

Disappearing Acts: Performing the Petrarchan Mistress in Early Modern England

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Boston College
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DISAPPEARING ACTS:
PERFORMING THE PETRARCHAN MISTRESS IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

a dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

Disappearing Acts: Performing the Petrarchan Mistress in Early Modern England

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Disappearing Acts interrogates the concept of Petrarchism and the role of the Petrarchan mistress in early modern England. Critics from the early modern period onward have viewed Petrarchism as limiting to women, arguing that it obstructs female agency. This view stems from a long history of trying to establish the parameters of Petrarchism itself, a body of literature whose inchoate nature makes it difficult to define. *Disappearing Acts* takes as its starting point the instability of Petrarchism, embracing the ways in which it functions as a discourse without boundaries, whose outlines are further blurred by its engagement with other genres, forms, and contexts. Examining the intersections between Petrarchism and other early modern discourses—religious, political, theatrical, humanist, romantic—illuminates the varied ways in which the role of the mistress is deployed in early modern literature and suggests that, as a term, the “Petrarchan mistress” loses the coherence that critics often impose on it. Rarely ever entirely there or entirely missing, the figure of the mistress instead signifies an unstable, liminal role that results in far more complex representations of women. This project emphasizes the complexities of the Petrarchan mistress and examines this figure as a performative role that is negotiated rather than simply inhabited as a prison.

Each chapter traces the intersections between Petrarchism and another early modern discourse in England. Chapter One examines the overlap between Reformist language and Petrarchan language, particularly in the “absent presence” of the Eucharist and the female beloved. I argue that the elusive persona of the Protestant martyr Anne Askew is produced by the conjunction of Petrarchan and Reformist discourses. Chapter Two interrogates the relationship between the theory of the king’s two bodies and the concept of the Petrarchan female double, pairing Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* with the writings of Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots. I suggest that female queens of the sixteenth century both secured and imperiled their authenticity by comparing themselves to a false version. Chapter Three examines the relationship between Petrarchism and the figure of the ghost in early modern England. I consider Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* in relation to the female complaint, a popular genre appended to sonnet sequences in which a ghost complains about her fate, and I argue that Shakespeare’s evocation of ghostliness enables Hermione to return from her immobilized position to perform a Petrarchan role in which she can speak her own desires. Chapter Four reexamines Mary Wroth’s character, Pamphilia, as two different characters produced by two different genres: one by the prose romance *The Countess of Montgomery’s Urania* and one by the sonnet sequence *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*. While the Pamphilia of the sonnets proclaims her constancy, the Pamphilia of the romance exposes the tensions produced by the varied historical uses of the term in discourses from martyrology to stoicism.

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INTRODUCTION

To literary scholars, Petrarchism is a term that gives the impression of coherence. Usually defined as a body of writing that imitates Petrarch's works, Petrarchan literature has been seen as a shaping force in early modern culture. Despite its pervasive use in criticism, however, the stability of the term "Petrarchism" is illusory, and there is no agreement in the field about what Petrarchism actually is. Some define it as a set of tropes—oxymorons, antitheses, common metaphors—while others define it by its subject matter—desire, gender relations, praise—while still others define it primarily as a form—the sonnet—that spurred imitations in the many sonnet sequences that followed Petrarch. The history of the criticism on Petrarchism traces a long struggle over how to define the term, and critics from the early modern period through today have tended to cope with the diffuseness of the term by evaluating Petrarchan works, demarcating the "good" imitators from the "bad" and "real" Petrarchism from "false." Critics thus substitute a value judgment for a clear definition, betraying their need to establish parameters around a field of literature difficult to define.

This project takes as its starting point the instability of Petrarchism. Although Petrarchism has recognizable features, it has never been confined to one form (the lyric) or one thematic issue, nor can it be defined as one set of tropes. Instead, Petrarchism functions as a discourse without boundaries, and its outlines are further blurred by its engagement with other genres, forms, and contexts. Petrarchan conventions help constitute a range of discourses in the early modern period—religious, political,

theatrical, humanist, romantic. Far from a monolithic concept, Petrarchism is a flexible set of characteristics that take on different connotations in the different settings in which they are deployed. Rather than engaging in an attempt to set definitive boundaries around Petrarchism, this study takes pleasure in seeking the ways in which Petrarchism changes and is changed by other discourses.

Embracing the amorphous qualities of Petrarchism has particularly significant implications for our understanding of how Petrarchism represents women. The concept of the Petrarchan mistress stems largely from critical attempts to fix the boundaries of Petrarchism and to codify its principal features and characters. Critics of Petrarchism from the early modern period onward have defined the term by disparaging the role of the Petrarchan mistress as constrictive and oppressive, arguing that it obstructs female agency. Just as Shakespeare protests that praise of the mistress creates a woman “belied with false compare,” so do modern feminist critics deem the mistress objectified in the obsessive catalogues of her body parts.¹ The Petrarchan mistress is often seen as entirely there—simplified in her fragmented presence—or entirely missing—closed off from her own voice in her absence. Yet the varied ways in which the role of the mistress is deployed in early modern literature suggests that as a term, the “Petrarchan mistress” loses the coherence that critics often impose on it. Rarely ever all there or all missing, the figure of the mistress instead signifies a more unstable, liminal mode—an absent presence—that results in far more complex, contested representations of women. This project seeks to interrogate the complexities of the Petrarchan mistress and to examine

¹ William Shakespeare, sonnet 130, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans and J. J. M. Tobin, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

the Petrarchan mistress as a role that is negotiated rather than simply inhabited as a prison.

What follows is a history of the term Petrarchism and its variants from the early modern period through today. I trace the ways in which the anxieties about defining—and placing boundaries around—the term lead to the construction of the Petrarchan mistress as an oversimplified figure. Finally, I suggest alternate ways to read Petrarchan discourse, looking at how embracing its instability can open up new possibilities for seeing the complexities with which Petrarchism represents female figures.

Petrarchism: A History of the Term

What is Petrarchism? On the surface, it seems like a straightforward term referring to the body of literature that imitates Petrarch and his writings, especially the *Rime sparse*. Its characteristics are easily recognizable by any scholar of the early modern period. Petrarchan literature favors the sonnet form, it makes frequent use of literary devices like the oxymoron, and it centers on two major characters, the masochistic male lover and the cruel female beloved. Yet on further inspection, the term reveals its own instability. Not all sonnets are Petrarchan, and not all Petrarchan works are sonnets; not all works that use literary devices like the oxymoron are necessarily Petrarchan; and not all Petrarchan works operate within the gender binary established in the *Rime sparse*. What at first announces itself as a discrete field of work with unique literary properties reveals itself as an inchoate discourse with no clear boundaries.

The history of the term “Petrarchism” tells the story of writers who grapple with—and often try to compensate for—this instability. One way writers have imposed coherence on the field is to separate good imitators of Petrarch from the bad. Ironically, the word “Petrarchist” in Italian, Spanish, and French was used in the sixteenth century to designate those who could not imitate Petrarch well, essentially grounding Petrarchism in its own impossibility. In 1558, for instance, Joachim du Bellay published the satirical poem, “Contre les Pétrarquistes” in his collection, *Divers Jeux Rustiques*. In the poem, du Bellay mocks Petrarchists for using stale clichés and for their insincerity:

J’ay oublié l’art de pétrarquizer,
 Je veulx d’Amour franchement deviser,
 Sans vous flatter, et sans me déguizer:
 Ceulx qui font tant de plaintes,
 N’ont pas le quart d’une vraye amitié,
 Et n’ont pas tant de peine la moitié,
 Comme leurs yeux, pour vous faire pitié,
 Jettent de larmes feintes.

[I've abandoned the Petrarchan art,
 I want honestly spoken love,
 Without flattering you, and without disguising myself:
 Those filled with complaints,
 Don't have a quarter of true fondness,

And lack by half true pain,
 As their eyes, to make you pity them,
 Offer false tears.]²

Du Bellay characterizes Petrarchists as frauds, describing them as lacking “true fondness” or “true pain” and only exhibiting “false tears” and “disguises.” John Florio’s translation of Michel de Montaigne’s essays similarly disparages “fantasticall, new-fangled, Spagniolized, and Petrarchisticall elevations.”³ Petrarchism, then, has its roots in anti-Petrarchism; far from a neutral term, it signifies the difficulty—perhaps the impossibility—of ever successfully imitating Petrarch.⁴

In the nineteenth century, the term “Petrarchist” retained the connotation of cheap imitation. In 1896, W.P. Ker expresses the anxiety that an “ideal” in literature can be endlessly debased, and he uses Petrarchism as the prime example to illustrate his case: “An ideal, defined or described in set terms, is an ideal without any responsibility and without any privilege. It may be picked up and traded on by any fool or hypocrite. . . . A definite ideal, and the terms of its definition, may belong to any one and be turned to any use. So the ideal of Petrarch was formulated and abused by the Petrarchists.”⁵

² Joachim du Bellay, “Contre les Pétrarquistes,” in *Divers Jeux Rustiques*, ed. Verdun L Saulnier (Lille: Librairie Giard, 1947), 70-71. Many thanks to Matthew Heitzman, who generously translated this poem into English.

³ Michel de Montaigne, *The Essayes, Or Morall, Politike, and Millitarie Discourses*, trans. John Florio (London: Val. Sims for Edward Blount, 1603), bk. 2, chap. 10, p. 238.

⁴ See Heather Dubrow, *Echoes of Desire: English Petrarchism and Its Counterdiscourses* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995); and Yvonne Hoggan, “Anti-Petrarchism in Joachim du Bellay’s ‘Divers Jeux Rustiques,’” *The Modern Language Review* 74, no. 4 (1979): 806-819. Hoggan notes du Bellay’s indebtedness to Cornelio Castaldi da Feltre’s poem, “Contro i Petrarchisti,” which attacks Petrarch’s “slavish imitators” (807). Hoggan argues that “whereas Italian anti-Petrarchists accused Petrarchan poets of being thieves, du Bellay accuses them of being liars” (808).

⁵ W.P. Ker, *Epic and Romance: Essays on Medieval Literature* (1896; reprint, London: Macmillan, 1908), 202-203.

Petrarchism, in Ker's formulation, is the abuse rather than the imitation of Petrarch. Ker imposes an artificial stability on a body of literature—"the ideal of Petrarch"—by valuing it against the inferior copies produced by "the Petrarchists."

The development of Petrarchism in English criticism, in fact, revolved around the concept of value. The term "Petrarchism" emerged in English at the same time as the discipline of "English" was developing in universities.⁶ As Terry Eagleton argues, the concept of English literature has always been ideological: "What was at stake in English studies was less English *literature* than *English* literature: our great 'national poets' Shakespeare and Milton, the sense of an 'organic' national tradition and identity to which new recruits could be admitted by the study of humane letters."⁷ Petrarchism is a product of this emerging literary system, and the term was used to chart the development of English literature from its unrefined beginnings to its culmination in greatness. In 1902, Lewis Einstein writes, "The Petrarchan movement was slow at the start to take root in England; neither its language nor its ideas proved congenial at first. Its very conceits were misinterpreted in the beginning by the slow-witted English, who took its stock of lovers' pangs and sufferings quite literally."⁸

Yet the "slow" start of the "slow-witted English" of the early sixteenth century grows, for critics like Einstein, into the flowering of the Petrarchism of the late sixteenth

⁶ The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (2010) lists many variants of the term, including "Petrarchal," "Petrarchan," "Petrarchanism," "Petrarchesque," "Petrarchian," "Petrarchist," "Petrarchistical," and "Petrarquize." Although a few variants of the word occurred in the early modern period, such as Florio's "Petrarchistical" (*OED Online*, s.v. "Petrarchistical"), most variants first appeared in the nineteenth century, when Petrarchism began to be considered a category of literature and a field of study.

⁷ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 28.

⁸ Lewis Einstein, *The Italian Renaissance in England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1902), 329-30.

and early seventeenth centuries. In his introduction to an 1895 anthology of Elizabethan lyrics, Felix Schelling writes disparagingly of “the classical mania” and the “superficial Italianism” of the early sixteenth century only to assert the poetic achievement of Petrarchan poets later in the English Renaissance:

The cultivation of the sonnet had, on the other hand, a beneficial effect on the English Lyric, as it demanded a greater attention to the minutiae of form, a greater regard for unity, and, from the somewhat dignified tread of its decasyllables, a greater care in the molding of the thought of the lyric in distinction from the quality of mere song. In the hands of Sidney, Spenser, Daniel, and Shakespeare, the sonnet reached an artistic height which was not surpassed until the conception of the scope of its subject was widened, and the beauty of the stricter Petrarchan form was reasserted by Milton, to be practiced by Wordsworth and Dante Gabriel Rossetti.⁹

With his use of capital letters, Schelling reifies “the English Lyric” and signals his nationalistic conception of the importance of Petrarchism in English history. Petrarchism becomes not a kind of imitation, not even a foreign influence anymore, but a signifier of Englishness. In Schelling’s assessment, Petrarchism transformed the lyric from “mere song” to “artistic height.” Unlike its earlier incarnations, “Petrarchan” comes to mean greatness rather than triteness, authenticity rather than a sham.

Yet the authenticity of English Petrarchism remained uncertain because it was always in the shadow of the authentic original, Petrarch himself. Critics at the turn of the

⁹ Felix E. Schelling, introduction to *A Book of Elizabethan Lyrics* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1895), xi, xx-xxi.

century established boundaries around Petrarchism by essentializing Petrarch as the ideal who could be imitated but never reproduced. In 1906, Peter Borghesi writes, “The refinement of [Petrarch’s] ideas is often in striking contrast with that of his century, because really he anticipates the refinement of the Sixteenth. His poems are perfect in form and wonderfully smooth and harmonious: his style is extraordinarily polished and graceful: his thoughts excel in tenderness, delicacy, and charm.”¹⁰ For Borghesi, Petrarch is the über-poet, a man whose greatness can be pursued but never achieved: “Not one of [the Petrarchists] had the real genius to perceive the greatest beauties of Petrarch’s poetry therefore not one of them could have equalled him. Nevertheless Wyatt both translated and imitated him successfully, although his imagination is simpler and less profound than Petrarch’s and although Petrarch’s art is inimitable.”¹¹ The contradictions in this statement suggest the degree to which Borghesi wrestles with the instability of Petrarchism as a term. Borghesi wants Petrarch to be an ideal that can be imitated, and he argues that Petrarch is a force that brings “refinement” to the sixteenth century and to poets like Wyatt who “both translated and imitated him successfully.” Yet he expresses anxiety that imitation will unravel the essence of Petrarch. His statement that “Petrarch’s art is inimitable” again makes Petrarchism an impossibility at the very moment that he asserts that Petrarchism exists.

The critical assessments of English Petrarchan poets at the turn of the century reveal the concerns that Petrarch’s essence will be diluted if poets are too successful at

¹⁰ Peter Borghesi, *Petrarch and His Influence on English Literature* (Bologna: Nicholas Zanichelli, 1906), 30.

¹¹ Borghesi, *Petrarch and His Influence*, 38.

mastering his features. For Einstein, Wyatt “could not compare with [Petrarch] in skill, and the conceits he attempted were clumsy and ill-fitting as a rule. Even the sonnet form he reproduced but feebly, the rhymes being often bad and the metrical effects by no means easy.”¹² Borghesi calls Wyatt “very deficient” and “inferior,” arguing that “in his translations from Petrarch he found himself constantly at a loss: he began to translate some of Petrarch’s sonnets, but he ended them using ideas of his own. This fact also proves to us that Wyatt knew he was not able to render adequately his master’s creations.”¹³ Even poets who supposedly represent Petrarchan greatness in Renaissance England, like Sidney, fail to live up completely to the original. Einstein states, “Sidney’s poetry, however, in spite of the elements of imitation, differed from Petrarch’s; there was in it more life and vigor, and also less art.”¹⁴ In their moves to distinguish Petrarchists from Petrarch, these critics seek to retain the concept of a true, original, and impenetrable Petrarchan ideal.

More recent scholars often betray the same anxieties about Petrarchan authenticity. Like his predecessors, Thomas Greene in *The Light in Troy* (1982) holds Petrarch as an authentic ideal—the essence of perfection—that can never be truly imitated. Apologizing for having “lingered so long over Petrarch,” Greene justifies his dalliance with the following encomium of Petrarch:

Because he was a figure of immense significance, both as poet and as reader of history, for the civilization of the following centuries, the

¹² Einstein, *The Italian Renaissance*, 326.

¹³ Borghesi, *Petrarch and His Influence*, 57, 45.

¹⁴ Einstein, *The Italian Renaissance*, 337.

particular behavior of his poems as diachronic constructs is of greater moment than their number or even their undisputed intrinsic value would warrant. For Petrarch left as a legacy to the European Renaissance not only his books but the vision of history for which each imitative poem served as *speculum*. He left a legacy that was double-edged generally for a culture and privately for each humanist poet. The remainder of this study will be devoted primarily to individual poetic responses to Petrarch's difficult legacy, which of course ceased to be purely Petrarchan once the humanist movement proper gathered headway. His special privilege lies in that transitive role for which he deliberately cast himself and which he accepted responsibly, assuming in good faith the burden one carries to cross a threshold.¹⁵

Just as Borghesi argues that “The refinement of [Petrarch's] ideas is often in striking contrast with that of his century, because really he anticipates the refinement of the Sixteenth,” so does Greene assert Petrarch's legacy, which “served as a *speculum*” for each imitation that followed. And yet just as Borghesi argues that “Petrarch's art is inimitable,” so does Greene assert that poems after Petrarch “of course ceased to be purely Petrarchan once the humanist movement proper gathered headway.” Although Greene's book is about distinguishing between successful and failed imitations in the Renaissance, he suggests here that all imitations—all Petrarchan poems—are in a sense failures because they can be only a shadow of the “pure,” ideal Petrarch that came before

¹⁵ Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 145-46.

them. In Greene's analysis, Petrarchism is a term that collapses under its own weight, always emerging as a failure at the very moment it emerges at all.

