, becomes a communicable disease when considering questions of Hamlet’s letter-poems’ reception. This peculiar linking of imagery and idea—bosom and disease—plunges to the heart of the wormwood-weaned Petrarchan

³⁵⁰ II.ii.125-126.

mode. Ophelia removes “these” corrupted/diseased files that Hamlet has stuffed into her figurative and physical bosom. Hamlet, “ill at these numbers” has pawned them off his Petrarchan object. Made ill by them as a result, she seeks to return the disease to its host.

Passannante emphasizes that Virgil’s importation of Lucretius’ “rare Latin word *amaror* (bitterness)”³⁵¹ infects/corrupts Petrarch’s reading to the extent that he uses the term “to describe the ‘bitter sweetness’ of rereading Virgil after the death of Laura.”³⁵² The Laura of the *Canzoniere* seems to have died of plague, a chronic early modern epidemic that many scholars believe killed Shakespeare’s son Hamnet in 1596—a year that falls between the staging of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Q2 Hamlet*. Elsinore’s diseased atmosphere is a well-established critical tradition. However, we have underestimated the extent to which this pervasive disease extends, and how bound up Elsinore’s diseased atmosphere is in its Petrarchan protagonist’s desire to assume a Stoical position toward the soul-ravaging folly of love. Hamlet is so ill at the numbers of the Petrarchan machine that, like all aspiring Senecan Stoics, he seeks to rid himself of the machine entirely. Though one might be tempted to view the Prince’s suicidal attitude itself as a kind of disease infecting the atmosphere of the play, Hamlet’s eventually serene suicidism is the cure for the malady of life in Elsinore. For Hamlet and his literary heirs, suicide is poetry in motion. Few auditors of the play have realized that the Prince learned this attitude from Petrarch.

³⁵¹ Gerard Passannante, *The Lucretian Renaissance*, p. 31.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 34. I will draw a direct link between Petrarch’s self-consoling notation on the death of Laura to Swift’s “On The Death of Mrs. Johnson.”

Hamlet's response to Ophelia's provocation was long ago consigned to the dark cave of misogyny, and rightfully so. Ophelia's betrayal of Hamlet by pretending, Laura-like, not to have requited the Prince's Petrarchan expression of love³⁵³ does not excuse the abusive torrent with which her betrayal is met. I do not mean to suggest that it is any critic's job to excuse or condemn a literary character's behavior, according to anachronistic moral/ethical norms. Rather, I want to emphasize how the "remembrances" exchange combines the explicitly Petrarchan—perhaps a whole cycle of Petrarchan lyrics written by Hamlet for Ophelia—with what the *Canzoniere* constantly implies: that the "deep mystery" at the heart of the Petrarchan speaker's quest is his sense that where he "come[s] from and when" is his forced separation from an initial female body in the weaning process, which was almost certainly accomplished by the original woman's applying wormwood to her "dug." Therefore, when Ophelia removes from her "bosom" expressions of the central Petrarchan dilemma of the female bosom, she rehearses the original "treason in my breast" by which Hamlet is only half-conscious of being consumed.

The first line of Hamlet's tirade evidences this focus on female-bodied treason: "Ha, ha! are you honest?"³⁵⁴ He follows this implicit accusation of dishonesty by asking, "Are you fair?"³⁵⁵ The twinning of these concerns—honesty and beauty—

³⁵³ Though Shakespeare wisely leaves the question of Did They Or Didn't They ambiguous, the intimacy, intensity, and affection of Hamlet's other interactions with Ophelia suggests a reciprocal sexual relationship.

³⁵⁴ III.i.102.

³⁵⁵ III.i.104.

characterizes much of Hamlet's misogynistic explosion, which reaches its climax with the rant that begins, "I have heard of your paintings, well enough. God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another . . . I'll no more on't, it hath made me mad."³⁵⁶ "To be or not to be" soliloquy, this sounds like someone else's language—a Puritan preacher on a late sixteenth-century Southwark street-corner, to be exact. The educated, drama-loving Hamlet should have no quarrel with make-up. He seems to be exporting corrupted files in the manner of Ophelia when she goes "mad." However, if the Prince knows—and there is good reason to suspect he does³⁵⁷—that Ophelia is setting him up, that he and Ophelia are being observed—his explicitly stated "it hath made me mad," coupled with his provincial attitude toward make-up, suggest that Hamlet's misogynistic tirade is actually a misogynistic charade.

Because Swift appropriates Hamlet's lobby "nunnery" pose for the speaker of the Excremental Poems and Book IV of *Gulliver's Travels*, and because Hamlet and Swift are essentially satirists, this undermining of the notion of an "authentically" misogynistic Hamlet prepares us to discuss the Petrarcho-Hamletian work of Swift, whom Yeats will describe as "the last passion of the Renaissance,"³⁵⁸ and whom this study views as the last Hu/man. It is wildly inappropriate to consider that a literary character can be "authentically" anything—yet Hamlet's textual singularity invites his auditors to treat

³⁵⁶ III.i.142-147.

³⁵⁷ For convincing support of this position, see the passage from John Dover Wilson's essay "Hamlet and Ophelia" in the Norton edition of *Hamlet* edited by Cyrus Hoy.

³⁵⁸ W.B. Yeats, quoted in the chapter *The Words Upon the Window-Pane* in *A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats*, by A. Norman Jeffares and A.S. Knowland, p. 595.

him as if he were capable of moral consistency, and as if that were advisable in a literary figment. In this way, especially in the context of those who view Hamlet as a kind of ultimate expression of the Renaissance Human, the Prince satirizes the notion of the Renaissance Human. He knows we are watching from a safe remove and he mocks our interpretations of his behavior. This is a way of equating the Human with madness.

To be fair/honest, Hamlet's tirade includes the tellingly mother-obsessed self-condemnation that "it were better my mother had not borne me," a line echoed by Hamlet's phrases "... to the manor born" and "from whose bourn no traveler returns." Further reinforcing the sense that the wordsmith Prince is obsessed with female-bodied origins is Hamlet's declaration in the Graveyard Scene that Yorick "hath bore me on his back a thousand times."

The Graveyard Scene

[Throws up a shovelful of earth with a skull in it.]

Hamlet: That skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once. How the knave jowls it to the ground, as if it 'twere Cain's jaw-bone, that did the first murder! This might be the pate . . . of a courtier, which could say, "Good morrow, sweet lord! How dost thou, sweet lord?" . . . Why, e'en so, and now my Lady Worm's chopless, and knock'd about the mazzard with a sexton's spade. Here's fine revolution . . .

[Throws up another skull.]

Hamlet: There's another . . . Whose was it? . . .

1 Clown: A pestilence on him for a mad rogue! 'a pour'd a flagon of Rhenish on my head once. This same skull, sir, was, sir, Yorick's skull, the King's jester.

Hamlet: This? *[Takes the skull.]* . . . Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath bore me on his back a thousand times, and now how abhorr'd in my imagination it is! my gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kiss'd I know not

how oft. Where be your gibes now, your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now to mock your own grinning—quite chop-fall'n. Now get you to my lady's [chamber], and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favor she must come; make her laugh at that.³⁵⁹

A spectral breast hangs over the Graveyard Scene. Not only does Hamlet envision Yorick's oft-kissed lips with a power that verges on Macbeth's ability to see daggers in air, he attempts to tally the times his old caregiver "bore" him "on his back." Being thrown up and registered so quickly after the previous skull—which glides in Hamlet's imagination from a series of male-gendered embodiments to the female-gendered Lady Worm—Yorick becomes feminized, as if Hamlet somehow thought and thinks of the dead clown as a kind of wet nurse, similar to the "knave" proud to have weaned Juliet during an earthquake.

Hamlet's speech to/about Yorick's skull has the air of a fragmented Petrarchan lyric to a dead beloved—or to a living beloved who withholds her nurturing body from the reluctantly autonomous speaker. As we have seen, in the world of the Petrarchan lyric, there is little difference between the living and the dead, since in both cases the life-sustaining body is absent. Lax readers of the Petrarchan mode tend to overlook this fundamental aspect of Petrarchism, which seems to contradict the caricature of an oversensitive poetic speaker, begging for requited love. The position is Stoical, because it blurs the line between life and death in order to see life in death and thereby steel oneself against death's ultimate power. In this way, *Memento mori* partakes in Stoicism and helps to explain how modern lyric poetry is essentially Stoical. By combining erotic love

³⁵⁹ V.i.75-195.

and death, Petrarchan lyric poetry generates an antidiscourse that embraces oblivion in order to subvert it.

Here again, issues of in-articulation—“had a tongue, and could sing once”—fuse with bodily dependence, in such a way that autonomy itself becomes an antidiscourse. Not only can one not “sing” with another’s lips or breast in one’s mouth, there is perhaps no other reason to sing or “jest” but that one is bodily alone, as if all solo songs and jokes ultimately testify to nothing so much as the fact that one *is* bodily alone. In this way, the Petrarchan mode seems to augur, even create the individuo-isolationist atmosphere of the Protestant Reformation, whose rejection of transubstantiation amounts to awareness of a rupture from a nourishing divine body. Luther seems to have found a way to market the Petrarchan romance of loneliness—at the moment of this writing still extant in predominant Western notions of “tortured artists” and “authentic,” lone geniuses—bound up with Stoicism and a monk’s sacred desire to withdraw from the secular world, to the masses. *Be alone together*, Protestantism seems to say, or *Be dead in life*, turning Petrarch’s death/life blur inward, against oneself. Petrarch (and his speaker) physically remove/d him/themselves from Avignon, Rome, Naples, Venice, and other cities; in order to conquer the crowded world, Luther found a way for separate persons to imagine themselves infinitely apart.

“Infinite jest” is Hamlet’s fourth and final use of the term *infinite*. The Prince’s first use, in I.iv, is thrown away in a usually rapidly delivered speech whose upshot is that the new king is a drunk. The succeeding two uses, both uttered in the same scene, are among the most quoted phrases from this most-quoted play: “I could be bounded in a

nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space”³⁶⁰ and “What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculties!”³⁶¹ The presently discussed fourth use has reached new levels of notoriety as the title of one of the twentieth century’s most highly regarded novels. All of this begs the question: what is it about infinity that resonates so powerfully with this play, and with its auditors?