Of course, Greene insists that there are successful imitations—those that are furthest away from their source, those with the most innovation and new thought. Unlike critics at the turn of the twentieth century, who criticized Petrarchists who strayed far from, in Borghesi's words, their “master's creations,” Greene values those translations that express originality. In his chapter on Wyatt, Greene argues, “It has to be stated at the outset that the body of Petrarchan imitations contains both distinguished and mediocre poetry, work highly characteristic of Wyatt's idiolect and work that is close to colorless. The interest here will be directed to those versions where the idiolect is most distinctly heard, the historical consciousness most active, and where patterns of distancing can be most coherently described.”¹⁶ Yet in maintaining the distinction between good and bad Petrarchism, Greene resembles his predecessors much more than he departs from them. Greene, in fact, echoes earlier critics' judgment of Wyatt as a “deficient” or “inferior” poet when he writes about what he deems one of Wyatt's “weaker” poems, “In Spain”: “That couplet, like the poem as a whole, fails to do anything with Petrarch's anguish of temporality; there is no equivalent anguish, no equivalent sense of time in Wyatt, nor is there any transformation into something else; there is simply a deadening of Petrarch's pathos. There is a clash of cultures not under artistic control.”¹⁷ Although he criticizes Wyatt for failing to make a “transformation” in this poem, Greene's real disapproval seems to lie in his sense that he does not live up to “Petrarch's anguish” or “Petrarch's

¹⁶ Greene, *The Light in Troy*, 247.

¹⁷ Greene, *The Light in Troy*, 244.

pathos.” Again, Petrarchism materializes only in its own impossibility—only in the moments that highlight its inability to match the construct of ideal perfection in Petrarch.

Ultimately, Greene’s project resembles those of the turn of the century in its attempts to establish boundaries around what otherwise would be an unstable literary discourse. In the book’s opening, Greene asserts that “We have not been adept as literary critics at accounting for imitative successes as against the many failures, or at recognizing the variety of strategies imitative writers pursued. The present study sets out to sketch suggestions which might solidify a little these areas of insecurity.”¹⁸ Greene’s statement suggests that rather than *describing* a literary field, scholars of Petrarchism are more often interested in *assigning value* to literary works—deeming them successes or failures—in order to stabilize a discourse whose amorphous nature makes them uncomfortable. Greene’s wish to “solidify a little these areas of insecurity” speaks to the discomfort that the instability of Petrarchism as a body of literature generates.

Like Greene, writers of encyclopedia entries on Petrarchism wrestle with its uncertain boundaries. Usually, these entries begin by casting a wide net: Petrarchism is the imitation of Petrarch’s writings. Yet as they continue, they reveal the same anxieties about where Petrarchism begins and where it ends and about who is a good Petrarchist and who is a bad one. In her entry for the *Encyclopedia of the Renaissance* (1999), Fiora Bassanese begins by noting Petrarch’s “astonishing literary importance for more than three centuries throughout Europe,” writing about the ways in which Pietro Bembo’s

¹⁸ Greene, *The Light in Troy*, 1.

works “launched Petrarch as a paragon of good taste rather than of artifice.”¹⁹ Yet her more neutral descriptions of Petrarch’s influence quickly move to value judgments: “Imitation allowed for a secure grasp of the mechanics of prosody, but in many disciples it led to mediocrity and repetition rather than authenticity and originality. Art often gave way to parroting, psychological insight to clichés.”²⁰ Like earlier critics, Bassanese holds Petrarch as an “authentic” ideal, and her designation of certain Petrarchists as “mediocre” in fact helps constitute the identity of the “authentic” Petrarchists.

Even critics who acknowledge the constructed nature of Petrarchism as a term still express the need to demarcate the limits of Petrarchism. In his entry for *Tudor England: An Encyclopedia* (2001), for instance, Thomas Roche concedes that “What we now call Petrarchanism is a fabrication of literary historians” but goes on to claim that “the essence of Petrarchanism is the analysis of human desire, its objects, and its ends.”²¹ While he begins by calling Petrarchism a fabrication, he moves toward pinpointing an essence—yet, ironically, this “essence” is so broad that it includes just about any kind of literature imaginable. At the end of his entry, as if to rein in the term, Roche identifies what he sees as a fallacy in the criticism of Petrarchism:

Petrarchanism has often been identified with the *blazon*, a short poem enumerating and praising the physical attributes of the lady—the hair, the eyes, the nose, the mouth, the breasts—but in point of fact, Petrarch never wrote such a poem, although the possibilities of creating such a pastiche

¹⁹ Fiora A. Bassanese, “Petrarchism,” in *Encyclopedia of the Renaissance*, ed. Paul F. Grendler (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1999), 458.

²⁰ Bassanese, “Petrarchism,” 459.

²¹ Thomas P. Roche, “Petrarchanism,” in *Tudor England: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney and David W. Swain (New York: Garland Publishing, 2001), 543.

exited in Petrarch. . . . It is a mistake to call Shakespeare's sonnet [130] "anti-Petrarchan" because it merely uses devices evident in Petrarch and formalized by the French for comic effect.²²

Like the critics at the turn of the twentieth century, Roche reveals his anxiety about the boundaries of Petrarchism by imposing limits on what is real Petrarchism and what critics only "mistakenly" believe is Petrarchism. Roche's statement is odd, not only because Petrarch does frequently catalogue Laura's body parts, but also because excluding the blazon from Petrarchism would exclude most of what is regarded as Petrarchan literature from Petrarchism. At the end of the article, the reader is left with a definition of Petrarchism both unrealistically broad and unrealistically narrow, suggesting that attempts to define Petrarchism only further unravel the coherence of the concept.

Some critics do recognize the diffuse nature of Petrarchism. Roland Greene argues that "Petrarchism is neither static nor one sort of thing," and William Kennedy remarks that "When you've read one Petrarchan sonnet sequence, you haven't read them all."²³ Yet even Greene's and Kennedy's studies examine only lyric sequences, and when critics try to push open the definition of Petrarchism—even just a little—they often face stiff questioning. In his review of Gordon Braden's *Petrarchan Love and the Continental Renaissance*, for instance, Alan Nagel questions Braden's categorization of Sor Juana de la Cruz's poetry as Petrarchan: "Why, we may ask, is oxymoron necessarily a Petrarchist signature (*odi et amo*, wrote Catullus)? . . . Are all sonnets Petrarchist? . . . When Sor

²² Roche, "Petrarchanism," 543-44.

²³ Roland Greene, *Post-Petrarchism: Origins and Innovations of the Western Lyric Sequence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 3; and William J. Kennedy, *Authorizing Petrarch* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 5.

Juana chooses ‘the enforced service of him I do not want,’ is she any more Petrarchan than Augustinian or Pauline, or is she merely confirming her convent’s duties? How broad a stroke may Petrarch brush?”²⁴ While these questions are not entirely unfair, they also speak to the same anxiety about losing control over Petrarchism as a term. Nagel’s doubts about the reach of Petrarchism here point to fears that Petrarchism will dissipate until it disappears completely or loses all coherence. Yet any coherence Petrarchism had since its inception has always been artificial, contradictory, and contested.

Constructing the Petrarchan Mistress

Criticism that has so often reified Petrarchism has also produced essentialist readings of one of its central characters, the mistress. Modern scholars have widely interpreted the figure of the Petrarchan mistress as one that limits women by objectifying and silencing them. Yet this type of analysis has roots in much earlier criticism on Petrarchism. Early modern texts, especially anti-Petrarchan poems, often depict Petrarchan praise as grotesque caricatures of women. Du Bellay mocks the “Perles, crystal, marbre, et ivoryre encor [Pearls, crystals, marble, or even ivory]” of these mistresses “De semblables outrages [As seemingly outrageous],” and Shakespeare famously highlights the hairs like “black wires” and breath that “reeks” of the mistress to ridicule the shallow “false compare” of Petrarchan sonnets.²⁵ As the term Petrarchism developed at the turn of the twentieth century, critics maintain that the mistress is a

²⁴ Alan F. Nagel, review of *Petrarchan Love and the Continental Renaissance*, by Gordon Braden, *Modern Language Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (2001): 298-99.

²⁵ Du Bellay, “Contre les Pétrarquistes,” 71; and Shakespeare, sonnet 130.

superficial character, and just as these critics anxiously place boundaries around Petrarchism as a body of literature, so do they demarcate the limits of the Petrarchan lady. In 1902, Einstein writes, “Convention demanded certain things; the Petrarchan lady was to be as beautiful and virtuous as she was cold and indifferent to her lover. The type never varied; she possessed no individuality, no life nor movement; she was, in fact, a stationary sun, radiating all happiness yet insensible of her own attraction.”²⁶ Four years later, Borghesi argues, “In all these sonnets the external beauty of the mistress absorbs more the attention of the poet than does the greatness and richness of her mind. She was rather a thing than a person.”²⁷ These critics rightly point to some of the limitations imposed on this role, but they rigidly see the role as nothing but limitations.

Modern feminist critics echo their forebears, who described the Petrarchan mistress as a lifeless “thing,” by focusing on the restrictive qualities of the role. Nancy Vickers emphasizes the fragmented nature of Laura’s depiction, pointing out that “We never see in the *Rime sparse* a complete picture of Laura” and that “Laura is always presented as a part or parts of a woman . . . Her textures are those of metals and stones; her image is that of a collection of exquisitely beautiful disassociated objects.”²⁸ Vickers concludes that “bodies fetishized by a poetic voice logically do not have a voice of their own; the world of making words, of making texts, is not theirs.”²⁹ Like Einstein’s description of the lady who is “beautiful and virtuous” yet who “possessed no individuality,” Vickers looks to the devastating consequences that mistress worship

²⁶ Einstein, *The Italian Renaissance*, 334.

²⁷ Borghesi, *Petrarch and His Influence*, 88.

²⁸ Nancy J. Vickers, “Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme,” *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 2 (1981): 266.

²⁹ Vickers, “Diana Described,” 277.

produces. Similarly, Gary Waller argues that “Petrarchism was, historically, predominantly a male discourse” and that the beloved “is the object by means of which [the suitor] can indulge his anguish, his pleas, his manipulations. . . . In no sense is she ever an agent: she has no choice but to be sexualized, and she is not accorded reciprocal power.”³⁰ For Vickers and Waller, as for earlier critics, Petrarchism is a rigidly exclusionary discourse, one that inhibits complex representations of women, but its boundaries certainly are clear: Petrarchism pays attention to the complexity of its male characters, but diminishes the complexity of its female characters.

Following this line of thinking, critics often view any power that the Petrarchan mistress seems to possess as illusory, something that exists only to feed back into the male speaker’s mastery. In their analysis of Philip Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*, Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass argue that “Stella, as subject or agent, is absorbed into the performances of the I-speaker; she becomes his subject (in the sense of ‘topic’) and also the instrument through which he studies himself.”³¹ And for Thomas Greene, the female “love-object is typically apprehended and contained in an incomplete process of assimilation by an ego itself struggling for self-definition, self-understanding and self-expansion.”³² Whether they see the speaker as masterful or perverse, scholars such as these characterize Petrarchism as a male discourse—one that explores male suffering, male fetishism, and male skillfulness at the expense of female subjectivity.

³⁰ Gary Waller, *English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1993), 84, 89.

³¹ Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, “The Politics of *Astrophil and Stella*,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 24, no. 1 (1984): 62.

³² Thomas M. Greene, “The Poetics of Discovery: A Reading of Donne’s Elegy 19,” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 2, no. 2 (1989): 131.

Yet the rigidity with which Petrarchism is interpreted ironically makes it more difficult for critics to accommodate the complex ways with which women are represented—and do the representing—in Petrarchan discourse. For one, critics struggle to contend with women writers, such as Vittoria Colonna, Louise Labé, and Mary Wroth, who chose to write their own Petrarchan sonnets. If women are always objectified or silenced by Petrarchism, then they are always outside of it, and critics often use the language of “rebellious,” “rewriting,” or “confronting” to depict the ways women engage with Petrarchism. Ilona Bell, for instance, argues that the only way that women of the early modern period can write within Petrarchism is by writing against it. Bell focuses on “Elizabethan women writers who reappropriate the conventions of the Petrarchan lyric and the Ovidian complaint to wage and conceal a rebellion against those aspects of male poetic tradition which might otherwise reduce them to the object of male desire.”³³ And Barbara Lewalski argues that Jacobean women writers “rewrite discourses which repress or diminish women—patriarchy, gender hierarchy, Petrarchism, Pauline marriage theory, and more—by redefining or extending their terms or infusing them with new meaning: this is the way any orthodoxy is first opened to revisionism.”³⁴ To these critics, women must take an oppositional stance against Petrarchism to be engaged with it at all; Petrarchism remains an artificially coherent discourse that women must subvert if they want to find a place in it.

³³ Ilona Bell, *Elizabethan Women and the Poetry of Courtship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 100.

³⁴ Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, *Writing Women in Jacobean England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 4.

For some, Petrarchism is so inflexible that women who try their hand at it mostly fail. In her encyclopedia entry on Petrarchism, Bassanese writes,

Like all sixteenth-century versifiers, women had to confront the power of tradition, which was both written by and directed to men. The better poets developed strategies to overcome the exclusion of women authors from literary tradition without overturning the Petrarchan model that indirectly validated their work. Some, like Gaspara Stampa and Vittoria Colonna, stayed close to the model while using its language and imagery to propose feminine variants and interpretations. Other female practitioners, however, were unable to escape the masculine worldview inherent to Petrarchism and lost their sexual identity and individual voice to the dominant style.³⁵

Because she sees sexual identity as something women essentially possess rather than something that is culturally constructed, Bassanese represents women as extremely vulnerable to the “power” of Petrarchism. Like critics throughout the twentieth century, Bassanese looks at Petrarchism as possessing an essence, and this view works to the detriment of being able to see women as part of Petrarchism in any complex way. Petrarchism is something women must “confront,” “overturn,” or “escape,” but it can never be something to which women belong in the first place. For Petrarchism to be as “masculine” and “dominant” as Bassanese suggests, women can be seen only as something other and something inferior.

³⁵ Bassanese, “Petrarchism,” 459.

Some critics have challenged the widespread essentializing of the Petrarchan mistress, opening up ways to read the role as multiple and even contradictory. In her postmodern reading of Petrarch and some of his successors—Wyatt, Donne, and Marvell—Barbara Estrin, for instance, sees Petrarchism as an “anamorphic” genre that produces numerous, competing versions of the Laura figure. Estrin argues that in some Petrarchan lyrics “the woman imagined for the poem . . . recasts the space of her imagining to change the genre of the poem and to challenge the gender binarisms Petrarchism ordinarily demands.”³⁶ Heather Dubrow acknowledges the uncertain scope of the term Petrarchism, writing that “both Petrarchism and the reactions against it prove notoriously hard to define.”³⁷ She argues that the voice of the Petrarchan mistress comprises “varied and even contradictory registers” and that Petrarchism “repeatedly challenges the boundaries between characteristics that might be gendered masculine and feminine.”³⁸ Yet even these studies, which look to the slipperiness of gender within Petrarchism, still largely treat Petrarchism as a coherent genre. While both Estrin and Dubrow produce nuanced readings of Petrarchan instability, they still confine their studies to lyric poetry, suggesting that the boundaries of Petrarchism are fairly secure.

This study seeks to open up the concept of Petrarchism; rather than assuming it is a discrete body of literature, *Disappearing Acts* looks at Petrarchism as a looser set of conventions, forms, and especially roles that are appropriated in other contexts. This project argues that the move to reify Petrarchism often results in the reification of the

³⁶ Barbara L. Estrin, *Laura: Uncovering Gender and Genre in Wyatt, Donne, and Marvell* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 19.

³⁷ Dubrow, *Echoes of Desire*, 4.

³⁸ Dubrow, *Echoes of Desire*, 11.

Petrarchan mistress as well. Referring to Petrarchism not as a coherent genre, and certainly not as the means to designate literature intrinsically “good” or “bad,” this study uses the term as one that announces its own incoherence in its promiscuous intermingling with other discourses. Examining the varied ways in which the Petrarchan mistress is deployed highlights this role *as a role*—not as a stable gender identity, but as a means through which the inconsistencies of gender identity are revealed. A figure that conspicuously announces both its presence and its own erasure, the Petrarchan mistress puts pressure on the various cultural systems in which she is represented, contesting the gender stability they seek to impose.