The answer lies in the play’s Petrarchan aspects, which, as I noted in the Introduction, not only elides temporal and spatial restraints but ultimately suggests a desire to transcend all limits—gender, Human, and existential. After all, doing away with limits would be the only way to reach back to ancient Rome and to the immemorial self. In my discussion of Mazzotta’s work, I have discussed erotic love’s philosophical efficacy; I have argued that in *Hamlet* Shakespeare experiments with removing erotic love from the Petrarchan calculus, sensing profundities radiating beneath even that foundational aspect of the Italian poet’s mode. All of these observations are in play in the Graveyard Scene, with a difference: Hamlet seems here to experiment with Petrarch’s love of deceased Laura’s body, reinstating erotic love into his concerns in order to explore the Petrarchan romance of the dead. Hamlet’s speech renders the idea of gendering a skeleton absurd, thereby suggesting, especially in the *Memento mori* context of the Graveyard Scene (and the entire play is a kind of Graveyard Scene), that since we

³⁶⁰ II.ii.254-255, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*.

³⁶¹ II.ii.273-274. These lines are often taken out of context, in order to craft a Hamletian celebration of the Human. Nothing could be further from the truth—not only does Hamlet perform this speech for his acknowledged enemies Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, his celebration is a set-up for the humorless punch line of, “And yet to me what is this quintessence of dust?” It is interesting to note that *quintessence*—an idea about essential substance that dates from ancient Greece—has come to refer to the “dark energy” expanding in our universe.

are all walking skeletons, gender and its attendant limits on the Human are absurd. This is taking Petrarch's implications as far as possible; this explores the infinite; this is the stuff of a "poem unlimited."

In the Graveyard Scene, Hamlet seems to be surprised, even angry to discover that Yorick's skull does not continue to "jest," to flash "merriment." This seems a reasonable reaction in the world of the play, where dead fathers make petulant demands in either armor or pajamas, and where the Prince—who has spent the vast bulk of his play as if he were a kind of zombie, backing out of rooms without looking where he is going—has survived an assassination attempt at sea and returned to triumph over his remaining foes. The claustrophobic nutshell of Elsinore serves as a round metaphor for the earth, whose limits can only be transcended via the poetic imagination, whose history-and-death-obsessed characteristics in *Hamlet* are Petrarchan.

Hamlet drags to light the skull of a friend and satiric mentor, but not until he has made a Lucretio-Ovidian speech that satirizes those poets' more dignified expressions of the metamorphoses to which all mortal forms are subject. The way the scene progresses from Hamlet's detached dismissal of the public's universal fate to his strange and heartfelt paean to his personal friend brings to mind Jonathan Swift's statement in his September 29, 1725 letter to Alexander Pope that, ". . . I hate and detest that animal called man, although I heartily love John, Peter, and Thomas, and so forth." This attitude is itself a manifestation of the satiric frame of mind, which, if it must love, does so as a

mockery of loving at large. This is one way that epicurean atomism suits perfectly the needs of a Christian satirist of infinite degree—Christ commands his followers to love their neighbors, who the satirist finds unlovable, save one or two, amen.

Ultimately, the target of every satire is of nostalgia—for shopworn ideas, misplaced affection, unworthy institutions. In this way, we can say that Petrarch is satiric of the medieval frame of mind, particularly in his *Invectives*. It is too much to ask of Petrarch to be satiric of a movement his poems are in the process of crystallizing, though the overriding sense of shame in the *Canzoniere* invites the vast satiric tsunami that will eventually dislodge Petrarchism from cultural prestige. Regardless of whether late-coming anti-Petrarchans thought they mocked the sheepishness of the Petrarchan speaker's shame, they merely partake in it. In this way, anti-Petrarchans are emissaries sent by Petrarch's speaker into the weaknesses his poems constantly admit. The Petrarchan mode in its explicit, English Renaissance form does not become exhausted until satire of it becomes exhausted. The moment of that ultimate exhaustion can be traced to Hamlet's failed hyperbole in Ophelia's grave. Having completed his Petrarchan mission, the Delay is over, and Hamlet is free to have a fencing match—the success of which requires the absence of rumination, the banishing of deeply inward philosophizing—and die.

Still, each of Hamlet's examples of glorious bodies now relegated to bungle-dom—Alexander and Julius Caesar—derive from a classical era never satirized by Petrarch. In other words, in this scene Hamlet satirizes the Petrarchan/Renaissance impulse to nostalgically glorify the classical past, and in so doing he puts his finger on a latent anti-Petrarchan impulse. If Petrarch's speaker lyrically conflates his passion for

Laura with a desire to re-enter the past (physically and figuratively), anti-Petrarchism must eventually include satire of nostalgia for the past—which, seen from one angle, is what the Renaissance is.

Chapter Six: Swift as Meditation

In an April 7, 1930 letter to Augusta, Lady Gregory, W.B. Yeats writes that he is reading “Swift, the *Diary to Stella*,” largely because “in Swift” is to be found “the last passion of the Renaissance.”³⁶² Yeats does not call Swift “the last man of the Renaissance”—rather, the fellow Irish poet Yeats emphasizes Swift’s “passion,” a word that refers both to powerful emotion and to the suffering and death of Christ. This shift evidences the Renaissance-enabled Reformation in contemporary life; to this day, our vernacular use of *passion* often carries this Christo-etymological connotation—“He’s passionate about this” or “She’s a passionate person” implies a sense of suffering for one’s enthusiasm, a tinge of anger or indignation at the edges of his or her cause, as if interiorizing, somehow, the suffering of Christ. This “indignant” sense of the word makes sense coming from Yeats about Swift; the former poet translated the latter’s poet’s Latin epitaph thus:

Swift has sailed into his rest;
Savage indignation there
Cannot lacerate his Breast.
Imitate him if you dare,
World-Besotted Traveler; he
Served human liberty.³⁶³

This is a fairly literal translation, with one key difference: Yeats translates the Latin *cor*, which means “heart,” as “breast.”³⁶⁴ The rest/breast rhyme is facile, monosyllabic; it is

³⁶² William Butler Yeats, quoted in the chapter *The Words Upon the Window-Pane* in *A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats*, by A. Norman Jeffares and A.S. Knowland, p. 595.

³⁶³ William Butler Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, ed. by Richard J. Finneran, pp. 245-256.

³⁶⁴ The original runs thus:

hard to imagine Yeats having trouble coming up with a rhyme for the equally facile *heart*. Moreover, “. . . sailed into his rest” is hardly an indispensable phrase, and it is not Swift’s idea (the literal translation of his epitaph’s first line is, “Here is laid the body”). Yeats is true to *indignatio*/indignation and *lacerare*/lacerate, but he betrays Swift’s heart in order to make it a breast. Gordon Braden is useful in understanding Swift’s laceration:

Anger is the uniquely dangerous emotion, particularly, it would seem, for the wise man: “A wise man will not stop being angry once he starts (Plato’s *Dialogues* 4.9.1).” The potential for moral outrage is the wise man’s special weakness; if he allows himself even a taste, he will not make it twenty yards down the street . . . The Stoic’s very superiority threatens him with a fury that grades helplessly into madness: “If you want the wise man to be as angry as the indignity of crimes demands, he would have to become not angry but insane (4.9.4).”³⁶⁵

Braden suggests that the individual’s inevitable failure at addressing indignity lies in applying a stoically unified spirituality to an infinitely dispersed, epicurean multiplicity of crimes, outrages, and indignities. The cure cannot find the disease. Madness ensues.

Both women and men have breasts, as they do hearts, yet Yeats’ “breast” engages a different, more feminized range of associations. Given the distancing effect Yeats’ alteration generates—“breast,” if not completely exterior in connotation, exists further from the body’s *cor/e* than does the heart—Yeats’ “betrayal” heightens the erotic

Hic depositum est Corpus
IONATHAN SWIFT S.T.D.
Hujus Ecclesiae Cathedralis
Decani,
Ubi saeva Indignatio
Ulterius
Cor lacerare nequit,
Abi Viator
Et imitare, si poteris,
Strenuum pro virili
Libertatis Vindicatorem.

³⁶⁵ Gordon Braden, *Anger’s Privilege*, p. 22.

atmosphere of the piece. To dispel the possible protestation that this is a “wild” argument to make about an epitaph, we need only recall that the *Canzoniere*’s lyric necrophilia enables the climax of *Romeo and Juliet*, which digs out a space for Hamlet to leap into (and crawl out of) Ophelia’s grave. In this chapter I will directly relate this particularly Petrarchan passion to the poetry of Swift.

There is an old rugged cross in *passion*, a word that raises the specter of embodied love in order to skewer it, to make it bleed. But what is a Renaissance passion? Is not the Renaissance the era *When God Left the World?*³⁶⁶ When one uses *passion* to refer to lovers, indignity is replaced by an erotic ardor that borders on the unstable, an implicit acknowledgement that erotic passion frequently leads to suffering. In this way, the *Canzoniere* is a secular passion whose more or less straightforward substitution of erotic desire for spiritual devotion generates a teleology of its isolated speaker’s arc from Laura, back to Artemis/Diana, concluding with Poem 366’s canzone to Mary. *Hamlet*, late-coming and alive to this Petrarchan teleology’s humanistic implications, removes all three objects of Petrarchan desire, leaving only the Petrarchan subject, the Petrarchan speaker, the Petrarchan self.

Clearly, for Yeats, Swift’s “last passion of the Renaissance” bears a textual relationship to Stella, the name Swift appropriates from Philip Sidney’s seminal, openly Petrarchan poem sequence *Astrophil and Stella*,³⁶⁷ and which Swift bestows

³⁶⁶ I refer to Regina M. Schwartz’s *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism: When God Left the World*.

³⁶⁷ Sidney’s formal experimentation characterizes *Astrophil and Stella* and as such is early Elizabethan evidence of Petrarchan “lyric substance” being more important than strict adherence to Petrarchan numbers, already comprised of the “lyric substance” that is *found* in translation.

pseudonymously on his friend Esther Johnson. Yeats wrote his letter to Lady Gregory in 1930,³⁶⁸ while he was composing the one-act play *The Words upon the Window-pane*, a kind of horror piece about the ghosts of Swift and his lovers Stella and Vanessa haunting a house in the Irish countryside. *Window-pane* is a hair-raising play; at one point the ghost of a little girl named Lulu, speaking through the character Mrs. Henderson, says of Swift's ghost, "Bad old man does not know he is dead."³⁶⁹ This seems to flow from Yeats' sense that Swift did not really know the Renaissance was dead, as if Swift were a ghost in life. In turn, this suggests an elemental way that Swift "was" Hamlet—the Prince, in his Delay, does not accept that his world is dead and seeks to be the Ghost he loves. (Though Hamlet consistently extols his father's virtues, and though she has opportunities to agree, Gertrude never praises Old Hamlet.) Yeats' play posits that this ghostly desire, this deathly denial is enough to make an afterlife existence so, as if Petrarch's *Epistolae familiares* (in which the Father of Humanism writes letters directly to Cicero and other ancients he admires)—indeed, as if Petrarch's entire Janusian, Renaissance-generating motion—were a Jazz Age séance, monkey glands swinging from one participant's vein to the next.