Crucial to exposing the constructed nature of gender is the absence or elusiveness of the Petrarchan mistress. Often seen only as a body—a sun, a star—or, more recently, as a collection of body parts, the Petrarchan mistress is also significant for the ways in which her body can never be completely located. Gender, as Judith Butler describes it, is the illusion created by acts of the body: “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.”³⁹ The desirable body of the Petrarchan mistress produces such an appearance, especially for critics who have described her as a coherent identity. Yet the constant inaccessibility of this body disrupts that coherence by exposing its artificiality—or, at the very least, by rendering it an illusion impossible to obtain. Butler argues, “When the disorganization and disaggregation of the field of bodies disrupt the regulatory fiction of heterosexual

³⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 25.

coherence, it seems that the expressive model loses its descriptive force. That regulatory ideal is then exposed as a norm and a fiction that disguises itself as a developmental law regulating the sexual field that it purports to describe.”⁴⁰ The figure of the Petrarchan mistress can thus be seen as performative in two ways: through its bodily acts and gestures, it sustains the illusion of coherent gender identity, yet through its frequent absences or evasions—its very state of in-betweenness—it disrupts that coherence. The figure both constructs the idea of authenticity and exposes the ways in which that idea of authenticity is itself a construct.

This study situates itself in those moments of disruption, when the figure of the Petrarchan mistress is deployed in ways that complicate gender coherence in other early modern contexts. I look at women as neither “inside” nor “outside” of Petrarchism, but instead as represented by a complex conjunction of discourses. I especially seek those moments when Petrarchan language intersects with other cultural discourses in early modern England and works to disentangle concepts of stable, essential, or authentic gender identity. Chapter One looks at the overlap between Reformist ideas and Petrarchism in the 1530s and 1540s, when both of these discourses first came to England. I examine the relationship between the concept of the elusive “absent presence” of Christ’s body in the Eucharist and the elusive, “absent presence” of the desirable beloved in circulating collections of poetry, and I look at the examinations of Anne Askew, a Protestant martyr under Henry VIII’s reign, as a particularly vivid intersection between Reformist and Petrarchan cultures. This chapter suggests that her representation as an

⁴⁰ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 136.

inscrutable, evasive, and yet desirable figure draws from both the Reformist and Petrarchan cultures that inform the text and that the persona produced in the examinations contests some of the rigid formulations of gender identity in Reformation England.

Chapter Two interrogates the concept of the female double, pairing Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* with the writings of Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots. I suggest that early modern female sovereignty is constructed from both the theory of the king's two bodies and from the idea of the Petrarchan female double, and I argue that female sovereigns of the sixteenth century both secure and imperil their authenticity by comparing themselves to a false double. This chapter argues that both Elizabeth's and Mary's attempts to prove their authenticity as part of the corporate body politic rely heavily on constructing the other as a false, Petrarchan double, and I look at the ways in which *The Faerie Queene* similarly imagines ideal, legitimate queens—such as Una, Britomart, and Mercilla—only by describing, and ultimately eliminating, their counterfeit doubles—Duessa, Radigund, and Lucifera. Of course, the very process of doubling these female characters calls into question the distinctions between them and suggests that the very concept of authenticity—along with the concept of the body politic—is itself a fraud. Yet the obsessive anxiety about authenticating a true female self points to the cultural currency of the idea of the counterfeit woman—its potential to undermine as well as (tenuously) uphold a woman in power.

Chapter Three examines the relationship between Petrarchism and the figure of the ghost in early modern England. Officially, Protestants argued that ghosts were Catholic superstitions, “old wives’ tales” designed to inflict terror onto children. Yet the

Protestant tracts about ghost stories also reveal them to be a space of illicit pleasure—precisely because of their unreal status. This chapter argues that the figure of the ghost is a way to explore illicit pleasure in Petrarchan literature as well. I contend that the figure of the ghost intersects with the figure of the Petrarchan mistress in ways that challenge conventional definitions of the mistress. I consider Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* in relation to the female complaint, a popular genre appended to sonnet sequences in which a ghost complains about her fate. I argue that a female speaker who complains from the grave constitutes a different kind of absent presence than that ascribed to the icy, distant Petrarchan beloved of the sonnets. As a ghost, a female figure can evoke full bodily and sensual presence—the unfulfilled fantasy of the sonnet speaker—while maintaining her characteristic unavailability. The status of a ghost allows the Petrarchan mistress to be both virtuous and loose, desirable and desiring, admirable and wanton. This chapter argues that just as the ghostly status of the female speakers of the complaint poems enables them to justify (or advertise) their transgressive lives, so does Hermione’s ghostly status at the end of the play enable her to return from her immobilized position to perform a Petrarchan role in which she speaks her own desires.

Chapter Four looks at Mary Wroth’s examination of the term constancy in both her prose romance *The Countess of Montgomery’s Urania* and her appended sonnet sequence, *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*. I argue that while Pamphilia in the sonnets proclaims her constancy like so many sonnet speakers who came before her, the prose romance complicates the suggestion that she can adopt such a singular identity. At the end of the sonnets, Pamphilia suggests that she has triumphed over her trials of love, and

critics have argued that Wroth reappropriates the term constancy, making it a heroic virtue for women. Yet the varied uses of constancy in the *Urania* trouble the idea that Pamphilia's identification with constancy is secure—or even desirable. Wroth reveals that the term has a complex history and that it circulates in multiple discourses, including martyrology, which emphasized martyrs' constancy through pain, and humanism, which valued the stoic concept *constantia* as a way to conquer emotions. Wroth explores the tensions created by this term's varied connotations, adopting the humanist mode of debate to test the term's value and exploring the possibility that constancy is an identity trap for women. Although Pamphilia defends constancy, Wroth reveals the contradictions, dangers, and even absurdities of embracing constancy, and she posits the term as one strained by both historical and literary convention. Wroth suggests that while the conventions of a sonnet sequence enable the easy declaration of constancy, the conventions of prose romance expose the same term to be a tenuous fiction.

Rather than see Petrarchism as a monolithic discourse that women must fight or resist, this study attends to the complexities with which Petrarchism—in its many incarnations—already represents female figures. It does not suggest that Petrarchan representations of women are necessarily positive or empowering, but it does suggest that they are more flexible than once thought and that they can be appropriated in situations not considered, to borrow Thomas Greene's language, “purely Petrarchan.” The figure of the Petrarchan mistress points to the elasticity of both Petrarchism itself and of gender identity in early modern England, pushing critics to open up ways of thinking about the complex possibilities of representing women in a Petrarchan framework.

CHAPTER ONE

Absent Presence: Women and the Elusive Body in Reformation England

One thing on the minds of both Petrarchan poets and Protestant Reformers in sixteenth-century England was the question of material presence. Petrarchism and the Reformation have rarely been examined in conjunction, yet both discourses obsessively return to the idea of absent presence, a presence that can never be fully, materially *there* yet can never be completely absent either. For Petrarchan writers, the desire for the perpetually inaccessible mistress shapes their articulation of an absent presence, and for Reformists, the desire for a spiritual rather than corporeal connection with Christ compels them to assert Christ's absent presence in the Eucharist. Although one discourse is secular and the other religious, writers from both traditions share the same language. In both discourses, the body becomes most viable at the moment in which it disappears.

This chapter will examine the intersections between Petrarchism and Protestantism, two discourses that developed at the same time—and often in the same spaces—in England during the 1530s and 1540s. Although the absent Petrarchan mistress and the absent body of Christ are not identical concepts, a look at them together suggests the extent to which both Petrarchism and Protestantism rely on elusive bodies for their rhetorical effects. It also reveals the extent to which women participated in these genres. Far from excluding women, the emphasis on elusive bodies actually enabled women to articulate their voices in intellectual life, allowing them to assert a presence while maintaining inaccessibility at the same time. In what follows, I will look at Anne

Askew's *Examinations* as an especially vivid intersection between Petrarchism and Protestantism. A martyr who was executed in 1546 for her Reformist beliefs, particularly her rejection of Christ's real presence in the Eucharist, Askew has attracted recent critical attention for her ironic use of scripture and her opaque writing style. Yet while critics have situated her text within a Protestant framework, the elusive persona that emerges in the *Examinations* is also constituted by Petrarchan culture. Askew's narratives, in fact, enact the classic Petrarchan scenario in which frustrated men seek access to an unavailable woman only to be denied that access. Of course, the elusive character, "Askew," and the elusive body of Christ are not the same thing, but their appearance in the *Examinations* in the very same moments suggests a deep entanglement between Petrarchism and Protestantism during a tumultuous time in English history.

"Ydill Poeses" and Books of Prayers

Although most scholars have not looked at Petrarchism and Protestantism together,¹ evidence from the time period suggests that their shared spaces abound. At the beginning of Elizabeth I's reign, for instance, a Protestant chaplain named William Latymer wrote a biography of his former patron, Anne Boleyn, perhaps as an attempt to secure patronage from her mother, the new queen. In his account, which focuses on Boleyn's reign as queen, Latymer includes many anecdotes that portray Boleyn as a

¹ Exceptions include Thomas P. Roche, Jr., *Petrarch and the English Sonnet Sequences* (New York: AMS, 1989), who notes that the first sonnet sequence in English, Anne Lok's translation of Psalm 51, is religious rather than amatory (155) and who challenges the "hideous dichotomy of sacred vs. secular" in critical works about early modern sonnets (154); and Stephen Hamrick, who looks at the religious inflections in *Tottel's Miscellany* and points out that scholars have not "recognized that the Reformation and Petrarchism came to England at the same time" ("*Tottel's Miscellany* and the English Reformation," *Criticism* 44, no. 4 [2002]: 329).

pious, Reform-minded woman. One anecdote recalls Boleyn's interaction with her cousin and maid of honor Mary Shelton. Shelton was one of at least three women in Henry's court to be involved with the Devonshire manuscript, a manuscript of Petrarchan verse that circulated during the 1530s and included some of Wyatt's poems. According to Latymer, Boleyn scolded Shelton for writing "ydill poeses" into her prayerbook:

After that there was a booke of prayers whiche belonged to one of her maydes of honour called Mrs Mary Shelton presented unto her highnes where in ware writton certeyne ydill poeses. . . . At the length the pensive gentilwoman (to whome the booke appertayned) was discovered. Wherupon the quene her majestie, calling her before her presence, wonderfull rebuked her that wold permitte suche wantone toyes in her book of prayers, which she termed a myrroure or glasse wherein she might learne to addresse her wandering thoughtes; and upon this occasione commaunded the mother of the maydons to have a more vigilante eye to her charge to thende that at all tymes and in tyme of prayers especially they might comely and vertuously behave their selves.²

This anecdote is suggestive in at least two important ways. First, it reveals the proximity of Petrarchan and Reformist writing. Although scholars debate the extent of Boleyn's Reformist leanings, and although Boleyn was probably more likely to produce Petrarchan poetry than police it, Latymer's account suggests that these discourses—far from being insulated from one another—occurred in the same spaces and among the same people—

² William Latymer, *William Latymer's Chronickille of Anne Bulleyne*, ed. Maria Dowling, in *Camden Miscellany* 30, 4th ser., 39 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1990): 62-63.

and sometimes on the very same page. Shelton's practice of writing Petrarchan verse into the blank spaces of religious books was not, in fact, unusual. After Henry VIII's death, for instance, Thomas Seymour secretly courted and eventually married Katherine Parr, and during his courtship he composed a love poem in the back of Parr's volume of *A Sermon of Saint Chrysostome*. In the poem, Seymour presses the reluctant Parr to "Set doubts aside / And to some sporting fall." Using *carpe diem* language, he urges Parr, whom he addresses as "fair nymph," to yield to him, and he assures her that he banishes "suspicion."³ While there is no direct relationship between the ancient Greek writer Chrysostome, whose writings were employed by a number of Protestant reformers in support of their beliefs, and Seymour's courtly love poem, the placement of this poem reveals the intimacy between Petrarchism and the Reformation.

The Devonshire manuscript, the primary manuscript with which Shelton is associated, is actually one of the only manuscript collections of the period that contains courtly lyrics alone.⁴ Most courtly poetry, according to Arthur Marotti, was composed and transcribed onto blank spaces of miscellaneous collections: "Lyrics were often transcribed in available odd spaces, including flyleaves of books and manuscripts of various kinds."⁵ The transcription of Petrarchan lyrics in England grew out of a tradition of fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century commonplace books and other miscellanies in which love lyrics were juxtaposed with material as diverse as religious poetry, medieval

³ Quoted in Susan E. James, *Kateryn Parr: The Making of a Queen* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1999), 413.

⁴ Julia Boffey, *Manuscripts of English Courtly Love Lyrics in the Later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1985), 7.

⁵ Arthur F. Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 22.

romances, recipes, and aphorisms.⁶ Petrarchism and the Reformation developed side by side rather than apart from one another in England during the 1530s and 1540s, when Petrarch's translators and evangelicals abounded in London, often composing their poems alongside one another. Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, wrote Petrarchan lyrics at the same time as they participated in the Protestant practice of Biblical translation. The Arundel Harington manuscript, which contains poetry from the 1540s to the 1620s, includes Wyatt's Petrarchan poems along with his penitential psalms and Surrey's Petrarchan poems along with his translations of Ecclesiastes.⁷

One place where both Petrarchan writers and Reformists wrote prolifically was in prison. George Blage, for example, a Reformist who was nearly burned as a heretic alongside Anne Askew, was also a Petrarchan poet who composed and collected poems in what is now known as the Blage manuscript, one of the source texts for Wyatt's lyrics. Pardoned at the last moment by Henry VIII, who referred to Blage as his "pygge,"⁸ Blage went on to compile his manuscript, which includes poems that lament the "vnkyndnes /

⁶ Marotti, *Manuscript*, 18. See also David R. Parker, *The Commonplace Book in Tudor London: An Examination of BL MSS Egerton 1995, Harley 2252, Lansdowne 762, and Oxford Balliol College MS 354* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1998).

⁷ Ruth Hughey, ed., *The Arundel Harington Manuscript of Tudor Poetry*, 2 vols. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1960).

⁸ John Foxe. *Acts and Monuments [...] The Variorum Edition* (1570 edition), [online]. (hriOnline, Sheffield), p. 1427. Available from: <http://www.hrionline.shef.ac.uk/foxe/>. [Accessed 6.23.2010]. Unless otherwise noted, all citations are taken from the 1570 edition and are recorded parenthetically within the text by page number. I am aware that other individuals besides Foxe, including the printer John Day, greatly contributed to the authorial function in this text. I use Foxe's name as a convenient marker for all the collaborative elements that shaped the text. For a discussion on Foxe's role as "author-compiler" of *Acts and Monuments*, see John N. King, *Foxe's "Book of Martyrs" and Early Modern Print Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), esp. chap. 1, "The Compilation of the Book." I choose to cite primarily from the 1570 edition because Foxe greatly expanded his text from the first edition in 1563 and added many illustrations, including the one of Cicelie Ormes discussed below.

Of my mystres” along with Reformist poems such as “Only the Elect on the Sabbath doth praye.”⁹ In one of the poems, Blage writes about his anticipated martyrdom:

A voyce I haue and yk a will to wayle
 and fro my yes salt teers adoun doo rounne
 mi wyt I want mi sensis aal doo fayle
 my brethe it feintes, my hart it feel it downe

 and I O Lord in to thi handes do yield
 my faythefull soul apoynted now of the
 this Lyfe to leue thoro fier in smythefild
 bi whiche I shawl be rid of my leve
 to the o chryst whiche in the heauen only
 bi the father on the ryght hand dothe syt¹⁰

In the Blage manuscript, Petrarchan lover and Protestant martyr are one and the same. The line between “ydill poesies” and books of prayer becomes remarkably thin, for the opening section of this religious poem—in which Blage complains of his salty tears, his lacking wit, his failing senses, and his fainting breath—is indistinguishable from the Petrarchan love poems that surround it. Only further down the poem does Blage reveal

⁹ Blage Manuscript, Trinity College Library, Dublin, MS 160 (D.2.7), fols. 63, 153. Some of the poems from this manuscript are printed in Kenneth Muir, ed., *Sir Thomas Wyatt and His Circle: Unpublished Poems Edited from the Blage Manuscript*, English Reprints Series 18 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1961). Interestingly, Muir includes only Petrarchan poems and omits religious poems from his selection. A few of Blage’s poems omitted from this collection are printed in the “Commentary” section of Thomas Wyatt, *Collected Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt*, ed. Kenneth Muir and Patricia Thomson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1969), 390-415.

¹⁰ Blage Manuscript, fols. 101, 103. Blage signs this poem “G.B.”

that his subject is his pending death for his religious beliefs. Blage scorns his enemies, praying to God that he will “destroy ther wourkes in twinklinge of an ie” and articulating the Reformist belief for which he is condemned to die: Christ’s body is absent in the Eucharist, present in “heaven only / bi the father on the right hand.”¹¹

Latymer’s anecdote about Boleyn and Shelton is suggestive also because at the heart of this intersection between the Reformation and Petrarchism are two women. Although the Reformation and Petrarchism have been seen as largely male domains, the manuscript with which these women were associated—the Devonshire manuscript—suggests these discourses enabled female participation. Shelton, for example, possessed the manuscript for many years, transcribing its contents and composing lines of poetry herself. Mary Fitzroy, Surrey’s sister, also transcribed poems in the manuscript, and she patronized the most influential martyrologists of the English Reformation, John Foxe and John Bale, employing Foxe as a tutor to Surrey’s children.¹²

Although Latymer portrays Boleyn as opposed to the “ydill poesies” that Shelton transcribed, historical evidence suggests that she was involved in both Reformist and Petrarchan circles. Educated as a young girl in the humanist French court and influenced by figures such as Marguerite de Navarre,¹³ Boleyn promoted Reformist practices such as Biblical translation, and according to Foxe, she brought controversial texts such as Simon Fish’s *Supplication for the Beggars* and William Tyndale’s *Obedience of a Christian*

¹¹ Blage Manuscript, fol. 103.

¹² See W.A. Sessions, *Henry Howard, the Poet Earl of Surrey: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 64; John N. King, *English Reformation Literature: The Tudor Origins of the Protestant Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 106; and Helen Baron, “Mary (Howard) Fitzroy’s Hand in the Devonshire Manuscript,” *The Review of English Studies* 45, no. 179 (1994): 318-35.

¹³ Retha M. Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn: Family Politics at the Court of Henry VIII* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). See esp. chap. 1, “Boleyn Origins.”

Man to the English court (1153). She patronized a number of Protestant Reformers at court, such as Nicholas Udall, and Maria Dowling argues that Boleyn's actions suggest that she desired "to direct Henry's religious policy into more radical channels."¹⁴ Yet Boleyn was also involved in the circle that produced the Devonshire manuscript.

According to Raymond Southall, she made at least two entries into the manuscript: "an expression of affection ('amer ann i,' i.e. love, Anne) on f. 56" and the signature "'an' at the foot of f. 69." She also possibly entered the riddle that concludes "I ama yowrs an" as an answer to Wyatt's poem, "What wourde is that."¹⁵ Both the Reformist and Petrarchan circles with which Anne was involved proved dangerous and eventually deadly, but they did enable her contribution to political and literary culture.

Scholars have well documented the ways in which the English Reformation opened up new ways for women to participate in intellectual life.¹⁶ Despite the fact that Protestant teachings support patriarchal authority with their strong emphasis on marriage, the Protestant values of literacy and an individual's relationship with God prompted some women to seek access to God unmediated by male authority, particularly in the nascent years of the Reformation. Retha Warnicke points out that of all the martyrs in Foxe's *Acts*

¹⁴ Maria Dowling, "The Gospel and the Court: Reformation Under Henry VIII," in *Protestantism and the National Church in Sixteenth Century England*, ed. Peter Lake and Maria Dowling (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 52.

¹⁵ Raymond Southall, *The Courtly Maker: An Essay on the Poetry of Wyatt and His Contemporaries* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1964), 17-18.

¹⁶ This is not to say that Catholicism failed to provide any opportunities for women to participate in literary and political culture; many nuns, for instance, contributed to a rich body of translations and other documents. For the influence of Protestantism on women, see, for example, Patricia Crawford, "The Reformation," in *Women and Religion in England 1500-1720* (London: Routledge, 1993), 26-37; Diane Willen, "Women and Religion in Early Modern England," in *Women in Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe: Public and Private Worlds*, ed. Sherrin Marshall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 140-65; and Margaret Patterson Hannay, ed., *Silent But for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators, and Writers of Religious Works* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1985).

and Monuments, an astonishing one-fifth of them are women.¹⁷ Petrarchism, however, seems to be a discourse less conducive to women's participation. Long seen as a genre about male subjectivity, critics like Nancy Vickers have influentially argued that Petrarchism prevents female agency by objectifying women with rhetorical conventions like the blazon that break women's bodies into pieces.¹⁸

Yet Petrarchism emerges as a discourse less about the female body than about the female body's inaccessibility. Petrarchan poems routinely express desire for the beloved only to find the beloved out of reach. For instance, the Devonshire manuscript contains a poem attributed to Wyatt in which the first letters of each stanza spell SHELTVN. In the poem, Wyatt's speaker complains that he must "serue and suffer styll allwaye" until "she knowythe the cawse of all my payn."¹⁹ Beneath the poem is a three-line response attributed to Shelton: "ondesyerd sarwes / reqwer no hyar / mary mary shelton."²⁰ Paul Remley argues that this retort "provides a remarkable example of an overtly critical rejoinder to a courtly lyric by a contemporary reader who is almost certainly the intended recipient of the verse" and that Shelton's contributions to the Devonshire manuscript "convey her disillusionment with some of the inequities of her day, particularly in relations between the sexes."²¹

¹⁷ Retha M. Warnicke, *Women of the English Renaissance and Reformation* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), 74.

¹⁸ Nancy J. Vickers, "Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 2 (1981): 265-79.

¹⁹ Thomas Wyatt, *Collected Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt*, ed. Kenneth Muir and Patricia Thomson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1969), poem CLXV. All subsequent references to Wyatt's poems will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text by poem number.

²⁰ Quoted in Paul G. Remley, "Mary Shelton and Her Tudor Literary Milieu," in *Rethinking the Henrician Era: Essays on Early Tudor Texts and Contexts*, ed. Peter C. Herman (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 50.

²¹ Remley, "Mary Shelton," 50, 47.

More than a critique or a protest of gender relations, however, Shelton's verse plays right into the conventions of the genre. Her female speaker refuses the answer Wyatt's speaker desires, instead deeming his sorrows undeserved and requiring no hire, or reward. Her role as cruel mistress who scorns her lover is produced by the genre within which she writes, a genre that legitimates her ambiguous power. Often, critics argue that the only way that women of the early modern period can write within Petrarchism is by writing against it. Yet as Shelton's rejecting speaker demonstrates, women within Petrarchism are not always so easy to objectify. Instead, the "doubleness" or "fickleness" of which male writers so often accuse women can actually work to their advantage as strategies of evasiveness. Shelton gains access to literary culture by performing the very disembodied presence that many critics say denies her a voice. Women do not have to get outside of Petrarchism to gain authority, but can use Petrarchan conventions to perform their inaccessibility.

A Place All Voyde

Scholars have long argued that in Petrarchan poetry, the male subject emerges as the primary focus and any female character functions only as an object of the struggling male self. Yet from the beginnings of English Petrarchism, female characters are often represented as resisting the kind of closure that the speaker seeks. In Wyatt's translation of one of Petrarch's poems, for instance, a male speaker summons his "froward master," Love, before the judge Reason, whom Wyatt translates as "that Quene." In a familiar Petrarchan scenario, the speaker lays out his grievances against his master, claiming that

he has wasted “pleasant dayes” in “serving this false lyer so deceaveable” and that the central enticement that his master offered, “a woman,” was a false promise. Love defends himself, arguing that he lifted the speaker from “that art / That selleth wordes, and maketh a clattering knyght; / And of my welth I gave him the delight.” After a long debate, Love demands a “sentence” from the queen, and Wyatt ends the poem:

At last, boethe, eche for himself, concluded,
 I trembling; but he, with small reverence:
 “Lo, thus, as we have nowe eche othre accused,
 Dere lady, we wayte onely thy sentence.”
 She, smyling: “after thissaid audience,
 It liketh me” (quod she) “to have herd your question:
 But lenger tyme doth aske resolution.” (VIII)

Unlike Petrarch, Wyatt makes this final moment of uncertainty an explicitly gendered one. Although the speaker introduces Love as his “olde dere En’mye,” the end of the poem makes clear that the true threat against him is female. By translating Reason as a “Quene,” Wyatt incorporates the Petrarchan mistress as a character in this poem, suggesting that she has the ability to resist closure, hold power relations open, and reduce the male speaker to “trembling.” Wyatt highlights the extent to which Petrarchism relies on the performance of female elusiveness—what Wyatt would call “dowblenes” or “vncertaintye”—for its effects.²² When Wyatt’s queen smiles, she performs her own inaccessibility and flexes her ability to perpetuate the “trembling” speaker’s suffering.

²² See, for example, “What vaileth trowth” (II), “Alas the greiff” (V), and “Gyve place” (CCXVI) in Wyatt, *Collected Poems* for instances of these words.

Wyatt is not the first to emphasize the smiling mistress (Laura smiles frequently in the *Rime sparse*), but for Wyatt, as for later English Petrarchan writers, the female smile provokes highly charged anxiety about the inability to interpret a woman's body or to access what may or may not be lurking underneath. When Laura smiles in the *Rime sparse*, she is "sweet" or "angelic," but when Wyatt's queen smiles, she is ambiguous, cruel, and powerful.²³

The cruelty of women is, of course, a commonplace misogynist trope in Petrarchan poetry. The Devonshire manuscript, for example, features many poems that argue that women escape men's control because they are by nature double, slippery, and untrustworthy. An anonymous poet writes,

To dere is bowght the doblenes
 That perith owte in trowthes sted;
 For faut of faith newfangilnes
 Is cheff ruler in womanhed.²⁴

The speaker's conclusion about women's inherent "faut of faith" is undoubtedly negative. Yet far from enabling male speakers to possess the women they desire, their "newfangilnes" ensures that they remain out of reach, difficult to locate, and impossible to interpret. Another poem from the Devonshire manuscript reads,

To men that knows ye not,
 Ye may *aper to* be,

²³ See, for example, Francesco Petrarca, poems 17, 126, and 149, in *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The "Rime sparse" and Other Lyrics*, trans. and ed. Robert M. Durling (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).

²⁴ Kenneth Muir, "Unpublished Poems in the Devonshire MS," *Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical Society, Literary and Historical Section* 6 (1947): 273.

Ffol clen and withowt spot,
 But sewarly unto me
 So ys yowar wonted kynd
 By proffer so sewarly knowen.
 That I wel not be blynd,
 Myn ys shall be myn owen.²⁵

The speaker attempts to reclaim power over his own eyes, yet in doing so, he articulates the fear that women can never be what they “*aper*.” He claims that “I wel not be that man / That so shal the devowar,” yet instead of asserting power over her, he promises only to avert his gaze.²⁶ While the poem feeds into familiar misogynist fears that women are deceptive, it also implies that women will always remain beyond male possession.

Petrarchism is often interpreted as a mode that displays male ownership of the female body, yet poems such as these demonstrate the ways in which Petrarchan discourse allows—even requires—the female body to escape male control. The female smile is one recurring trope that signals women’s command of their own bodies by rendering them unreadable to the men who desire them. The smiling mistress persists in English Petrarchism throughout the sixteenth century as a figure of inscrutability. Surrey, for instance, writes of a male lover tricked by the bodily gestures of his beloved:

Then to retain him stil, she wrasteth new her grace,
 And smileth, lo, as though she would forthwith the man embrace.
 But when the prooffe is made to try such lokes withal,

²⁵ Muir, “Unpublished Poems,” 273.

²⁶ Muir, “Unpublished Poems,” 274.

He findeth then the place all voyde, and fraighted full of gall.

Lorde, what abuse is this! who can such women praise

That for their glory do devise to use such crafty wayes!²⁷

What the lover thought would be a woman he could possess turns out to be an absence—a “place all voyde.” Her smile signals his powerlessness to interpret her body. Instead of a term that signifies her female passivity, “her grace” becomes a malleable, unstable construct that gives the mistress the upper hand in the relationship and keeps her body an enigma. Even when Surrey extensively catalogues the female body in other poems, the blazons more often point to what the speaker cannot have rather than what he obtains:

But since ye knew I did youe love and serve

Your golden treese was clad alway in blacke,

Your smilyng lokes were hid thus evermore,

All that withdrawne that I did crave so sore.²⁸

Significantly, the beloved’s tresses and her smiles appear in the poem only when they disappear for the speaker. As soon as the speaker’s beloved realizes that she is desired, she exercises her newfound power over the speaker by withholding her body from him. Instead of closing off power relations by objectifying the female beloved, the poem leaves them indeterminately open.

Later in the century, during the sonnet sequence craze of the 1590s, smiling women continue to be synonymous with women who cruelly reject their lovers and who

²⁷ Henry Howard, *Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey: Poems*, ed. Emrys Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), poem 21.

²⁸ Howard, *Poems*, poem 6.

deny them access to their bodies. In Barnabe Barnes's *Parthenophil and Parthenophe*, the speaker laments, "Ay me *Parthenophe* smiles at my teares, / I neither take my rest by day, or night: / Her cruell loues in me such heate haue kindled."²⁹ In Giles Fletcher's *Licia*, the speaker similarly complains, "I look'd (fayre Love) and you my love lookt fayre, / I sigh'd for love, and you for sport did smyle. / Your smyles were such as did perfume the ayre, / And this perfumed did my heart beguyle."³⁰ And in William Percy's *Sonnets to the Fairest Coelia*, his speaker concludes one of his sonnets by saying, "Ay me, Ah no, teares, words, throbs all in vaine, / She scornes my dole, and smileth at my paine."³¹ In other moments, a woman's smile signifies not simply her cruel rejection but also her power to disarm the men around her. In book 2 of *The Faerie Queene*, Phaedria is able to get Guyon and Cymochles to stop fighting only after "she sweetly smyld."³² Female personifications, like Wyatt's queen, also smile as a sign of their doubleness or unreliability. In Mathew Grove's *The Historie of Pelops and Hippodamia*, Grove begins one poem by blaming the world's problems on Fortune and her untrustworthy smile: "Whom fortune doth most smilingly aduance / Those sonest doth she cast vnto the ground / Unequall hap she holdeth still by chaunce, / For to extoll, or else defame by sound."³³ The frequency of these tropes suggests that Petrarchism is a mode that depends

²⁹ Barnabe Barnes, sistine 5, in *Parthenophil and Parthenophe: A Critical Edition*, ed. Victor A. Doyno (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971), 127.

³⁰ Giles Fletcher, sonnet 44, in *Licia* [Cambridge: John Legat, 1593], 45.

³¹ William Percy, sonnet 3, in *Sonnets to the Fairest Coelia* (London: Adam Islip, 1594).

³² Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton, 2nd ed. (London: Pearson, 2001), bk. 2, canto 6, st. 36.

³³ Matthew Grove, "To his friend of the frailleness of dame Fortune," in *The most famous and tragicall historie of Pelops and Hippodamia* (London: Abel Ieffs, 1587).

on the elusive Petrarchan mistress; as Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass state, once male “desire is filled,” the Petrarchan mistress “loses all value.”³⁴

Some scholars insist, however, that any exercise of female authority only feeds back into the authority of the male speaker. Wendy Wall, for instance, calls early modern authorship a “masculinized notion,” and she argues that “in the potent cultural and literary discourse of Petrarchism, . . . the woman often functioned as a trope for social prestige and poetic laurels.”³⁵ Yet from the beginnings of Petrarchan literature in England, women functioned not only as characters written by male authors but also as writers themselves as well as transcribers and participants in manuscript culture. Some scholars have contested the idea that early modern Petrarchism was an exclusively male terrain. Ilona Bell examines the role women played in Petrarchan poetry as “writers, readers, and interlocutors, actively engaged in dialogue with men and other women,” and Mary Moore, looking at the number of women who did write Petrarchan poetry, argues that “particular traits” of the genre actually “invite female imitation” and that “its sometimes slippery gender roles opened a gap in prohibitions against early modern women’s writing, self-development, and subjectivity.”³⁶ The indeterminacy with which women are represented in the Petrarchan mode suggests that instead of closing women off, the genre requires their involvement and disrupts secure dichotomies of gender.

³⁴ Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, “The Politics of *Astrophil and Stella*,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 24, no. 1 (1984): 67.

³⁵ Wendy Wall, *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 282, 281.

³⁶ Ilona Bell, *Elizabethan Women and the Poetry of Courtship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4; and Mary B. Moore, *Desiring Voices: Women Sonneteers and Petrarchism* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 11.

The surviving manuscripts from the period suggest that far from being solely fictive objects of desire, women participated in the very genre that some scholars say excludes them. In his survey of the manuscript system in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Arthur Marotti notes that “women figure in important ways as the owners, compilers, and contributors to the manuscript miscellanies and poetry anthologies.”³⁷ The Devonshire manuscript, for instance, includes, along with its contributions by Shelton and Fitzroy, a poetic exchange between Margaret Douglas and Thomas Howard, who were imprisoned because their clandestine engagement made their claims to the throne too strong.³⁸ In her poems, Douglas takes on a role usually reserved for men, that of a lover who cannot achieve union with her beloved:

I may well say with joyfull harte
 As neuer woman myght say befor
 That I haue takyn to my part
 The faythfullyst louer that ever was born.³⁹

Douglas’s assertions reveal the extent to which her position as a woman within the system of Petrarchan poetry is not fixed at all. Embracing her role as a desiring subject and swearing “To loue hym best vnto my graue,” Douglas suggests that her gendered place in Petrarchism is malleable. Rather than being incorporated into Howard’s subjectivity, Douglas asserts at the end of the poem her hope to incorporate him into her poetic world: “Unto god dayly I make my prayer / To bryng vs shortly both in one lyne.”

³⁷ Marotti, *Manuscript*, 61.

³⁸ Margaret Douglas was the daughter of Henry VIII’s sister, and Thomas Howard was descended from Edward I.

³⁹ Muir, “Unpublished Poems,” 264. Subsequent references from this poem are taken from this page.

The kind of poetic exchange that Douglas has with Howard is common in the early modern period and is part of a tradition of “answer” poems that circulate during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England.⁴⁰ The speaker of the answer poem is usually female, rejecting a male lover’s pursuit from the previous poem. For instance, in the Blage manuscript, a male speaker demands,

Madame, I you requyere
 No longer tyme detrack;
 Let truth in you aper,
 And geve me that I lak.