Window-pane puts its finger on a way that Swift embodies a Blanchot-esque negative passion of the Renaissance, where ancient Rome is a bad old man that does know he is dead. Petrarch's recuperation of flecks of ancient Rome, carried out in defiance of a "dark age" ignorant of the earlier period's intellectual and artistic bounty,

³⁶⁸ A. Norman Jeffares and A.S. Knowland, *A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats*, p. 595.

³⁶⁹ W.B. Yeats, *Wheels and Butterflies, The Words upon the Window-Pane*, p. 50.

necessarily requires a positive point of view: increased knowledge of what came before benefits the present moment. Yet imported products carry with them exotic disease. There are endless healthy reasons for organisms and ages to die, the first demonstration of which is the forced autonomy of weaning, whose message amounts to: *Be free and die*. A ghostly, Elsinoric contamination must always be an elemental aspect of Humanities departments, so dependent upon the spectral breast of a dead world, supposedly superior to our own.

Yeats seems wrote “Swift’s Epitaph” in the *Window-pane* of the late 1920s. Therefore, we can stand back and recognize in Yeats—a modernist lyric poet whose work orbits how the past and present are layered or spiral, not linear—a perhaps instinctive/subconscious association of Swift’s morbidity with his erotic desire for the female body. The Hamletian formula of ghosts, graves, mis-requited love, and self-consciously presented lyric poetry seem to equal for Yeats a “passion of the Renaissance.” Indeed, Stella’s specter haunts the “Epitaph” in one bluntly biographical way: though there is no evidence they were ever married, Swift requested to be buried next to Esther’s remains in Dublin’s Saint Patrick’s Cathedral. It seems that a “sexton” straight out of *Hamlet*’s Graveyard Scene subsequently joined them even more completely.

In his *In Search of Swift*, Denis Johnston writes that after Swift’s and Stella’s bones were returned to St. Patrick’s Cathedral in 1838—after being passed around Dublin for three years (see Dr. William Wilde’s description of Stella’s skull below)—St. Patrick’s sexton William Maguire “took it upon himself to place both [Swift’s and

Stella's] skulls in [Swift's] coffin," and then to close up the cathedral floor.³⁷⁰ Johnston adds that

In 1882 the floor was opened again for the purpose of more permanent repair, and the coffin containing the two skulls was seen once more by people who have talked to others still alive. Thus there is now no question about its present position.³⁷¹

Therefore, Stella and Swift remain together to this day. This carries with it something of Hamlet's vow to Laertes in the Graveyard Scene that the Prince will be buried with Ophelia. Petrarch's remains lie in a memorial sarcophagus before Chiesa Santa Maria Assunta in Arquà Petrarca; we know from John Hooper's April 6, 2004 article in *The Guardian* entitled "Petrarch—the poet who lost his head"—which ends with the phrase "no one should expect swift results"—that Petrarch's skull has been stolen and replaced with that of a female, thereby making explicit the implied hermaphroditism of lyric poetry as crystallized by the *Canzoniere*. Indeed, the Petrarchan mode's focus on death positions hermaphroditism as a shallow afterthought—our mixed remains are gendered only Life.

Whether or not Yeats was conscious of a connection between Swift and Hamlet specifically, the link was in the air. During this period, scholars W.B.C. Watkins and Shane Leslie each wrote extended studies of Swift that explore the affinity his work shares with the spirit, or the specter, of the Dane. Watkins' classic *Perilous Balance*, published in 1934, begins by connecting Hamlet's dying plea to, "Absent thee from

³⁷⁰ Denis Johnston, *In Search of Swift*, p. 198.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

felicity awhile”³⁷² to “all Swift’s satire.”³⁷³ This is a grim claim to make, because the felicity to which Hamlet refers is death—he makes his plea to Horatio, after the Prince has wrested the poisoned cup from the properly Senecan-Stoic’s suicidal lips. The line is grim also as a statement of Hamlet’s idea of happiness. Though consistently suicidal from his first appearance in the play, the Dane defends his life and avenges threats to it on the way to this, his last and first chance at felicity. This, in turn, suggests a way that *Hamlet* mirrors and/or has altered Western attitudes towards suicide, down through Bryon, James Dean, et al: Hamletian suicidism is characterized by the desire not to take one’s own life but, rather, to find a cause noble enough to justify the *a priori* desire to end one’s existence, in an infinitely subjective world where no causes are purely/clearly noble. It is Senecan/Roman Stoicism skewed post-Reformation morbid, and as such is best understood in contrast to Horatio, who does not seek death until he witnesses the overwhelmingly tragic events of the final scene of the play. If Romeo is Hamlet in love, Horatio is Hamlet without a universal, emotionally paralyzing sense of feminine betrayal. The line bears the Petrarchan self-annihilative stain, the rich portability of “Absent thee” carrying with it the beloved body’s omnipresent absence.

Watkins recognizes in Swift’s writings a spirit similar to Hamlet’s:

If asked to consider Swift in the light of Shakespeare, many would think at once of the bitterly satirical play *Troilus and Cressida* or the invective and misanthropy of *Timon of Athens*. Swift has much more in common with Hamlet . . . in many respects his problem is identically the problem of Hamlet . . . Swift’s melancholia is the melancholia of Hamlet, and its root is very much the same—a dichotomy of personality expressing itself in an abnormal

³⁷² V.ii.330.

³⁷³ W.B.C. Watkins, *Perilous Balance*, p. 1.

sensitivity to the disparity between the world as it should be and the world as one sees it.³⁷⁴

Note that Watkins does not conclude the above passage by writing “the world as it is”—“the world as one sees it” acknowledges a Hamletian infinite subjectivity, an inward glance toward the outer world, gazing at the world through the lens of one’s “insides,” an essential troubling of phenomenology by way of the Petrarchan machine, allowing for endless interpretations of the shapes and colors one thereby perceives. The notorious inwardness of Hamlet seems unconsciously to refer to the popularity of public anatomical dissections in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. (Shakespeare almost certainly refers to these dissections more explicitly in *Coriolanus*.) Public dissections, performed in theaters on weekend nights, attracted Elizabethan and Jacobean crowds comparable in size to those attending plays. The whole culture seems to have been looking inward and thinking in fragments. That it has become commonplace to say that we all perceive our own realities is itself a testament to Hamlet, who learns his infinity from Petrarch’s prismatic fragmentation of the self. Lyric smashes to pieces the inherent lie of epic, father of narrative; lyric acknowledges that we experience life differently from one moment to the next; lyric gives the lie to the sustainability of nations, passions, loves.

Watkins’ defense of his choice of affinity—Swift’s with Hamlet³⁷⁵—resembles the one I have been making in this study. Writing in Watkins’ terms, I could say that,

Asked to consider Shakespeare’s drama in the light of Petrarch, many would think at once of the doomed, young, northern Italian eroticism of *Romeo and Juliet* or, slightly eccentrically, the stagey melodrama

³⁷⁴ W.B.C. Watkins, *Perilous Balance*, p. 1.

³⁷⁵ In 1721, Swift wrote an epilogue for a Dublin production of *Hamlet*, on behalf of the Irish weavers. See pp. 228-229 of Swift’s *The Complete Poems*, ed. by Pat Rogers.

suggested by the ordering of the Petrarch-indebted *Sonnets*. But Hamlet has much more in common with Petrarch's poetic speaker . . . in many respects his problem is identically the problem of Petrarch's speaker . . . Hamlet's melancholia is the melancholia of Petrarch's speaker, and its root is very much the same—a dichotomy of personality expressing itself in an abnormal sensitivity to the disparity between the world as it should be and the world as one sees it.

I perform this experiment at length to gesture toward the great span of time here discussed, which nevertheless, seen in terms of the Petrarchan mode, is also instantaneous, like a lyric poem immediately digested. I do not think Petrarch could or would have been so audacious as to write the *Canzoniere* or to father the Renaissance if he did not see the gathering of origins as something instantaneously achievable, perhaps best evidenced by his pioneering, poetic approach to Roman ruins, where an endless chain of moments drags across the traveler at once.³⁷⁶ There is something faithful and apocalyptic in this method, something akin to vowing to wipe away “all forms, all pressures past” after your father's ghost has said, “Remember me.” Of course, wiping away all forms and pressures past amounts to valorizing certain past forms and pressures (memories of one's relationship with one's father) over other past forms and pressures (memories of one's relationship with one's uncle and, perhaps, one's mother). The tragedy of the satirist is that he is the most ruthlessly nostalgic of them all.

This brings me to another reason for my above, extended experiment—the satiric and lyric impulses both feature “a dichotomy between the world as it should be and the world as one sees it.” In this way, Hamlet serves as a bridge between two genres whose most (anachronistically) Hamletian practitioners also happen to be their genres' most unsurpassed practitioners. Shakespeare's play—more specifically, Hamlet's Delay—

³⁷⁶ I refer again to Petrarch's *Familiare* II.14.

charts a path from Petrarchan lyricism into Swiftian satire. One cannot get to one mode without starting from the other. Hamlet's success or failure in his lyric and satiric experiments matters less than his instinct that the two genres are somehow conjoined, in a burgeoning modernism that will find courtly anti-Petrarchism too foolish to regard. Watkins implies as much when he writes that, "Since satire . . . is akin to comedy, we should expect to find our parallel to Swift in that type of comedy . . . that . . . approaches tragedy." The *Canzoniere*, which ends "happily" with Poem's 366's deathbed canzone masterpiece to the Virgin Mary, nevertheless approaches tragedy not only in its retrospective vantage onto the speaker's unrequited/unasked-for-autonomous isolation, but also in the very virginity of the g/God he perceives he is about to join in a kind of feminine Ephesian paradise beyond the clouds. That the Mother of God is simultaneously perceived to be *the* Virgin is tragic in that it bestows a richly poetic fecund status on Mary, as it denies her erotic agency. In this way, Mary departs from the prehistoric Minoan and ancient Greek tradition of earthy, mighty Artemis and flows from the "chaste" Cynthia/Diana, distant moon-goddess iteration of ancient Rome.