In the following poem, a female speaker retorts,

Your ffolyshe fayned hast
 Ffull small effecte shall tak;
 Your wordes in vayne ye wrast;
 Ye get not that ye lack.⁴¹

Like the “place all voyde” that Surrey’s speaker finds when he pursues his beloved, the female speaker finds voice in this literary system only by articulating her inaccessibility. Paradoxically, she comes into being at the moment when she denies her material presence—“Ye get not that ye lack”—to her male suitor. In effect, she becomes the absent presence that the male speaker seeks in order to find voice at all.

⁴⁰ See E.F. Hart, “The Answer-Poem of the Early Seventeenth Century,” *The Review of English Studies*, n.s., 7, no. 25 (1956): 19-29; and Marotti, *Manuscript*, 159-71.

⁴¹ Muir, *Sir Thomas Wyatt and His Circle*, 41-42.

Petrarchism, then, rather than just rendering women objectified in their materiality, disrupts any clear ideas of material presence. Representations of the female body not only made women erotic commodities in Petrarchan literature, but they also exposed the difficulty of interpreting those bodies and often their very incoherence. Surviving poetry from the period indicates that women as well as men manipulated generic conventions to their advantage and that women could appropriate misogynist conventions to wield authority.

A Piece of Bread

Although scholars have examined the relationship between Petrarchism and other early modern discourses—those of patronage and colonialism, for example—Reformation writing, until only recently, has not been one of them. Marotti, for instance, argues that love poetry was not about love, but about frustrated male courtiers: “Love lyrics could express figuratively the realities of suit, service, and recompense with which ambitious men were insistently concerned as well as the frustrations and disappointments experienced in socially competitive environments.”⁴² And Roland Greene argues for the colonial implications of Petrarchan literature, making a case for Petrarchism “as a widely adopted template in the discourse of discovery.”⁴³

A close look at Reformist views on transubstantiation also reveals a strong link to Petrarchism in its intense obsession with the question of bodily presence. Like Petrarchan

⁴² Marotti, “‘Love is Not Love’: Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order,” *English Literary History* 49, no. 2 (1982): 398.

⁴³ Roland Greene, “The Colonial Wyatt: Contexts and Openings,” in *Rethinking the Henrician Era: Essays on Early Tudor Texts and Contexts*, ed. Peter C. Herman (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 241.

writers, Reformist writers focus on—and are willing to die for—the tension between bodily absence and presence. Just as the Petrarchan mistress is always unavailable but never fully absent, so for Reformist writers, the presence of Christ is adamantly *not* material in —yet never spiritually absent from—the bread that in the Catholic tradition purports to be his body. In works that argue against transubstantiation, Reformists repeatedly take the position—for which many of them would be burned during Mary’s reign—that Christ’s body, if it is in Heaven as recorded by the scriptures, cannot be in two places at once. In a response to Stephen Gardiner’s defense of transubstantiation, for example, John Hooper insists that “if Christ haue atrew body it must occopy place, in the sacrament it occopyyth no place then it folowith it is not there.”⁴⁴ Similarly, a Marian martyr whose name Foxe records as “the wife of one called Prest” stresses that the bread can be only a remembrance and not Christ’s body itself:

Then diuers of the Priests had her in handlyng, persuading her to leaue her wicked opinion about the Sacrament of the altar, the naturall body and bloud of our Sauour Christ. But she made them aunswere that it was nothyng, but very bread and wyne, and that they might be ashamed to say that a peece of bread should be turned by a man into the naturall body of Christ, which bread doth vinow, and mice oftentimes doe eate it, and it doth mould and is burned: And (said she) Gods owne body will not be so handled nor kept in prison, or boxes, or aumbries. Let it be your God: it

⁴⁴ John Hooper, *An Answer vnto my lord of wynchesters book intyled a detection of the deuyls Sophistrye wherewith he robbith the vnlernyd people of the trew byleaf in the moost blessyd sacrament of the aulter made by Johann Hoper* (Zurich: Augustyne Fries, 1547), 14r.

shall not be myne: for my Sauour sitteth on the right hand of God and doth pray for me. And to make that Sacramentall or significatiue bread instituted for a remembraunce, the very body of Christ, and to worship it, it is very foolishnes and deuilish disceate. (2250)

Reformers like these carefully argue, however, that although Christ is physically absent, he is spiritually present. Hooper states that “Thowgh Christ be Absent bodely from his churche, yet with his ayed. Helpe and consolacion he is present in sprit which sufficit untill the end of the worold, where as we shall se his glorious body in dead really and corporally that now haue but a signe and sacrament thereof which sufficithe to kepe that holy sacrifice in memorie.”⁴⁵ And Thomas Cranmer, also responding to Gardiner, argues, “And therefore you gather of my sayings vniustly, that Christ is in deede absent, for I say (according to Gods worde and the doctrine of the olde writers) that Christ is present in his sacramentes, as they teach also that he is present in his worde, when he worketh mightely by the same, in the hartes of the hearers.”⁴⁶ Christ achieves, in these writers’ arguments, an “absent presence” similar to that of the Petrarchan mistress, a presence that is not there but that is nevertheless palpable.

Of course, the language on which Reformist writers rely to make their case for this “absent presence” is inevitably corporeal. Like Petrarchan writers who obsessively praise the beloved’s breasts, eyes, and hands only to find them missing, Reformist writers depend on the language of the body to argue for Christ’s “bodiless” presence in the

⁴⁵ Hooper, *An Answer*, Pr.

⁴⁶ Thomas Cranmer, *An Answer of the Most Reuerend Father in God Thomas Archebyshop of Canterburie, Primate of all Englande and Metropolitane vnto A crafty and sophisticall cauillation deuised by Stephen Gardiner doctour of law, late byshop of Winchester, agaynst the trewe and godly doctrine of the moste holy Sacrament of the body and bloud of our Sauour Iesv Christe* (London: Reynolde Wolfe, 1551), 4.

Eucharist. In Hooper's tract, although the Eucharist is "an inuisible miracle," Hooper's goal is to "to take away the uele of blyndenys."⁴⁷ And John Frith says that "I nether wyll nor can cease to speake / for the worde of God boylyth in my bodye / lyke a feruent fyere / and wyll nedes haue an issue and breakyth oute / whan occasion ys geuyn."⁴⁸ Yet in insisting on a presence that is spiritual, these Reformist writers argue for a radically unstable idea of presence. In his absent presence, Christ acquires a kind of doubleness in that he can and cannot be felt, seen, or ingested. Like Petrarchan poets, Reformers passionately devoted themselves to what remained just out of their corporeal reach.

Significantly, at moments when Reformers—particularly women Reformers—denied the Catholic doctrine of real presence, crises of gender often occurred. For example, Foxe records in *Acts and Monuments* the examinations of Elizabeth Young, a Reformist who smuggled Protestant books into England during Mary's reign. Over the course of her interrogations, as Catholic officials question Young about her involvement with the book trade and about her beliefs regarding transubstantiation, Roger Cholmley, a privy councilor under Mary, begins to doubt Young's female gender, saying to Bishop Bonner, "xx. pound it is a man in a womans clothes: xx. pound it is a man" (2270). Cholmley's accusation seems nonsensical and random, yet his skepticism about her female body intersects precisely with the moment at which she casts her own skepticism on Christ's corporeality. For Cholmley, Young's destabilization of Christ's presence

⁴⁷ Hooper, *An Answer*, A4v.

⁴⁸ John Frith, *A boke made by Iohn Frith prisoner in the tower of London / answeringe vnto M mores lettur which he wrote agenst the first litle treatyse that Iohn Frith made concerninge the sacramente of the body and bloude of, Christ, vnto which boke are added in the end the articles of his examinacion before the bishoppes of London / winchestur and lincolne / in Paules church at London / for which Iohn Frith was condempned and after burent in smith felde with out newgate the fourth daye of Iuli. Anno. 1533*, [Antwerp, 1533], B5r.

leads him to question the stability of her own gendered presence. A few moments later, Young asserts, “I beleue that in the holy Sacrament of Christes body and bloud, which he did institute and ordeine and left among hys Disciples the night before he was betrayed, when I do receaue this Sacrament in faith and spirite, I do receiue Christ.” Cholmley immediately interjects, “Ah whore? spirite and fayth whore?” (2270). The coherence of Young’s gender identity has completely unraveled for Cholmley, who accuses her of being a transvestite and a whore at the same time.⁴⁹ Young’s adherence to her sacramentarian beliefs produces for her Catholic opponents an instance in which clear categories of gender and the body come undone.

The examinations of Alice Driver, another Marian martyr whose interrogations Foxe includes in *Acts and Monuments*, also disturb gender binaries. Driver, who like a Petrarchan mistress infuriates her interrogators by “comming into the place where she should be examined with a smiling countenance” (2247), outsmarts her Catholic opponents by getting them to admit that a sacrament is “the signe of an holy thing” (2248). Outraged and feeling as though he has been tricked, one of her interrogators, a scholar from Cambridge named George Gascoigne, asserts that Driver is wrong: “Then stood vp Doctor Gascoyne, and sayd, she was deceaued: for there were three churches: the malignant church, the church militant, and the church trimphant. So he would fayne haue made matter, but he could not tell which way.” When Driver demands that he “shew

⁴⁹ For a reading of Elizabeth’s Young’s examinations in the context of the transvestite English theater, see Steven Mullaney, “Reforming Resistance: Class, Gender, and Legitimacy in Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*,” in *Print, Manuscript, and Performance: The Changing Relations of the Media in Early Modern England*, ed. Arthur F. Marotti and Michael D. Bristol (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000), 235-51.

the place where it is written,” Gascoigne cannot and feels forced to assert that “I am as good a Doctour as you” (2248).

Driver’s success in undercutting Gascoigne’s masculine authority leads her even more forcefully to assert her own authority:

Haue you no more to say? God be honored. You be not able to resist the spirit of God in me a poore woman. I was an honest poore mans daughter, neuer brought vp in the Vniuersitie as you haue bene, but I haue driuen the plough before my father many a tyme (I thanke God): yet notwithstanding in the defence of Gods truth, and in the cause of my master Christ, by his grace I will set my foote agaynst the foote of any of you all in the maintenaunce and defence of the same: and if I had a thousand lyues, it should go for payment therof. (2248)

Although she cites her legitimacy in her presence as “a poore woman,” she is also an authority as masculine as the “doctors” next to her, having “driuen the plough before my father many a tyme” and being willing to “set my foote agaynst the foote of any of you.” Driver’s performance during her interrogations disables the male/female binary that her examiners, who frequently address her as “woman,” seek to uphold. By the end, it is unclear who possesses the more masculine qualities: the doctors from Cambridge who are caught in their own ignorance about scriptural text, or Driver herself, who demonstrates her physical and intellectual vigor by challenging their beliefs.

It is moments like these—ones that obfuscate clear gender distinctions during intense debates about Christ’s material presence—that we find in Askew’s *Examinations*.

Askew's text is a rich site for investigating these intersections between Petrarchism and Reformation martyrology, particularly in the nascent years of the 1540s when both these discourses were emerging in England for the first time. Askew's text is embedded within the commentary of John Bale and John Foxe, both of whom use the corporeal language of the Petrarchan mistress to characterize the first major female martyr in Reformation England. Yet writing from a religious tradition that values text over body, immateriality over materiality, Askew points to the elusiveness of all bodies. Through her religious and gendered subject position, Askew suggests the ways in which both Petrarchism and Reformation martyrology are about bodily elision as much as bodily presence. Far from just an erotic commodity, Askew obscures the accessibility of her own body and presents a persona who eludes the desires of her interrogators.

“And than I smyled”

Anne Askew's *Examinations* vividly enact the interplay between Petrarchism and the Reformation, particularly from a female perspective. Askew was a committed Reformist who denied the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and she was executed in 1546 for violating the Acts of the Six Articles, which reestablished Catholic doctrine as law in England in 1539. Scholars have commented on Askew's smart and ironic use of scriptural text during her interrogations. Yet Askew's connections to the court have been less examined. She had familial connections, for example, with Catherine Willoughby, Duchess of Suffolk, a member of Katherine Parr's Reformist circle of women who was,

like Askew, from Lincolnshire.⁵⁰ Askew's text includes an account of her inquisitors' attempt to force Askew—through torture—to implicate those associated with Parr: "Then they asked me of my ladye of Sothfolke, my ladye of Sussex, my ladye of Hertforde, my ladye Denny, and my ladye Fizwylliams. I sayd, if I shuld pronounce anye thyng agaynst them, that I were not hable to prove it."⁵¹ It is unlikely that Catholic authorities, who sought to incriminate the Protestant Parr, would have taken such extreme measures against Askew were it not for these courtly connections.

Moreover, Askew's poem following the *Examinations* quotes directly from Surrey's paraphrase of Ecclesiastes, showing that she had access to manuscripts—most of which contained a mix of religious and love poetry—that circulated at court.⁵² While it is often assumed that Askew was "a woman who read deeply (but not broadly) in English,"⁵³ it is unlikely that she was insulated from Petrarchan discourse given the nature of manuscript circulation at the time. Her exposure to Petrarchan poetry shaped the elusiveness of her representation, and the resulting character, "Anne Askew," is constituted by the overlapping discourses of Petrarchism and the Reformation, both of which articulate a presence that can never be fully present. The *Examinations* suggest that Askew is a figure who can achieve voice only at the moment when she disappears.

⁵⁰ Askew's sister was married to the Duke and Duchess of Suffolk's steward. See Susan Brigden, *London and the Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 371.

⁵¹ Elaine V. Beilin, ed., *The Examinations of Anne Askew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 121-22. All subsequent references to Askew and Bale are from this edition and hereafter will be cited parenthetically in the text by page number.

⁵² It is possible that Surrey borrowed from Askew instead of the other way around, but either possibility highlights the interrelationship between courtly poetry and Reformist poetry. For more on the relationship between Askew and Surrey, see Sessions, *Henry Howard*, 353-57.

⁵³ Kimberly Anne Coles, "The Death of the Author (and the Appropriation of Her Text): The Case of Anne Askew's *Examinations*," *Modern Philology* 99, no. 4 (2002): 521.

Since Askew's emergence into the critical landscape in the 1980s, scholars have puzzled over her apparent slipperiness as a subject. As Joan Pong Linton asks, "Why was she reticent when she had the means to strike back at her persecutors in the forum of public opinion?"⁵⁴ For some, Askew's elusiveness suggests a nascent individualism that forms in resistance to the systems that oppress her. Elaine Beilin writes, "By showing herself to be *not* a weak woman, but a vanquisher of the papist foe, a learned, honest, God-fearing, Scripture-loving comrade in the faith, Askew was seeking to disclose her true identity," and Kimberly Coles argues that in contrast to the writings of fellow Protestant reformers like Bale and Frith, which strive to articulate a creed of Protestantism, "Askew's written narrative indicates a radical, and radically individual, faith. . . . She speaks for herself alone."⁵⁵ For others, Askew is a product of other authorial figures. Thomas Freeman and Sarah Wall argue that Askew's text should be seen as a construction of both Bale and Foxe: "The formulation 'Anne Askew's *Examinations*' is actually a misnomer; the text we have might more properly be called Bale's *Examinations of Anne Askew* or Foxe's *Examinations of Anne Askew*, and so forth. An autograph manuscript of Askew's text has never been found. . . . Her voice only exists as it has been constructed by Bale and Foxe."⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Joan Pong Linton, "Scripted Silences, Reticence, and Agency in Anne Askew's *Examinations*," *English Literary Renaissance* 36, no. 1 (2006): 4.

⁵⁵ Elaine V. Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 32; Coles, "The Death of the Author," 528. See also Megan Matchinske, who argues that Askew is able to develop a resistant agency as a result of her entanglement in the ideological institutions that oppose her ("Resistance, Reformation, and the Remaining Narratives," in *Writing, Gender, and State in Early Modern England* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 24-52).

⁵⁶ Thomas S. Freeman and Sarah Elizabeth Wall, "Racking the Body, Shaping the Text: The Account of Anne Askew in Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs,'" *Renaissance Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (2001): 1168, 1194.

Arguments such as these focus much of their energy on trying to locate the identity of Askew the writer. Yet in a system of collaborative manuscript circulation, authorial identity becomes nearly impossible to pin down definitively. Like the female speaker in the answer poem of the Blage manuscript, who may not have even been written by a woman, “Askew” the writer will always be a vexed term, and like so many early modern writers, a term to be put in quotation marks.⁵⁷ Looking at “Askew” the character, however, gets around the urgency of that question. An analysis of the ways in which her enigmatic persona—however collaboratively produced—is constituted by both the Petrarchan and the Reformist discourses that informed her creation illuminates the complexity of the literary and political system in which the real Askew lived, suffered, and died. It also highlights the complicated place of female voice in the early modern period, a place that negated as soon as articulated. Askew’s text suggests that, paradoxically, a woman must speak through this kind of “place all voyde” to speak at all.

Scholars have also emphasized the ways in which Askew’s character diverges from representations of Askew by her editors, Bale and Foxe. While the “Askew” of the *Examinations* is an enigmatic figure, rarely using the language of the body, Bale and Foxe obsess about bodily details and suggest that she is a weak instrument made strong

⁵⁷ It is unlikely that Bale wrote Askew’s narrative; he repeatedly emphasizes that Askew’s text is derived from a manuscript “by her owne hande wrytynge” (7). More likely, as Diane Watt argues, is that Bale made emendations to Askew’s text. We know that Bale made some changes to Elizabeth I’s translation of Marguerite de Navarre’s “Le miroir de l’âme pécheresse” in his edition, *A godly medytacyon of the christen sowle*, because we have an autograph copy to which to compare his edition (*Secretaries of God: Women Prophets in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* [Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997], 88-95). For a discussion of Bale’s editorial role in Elizabeth’s translation, see also Anne Lake Prescott, “The Pearl of Valois and Elizabeth I: Marguerite de Navarre’s *Miroir* and Tudor England,” in Hannay, *Silent But For the Word*, 61-76. Leslie P. Fairfield, *John Bale: Mythmaker for the English Reformation* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1976), has noticed that certain phrases in the *Examinations* are suspiciously similar to Bale’s common terminology (134-35).

through God. Yet what critics have failed to realize is that these modes of representation are actually two sides of the same coin. Bale and Foxe demonstrate influence of Petrarchism on them when they catalogue the body parts of Askew and other martyrs, especially female ones, yet their use of rhetorical devices like the blazon only points to the thing they can never fully possess. Like Wyatt, Surrey, and other contemporary Petrarchan poets, Bale and Foxe write about the erotic features of the beloved at the moment at which they cannot have her. Askew remains a perpetually desirable enigma, and this inaccessibility constitutes Askew's entry point through which she can participate in the intellectual life of her culture.

It is true that Bale's contrasts to Askew are quite evident. In his preface to the *first examinacyon*, for instance, Bale focuses on the very moments of bodily torture that Askew minimizes, comparing her typologically to the early Christian martyr, Blandina:

Blandina never faynted in torment. No more ded Anne Askewe in sprete, whan she was so terrybly racked of Wrysleye the chaunceller and Ryche, that the strynges of her armes and eyes were peryshed. Blandina deryded the cruelte of the tyrauntes. So ded Anne Askewe the madnesse of the Byshoppes and their speche men. Reade burnynge plates of yron and of brasse had Blandina put to her sydes.

So had Anne Askew the flamynge brandes of fyre. (11)

For Bale, Askew's martyrdom manifests itself in its most spectacular moments of pain. While he praises both Blandina's and Askew's verbal derision of their tormentors, Bale also situates their power in the brokenness of their bodies—the "strynges" of Askew's

arms and eyes and their mutilation through fire. Emphasizing that Askew was “yonge and tender” like Blandina (10), Bale draws attention to her innocence, frailty, and sexuality.

Yet Bale’s excessive bodily details lead only to what he does not know. When Askew fails to provide crucial familial details about herself, for instance, Bale tries to fill them in, but his language questions his certainty:

Notwithstandynge the marryage ones past, she demeaned her selfe lyke a Christen wyfe, and had by hym (as I am infourmed) ii. chyltren. In processe of tyme by oft readynge of the sacred Bible, she fell clerelye from all olde superstycyons of papystrye, to a perfyght beleve in Jhesus Christ. Wherby she so offended the prestes (as is to be seane afore) that he at their suggestion, vyolentlye drove her oute of hys howse. Whereupon she thought her selfe free from that uncomelye kynde of coated marryage, by thys doctryne of S. Paule 1. Cor. 7. If a faytfull woman have an unbelevynge husbände, whych wyll not tarrye with her, she may leave hym. For a brother or syster is not in subjeccyon to soch, specyallye where as the marryage afore is unlawfull. Upon thys occasion (I heare saye) she sought of the law a dyvorcement from hym, namelye and above all, bycause he so cruellye drove her out of hys howse in despyght of Christes veryte. (92-3)

Eager to resituate Askew within domestic roles, Bale emphasizes her demeanor as a “Christen wife” and her role as a mother, despite the fact that he obtains this information secondhand. His parenthetical qualifications like “as I am infourmed” and “as is to be

seane afore” betray his uncertainty about the facts (facts that he admits are “heare saye”), and his emphasis on these material aspects of Askew’s femininity suggests his anxiety about Askew’s radical departure from traditional female roles. Ultimately, he has difficulty placing her, both figuratively and literally, admitting, “What was done with the Ashes of Anne Askewe and her companyons, I can not yet tell” (12). For Bale, Askew retains value not only as an erotic commodity, but also as a figure who can never be completely located—as one whose ashes have disappeared.

Foxe, too, grounds the power and emotional appeal of Askew’s story in her violated body, yet also like Bale, the appeal of Askew and other female martyrs lies in their inaccessibility. The Petrarchan influences on Foxe’s storytelling are clear in many moments of *Acts and Monuments*. In his description, for instance, of the Marian martyr Cicelie Ormes, who was executed for her Protestant beliefs in 1557, Foxe calls attention to the last moments of her burning:

Then she came to the stake and laid her hand on it, and said: welcome the crosse of Christ. Which being done, she loking on her hand, & seing it blacked with the stake, she wiped it vpon her smocke, for she was burnt at the same stake that Simon Miller & Elizab. Cooper was burned at. Then after she had touched it with her hand, she came and kissed it, and sayd welcome the sweete crosse of Christ, and so gaue her selfe to be bound thereto. After the tormentors had kindled the fire to her, she said: *My soule doth magnifie the Lord, and my spirite reioyceth in God my Sauour*, and in so saying, she set her hands together right against her brest, casting her

eyes and head vaward, and so stoode, heauing vp her handes by little and litle, till the very sinowes of her armes brast asunder, and then they fell: but she yelded her life vnto the Lord as quietly as she had ben in a slumber, or as one feeling no paine: So wonderfully did the Lorde worke wyth her: hys name therefore be prayed for euermore, Amen. (2219)

While Foxe's description of Ormes does conform to a long Christian tradition in which, according to Susannah Brietz Monta, "martyrs should be brave and patient, composed, long-suffering, even joyful,"⁵⁸ the text here also conforms to Petrarchan conventions similar to the ones adopted by Wyatt and Surrey in the 1530s. Foxe lingers on Ormes's individual body parts—in particular, her hands, eyes, and breasts—and characterizes her as a conventional "fair" Petrarchan mistress. Foxe emphasizes the whiteness of her hand, for example, when he notes that "loking on her hand, & seing it blacked with the stake, she wiped it vpon her smocke."⁵⁹ Ormes's kissing of the cross, in which she welcomes the "sweete crosse of Christ," draws attention to her lips as well as her erotic potential.

The accompanying woodcut, first present in the 1570 edition of *Acts and Monuments*, corroborates this Petrarchan vision. Her nipples protruding prominently through her garment and her hair draping around her shoulder, Ormes is an object of desire. Her blazoned body becomes homologous to her blazing body; Ormes's

⁵⁸ Susannah Brietz Monta, *Martyrdom and Literature in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 11.

⁵⁹ Kim F. Hall discusses the racial and sexual implications of signifying women as either "fair" or "dark" in Petrarchan literature: "Positing a mistress as dark allows the poet to turn her white, to refashion her into an acceptable object of Platonic love and admiration. The loveliness of these Petrarchan beauties, despite their color, represents not their seductive power but the poet's power in bringing them to light" (*Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995], 67).

fragmented body parts are at once idealized and commodified, delicate and grotesque. Foxe thus provides a vivid example here of the relationship that Vickers sees between violence and the blazoned female body in which the “stylized fragmentation and reification of the female body” provides an arena in which men play their battles—in Foxe’s case, an epic battle between the Reformers and the Catholic Church.⁶⁰ Foxe’s account of Ormes’s death reveals the extent to which Petrarchism and Reformation martyrology both rely a great deal on the broken female body as an authorizing strategy.

Yet all the talk about Ormes’s body inevitably leads to an absence—a moment when her body turns to ash. Despite the detailed and grotesque cataloguing of body parts, most martyrs in *Acts and Monuments* become inaccessible at the moment they burn. Foxe emphasizes, for instance, Askew’s broken, sexually violated body only to point to its dissolution. Foxe first printed Askew’s account in his Latin *Rerum Ecclesia Gestarum Commentarii*, published in 1559. Appended to his introduction to Askew is a eulogy, “In Annae Askevae Constantissimae foeminae & martyris bustum, Epitaphium Sapphicum, I.F.” (“Epitaph in Sapphic Verse upon the tomb of the most steadfast woman and martyr Anne Askew”). In the poem, Foxe focuses on Askew’s sexuality:

O warder, whose wicked hands are drenched in blood, why
do you vainly stretch her limbs on the rack and violently
tear apart a virtuous girl better far than you?

⁶⁰ Nancy J. Vickers, “‘This Heraldry in Lucrece’ Face” *Poetics Today* 6, no. 1/2 (1985): 182. See also Vickers, “‘The blazon of sweet beauty’s best’: Shakespeare’s *Lucrece*,” in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (New York: Methuen, 1985), 95-115. Jonathan Sawday connects the violence of dissection with the popularity of the blazon tradition (*The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* [New York: Routledge, 1995]). See esp. chap. 7, “The Realm of *Anatomia*: Dissecting People.”

.....
 The executioner comes forth, seething with ruthless fury:
 her tendons untied, the woman lies tied up to make her
 betray her partners in religion.

Her limbs are forced apart; her bones are broken, severed
 from their joints; nothing in that chaste body is left intact.⁶¹

Like a Petrarchan mistress, Askew is praised for both her chastity and her body torn apart. Foxe asserts her sexual purity—“that chaste body”—only to emphasize its violation. His images suggest the violence of sexual assault (“her limbs on the rack,” “her tendons untied,” “Her limbs . . . forced apart), recuperating this violence into a vehicle for the Protestant Reformation.⁶² Yet toward the end of the poem, Foxe writes, “So she who could not otherwise be overcome by instruments / of torture is at last dissolved by death in the flames, / and her ashes are blessed with life everlasting.”⁶³ Despite the obsession with her erotic body, in the end Askew’s body—“dissolved by death”—is out of reach and perpetually desirable—something that Foxe cannot possess in its material presence.

It is precisely this emphasis on elusiveness that brings Askew’s persona into being. From her very first sentences, Askew announces her presence in the text in a move that simultaneously withdraws it:

⁶¹ Beilin, *Examinations*, 194. The poem is translated from Latin by G.P. Goold.

⁶² See James C.W. Truman for an analysis of how the “correspondence between disciplinary violence and rape is vital to the writing of martyrdom” (“John Foxe and the Desires of Reformation Martyrology” *English Literary History* 70, no. 1 [2003]: 41).

⁶³ Beilin, *Examinations*, 194.

To satisfie your expectation, good people (sayth she) this was my first examynacyon in the yeare of oure Lorde M. D. xlv and in the moneth of Marche, first Christofer dare examyned me at Sadlers hall, beyng one of the quest, and asked yf I ded not beleve that the sacrament hangynge over the aultre was the verye bodye of Christ reallye. Then I demaunded thys question of hym, wherfore S. Steven was stoned to deathe? And he sayde, he coude not tell. Then I answered, that no more wolde I assoyle hys vayne questyon. (19-20)

On the one hand, Askew clearly situates herself squarely within the Reformist community, directly addressing the “good people” of the same faith and outsmarting her interrogators with a reference to Saint Steven, the martyr who was killed for claiming that God does not dwell in temples made with hands—a reason similar to the ones for which Protestant martyrs of the sixteenth century died. Yet significantly, Askew addresses the examiner’s question about the presence of Christ’s body with a refusal to answer at all: “no more wolde I assoyle hys vayne questyon.” At the moment that the materiality of Christ’s body comes into question, so does the materiality of Askew’s presence as a desired female subject. Askew’s character behaves much like a Petrarchan mistress, rejecting her suitor by refusing to give him access to her material presence. Like the female speaker of the answer poem, who tells her suitor, “Your wordes in vayne ye wrast; / Ye get not that ye lack,” or like Mary Shelton, who refuses to answer Wyatt’s “ondesyerd sarwes,” Askew asserts her presence only by withholding it.

Askew's male contemporaries who wrote about their interrogations address the same issue of transubstantiation, but they do not represent themselves with the same elusiveness. John Frith, for example, wrote an account of his examinations that occurred shortly before his death in 1533 in *A boke made by Iohn Frith*, a book that Askew mentions in the *Examinations*. In this book, Frith represents himself as directly confronting the challenge posed by his adversaries: "Well sayd they / do you not thincke / that hys very naturall body / bothe flesshe and bloude ys really contayned vnder the sacrament / and there actually present / besyde all similitudes. No sayd I / I do not so thincke."⁶⁴ He concludes his treatise matter-of-factly:

The cause of my deathe is this / because I can not in consciens abiure and swere / that our prelates opinion of the sacrament (that is / that the substaunce of brede and wine is verely chaunged in to the fleshe and bloude of our sauour Iesus Christ) is an vndouted / article of the faythe / necessary to be beleauid vnder the paine of dampnacyon.⁶⁵

Frith's interrogators seek to bend him toward their will, but Frith quickly and clearly denies their claims and asserts allegiance to his faith. Although his interrogators, like Askew's, seek to uncover their prisoner's theological beliefs, Frith, as a male figure, does not perform the role of elusive mistress that is available to Askew as a female figure.

In contrast to Frith's text, the *Examinations* represent Askew's interrogators as insatiably desiring subjects and Askew as a figure impossible to pin down.⁶⁶ Christopher

⁶⁴ Frith, *A boke made by Iohn Frith*, L4v-L5r.

⁶⁵ Frith, *A boke made by Iohn Frith*, L6v-L7r.

⁶⁶ For other contrasts between Frith and Askew, see Coles, "The Death of the Author," 522-26.

Dare “requyred moche to knowe therin my meaninge” (24); Bishop Bonner demands that Askew “utter the bottom of my harte” (44); John Standish “byd me saye my mynde” (54); and William Paget “desyred me to speake my mynde to hym” (99). Unlike Frith, who is direct in his replies, Askew responds with silence, more questions, or answers like, “That I have sayd to my lorde of London, I have sayd” (54), even when what she had said before is not clear at all. Represented as never fully available to those who so desperately want her innermost thoughts, Askew’s character maintains a tension between being a present, speaking subject, and an absent, inaccessible persona.

The *Examinations* frequently question, in fact, the very coherence of the interiority that Askew’s interrogators seek. In one of the most provocative moments of the text, Askew responds to her questioners not only with silence but also with a smile:

Besydes thys my lorde mayre layed one thyng unto my charge, which was never spoken of me, but of them. And that was, whether a mouse eatynge the hoste, receyved God or no? Thys questyon ded I never aske, but in dede they asked it of me, wherunto I made them no answe, but smyled. (27)

In a swift stroke, Askew’s character becomes charged with the very ambiguous power that legitimates the cruel, smiling mistress of Petrarchan poetry. A smile is, of course, a bodily sign, but one that is impossible to interpret with any certainty. Askew’s smile suggests the illegibility of the female body—and also the control a female subject can gain from that very position of illegibility. Her smile could be read as a sign of

condescension, of intellectual superiority, or even of the absurdity of the question. But her interrogators—or her readers, for that matter—can never know for sure.

Askew smiles in moments when her character wishes to signal the kind of doubleness that pervades the poetry of Wyatt, Surrey, and their contemporaries. She smiles for the second time in the *lattice examinacyon*, again at a moment in which her sacramentarian beliefs come under fire. In the *lattice examinacyon*, Askew is more direct about her Reformist beliefs, stating outright, “And as for that ye call your God, is but a pece of breade. For a more profe thereof (marke it whan ye lyst), lete it lye in the boxe but iii. monthes, and it wyll be moulde, and so turne to nothyng that is good. Whereupon I am persuaded, that it can not be God” (111). Yet despite her directness, Askew remains at least partly elusive:

After that they wylled me to have a prest. And than I smyled. Then they asked me, if it were not good? I sayd, I wolde confesse my fawtes to God. For I was sure that he wolde heare me with faver. And so we were condempned without a quest. (112)

Rejecting of course the Catholic practice of confession, Askew does so in a manner that infuriates her interrogators. Like Wyatt’s queen, Askew frustrates resolution at the moment when her male interlocutors desire it. When they seek access to the innermost secrets of her conscience, Askew denies them that access by signifying her body with a sign impossible to interpret. Her faults are interpretable only when she is in the company of God—only, that is, when her body is irrelevant.

It is this doubleness with which Askew responds to her opponents—often more than her Reformist beliefs—that frustrates them. For example, when Bonner tries to get Askew to sign a recantation, Askew agrees, but adds to the document, “I Anne Askewe do beleve all maner thynges contayned in the faythe of the Catholyck church” (62). Because in the early days of the Reformation both Catholics and Reformists applied the term “Catholic” to describe their beliefs, the word loses its fixed meaning in Askew’s statement, and the doubleness is not lost on Bonner: “Then because I ded adde unto it, the Catholyck church, he flonge into hys chambre in a great furye” (62). Askew’s ambiguity gives her power, even if that power is only temporary and cannot prevent what will eventually happen to her body. Askew’s body is eventually tortured and executed for her beliefs, but her character in the *Examinations* remains an absent presence—an enigma that can frustrate her male interlocutors at the very moments they desire her.