The Mary trajectory matters differently in Petrarch's moment, at the birth of the Renaissance Human. If tragedy can be figured as a protagonist being forced to choose between two bad options, early modern woman's paucity of options satirizes the tragic hero's at least having two. That denizens of Petrarch's space and time worship the divine embodiment of this lack of options has much to teach us about early modern literature's depictions of women, the most powerfully complex of which register an anxiety about what women mean, what women are, the wholeness that their parts contain. Barring women from fully Human status is a transparent, if unconscious attempt at seeking to

control their bodies by fetishizing (praising) them. Barring female bodies creates new problems of control: as Mary is absent from the earth but present with the already consummating God, Laura's body resides with her husband, and then with promiscuous Death. Swift's Petrarchism undermines the mode's inherent fetishization in order to argue for avoiding the female body altogether. In Swift's Stella and excremental poems, however, viably sexual female bodies cannot be escaped via banishment to "a nunnery." If their bodies cannot be banished, then the torturous desire their omnipresent bodies inspire must be, by reimagining those bodies as the digestive objects of their production, as animals with pronounced "breasts," as corpses with worms already roaming their nostrils. It is as if, for a Christian heterosexual male, if he cannot have Mary—and he knows he cannot—no one else will do.

A Swiftian spirit stirs in Poem 366. Once again, Petrarch's speaker merges lyric poetry with prayer, figuring Mary—her beauty unsurpassed—as passive/unrequited yet only lover of God. Petrarch's speaker suggests that he was practicing to love Mary and to live off her eternal holy body all along, that he was insane when he thought an earthly woman might satisfy his now "changed desires"—whose change is opportunistic, given the alteration Petrarch's speaker's body is about to undergo.

The canzone opens by reiterating Petrarch's speaker's essential inarticulateness, this time in a manner that recasts epics' conventional opening invocation of the Muses as partaking in a late-coming male illness "at these numbers," where all worshippers of female beauty are somehow already cuckolded:

Beautiful Virgin . . . love drives me to speak words to you, but I do not know how to begin without your help and His who loving[ly] placed himself in you.

Language describing inter-dimensional breastfeeding quickly follows:

I invoke her who has always replied to whoever called
on her with faith. Virgin . . . bend to my prayer; give
succor to my war, though I am earth and you are queen
of Heaven.

A phrase that nominates Poem 366 as the text Hamlet is reading in the “To be or not to
be” soliloquy comes:

O solid shield . . . against the blows of Death
and Fortune . . .

The apparently august, learned, and wise speaker nevertheless attests to his blindness,
confusion, and turmoil—thereby reiterating the emotional instability of the Petrarchan
mode:

O relief from the blind ardor that flames here among the foolish
mortals: Virgin, turn those beautiful eyes . . . to my perilous state,
who come dismayed to you for counsel.

The speaker anticipates and implies a defense of the fragmented-female-body aesthetic of
the *Canzoniere*:

Pure Virgin, whole in every part, noble daughter and mother
of your offspring, who lighten this life and adorn the other:
through you your son, Son of the highest Father (O shining,
noble window of Heaven) . . .

He places Mary on a spectrum of Great Mothers:

among all earthly dwellings only you were chosen. Blessed
Virgin, who turn the tears of Eve to rejoicing again . . .

You have gathered into yourself three sweet names: mother,
daughter, and bride . . .

God is given erotic motivations, and Laura is downgraded:

Virgin unique in the world . . . who made Heaven in love with your
beauties, whom none surpassed or even approached . . .

The Protestant collapse of all thought with prayer and lyric poetry is presaged:

Through you my life can be joyous . . . O Mary . . . where sin
abounded grace abounds. With the knees of my mind bent, I beg
you . . . to direct my twisted path to a good end . . .

The symbol of the missing tiller returns, again asserting essential Petrarchan instability,
its haunting aural imagery even foretelling—from the other side of a secular crevasse—
late-coming Hamletian Rimbaud’s “The Drunken Boat”:

Bright Virgin, stable for eternity, star of this tempestuous sea . . .
see in what a terrible storm I am, alone, without a tiller, and I am
close to the last screams . . .

Swift’s Hamletian revulsion of flesh is anachronistically signaled and given a slanted
Christian explanation, as if having flesh were a sacrifice equal to having that flesh
crucified:

Remember that our sins made God take on, to save us, human flesh
in your virginal cloister.

More wandering follows, more instability, more scattered prayers/tears/poems:

Virgin, how many tears have I already scattered . . . how many
prayers in vain . . . Since I was born on the bank of Arno,
searching in this and now this other direction, my life has been
nothing but troubles . . .

Then, astonishingly, Petrarch’s speaker encapsulates in an opening phrase the Petrarchan
mode and what I argue is its relation to Hamlet, particularly his Delay:

beauty, acts, and words have burdened all my soul. Holy and life-
giving Virgin, do not delay, for I am perhaps in my last year; my
days, more swift than an arrow, have gone away . . . and only
Death awaits me.

The speaker does not forget to whom he speaks—so why does he say that “only Death
awaits” him, and not Mary in paradise? It seems that even in this explicitly Christian
poem the speaker indulges an instinct for Artemesian paganism, as if he thinks his only

hope of entering heaven were to engage Mary as if she were an idol, as if she were Laura, as if the Virgin Mother of God were susceptible to the speaker's lyric gifts. In what follows we might as well be in the Graveyard Scene:

Virgin, one now is dust and makes my soul grieve who kept it,
while alive, in weeping and of my thousand sufferings did not
know one; and though she had known them, what happened would
still have happened, for any other desire in her would have been
death to me and dishonor to her.

Again the dying Christian Petrarchan speaker struggles with his instinct to contextualize Mary in divine history, and he emphasizes his desire to die:

Now you, Lady of Heaven, you our goddess (if it is permitted and
fitting to say it) . . . what another could do is nothing to your great
power, to put an end to my sorrow, which to you would be an
honor and to me salvation.

Hamlet's Chamber Scene comparison of his father's and Claudius' portraits seems presaged in the following lines:

do not leave me at the last pass, do not consider me, but Him who
deigned to create me; let not my worth but His high likeness that is
in me move you . . .

Shakespeare's Sonnet 55, which begins, "Not marble, nor the gilded monuments/
Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme," seems to have been generated by the next stanza—which registers the "insanity" of seeking immortality on the earthly plane, as if the speaker with horror perceives at this late stage a fleshly origin in ruins:

Medusa and my error have made me a stone dripping vain
moisture . . . let at least my last weeping be devout and without
earthly mud, as was my first vow, before my insanity . . .

Petrarch's speaker then marries the Renaissance turn toward origin with coyly eternal, flirtatious desire for the feminine ideal:

let love of our common origin move you . . . for if I am wont to

love with such marvelous faith a bit of deciduous mortal dust, how
will I love you, a noble thing?

Again astonishingly, in his desperate final straits, Petrarch's speaker takes pride in poetic accomplishments he elsewhere deems to be shamefully vain. Seeking eternal tenure, the speaker cites his "wit and style . . . tongue and heart":

If from my wretched and vile state I rise again at your hands,
Virgin, I consecrate and cleanse in your name my thought and wit
and style, my tongue and heart, my tears and sighs. Lead me to the
better crossing and accept my changed desires.

His penultimate virile flourish made, the speaker ends Poem 366 as he began, acknowledging his late-coming status, his heart penetrated by slings and arrows. This last stanza also recalls Poem 1, which emphasizes the relationship of the speaker's poetry to his sighs/breath:

The day draws near and cannot be far, time so runs and flies . . . now
conscience, now death pierces my heart: commend me to your Son . . .
that He may receive my last breath in peace.

In Poem 366, Petrarch's speaker's status is liminal—not quite Human, not quite alive, not quite dead, at last adjacent to the position of the early modern woman, where he always wanted to be. He resides in a kind of heretical Elsinoric Purgatory, still comprised of earthly pride, co-resident with the afterlife of his work—a space where an elderly, theatrically exploited Swift will conjure the failing power of speech to acknowledge the loss of his humanity. The ripe old deaths of Swift and Petrarch are the least Hamletian things about them. It is a testament to their lifelong ferocity—known respectively and connectedly as *satire* and *love*—the lyric substance radiant in their textual iterations—that they come down to us eternally strong.

As I earlier noted, this comedy-approaching-tragedy trajectory is precisely what *Hamlet*, refining *Romeo and Juliet*'s earlier and similar experiment, charts. The New Comedy/*senex iratus* plot of Polonius blocking Hamlet's access to the older man's daughter becomes darkly (and unprecedentedly?) perverted when Ophelia aids her father in the blocking, handing over Hamlet's II.ii letter-poem. Everything in Elsinore is perverted, all breasts treasonous but Horatio's and the Players'. Though we can never call Hamlet's misogyny justified, we can better understand his misogyny as an acute sensitivity to a traitorous world, darker, more diseased and suicidal than even he is capable of being. Hamlet responds to the toxicity of his environment; he does not author it; this seems to be another fundamentally Petrarchan aspect of his character: a latecomer's humility generating an extended state of shock at how unlike one's vision of the past the present world is. The world as one sees it, if one sees the world in terms of history and death, is bound not only to disappoint but also constantly to betray.

Of the objects of Swift's satire, Watkins writes that the Dean

like Hamlet, is very much personally involved; he lashes first himself. The comparative dispassionateness and objectivity of the *First Voyage* disappears as we progress through *Gulliver's Travels*. When this self-laceration has no suspicion of professional pose, no suspicion of superiority; when it becomes intense and terrible suffering—then the satire which it produces becomes in a real sense tragedy, and, like Elizabethan tragedy, its only solution is death.³⁷⁷

My chosen textual entities invite generic confusion in those who discuss them. This is appropriate, for the experimentally restless nature of the work I here discuss is never

³⁷⁷ W.B.C. Watkins, *Perilous Balance*, pp. 5-6.

quite generically secure. Watkins, ostensibly writing about the prose fiction of *Gulliver's Travels*, does not acknowledge that Swift's epitaph poem haunts the above passage; Watkins may not intend his "self-lacerations" both to allude to and to interpret the epitaph's "... where fierce indignation/can no longer/lacerate his heart."³⁷⁸ Watkins' choice of phrase suggests that Swift and not the world is to blame for those lacerations, that noting the world's unjust nature need not result in lacerations of the heart. At any rate, the epitaph and its laceration hang over the passage like the memory of Yorick's lips hang from his skull, weaned finally from mortal life's compulsory autonomy.

The speaker of the *Canzoniere* "lashes first himself" in Poem 1 and proceeds to consistently self-lacerate throughout the collection. Hamlet characterizes his Delay with self-lacerations, but to these he adds the innovation of the laceration of others. The balance of Petrarchan bitter-sweetness tips in *Hamlet*, so that by the time Swift takes up the Prince's pose he recognizes a clear bifurcation between what is bitter and sweet in the tradition. Swift registers this bifurcation in his Stella and excremental poems³⁷⁹—the former subversively but not bitterly sweet, the latter subversively but not sweetly bitter.

Bitterness and sweetness will never be completely discrete in the hands of talented writers, but Swift's two bodies of poems are remarkable in their separate strategies regarding these two modes. In general, the Stella poems begin in sweetness and move toward what we would now describe as "problemification;" the excremental poems tend to begin in a more or less neutral tone, becoming gradually more satirical,

³⁷⁸ I am interpreting the Latin of the epitaph as literally as I know how.

³⁷⁹ The Stella poems are those Swift wrote explicitly "to" the poetic object/character Stella. Swift wrote what we now refer to as his "excremental poems" toward the end of his career. The most famous of the excremental poems are "The Lady's Dressing-Room," "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed," and "Strephon and Chloe."

until they implode into a surprisingly foreclosed bitterness at the end. The *Canzoniere*'s bitter-sweetness results from its speaker's refusal or inability to relinquish his desire to know physically a woman he can only imagine. The speaker's lack of interest in physically traveling toward Laura suggests that he seeks to maintain his perilous balance between the bitter and the sweet, that he fears suffering a fate similar to Hamlet's, a fate similar to that of the Petrarchan mode.

Hamlet's II.ii letter-poem indicates a mind whose bitter-sweetness was balanced in a Petrarchan style, but the murder of the king amplifies a latent bitterness in the Prince that drowns out almost all of the sweetness he formally perceived. In this way, too, Hamlet fulfills a Petrarchan prophecy, demonstrating retrospectively that the only means of not succumbing to overwhelming bitterness afforded to a certain cast of Petrarchan mind—the only means afforded a Petrarchan Human—is that Human's embrace of enforced autonomy from the female body, via the total isolation of the self in physical seclusion. The physical proximity of potential female objects of desire, in this formulation, is too much for a Petrarchan subject to bear. If he cannot afford physically to remove himself as thoroughly as does the speaker of the *Canzoniere* (and, perhaps not coincidentally, Petrarch himself), he must find other means of isolation. From thence derive "Get thee to a nunnery" and Swift's "The Lady's Dressing-Room," the latter of which also recalls Hamlet's crazed, Janus-exiting visit to Ophelia's "dressing-room" in II.i—an act apparently performed in order to excise whatever Petrarchan sweetness was left in Hamlet's own breast, which now aspires to isopathic treason.

Perilous Balance, the title of Watkins' book, implies this progressive, bitter-sweet tipping over, this generic insecurity indicative of the total restlessness at the heart of the

Petrarchan mode: “the only solution is death.” Indeed, Watkins suggests that this restlessness is generic in nature:

By the time of Queen Anne, tragedy as a dramatic form had been dissipated . . . in vain efforts by writers who felt its lost vitality as a form to revivify it and to seek new directions for the tragic impulse. Such tragedies . . . are in their way poetic and fine but anemic and moribund. Realistic tragedy was a possible refuge; but [those] plays . . . are no real substitute for Elizabethan tragedy in power and scope. The nearest equivalent in the Augustan Age to expression of the most profound sense of tragedy, expressed by the Elizabethans in drama, is not to be found in the work of the dramatists, but . . . primarily in Swift . . . Apart from the disintegration of tragedy as a form, of the men of his age Swift alone had the emotional and imaginative power of the great Elizabethans, and he wrote prose like a poet.³⁸⁰

“The tragic impulse” is another way of saying “perilous balance,” another way of saying “the Petrarchan mode,” for though tragedy was similarly impossible in Petrarch’s time and space, the *Canzoniere* is full of the tragic impulse, presenting its protagonist with an existential choice between misery and death, its final stage littered with the deathbed body of the speaker and the decomposing corpse of his beloved. *Hamlet/Hamlet*, though the only of my three textual entities to generically satisfy its tragic impulse, restlessly subverts its tragic status, operating as a perverse Petrarchan poem hurtling towards satire. If *Romeo and Juliet* seeks to perfect the Petrarchan mode, *Hamlet* seeks to destroy even its anti-Petrarchan iterations. The two plays’ closely related uses of the wormwood trope evidence this connection, and this change.

Yeats’ conception of Swift as embodying the “last passion of the Renaissance” seems connected to a kind of secular faith in the possibility that the mortal non-human female can redeem the Human male—as opposed to a sacred faith in the power of the divine non-human to redeem. This faith in the power of the mortal female to do the work

³⁸⁰ W.B.C. Watkins, *Perilous Balance*, p. 6.

of the power-divested divine makes “betrayal” at the hands of the potential redeemer all the more vexing. Because there are so many other females physically present, it inspires in the betrayed believer a quest for discovery of the source of betrayal, a goal whose impossibility is compounded by the ubiquitous reminder of its impossible status. At least Christ’s body is absent from the world. The escape from women’s bodies requires the physical seclusion toward which Hamlet gestures and which Petrarch’s speaker more perfectly achieves. Yeats seems to have sensed in Swift an acute sensitivity to Shakespeare’s infinitely negative Hamletian experiment, whose Swiftian aspect required the Dean’s writing to and about women to bring to the fore: what if one removed from the Petrarchan love tradition even a secularized faith in the female body? *Hamlet* having already succeeded in doing away with erotic love from the equation, Swift needed only now to remove the remaining body, to lug the guts into the abyss.

In Swift’s poetry—particularly his excremental and Stella poems—the Petrarchan ampersand/ouroboros/double helix of bitter-sweetness disentangles, disintegrates, in a Epicurean Graveyard Scene fashion. Swift’s poetic speakers—like Petrarch’s speaker and Hamlet—has the early modern tragic knack for seeing “the skull beneath the skin,”³⁸¹ even when he tries only to see the skin. Consider the Graveyard Scene implications of one of Swift’s finest Stella poems, “A great Bottle of Wine, long buried, being that Day dug up”:

³⁸¹ In his poem “Whispers of Immortality,” T.S. Eliot writes of early modern English tragedian John Webster that he possessed this insightful gift. The tragic impulse seems to require seeing faces this way—it is an extension and variation on *Memento mori*.

. . . I gravely sat me down to think:
 I bit my Nails, and scratch'd my Head,
 But found my wit and fancy fled . . .
 And, what was yet a greater Curse,
 Long-thinking made my Fancy worse . . .
 A Spade let prudent Archy hold,
 And with discretion dig the Mould:
 Let Stella look with watchful Eye . . .
 BEHOLD THE BOTTLE, where it lies
 With Neck elated tow'rds the Skies!
 The God of Winds and Gods of Fire,
 Did to its wond'rous Birth conspire . . .
 See! as you raise it from its Tomb,
 It drags behind a spacious Womb,
 And in the spacious Womb contains
 A sov'reign Medicine for the Brains . . . ³⁸²

“Long-thinking made my Fancy worse” recalls Horatio’s chiding in the Graveyard Scene that, “’Twere to consider too curiously, to consider so”³⁸³—now with a dulled, dissipated difference. “Archy” clearly and comically stands in for the First Clown/Gravedigger, Swift’s digger’s name implying a wry, vernacular critique of one of ancient Rome’s greatest innovations. Like Yorick’s skull, the suddenly exhumed wine bottle is androgynous, simultaneously phallic and yonic, and is something to be pressed to one’s lips and kissed in order to receive a nourishment both redolent and satirical of a mother’s or a wet nurse’s breast. “The God of Winds and Gods of Fire” makes an explicitly empty and vague gesture towards the ancient, pagan gods, thereby registering those gods’ cultural emptiness and vagueness of import to Swift’s moment, whose neo-classicism is more thought of than felt. The reverse is true for the Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedians, whose most powerful work is shot through with a pagan instinct more sensed

³⁸² Jonathan Swift, “A great Bottle of Wine, long buried, being that Day dug up,” *The Essential Writings of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Claude Rawson and Ian Higgins, pp. 566-567.

³⁸³ V.i.205-206.

than understood. It is as if the entire, intellectually bracing, physically demanding, multi-sensory explosion of the Renaissance were reduced to the pleasant afternoon buzz an unearthed bottle of wine might provide. Byron's notorious habit, at his ancestral Newstead Abbey, of drinking wine from skulls unearthed on his property seems to have been merely a reading of Swift's "Bottle of Wine."

Swift wrote a Stella poem every year, on Esther Johnson's birthday. This partakes of the highly occasional quality of the *Canzoniere*, many of whose poems commemorate the anniversary of the date Petrarch's speaker first sees Laura in the church of Sainte-Claire d'Avignon.³⁸⁴ There is something of this occasional significance in Hamlet's exchange with the First Clown/Gravedigger:

Hamlet: . . . How long hast thou been a grave-maker?

1st Clown: Of [all] the days i'th' year, I come to't that day that our last king Hamlet overcame Fortinbras.

Hamlet: How long is that since?

1st Clown: Cannot you tell that? Every fool can tell that. It was that very day that young Hamlet was born—he that is mad, and sent into England.³⁸⁵

³⁸⁴ April 6, 1327. The church is now a ruin in Avignon, exposed to the elements, the contemporary city surrounding it. It is a miracle the space remains intact, its proportions still delineated.

John Donne's exquisite *Anniversaries* also partake in this Petrarchan tradition. Donne's poetry ranges from the almost satirically bitter to the overwhelmingly sweet. As the early modern period digests the Petrarchan mode, its heirs seem able to claim the right to lyric sweetness chiefly by way of a bitter, self-imposed, anti-Petrarchan trial by fire, as if the reclamation of a more complex sweetness were the goal all along. This is another way of explaining, perhaps, Donne's latent religious awakening, not to mention his view, expressed convincingly in his *Biathanatos*, that Jesus was a suicide. *Hamlet* seems to crystallize this apocalyptic Petrarchism—the play, like much of Donne's poetry, is post-anti-Petrarchan.

³⁸⁵ V.i.142-148.

This, in turn, recalls the Nurse's revelation that her suckling ward Juliet was weaned on her third birthday—Lammas Eve—during an earthquake, after the Nurse had “laid wormwood to my dug,/Sitting in the sun under the dovehouse wall.”³⁸⁶ Scholars have thoroughly documented the Nurse's self-representation in this speech as a kind of barnyard animal; less noted goes Swift's speaker's question—uttered in “A Receipt to Restore Stella's Youth”—“Why, *Stella*, should you knit your Brow,/If I compare you to a [starving] Cow?”³⁸⁷ Swift's *Stella* poems invest themselves in a disappearing reality—his speaker seems to realize that by speaking only on Stella's birthdays he has made himself the usher of doom not only for Esther Johnson but also for the Petrarchan mode.