Askew sustains her ambiguity through her persistent references to her own gender, and she prevents resolution by making the category of “woman” incoherent to her interrogators. When her examiners return to the issue of transubstantiation, pressing her again to answer whether a “beast” can ingest divinity, Askew uses the laws against women to her advantage:

Fortly he asked me, if the host shuld fall, and a beast ded eate it, whether the beast ded receyve God or no? I answered, Seynge ye have taken the paynes to aske thys questyon, I desyre yow also to take so moche payne more, as to assoyle it your selfe. For I wyll not do it, bycause I perceyve ye come to tempte me. And he sayd, it was agaynst the ordre of scoles,

that he whych asked the questyon, shuld answeere it. I tolde hym, I was but a woman, and knewe not the course of scoles. (34)

Again, at the moment in which Askew's interrogators demand that Askew affirm the material presence of Christ's body, Askew avoids doing so by pointing to the slipperiness of her material presence as a woman. While Bale takes Askew's profession of womanly ignorance at face value ("Thys hongrye wolfe practyseth by all craftye wayes possyble, to sucke the bloude of thys innocent lambe" [36]), Askew makes it clear that she plays the role of woman only when it can frustrate her opponents. From the first lines of her text she demonstrates her exegetical knowledge and her ability to outmatch her interrogators' use of scripture, yet she justifies her reticence with Biblical and early modern norms of feminine conduct. The text suggests that Askew can appear—and disappear—as a woman at her will throughout the examinations.

Later in the *first examinacyon* she again points to the incoherence of gender norms, saying, "Then he asked me, whye I had so fewe wordes? And I answered. God hath geven me the gyfte of knowlege, but not of utteraunce. And Salomon sayth, that a woman of fewe wordes, is a gyfte of God, Prover. 19" (51). At once expressing the ideal of female silence and showcasing her scriptural interpretation, Askew exposes the ways in which gender operates not as a stable bodily condition but as a set of competing representations that can be exploited for different effects. Almost immediately after quoting scripture to justify her silence, Askew claims that, "beynge a woman," she does not have the capacity to interpret the Bible at all: "And then doctor Standish desyered my lorde, to byd me saye my mynde, concernynge that same text of S. Paule. I answered, that

it was agaynst saynt Paules lernynge, that I beynge a woman, shuld interprete the scriptures, specyallye where so manye wyse lerned men were” (54). Askew’s statement unravels the coherence of gender identity before her interrogators’ eyes. Quoting Paul’s injunction against female preaching while at the same time using that injunction to avoid speaking her mind about scripture, Askew demonstrates that the very means of forbidding women’s access to scripture paradoxically *require* them to be familiar with and interpret scripture. Askew is able to defer as a woman to the “wyse lerned men” only because she has an intricate knowledge of scripture in the first place.

Even in moments of intense bodily pain, Askew represents herself with a degree of ambiguity that suggests that her torturers can never fully possess her body—even when they physically do. In one of the most remarked upon moments in the *Examinations*, Askew describes the torture that she endured for refusing to implicate the women in Parr’s circle, and she reports what happened in compressed language:

Then they sayd, there were of the counsell that ded maynteyne me. And I sayd, no. Then they ded put me on the racke, bycause I confessed no ladyes nor gentyllwomen to be of my opynyon, and theron they kepte me a longe tyme. And bycause I laye styll and ded not crye, my lorde Chauncellour and master Ryche, toke peynes to racke me their owne handes, tyll I was nygh dead. (127)

Like so many other Reformation martyrs, Askew emphasizes her patient suffering: “I laye styll and ded not crye.” The language of the body becomes more prominent here than in any other moment in the text. Scholars such as James Truman argue that the

language here is infused with sexual violence and that “the perception of her torture as rape authorizes [Askew’s] resistant voice.”⁶⁷ Yet more than a helpless victim, Askew is represented as one who evades her desiring subjects’ full control. Askew focuses on the insatiable desire of her torturers, who “toke peynes to racke me their owne handes,” but she also suggests that she slips through their grasp:

Then the lyefetenaunt caused me to be loused from the racke.
 Incontynentlye I swounded, and then they recovered me agayne. After that
 I sate ii. longe houres reasonynge with my lorde Chauncellour upon the
 bare floore, where as he with manye flatteryng words, persuaded me to
 leave my opynyon. But my lorde God (I thanke hys everlastynge
 goodnesse) gave me grace to persever, and wyll do (I hope) to the verye
 ende. (130)

Despite the chancellor’s “flatteryng words,” Askew refuses to give her torturers the information they seek. Askew’s character does not even tell the reader what transpired while she was “reasonynge with my lorde Chauncellour upon the bare floore” during those “ii. longe houres.” The text fails to articulate fully this highly dramatic moment, and Askew’s presence escapes the interrogators’ and the readers’ control. Askew becomes curiously disembodied even at a time of intense physical pain. The text suggests that Askew can “persever” as a voice only if her body remains difficult to locate.

The *Examinations* suggest, then, that Askew’s ability as a female figure to participate in literary and political culture depends on the very disappearing acts in her

⁶⁷ Truman, “John Foxe,” 42.

text that render her body difficult to pin down. Askew's sustained tension between absence and presence—her enigmatic persona—emerges as deeply informed by both the Petrarchan and Reformist discourses that shape it. Askew's depiction as an elusive female subject draws from the Petrarchan tropes—the smiling, the silence, the obstinacy toward desiring male figures—that pervade her character's responses. Yet it also draws from Askew's skepticism about material presence and her Reformist belief that one cannot “take Christ for the materyall thyng that he is sygnifyed by” (99). Askew writes in the *lattice examinacyon* that “ye shall fynde playnelye, that the thynges whych are seane are temporall, but they that are not seane are everlastyng” (90). Askew's character is one that can never be “seane” in full focus, but always one who is suggestive of a presence much more powerful than her bodily one alone.

A Coy Dame

Askew's representation as an elusive female subject means, of course, that she was vulnerable to critique not only for her Reformist beliefs but also for the very courtly doubleness that helped afford her authority in the *Examinations*. Wyatt and his contemporaries pay no compliment to women when they accuse them of being cruel or double, but draw from a long tradition of viewing women as untrustworthy, unfaithful, and deceptive. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Askew incurred pejorative manifestations of the very strategies that enabled her to outmaneuver her interrogators. The Jesuit Robert Parsons, a member of the underground Catholic network in England, writes of Askew in 1604,

For that she was a coy dame, and of very euill fame for wantonnesse: in that she left the company of her husband, *Maister Kyme*, to gad vp & downe the countrey a ghospelling & ghossipinge where she might, & ought not. And this for diuers yeares before her imprisonment; but especially she delighted to be in London neere the court. . . . By all which, and by the publike opinion and fame, that was of her lightnesse & liberty in that behalfe: euery man may ghesse, what *Iuuencula* she was & how fitt for *Bales* pen, & for Fox his Calendar. And the proud & presumptuous answers, quips, and nips, which she gaue both in matter of Religion, & otherwise to the Kings Councill, and Bishops, when they examined her, and dealt with her seriously for her amendment: do well shew her intollerable arrogancy.⁶⁸

The “coyness” that Askew’s character exhibits in the *Examinations* becomes a liability when read through her enemies. Askew’s agility in evading her interrogators’ questions becomes “wantonnesse” and “arrogancy,” and even her silence becomes loquacious when Parsons emphasizes her “ghospelling & ghossipinge” around the country. Her “presumptuous answers” suggest to Parsons that she is a sexually loose girl, a *Iuuencula* or a young cow. Yet even in his vehement critique of Askew, Parsons exposes his inability to contain the threat that Askew’s coyness unleashes. The “quips, and nips” that Askew delivers to her examiners and the “arrogancy” she suggests through her silences remain “intolerable” even sixty years later. Askew’s elusiveness kept the power relations

⁶⁸ Robert Parsons, *A Treatise of Three Conversions of England from Paganisme to Christian Religion* ([Saint Omer], 1603-1604), 3:495-96.

open indefinitely in a situation that might have excluded her participation, enabling her to have a voice by maintaining bodily enigma. Whether viewed as a heretic or a champion of faith, Askew remained formidable in the public eye and difficult to locate completely.

Interestingly, the *Examinations* end not on a note of certainty but on one of gender ambiguity. In “The Balade whych Anne Askewe made and sange whan she was in Newgate,” which is appended to Bale’s editions of the *Examinations*, Askew offers her readers an intriguing moment of cross-dressing:

Lyke as the armed knyght
 Appoynted to the fielde
 With thys worlde wyll I fyght
 And fayth shall be my shielde. (149)

An androgynous knight, Askew constitutes her identity as a fighter for her faith by the armor she dons rather than the body beneath it. Like Elizabeth Young, who is accused of being “a man in a womans clothes,” Askew generates gender uncertainty in upholding her Reformist beliefs. The poem suggests that Askew retains control by operating within the courtly and Reformist conventions that make her identity difficult to situate.

Critics often highlight this poem for its allusion to Surrey’s translation of Ecclesiastes and for the ways in which both Askew and Surrey offer a thinly veiled indictment of Henry VIII’s tyranny:

I sawe a ryall trone
 Where Justyce shuld have sytt
 But in her stede was one

Of modye cruell wytt.
 Absorpt was rygtwysnesse
 As of the ragynge floude
 Sathan in hys excesse.
 Sucte up the gyltesse bloude. (150)

Here, Henry's policies have allowed the devil to occupy the royal throne. Even worse, Henry possibly represents "Sathan" himself, who is responsible for the "gyltesse bloude" of Askew and of the martyrs that came before her. Yet the poem suggests that the most effective way for Askew—as a courtly woman—to assert a combative voice against Henry's oppression is to speak within the generic modes that render her female body inscrutable. Not just a victim of religious oppression, Askew keeps her ability to continue to fight her opponents—to continue to articulate a voice—by avoiding the reification of her body that was destined to perish for her beliefs.

Askew remains, then, for both contemporary figures and modern critics, a figure of such fascination partly because of the ways in which the *Examinations* prevent clear resolution of her martyrdom by maintaining the ambiguity of her gender and of her body. Her character is enabled by the conventions of Petrarchism and the Reformation—discourses that both unsettle material subjectivity. Although as readers, we may, like Petrarchan lovers or like her interrogators, desire access to what lies behind her silences or behind her armor of faith, the *Examinations* ensure Askew's continued power as a speaking voice by preventing us from ever reaching it.

CHAPTER TWO

Queenship and the Female Counterfeit in Early Modern England

One of the most striking aspects of the trial of Mary Queen of Scots in 1586 is Elizabeth's absence. Contemporary documents place special emphasis on Elizabeth's missing body. Her absence is conspicuous, staged by the prominence of her empty chair. A drawing of the trial depicts at the very top of the page Elizabeth's empty chair, physically larger than the figure of Mary to its right in the doorway.¹ And the official record of the trial notes, "At the upper end of the Chamber was placed a chair for the Queen of England, under a cloth of estate. Over-against it, below and more remote, near the transom or beam that ran cross the room, stood a chair for the Queen of Scots."² Elizabeth's invisibility is triumphant at this moment, demonstrating her authenticity as queen. Mary, on the other hand, despite her physical presence, her tears, and her frequent assertions that she is "an absolute Queen" and thus exempt from the laws of England, is condemned as a traitor.³

How can we understand Elizabeth's unwillingness to be in the same room with Mary, which she maintained throughout Mary's nineteen-year captivity in England and which climaxed in the powerful symbol of her empty chair? Historians have often interpreted Elizabeth's rejections of Mary's repeated requests to meet in person as an

¹ See "Ink and Pencil Drawing of Mary, Queen of Scots in the Great Chamber at Fotheringay Castle," British Library Board Additional MS 48027, fol. 569.

² William Cobbett, ed. *Cobbett's Parliamentary History of England* (London: R. Bagshaw, 1806-1812), quoted in Jayne Elizabeth Lewis, *The Trial of Mary Queen of Scots: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999), 99.

³ Quoted in Lewis, *The Trial of Mary Queen of Scots*, 95.

example either of her extreme cold-heartedness—her “*realpolitik*” attitude toward her cousin, as P.J. Holmes puts it—or of her fear of Mary’s charm.⁴ Jane Dunn argues that Elizabeth “grew increasingly distant and aloof, fearful of what she believed was Mary’s almost magical power to enchant, already exaggerated in her imagination and fuelled with the stories of others.”⁵ Yet the complexity of Elizabeth’s stance toward Mary—her refusal to see her and yet her insistence in her letters and speeches of sisterly proximity—suggests that more is at work here than just Elizabeth’s political ruthlessness or Mary’s personal charm. Why was Mary’s proximity so physically threatening yet so metaphorically necessary for Elizabeth’s power? This chapter seeks to put into a larger context Elizabeth’s relationship with Mary and to interrogate the framework for their sustained tension between absence and presence.

One cultural force certainly at work is Elizabeth’s ability to separate herself from her body natural. Elizabeth is pure body politic at this moment, the intangible corporate entity that stands for her sovereignty, and this intangibility establishes both her legitimacy as queen and her superiority over Mary (whose chair was “below and more remote” than Elizabeth’s empty one). More than any of the English kings that came before her, Elizabeth constantly negotiated the theory of the king’s two bodies, separating, as many scholars have argued, her male body politic from her female body

⁴ P.J. Holmes, “Mary Stewart in England,” in *Mary Stewart: Queen in Three Kingdoms*, ed. Michael Lynch (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 214.

⁵ Jane Dunn, *Elizabeth and Mary: Cousins, Rivals, Queens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), xxi. See also John Guy, who claims that “Elizabeth would not take the risk of meeting Mary, who all along she feared would get the better of her in an argument” (*Queen of Scots: The True Life of Mary Stuart* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004], 434).

natural in order to strengthen the shaky authority of female sovereignty.⁶ In her well-known Tilbury speech in 1588, Elizabeth says to her troops, “I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king and a king of England too.”⁷ Elizabeth famously suggests here that her place in the invisible body politic can compensate for her corporeal female presence.

Yet while scholars have long assumed the body politic to be male,⁸ Elizabeth’s absence in the trial of Mary Queen of Scots—keenly reflected in her sister figure—suggests that the concept also incorporates elements that are specifically female. Critics have in fact questioned the male/female binary of the king’s two bodies, looking at how Elizabeth blurs gender roles in complicated ways,⁹ and Marie Axton points out that the first publication to detail the idea of the body politic in English was actually a pamphlet that uses the theory to defend the right of Mary Queen of Scots from charges of duplicity, asserting her right to the English throne as well as her right as a woman to rule.¹⁰ First

⁶ See, for example, Carole Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), esp. chap. 6, “Elizabeth as King and Queen.”

⁷ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, ed. Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 326.

⁸ See, for example, Leah S. Marcus’s discussion of Elizabeth’s two bodies in *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and Its Discontents* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 53-66. Marcus asserts that “Elizabeth envisioned this primary public identity in clearly male terms” (53).

⁹ For scholarship on the ways in which the concept of a queen puts pressure onto the theory of the king’s two bodies, see, for instance, Susan Frye, *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Katherine Eggert, *Showing Like a Queen: Female Authority and Literary Experiment in Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); and Regina Schulte, ed., *The Body of the Queen: Gender and Rule in the Courtly World, 1500-2000* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006).

¹⁰ Marie Axton, *The Queen’s Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977), 20. Ernst H. Kantorowicz argues that the *Reports* of Edmund Plowden, an Elizabethan lawyer, constitute “the first clear elaboration of that mystical talk with which the English crown jurists enveloped and trimmed their definitions of kingship and royal capacities” (*The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957], 7). He notes that Plowden and his ideas were well known to the public, looking at Shakespeare’s use of the theory

published in 1569 despite Elizabeth's suppression of materials sympathetic to Mary,¹¹ John Leslie's *A defence of the honour of the right highe, mightye and noble Princesse Marie Quene of Scotland* complicates the idea that the theory of the king's two bodies was one that Elizabeth alone manipulated to her own benefit, and it also implies that the theory hinges on contemporary gender anxieties—particularly the fear of the female duplicity—just as much as on the theological concepts from which the theory stems.¹²

This chapter posits that Elizabeth's and Mary's struggles over their female sovereignty can be fully understood only by examining their intersections with another discourse equally concerned with the doubleness of women: Petrarchism. Part of what makes a Petrarchan mistress elusive is the difficulty of determining a real mistress from a false, or counterfeit, one. Language of counterfeiting is of course not limited to Petrarchism—Shakespearean characters like Richard III and Falstaff, who were known for their duplicity, were accused of “counterfeiting” their behavior, for example¹³—but anxiety about counterfeiting became particularly intense when the counterfeit in question

of the king's two bodies in *Richard II* (24-41). Yet Plowden's *Reports* were originally written in French and were not translated into English until the seventeenth century. Axton criticizes Kantorowicz for failing to “explore the Elizabethan setting [of the theory of the king's two bodies] in any depth,” and her book considers “in more detail the political circumstances in which the concept flourished” (15). She asserts, “Through Leslie's printed pamphlet Plowden's interpretation of history by means of the king's two bodies reached a wide range of English readers” (20).

¹¹ James Emerson Phillips, *Images of a Queen: Mary Stuart in Sixteenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964), 89.

¹² John Leslie, *A defence of the honour of the right highe, mightye and noble Princesse Marie Quene of Scotlande and dowager of France, with a declaration aswell of her right, title & intereste to the succession of the crowne of Englande, as that the regimete of women ys conformable to the lawe of God and nature* (London: Eusebius Dicaeophile, 1569). All subsequent references to this pamphlet will be cited by page number parenthetically in the text.