Thus, though certainly less notable than tragedy's dissipation, post-anti-Petrarchism seems also to be vitiated in Queen Anne's England. Indeed, it seems Swift is the only visible English poet of his moment who perceives, via his *Stella* poems, the Petrarchan mode's relevance for his era. This is perhaps related to the Dean's other anachronistic and contrarian eccentricities, which include his dismissal of the rise of science in his, the Age of Enlightenment. In this Swift resembles Petrarch, whose famous *Invectives* ridicule the ascendant discipline of medicine. It is remarkable that the tragic impulse and the lyric impulse characterize the attitudes of two such serious scholastic minds. Petrarch and Swift—both, it seems to me, indisputably geniuses—created oeuvres whose upshot can be viewed to be: anyone who thinks he has located truth or meaning in contemporary life on earth is an idiot. In this way, the “passion of the

³⁸⁶ I.III.ii8-29.

³⁸⁷ Jonathan Swift, “A Receipt to Restore Stella's Youth,” *The Essential Writings of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Claude Rawson and Ian Higgins, p. 581.

Renaissance” is already satirical, already a rejection of clear and present folly. Petrarch’s and Swift’s work, like Hamlet’s Delay, wander in search of a way to wrest a comedy out of the dire tragedy they perceive—miserable Petrarchan poetry and Hamletio-Swiftian satire seek an ultimate sweetness beyond the bitterness of their respective atmospheres. This ultimately constitutes Petrarchan unrequited love: the failure to convince the world to stop going forward, progressing through time toward oblivion. *Go back*, Petrarchism says. On the other breast, Petrarchan desire is constantly consummated in the ubiquity of Humanities Departments, in the omnipresent tourist hoards in Florence, in the continued existence of the notion of a Renaissance era. Indeed, it seems that Swift’s poems to Stella are as sweet as a Petrarchan speaker can be in the Augustan Age.

The anti-Petrarchan joke of the “Bottle of Wine” is that it is Petrarchan in its treatment of the bottle, not Stella. The bottle symbolizes the exhumation of dissipated genre itself, a necrophilic exhumation of sweetness in which a “Womb contains” no less than a “*sov’reign* medicine for the Brains.” Hence does Swift’s late-coming Petrarchan speaker drain inwardness (within inwardness) of poetic import—Hamlet’s bunghole, his nut-shelled king of infinite space, his plays-within-plays, his Petrarchan machine, here become mere “medicine,” a stimulant, a substitute for desire which is itself an agent of dissipation. This is sweetness as *pharmakon*, offered to the Petrarchan object to mitigate the bitterness of her proximity not being sufficient to inspire a poem. This forfeiture, this giving up the game by “the last passion of the Renaissance” is perhaps more bitter than the Stella poems’ counterpart, the excremental Poems.

If not for its final couplet, the derivative, overtly Hamletian qualities of “The Lady’s Dressing-Room” might border on embarrassing. Swift seems to premise the entire, naïve thrust of his poem on Hamlet’s uncharacteristically rube-like noting that Ophelia wears make-up: “God has given you one face and you make yourselves another.”³⁸⁸ In fact, the assumption that Hamlet here refers to make-up likely has much to do with the notoriety of Swift’s poem. Regardless of what I would deem Hamlet’s meta-hypocrisy—why should the otherwise infinite-minded Prince have a problem with a face-within-a-face?—the strangely Puritanical pitch of Hamlet’s and Swift’s speaker Strephon’s complaints suggest misogyny perhaps less than they suggest virginity. This latter designation—virginity—haunts Swift’s legacy to this day,³⁸⁹ constituting an unconscious tribute to Stoical, pre-emptive Petrarchan withdrawal, whose upshot is the absence of sex. The specter of virginity also allies Swift with the Holy Mother and with the “Virgin Queen” Elizabeth—the former of which Petrarch’s speaker addresses in the great final poem of the *Canzoniere*, the latter of which immortally embodies the passion of the English Renaissance.

This also problematizes Hamlet’s rube-like stance. Ophelia’s father-and-king-observed, naïveté-suggesting gesture of returning to Hamlet his letter-poems seems meant to strike a similarly virginal pose. Hamlet’s misogynistic response can be seen, in

³⁸⁸ III.i.145-146.

³⁸⁹ Denis Johnston’s *In Search of Swift*, Margaret Anne Doody’s “Swift and Women,” and Louise K. Barnett’s *Jonathan Swift in the Company of Women* all refer to Swift’s sexual “abstinence”—which scholars speculate variously indicates a secret injury that prevented Swift from having sex, to his disgust with physical congress, or to the entire idea being a ruse concocted to allow Swift to have as much sex as he pleased, with whoever he wanted. This latter-most speculation seems to be influenced by William Wycherley’s Restoration comedy *The Country Wife*.

this light, as an attempt to neutralize Ophelia's virgin pose, to undermine it. Rather than excusing or normalizing Hamlet's misogyny, I seek to bring its dramatic motivation to the fore—it does little good to foreclose Hamlet's misogyny by declaring it misogynous, using its misogynous status as an excuse not to explore it further. Though I do not believe that this monolithic tendency is conscious in contemporary scholarship of the play, I do feel that Hamlet's misogyny goes generally under-explored by scholars who would understandably prefer to dismiss its import out of hand. However, nothing is to be lost by exploring misogyny's strategies, the revelation of which, it seems to me, is often the point of Hamlet's and Swift's disturbing labor. *Here's how and why we do it*, they seem to say. It were foolish not to listen.

In a real and basic way, Petrarchism amounts to the literary appropriation of the impossibility of having sex with the object of one's physical and/or intellectual desire. It is a kind of born-again virginity, misogyny by virtue of its praise-from-afar withdrawal from physical interaction with the entire female sex. The Petrarchan sexual recluse is more misogynous than the Casanova-esque womanizer, for at least the former seeks to know the female body. Neither Swift's sweet Stella nor his bitter Excremental poems seek to know female flesh.

Alan Stewart describes what seems to me to be the Hamletian background of "The Lady's Dressing-Room" as a "physical and sexual assault . . . implied by Hamlet breaking into Ophelia's closet."³⁹⁰ Stewart's reading seems a tad breathless in light of the fact that we know of Hamlet's breaking and entering only from Ophelia's report of it to her father Polonius. Understandably, Ophelia would not want her *senex iratus* to know

³⁹⁰ Alan Stewart, *Hamlet's Letters*, p. 252.

if Hamlet were in her room as a result of her (perhaps open) invitation. Moreover, if Hamlet's being in Ophelia's chamber were outrageously outré, it seems that unscrupulous Polonius would exploit this information to his advantage. Instead, Polonius focuses on the lyric substance of what Hamlet's visit to daughter's chamber suggests about the Prince's mental state.

Indeed, Swift's poem combines two moments in Hamlet—the Prince's Janus-headed insanity in Ophelia's chamber, and his "Get thee to a nunnery" explosion—in order to craft something experimentally new and low. Strephon has broken into Cælia's dressing room, to take a "strict Survey/Of all the Litter, as it lay." This "Litter" Strephon then proceeds to describe as constitutive of the female . . . body? sexuality? Strephon displays "wide" Cælia's "dirty Smock" as if he were a doctor in an anatomy theater presenting to an audience the skin of a "woman flay'd"; Cælia has already issued "from her Chamber"; Strephon explores Cælia's ontological residue, her feminized excrement, as if it were a kind of Epicurean soul, located, as *De rerum natura* repeatedly reminds us, outside the body and therefore safely beyond the possibility of sexual consummation.

Swift's poetry, particularly his excremental poems, serve as self-administered wormwood, preventing his speakers' conjoining with female flesh. Though the Lucretian influence on Swift has been noted elsewhere—notably by John Traugott³⁹¹ and by A.H. de Quehen³⁹²—the discussion has largely been confined to *A Tale of a Tub*. The influence, however, is pervasive and direct. Swift seems often to be "rewriting"

³⁹¹ John Traugott, "A Tale of a Tub," *The Character of Swift's Satire: A Revised Focus*, ed. by Claude Rawson.

³⁹² A.H. de Quehen, "Lucretius and Swift's *Tale of a Tub*," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 2, Winter 1993/4.

Lucretius, as de Quehen argues in the context of *A Tale*.³⁹³ “The Lady’s Dressing-Room” alludes to Lucretius’s wormwood trope in one of the poem’s most disturbing and, it seems to me, overlooked moments:

THE Virtues we must not let pass
Of *Cælia*’s magnifying Glass . . .
A Glass that can to Sight disclose
The smallest Worm in *Cælia*’s Nose,
And faithfully direct her Nail,
To squeeze it out from Head to Tail;
For, catch it nicely by the Head,
It must come out, alive or dead.³⁹⁴

Hence the life-affirming trope of *De rerum natura*—the vermifuge of bitter wormwood tea, served in a cup with honey on its rim, at once beneficial and pleasant—in Swift’s poem becomes a crude grab at a sycophant the host/object seems resigned to continue hosting. In other words, in Swift’s poem the disease has been accepted; *Cælia* seeks merely to treat its symptoms, apparently to prevent a tapeworm from crawling from her nostril during a fashionable dinner. Lucretius’ and Petrarch’s speakers and Hamlet, to the contrary, seek to excise their atmospheres’ diseases at the root. *De rerum natura*, the *Canzoniere*, and *Hamlet* all feature speakers/protagonists who, however cynical or miserable or hopeless they may be, always seem to have a faith in what history/origins can teach them about their impending deaths. Unlike “The Lady’s Dressing-Room,” in the poetry of Lucretius, Petrarch, and Hamlet’s character history and death are radiantly alive.

³⁹³ H. de Quehen, “Lucretius and Swift’s *Tale of a Tub*,” *University of Toronto Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 2, Winter 1993/4, p. 300.

³⁹⁴ Jonathan Swift, “The Lady’s Dressing-Room,” *The Essential Writings of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Claude Rawson and Ian Higgins, p. 604.

Swift's poetry forecloses itself in not just a post-anti-Petrarchan manner but also, more specifically, in a post-*Sonnets* manner. Particularly the English iteration of the Petrarchan sonnet is notoriously foreclosed,³⁹⁵ but in Shakespeare's hands it also becomes prosaic, essayistic, diseased. Swift's prose is more poetic than his poetry, and vice versa. There is something already satirical in the perversity of forcing your poetry to be, if not totally un-poetic, less poetic than your prose; "The Lady's Dressing-Room" proceeds as if justified not only by Hamlet's anti-cosmetic exclamations and his intrusion into Ophelia's chamber, but also by the *Sonnets*' most miserably foreclosed moments—as if Swift perceived in those two textual bodies an ultimate anti-Petrarchism whose under-perceived cultural digestion ask to be registered in excremental terms. In this way, Swift is less the "last passion of the Renaissance" than he is the "Renaissance's excrement," expelled as a tapeworm after its cultural host has taken the wormwood poison/cure.

That Swift's poems constitute the terminus of the Renaissance Human is entirely appropriate, even essential. His poetry is less interested in exploring the liminal states between animal and Human than it is with undermining the idea of the Human—the celebration of the Human—via the deflating examination of what we now, ironically, call "human": gritty, earnest, un-romanticized physical details that have more to do with what early moderns would deem our animal aspects. It were anachronistic to dismiss this undermining move of Swift's as if it were childish or insane; his Excremental poems register a latent cultural desire that the Renaissance be finally expelled. Rather than endow the *David* with life and then depict him defecating in an unflattering way, Swift chooses to fail at humiliating Cælia, a voiceless cypher for the voiceless Laura, thereby

³⁹⁵ For an articulate expression of the sonnet's foreclosing nature, see A.D. Cousins' and Peter Howarth's Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion the Sonnet*, particularly p. 2.

poking fun at Petrarchan Humanism's failure to account for the Humanity of the female—via a then-contemporary female's universal "humanity." Hence "The Lady's Dressing-Room" succeeds as satire of the Petrarchan mode, and of the Renaissance itself.

I want to close by presenting four Swiftian vistas. The first seeks to augment the closing of Norman O. Brown's essay "The Excremental Vision," in which Brown draws inspiration from Swift's remarkable "A Panegyric on the Dean," "written as if by Lady Acheson . . . In the form of ironic praise [of Swift]."³⁹⁶ In "A Panegyric," Swift reverses the (anti-)Petrarchan trajectory, turning the tables on the non-game (because it is already forfeited) of the obscure lyric "I," in order to speak through a would-be female Petrarchan object to a would-be male Petrarchan subject, in terms that satirically anticipate the judgment of Swift as a misogynist—and acknowledge ancient/prehistoric matrilineal power:

. . . But now, in all our sex's name,
My artless Muse shall sing your fame.
Indulgent you to female kind,
To all their weaker sides are blind:
Nine more such champions as the Dean
Would soon restore our ancient reign . . .³⁹⁷

Nine identical Swift muses, inspiring women to write mock-epideictic poems about the Dean—in which he figures as a proto-feminist, seeking to "restore" a matrilineal "ancient

³⁹⁶ Norman O. Brown, "The Excremental Vision," *Life Against Death*, p. 200.

³⁹⁷ Jonathan Swift, *The Complete Poems*, ed. by Pat Rogers, pp. 434-444.

reign”—would seem to complicate hidebound notions of Swift as an insane lady-hater. Indeed, this pseudonymous poem imagines the Dean as a mass-produced product of an anti-Petrarchan machine, Parnassus as mountain factory down from which march perverse muse robots running on reverse lyric substance:

With ladies what a strict decorum!
With what devotion you adore ‘em! . . .
By your example and assistance,
The fellows learn to know their distance.
Sir Arthur, since you set the pattern,
No longer calls me snipe and slattern . . . ³⁹⁸
Now enter as the dairy handmaid:
Such charming butter never man made.
Let others with frantic face
Talk of their milk for babes of grace;
From tubs their snuffling nonsense utter;
Thy milk shall make us tubs of butter.
The bishop with his foot may burn it,
But with his hand the Dean can churn it.
How are the servants overjoy’d
To see thy deanship thus employ’d!
Instead of poring on the book,
Providing butter for the cook!
Three morning hours you toss and shake
The bottle till your fingers ache;
Hard is the toil, nor small the art,
The butter from the whey to part:
Behold a frothy substance rise;
Be cautious or your bottle flies.
The butter comes, our fears are ceased;
And out you squeeze an ounce at least.
Your reverence thus, with like success . . .
When bent upon some smart lampoon,
Will toss and turn your brain till noon;

³⁹⁸ This casually slapdash passage bears a remarkable semblance to the earlier cited stanza from *Garlande of Laurell*, John Skelton’s strange and seminal anti-Petrarchan satire:

By saint Mary, my lady,
Your mammy and your daddy
Brought forth a goodly baby!

Which in its jumbings round the skull,
Dilates and makes the vessel full:
While nothing comes but froth at first,
You think your giddy head will burst;
But squeezing out four lines in rhyme,
Are largely paid for all your time.

This is the pregnant penis and the teeming brain as female breast, spoken from a female-gendered speaker's perspective, written by a male and notoriously/supposedly misogynistic satirist poet. This is autonomous "distance" manipulated in order to register an ouroborically hermaphroditic connection with the anachronistic post-human from which the Human derives. This is sideways-sought-for absolution for Ophelia's suicide, a satirico-metaphysical merging with the mourning Nurse at Juliet's grave—assumedly only allowed to reside within respectably hallowed Veronese burial grounds via money, Friar Laurence's influence, or both.

From nursing/masturbation imagery "A Panegyric" quickly shifts to assert that ". . . the Dean's greatest achievement [in the poem is] . . . the construction of 'Two Temples of magnifick Size' . . . to the 'gentle Goddess *Cloacine*,'"³⁹⁹ where the goddess

Receives all offerings at her shrine
Is separate cells, the he's and she's,
Here pay their vows on bend knees:
For 'tis profane when sexes mingle,
And every nymph must enter single;
And when she feels an inward motion,
Come fill'd with reverence and devotion . . .
Ye, who frequent this hallow'd scene,
Be not ungrateful to the Dean . . .
I sigh to think of ancient days . . .
Thee, bounteous goddess *Cloacine*,
To temples why do we confine?
Forbid in open air to breathe,
Why are thine altars fix'd beneath?
When Saturn ruled the skies alone,

³⁹⁹ Norman O. Brown, "The Excremental Vision," *Life Against Death*, p. 200.

Mary, here finds a “gentle” conclusion in an alternate Great Mother, a goddess of letting go of origins and the Petrarchan imagination’s attendant, clenched hold on death.

In the couplet, “But, stop ambitious Muse, in time,/Nor dwell on subjects too sublime,” Norman O. Brown perceives “perspectives now opening up . . . too vast for Swift, or for us.”⁴⁰⁰ Thus we find ourselves, at this far remove, returned to a realm of inarticulation we have never really left. It seems that lyric poetry amounts to the skillful articulation of the ultimate impossibility of articulation, followed by the embrasure of that impossibility. Stoically, lyric poets learn to desire what they already have, which is nothing—except for Epicurean-esque fragments. The pre- and post-Reformation, increasingly Low Church, increasingly indiscriminate admixture of traditions that the early modern Human career straddles—from Petrarch to *Hamlet* to Swift—combines with articulate Petrarchan inarticulacy, itself a late-coming expression of the inexpressibility of lyric substance, in order to produce a spinning ouroboric energy, described beautifully in another context by Gordon Braden: “After so much denial, we expect more compensation; yet it is only in occasional gestures that the content of the Stoic’s withdrawal is anything other than its own tautological integrity.”⁴⁰¹ In occasional gestures, flashes of meaning, the lyric mode deconstructs the narrative lie before the lie commences. That life and lyric poetry are both brief is not a coincidence.

⁴⁰⁰ Norman O. Brown, “The Excremental Vision,” *Life Against Death*, p. 201.

⁴⁰¹ Gordon Braden, *Anger’s Privilege*, p. 24.

“On the Death of Mrs. Johnson” is perhaps Swift’s most Petrarchan document, in that it recalls Petrarch’s note on the death of Laura, which the Father of the Renaissance entered into the margins of his beloved volume of Virgil. Petrarch writes

I thought I should write these words as a bitter reminder of the facts, yet with a certain bitter-sweetness, and put them in this place, so that I may realize when I look at them that there is nothing left in the world that should delight me.⁴⁰²

Swift’s remembrance begins

This day, being Sunday, January 28, 1727-8, about eight o’clock at night, a servant brought me a note, with an account of the truest, most virtuous, and valuable friend that I, or perhaps any other person ever was blessed with.⁴⁰³

The poets’ notes foreshadow and recall Hamlet’s response to the Ghost’s command, “Remember me”:

Remember thee!
Yea, from the table of my memory
I’ll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past
That youth and observation copied there . . . [*writes of Claudius*]
So . . . there you are.⁴⁰⁴

Turning to the page in states of emotional shock is an act of positive faith, a momentary removal of the mask that returns the barricaded Petrarchan poet to a childlike nudity where truth and authenticity seem still to be possible to register. This naïve lunge is useful as a mode against which to measure Petrarch’s and Swift’s other, more guarded

⁴⁰² I take this quote from Gerard Passannante’s *The Lucretian Renaissance*, p. 18, the footnote of which reads: “Cited and translated in Watkins, ‘Petrarch and the Black Death,’ 199.”

⁴⁰³ Jonathan Swift, “On the Death of Mrs. Johnson,” *The Essential Writings of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Claude Rawson and Ian Higgins, p. 694.

⁴⁰⁴ I.iv.91-111.

and performative modes. Hamlet's status as imaginative figment prevents his becoming similarly nude, even as the Prince's dual status as manifestation of lyric essence enables textual nudity undertaken in his name.

One wonders while reading "On the Death" for whom Swift wrote it. There is in scholars a natural inclination to archive material; perhaps the Archive is Swift's demographic. Yet the Archive—for Petrarch, Shakespeare, and Swift—seems not to have been perceived as an increasingly, infinitely unfathomable monolith of information in which everyone and their efforts are destined to disappear but, rather, as a recoverable key to understanding. In this sense, and perhaps despite it, Swift's and Petrarch's candid remembrances for their beloved dead partake in the spirit of Petrarch's *Epistolae familiares*, indulging a faith in the dead's ability to receive written communication, via the writer's appreciatively transmitting pen.

And yet because casually-perceived English Petrarchism's afterlife in Swift's era seems to have amounted to roughly the same simplified unrequited love/endless praise paradigm as it does to this day, the intermittently bald hyperbole of "On the Death" is remarkable—especially if we consider that the demographic for Swift's tongue-in-cheek, playfully anti-Petrarchan Stella poems seems to have been only Esther Johnson herself.

In "On the Death," Swift the merciless satirist writes of Johnson that she was

the truest, most virtuous, and valuable friend, that I, or perhaps any other person ever was blessed with . . . [from] the principles of honour and virtue . . . she never swerved in any one action or moment in her life."⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁵ Jonathan Swift, "On the Death of Mrs. Johnson," *The Essential Writings of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Claude Rawson and Ian Higgins, p. 694.

Can it be that Swift only felt at liberty to openly praise his beloved once she was dead—and then in a manner that is unbelievable, as if he sought somehow to prevent himself from loving her as an individual/Human? This were Stoicism taken too far; it opens up a new vista on Petrarchism, passively and actively received: by modeling a poetry of epideictics whose speaker seeks constantly to remove himself bodily from the scene of any potential requisite passion—as if exiled and self-exiling from all feminine physical affection—Petrarch stages the extremity of male suffering for feminine love, thereby giving Christ-like cover to late-coming Petrarchan (anti-)devotees. Indeed, Swift the satirist seems to overhear himself, for he soon follows his opening, fulsome praise by pointing out that Esther was generally perceived to be “only a little too fat”⁴⁰⁶ and that “her memory was not of the best,”⁴⁰⁷ the former of which the Q2 Gertrude says of Hamlet,⁴⁰⁸ the latter of which is a failing to which Hamlet aspires.⁴⁰⁹ It were appropriate for Hamlet, the early modern English sacrificial lamb of Janusio-*David*-ian/Renaissance backwards glancing, to desire a kind of youthful senility. Moreover, this failing links Stella to the folk-song/flower mythos-spitting Ophelia as literary ghosts in the Petrarchan machine—Petrarchan objects in defiance of the machine, real and wild Humans in comparison with which Petrarchan speakers appear to be pre-determined, pre-Human, robotic, mere matches with which to make a sacrificial fire.

⁴⁰⁶ Jonathan Swift, “On the Death of Mrs. Johnson,” *The Essential Writings of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Claude Rawson and Ian Higgins, p. 694.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 695.

⁴⁰⁸ V.ii.271.

⁴⁰⁹ See above quotation from the play (I.iv.91-111).

Tellingly, Swift writes of Stella/Johnson that, “Her hair was blacker than a raven,” the superlative quality of the rhetoric redolent with Shakespearean-Petrarchism, so concerned with their female subjects’ hair color. Sonnet 130 cannot be far from Swift’s meaning here, given the *Sonnets*’ prestigious notoriety and the Stella poems’ gaming with Petrarchan conventions. The effectiveness of Petrarchism’s presentation of a blond hair/blue-eyed Laura ideal seems to have generated a perversely (Protestant?) anti-Petrarchan energy that sought to embrace the aesthetic opposite of that ideal. In his Introduction to *The Words Upon the Window-Pane*, Yeats writes of “stories still current among our country people of Swift sending his servant out to fetch a woman and dismissing that servant when he work to find a black woman by his side.”⁴¹⁰ Yeats’ anecdote does not mention whether or not Swift dismissed the woman by his side. Black Laura is by every Petrarchan speaker’s side, regardless of his turning away, because of his turning away.

In a thrilling moment of “The Death,” Swift tells us that Stella/Johnson once shot and killed an escaping, armed intruder with a “pistol.” She shot the man from her “dining-room window,” wearing “a black hood, to prevent being seen.”⁴¹¹ Again, black clothes, stealth and deadly female violence, male intrusion, and dining/digestion cohere around a beloved ghost, the absence of flesh liberating an intimate candor neither facetiously epideictic (as in the Stella poems) nor bitterly satirical (as in the excremental poems). The black-clothed, black-haired Stella had that within which passed show—her

⁴¹⁰ W.B. Yeats, *Wheels and Butterflies, The Words upon the Window-Pane*, p. 24.

⁴¹¹ Jonathan Swift, “On the Death of Mrs. Johnson,” *The Essential Writings of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Claude Rawson and Ian Higgins, p. 695.

face, her gun, her will to kill a man fleeing from what appears to have been a failed attempt at robbery. The unquestioningly admiring manner with which Swift writes the pistol anecdote generates a sense of justified Hamletian bloodlust in a world full of meddling men shuffling behind a global arras, all of them deserving to die.

Though Swift seems determined to write only about Stella/Johnson in his document—an anti-Petrarchan gesture in its departure from the speaker’s self-focus via his praise of an Other—Swift writes, movingly, of himself that

This is the night of the funeral, which my sickness will not suffer me to attend. It is now nine at night, and I am removed to another apartment, that I may not see the light in the church, which is just over against the window of my bedchamber.⁴¹²

Swift (whom we now know suffered from a disturbance of the inner ear called Meniere’s Disease, which causes nausea and vertigo), here *turns his back* on the light from Esther’s funeral, which contaminates the sanctuary of his bedchamber. Hence, Stella/Johnson intrudes on Swift in his bedchamber—turning the tables on the Hamletian exit of Ophelia’s room in II.i and on the myopic inspections that characterize the speaker of Swift’s “The Lady’s Dressing-Room”—and the late-coming embodiment of Hamlet, deprived of a female body over which to imagine Petrarchan control, meekly retreats. This is the last moment of the last passion the Renaissance. Swift gives up the game, his actions and words suggesting nothing so much as, “Good riddance.”

Still, faith in the dead is bound up with faith in “On the Death.” “There you are,” on the page, Hamlet says—*you are outside me, you exist in atom-ic, fragmented letters, you are that without which cannot passeth show. In order to find you there, in my own*

⁴¹² Jonathan Swift, “On the Death of Mrs. Johnson,” *The Essential Writings of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Claude Rawson and Ian Higgins, p. 695.

hand, I have made myself vulnerable/nude, like a naked whore still unpacking her heart with the clothes and inward make-up of her words. Comparing myself to a verbal whore complicates my supposedly global misogyny and nullifies my supposed lyric gifts, not that anyone will ever notice. The Petrarchan machine's user manual is a book of broken mirrors, satirizing the distinction between the inner and the outer, suggesting a universal hermaphroditism, thereby satirizing distinctions between the masculine and feminine. The female breast penetrates the male or female infant without permission or distinction, then refuses to penetrate again, launching the weaned subject on his/her miserable discovery of arbitrarily devised classifications mindlessly perpetuated, otherwise known as "life," otherwise known as the Delay before the reasonable disintegration of all distinction continues its sluttish work.

In 1835, the remains of Swift and Stella were exhumed, their bones passed around Dublin by doctors and fashionable society members. Phrenology was then in vogue, as was the belief that Swift had been a mad genius—this made the examination of his skeleton a *cause célèbre*. The remains of the notorious friends came into the possession of Dr. William Wilde, MD, father of Oscar. In his subsequent *The Closing Years of the Life of Dean Swift*, Wilde describes the Dean's skeleton vividly and compellingly, but it is in his discussion of Stella's skull that his book achieves an unconsciously Petrarchan apotheosis. Wilde accompanies a sketch of Stella's skull with the following description:

As may be seen by the foregoing representation, this skull is a perfect model of symmetry and beauty. Its outline is one of the most graceful we

have ever seen; the teeth, which, for their whiteness and regularity were, in life, the theme of general admiration, were, perhaps, the most perfect ever witnessed in a skull. On the whole, it is no great stretch of the imagination to clothe and decorate this skull again with its alabaster skin, on which the rose had slightly bloomed; to adorn it with its original luxuriant dark hair, its white, expanded forehead, level, penciled eye-brows, and deep, dark, lustrous eyes, its high prominent nose, its delicately chiseled mouth, and pouting upper lip, its full, rounded chin, and long but gracefully swelling neck—when we shall find it realizes all that description has handed down to us of an intellectual beauty of the style of those painted by Kneller, and with an outline and form of head accurately corresponding to the pictures of Stella which still exist.⁴¹³

So completely does Swift seem to have been Hamlet that his Petrarchan object somehow also becomes Yorick in the hands of a poet's father.

Beyond the strictures of the Human, beyond satire and Petrarchism, beyond mask of Renaissance and funereal nudity, beyond speech, Swift was liberated into lyric substance—residing and radiating with what A.R. Braunmuller calls “the fear that language might regain its primordial union with other sounds.”⁴¹⁴ Denis Johnston writes that “as [Swift] slipped further into his seventies . . . his memory began to fail.”⁴¹⁵ Thus like his beloved Esther/Stella, Swift's power of recall slips—thereby realizing memory-tormented and supreme Petrarchan poet Hamlet's aspiration. Johnston then quotes John Boyle Orrery's *Remarks on the life and writings of Dr. Jonathan Swift*,

⁴¹³ William Wilde, *The Closing Years of the Life of Dean Swift*, p. 117.

⁴¹⁴ A.R. Braunmuller, “The arts of the dramatist,” *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama*, p. 67.

⁴¹⁵ Denis Johnston, *In Search of Swift*, p. 181.

published soon after the Dean's death, which attests that Swift consummated another of Hamlet's mere flirtations:

. . . early in the year *forty-two*, the small remains of his understanding became entirely confused, and the violence of his rage increased absolutely to a degree of madness. In this miserable state . . . he sunk . . . into a quiet, speechless idiot; and dragged out the remainder of his life in that helpless situation.⁴¹⁶

Johnston—an Irish playwright whom Yeats once sought to hire as co-director of the Abbey Theatre⁴¹⁷—is quick to offer the more sympathetically written, yet ultimately similar point of view of J.R. Delaney, another of Swift's contemporaries:

And that he did feel the chastisement, I am fully convinced, from his own bitter complaints to me on that head; lamenting in manner, that pierced me to the heart, that *he was an idiot*; that *he was no more a human creature*, &c.⁴¹⁸

Thus at the end of this study, we find ourselves where we began, puzzling over to whom to attribute a quoted &c.—an excess of helpless infant dependency that cannot quite leave it behind, an excess of beast-hood that carries its beastly origins with it, a curving treason in the breast those of us fortunate still to be living have no choice but to know as love.

⁴¹⁶ Denis Johnston, *In Search of Swift*, quoting Orrery's *Remarks*, p. 169.

⁴¹⁷ See. R.F. Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life, Vol. II*, pp. 398-399.

⁴¹⁸ Denis Johnston, *In Search of Swift*, p. 182, quoting Delaney's *Observations upon Lord Orrery's remarks on the life and writings of Dr. Jonathan Swift*, p. 151.

APPENDIX

Doctor's Office, Mid-Town Los Angeles, 2014

A jackhammer slams loudly in the distance.

Doctor: How was the book tour? Did you find time for fun?

Author's Wife: If visiting every place Petrarch lived is fun.

Doctor: I looked at the tests. You're fourteen weeks pregnant. Congratulations.

Author's Wife: Oh my God. That's why my one-year-old stopped nursing.

Author: Boy or girl, let's call the baby *Venice*.

Nurse: For the neighborhood in L.A.?

Author: For canals and bridges.

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