¹³ See *I Henry VI*, when Somerset tells Richard, “'Tis not for fear, but anger, that thy cheeks / Blush for pure shame to counterfeit our roses” (*The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans and J. J. M. Tobin, 2nd ed. [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997], 2.4.65-66); and *I Henry IV*, when Falstaff says to Prince Harry, “Counterfeit? I lie, I am no counterfeit. To die is to be a counterfeit, for he is but the counterfeit of a man who hath not the life of a man” (5.4.114-17).

was a woman. Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, for instance, imagines legitimate Petrarchan mistresses/queens—Una, Florimell, Britomart, Mercilla—only by describing, and ultimately eliminating, their counterfeit doubles—Duessa, False Florimell, Radigund, Lucifera. Of course, the very process of doubling these female characters calls into question the distinctions between them and suggests that both the concept of authenticity and the concept of the body politic are frauds. Yet the anxiety about authenticating a true female self in Petrarchan literature points to the cultural currency of the concept of the counterfeit woman—its potential to undermine as well as (tenuously) uphold the idea of a woman in power. Elizabeth could show herself as the legitimate female sovereign only in relation to a counterfeit double, Mary Queen of Scots.¹⁴

The leitmotif that runs through Leslie's pamphlet is, in fact, the idea of the counterfeit. Leslie argues that any evidence that his opponents produce against Mary's claim to the throne—including the letters and poems incriminating Mary, Henry VIII's will barring his sister Margaret's descendants from the throne, and the laws of nature cited to prove that women's rule is monstrous—is counterfeit. He insists that Mary Queen of Scots is the real thing: the true heir to the throne and a part of the invisible body politic to which Elizabeth lays claim. Leslie's anxious insistence on Mary's authenticity as queen and yet his claim that the queen is so easily counterfeited highlight the intersections between the discourses about female sovereignty and the discourses about the false Petrarchan woman. The absent presence of Elizabeth during Mary's trial, the

¹⁴ See Mary Thomas Crane, *Framing Authority: Sayings, Self, and Society in Sixteenth-Century England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), for a reading of how the courtly lyric was used to demonstrate a sense of authenticity, "to assert a feeling presence, a genuine speaking voice engendered by desire and pain" (156). Crane argues that the courtly lyric existed in tension with the humanist tradition of aphoristic poetry, particularly in Wyatt's lyrics.

charges against Mary that she is a false counterfeit, and the long, painful exchange between the two queens in which Mary pleads to Elizabeth to allow her to authenticate herself before her—all of these cultural expressions suggest that Petrarchism is at play when one of the most important questions in early modern England—that of who is the real queen—is being decided.

Scholars have long noted Elizabeth's use of Petrarchan conventions throughout her reign. Susan Frye, for instance, argues that in Elizabeth's own Petrarchan lyrics, Elizabeth creates distance between her and her courtiers, sending "a clear if ironic message to her 'suitors' to leave her alone."¹⁵ Yet Elizabeth's relationship to Petrarchism is more than just a tool for managing her male courtiers. It is also a high stakes cultural discourse that she needs to survive as a female sovereign. Elizabeth's correspondence with Mary Queen of Scots and her handling of her trial suggest that she recognizes that to prove her authenticity as a queen, she must prove her authenticity as a woman—which involves holding up and eventually eliminating her counterfeit double. To do so, she carefully stages both her absence and presence, performing the role of the elusive Petrarchan mistress to make sure that she is not the one who materializes as the counterfeit double and that she is not the one who disappears in the end.

This chapter will examine sixteenth-century discourses on female counterfeits, looking at how the anxiety about a woman's ability to rule intersects with the anxiety

¹⁵ Frye, *Elizabeth I*, 110. See also Louis Adrian Montrose, who focuses on Elizabeth's courtiers' use of Petrarchan language, which he argues "provided her (male) subjects with a flexible medium—at once humble, elegant, and intimate—in which they could supplicate and inveigle their royal mistress, and in which they could project and symbolically master the condition of their subjection to a female ruler" ("The Elizabethan Subject and the Spenserian Text," in *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts*, ed. Patricia Parker and David Quint [Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986], 325-26).

about determining a true woman from a false one. I argue that the theory of the king's two bodies is not only a "crypto-theological" medieval concept¹⁶ but also a concept that overlaps with sixteenth-century ideas about the elusive Petrarchan mistress. I look at a variety of texts that deal with the question of female sovereignty, suggesting that the debate about the body politic—about whether a person is part of a larger, invisible, sovereign corporation—becomes most charged when the body in question is female.

Leslie's Defense of Mary

Published the year after Mary fled to England in 1568 and became a prisoner of Elizabeth, Leslie's pamphlet makes three claims about Mary: that she is a true woman, innocent of the charges against her; that she is a true sovereign, next in line to the English throne; and that women have the right to rule because true women could be true sovereigns. His threefold argument reveals the proximity of the anxieties about sovereignty and about women. On the one hand, Leslie's argument about Mary's authenticity props up her validity as a sovereign, but on the other, it calls into question the entire idea of sovereignty, which can be determined only by holding up other versions of Mary—like those in the love letters supposedly written by her—as counterfeits.

Leslie published his pamphlet in response to a number of controversies, both recent and longstanding, surrounding Mary. The most recent controversy was the murder of Mary's second husband, Lord Darnley, in 1567. Mary's opponents, including her illegitimate half-brother, the earl of Moray, accused Mary of conspiring to murder

¹⁶ Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 16.

Darnley with the earl of Bothwell, whom she hastily married shortly after Darnley's death. At the time of the pamphlet's publication, Mary had sought refuge in England from those who had driven her out of Scotland, and she found herself a prisoner of Elizabeth. One of the primary pieces of evidence Mary's opponents used against her was a set of love letters and sonnets now called the Casket Letters, supposedly written by Mary to Bothwell. In these papers, the female speaker professes her love for Bothwell and her jealousy of Bothwell's wife.¹⁷ Moray's use of the Casket Letters as the main evidence of Mary's guilt suggests that Mary's threat derives not only from her potential role as a murderer but also from her role as Petrarchan mistress—a false, deceiving female lover. Leslie argues that these documents are forgeries, a situation that many historians today believe is probable,¹⁸ but regardless of their validity, they point to the strong cultural anxiety about the doubleness of women.

Leslie's pamphlet also addresses the longstanding controversies over Mary's place in the succession of the English throne as well as her ability as a woman to rule. Despite many tactical disadvantages, Mary insisted on her right to inherit England's crown throughout her entire life, rejecting the Treaty of Edinburgh, which would have barred Mary from wearing English arms. Yet Elizabeth, refusing to name any successors and particularly reluctant to name one who is Catholic, denied Mary's right on the grounds that she is a foreigner (Mary was born in Scotland and raised in France) and on the grounds that Henry VIII disinherited any descendents of his sister Margaret, of whom

¹⁷ Before Bothwell married Mary, he was married to Jane Gordon. Bothwell's marriage to Gordon was nullified one week before his marriage to Mary.

¹⁸ See, for example, Retha M. Warnicke, *Mary Queen of Scots* (London: Routledge, 2006), 200-201; and A.E. MacRobert, *Mary, Queen of Scots and the Casket Letters* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002).

Mary was one. Finally, Leslie responds to the recent “poysoned pestiferous pamphlett” (“To the gentle Reader,” 2v)—most certainly John Knox’s *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrvovs regiment of women* (1558), which argues that women should never be able to rule over men because they are “vnconstant, variable, cruell and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment.”¹⁹ Leslie’s pamphlet thus addresses two intersecting cultural fears in Tudor England: the difficulty of distinguishing a true sovereign from a false one, and the difficulty of distinguishing a true woman from a false one.

A fierce advocate for Mary, Leslie writes the pamphlet primarily to prove Mary’s authenticity—as a loyal wife, as an heir to the English throne, and as a woman fit to rule. On the one hand, Leslie points to Mary’s female body as evidence for this authenticity, looking at the material conditions of the gender roles Mary plays. Leslie emphasizes Mary’s innocence in the murder of Darnley because women, he claims, are incapable of such brutality. He insists that her “sexe naturallye abhorrethe suche butcherlye practyzes” (3v), and he argues that Mary grieved appropriately for her husband as women are meant to do: “They, as women most commonlie do take their honour and cheif dignitie of their husbands. . . . And yet did this good gentle ladie bemoane, even such a notable time, enioinge and vsinge none other then candle light, as was knowen to all the nobilitie of Scotlande” (14r-v). Leslie highlights the physical conditions of Mary’s mourning—the bemoaning, the use of candlelight—as proof of her genuine grief.

Leslie also uses Mary’s gender as evidence of her true place in the succession, emphasizing Mary’s proximity to Elizabeth:

¹⁹ John Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrvovs regiment of women* ([Geneva], 1558), 10r.

For this Ladye and Quene ys her most nighe neighbour by place: And her nighe cosen and sister by bloude. She ys a Quene, and therefore this were a fitt benefitt for her relief from a Quene. Yea she ys, as yt were her dawghter, bothe by dawghterlye reuerence she beareth her maiestie, and by reason she ys of God called to the daughters place in the succession of the crowne. (“To the gentle Reader”)

A cousin, sister, and daughter to Elizabeth, Mary becomes, through Leslie’s logic, the inevitable heir to Elizabeth with her multiplying familial associations.²⁰ Leslie underscores Mary’s likeness to Elizabeth by using some of the same strategies that Elizabeth herself used to garner support from her people, including stressing Mary’s motherly characteristics.²¹ He argues that she cannot have murdered Darnley because of her nurturing behavior toward him:

for besids all other respects thowghe they Were not farre differente in yeaes, she was to him not onlie a loyall Prince, a louinge and deare wyfe, but a most carefull and tendre mother with all, . . . Where, as also at diuers other places, especiallie at Edenborowghe, she from time to time most louingelie entertayned, and most tenderlie cherished him euer, eauen to the verie laste howre, that euer she sawe him. (6v-7r)

²⁰ Elizabeth also invokes a variety of kinship relations as a way of securing power. See Kimberly Anne Coles, who argues that “by claiming an excess of kinship she could undermine the necessity to make exogamous kinship ties” (“‘Perfect hole’: Elizabeth I, Spenser, and Chaste Productions,” *English Literary Renaissance* 32, no. 1 [2002]: 39).

²¹ For an analysis of the ways in which Elizabeth used tropes of motherhood to her advantage, see Christine Coch, “‘Mother of my Contreye’: Elizabeth I and Tudor Constructions of Motherhood,” *English Literary Renaissance* 26, no. 3 (1996): 423-50.

Interestingly, Leslie uses the positive connotations of the gender roles Mary plays to authenticate her as both woman and queen. Mary's trueness as a woman—as a “deare wyfe,” and “tendre mother”—bleeds into her trueness as a sovereign—as a “loyall Prince,” “cosen,” “sister,” and “dawghter” to Elizabeth.

Just as much as Leslie links Mary's female body to her authenticity as a sovereign, though, he also uses Mary's bodilessness—her invisible body politic—to prove her place in the succession. Leslie dismisses, for instance, charges that Mary cannot succeed to the English throne because she is a foreigner by arguing that as a sovereign, Mary is not subject to the common law that bars ordinary citizens from inheriting English property if they are foreign born. Leslie contends that

the argumentes and proufes which we meane to alleage and bringe forthe for the confirmation of her right and title in succession, (as heire apparente) to the crowne of Englande, are gathered and grownded vpon the lawes of God and nature, and not onlie receaued in the ciuill pollicies of other nations, but also in the olde lawes and customes of our owne contrey. (55v)

Just as nature governs Mary's role as a woman, whose “sexer naturallye abhorrethe suche butcherlye practyzes” as murder (3v), nature also governs her role as sovereign, which is larger than the role of a private person. Articulating Edmund Plowden's ideas about the king's two bodies, Leslie argues that Mary is part of a corporate body politic and as such, she is not subject to the ordinary rule of law:

I saye that there ys a greate difference betwene the kinges right and the right of others. And that the title of the crowne of this realme ys not subiecte to the rules and principles of the common lawe of this realme as to be ruled and tried after suche order and course as the inheritance of priuate personnes ys by the same. (56v)

In Leslie's view, Mary cannot be considered foreign if her body natural is taken out of the equation because "the kinge cometh to the crowne not onlie by discente, but also and cheifelie by succession, as vnto a corporation" (61v). Mary's physical body is not what actually inherits the crown and so it becomes impossible, according to Leslie, to invalidate Mary's sovereignty through that body.

The problem with Leslie's argument about Mary's authenticity is that his primary rebuttal to critics who claim they have proof of Mary's treasonous activities is that it is remarkably easy to counterfeit Mary's presence. He denies that Mary wrote the Casket Letters, arguing,

Thincke ye that wise & experte men are ignorante, howe perelouse and daungerouse a matter yt ys, to fasten any good prouf vpon collation of lettres, and howe easie yt ys to some men to imitate & counterfaite any character? . . . As thowghe manie in Scotlande coulde not expresse and resemble, and counterfeite in their writinge, the Quenes verie character?
(11v-12r)

Paradoxically, Mary's very authenticity rests on the fact that she can be duplicated, forged, or copied.

Leslie asserts that no kingship can be validated based on the physical documents it produces. He questions the validity of Henry VIII's statute disinheriting his sister Margaret's descendants, arguing that there is no way to prove whether or not the document is a forgery:

The monumentes of all antiquitie, the memorie of all ages, and of our owne age, and daylie experience can tell and shewe vs manye lamentable examples of manye a good and lawfull testamente by vndewe and craftie meanes, by false and suborned witnesses, by the couetous bearinge and maintenance of suche as be in auctoritie quite vndone and ouerthrowne.

(93r)

Leslie says that a king could never produce any document that threatens the body politic, for “the kinge as kinge coulde not dispose the crowne by his will And was in this behalfe but an arbiter and comissioner” (108r). Thus in Leslie's pamphlet, we find the concept of sovereignty—when the sovereign is female—strained between the idea that she is validated by her physical presence—her tears for her dead husband, her motherly care for her people, her sisterly love for Elizabeth—and the idea that that she can never be validated by her physical presence because she is part of an invisible body politic.

The very transmission of the Casket Letters rendered it impossible to trace the originals—and thus impossible to determine authenticity. In what Retha Warnicke calls a “bizarre publication record,” Mary's love letters became translated, multiplied, and altered all while the so-called originals disappeared.²² The first transmission of the letters

²² Warnicke, *Mary Queen of Scots*, 200.

occurred when in 1568 Moray sent to English commissioners translations of the letters—supposedly written originally in French, which Mary could fluently write—in Scots, which Mary could speak but not write. Why the letters were sent in Scots to the English commissioners, who could read French, remains a mystery to scholars, and some believe that this action suggests that the originals were in Scots after all. Ironically, the commissioners took these letters as evidence of Mary’s duplicity, even though they could not have been written in “her owne hand”:

Afterwardes they shewed unto us one horrible and longe lettre of her owne hand, as they saye, contayning foule matteir and abhominable, to be either thought of, or to be written by a prince, . . . The said lettres and ballades do discover suche inordinate And filthie love betwene her and Bothaill, her loothsomnes and abhorringe of her husband that was murdered, in suche sorte, as every good and godlie man cannot but detest and abhorre the same. And theis men heare do constantly affirme the said lettres and other writinges which they produce, of her owne hand, to be of her owne hand in dede, and do offer to sweare and take their othe thereupon the matteir conteyned in them beinge suche as coulde hardely be invented or devised by anie other then by her selfe . . . And as it is harde to counterfeite so manie, so the matteir of them, and the manner how theis men came by them, is suche, as it semethe that God (in whose sight

murder and bludshed of the innocent is abhominable) wolde not permitte the same to be hidde or concealed.²³

Their testimony calls into question the methods by which authenticity is gauged.

Although the only evidence that these letters are in Mary's "owne hand" comes from the Scottish messengers ("as they saye"), the titillating content ("foule matteir" and "filthie love") becomes solid proof. The commissioners find it impossible that "so many" letters (eight) could be counterfeited, but they find it certain that a woman could be duplicitous.

When the Casket Letters made it into print, they were further removed from any sense of original authenticity. George Buchanan first printed the letters in his Latin work condemning Mary in 1571. This work was soon translated into Anglicized Scots as *Ane Detectiovn of the duinges of Marie Quene of Scottes*.²⁴ The letters were printed in French only in 1572 in what Warnicke calls "bad translations of the Scots, which seem to be versions of Buchanan's Latin renditions of the originals."²⁵ Eventually, the casket itself—the "small guilt coffer" that was produced at Westminster in 1568 as evidence of Mary's love affair with Bothwell²⁶—disappeared, and all that was left of the letters were the various versions that circulated in published form. Whether they are counterfeits, as Leslie claims, or not, their distance from the purported originals obscures the idea that an

²³ United Kingdom, Public Record Office, "Norfolk etc. to Elizabeth," 11 October 1568, *Calendar of State Papers Relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots 1547-1603*, ed. Joseph Bain, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: H.M. General Register House, 1900), no. 854, pp. 527-28.

²⁴ George Buchanan, *Ane Detectiovn of the duinges of Marie Quene of Scottes touchand the murder of hir husband, and hir conspiracie, adulterie, and pretended mariage with the Erle Bothwell. And ane defence of the trew Lordis, mainteineris of the Kingis graces actioun and authoritie. Translatit out of the Latine quhilke was written by G.B.*, [London: John Day, 1571], hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by page number.

²⁵ Warnicke, *Mary Queen of Scots*, 200.

²⁶ United Kingdom, Public Record Office, "Fifth Session at Westminster," 7 December 1568, *Calendar of State Papers Relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots 1547-1603*, ed. Joseph Bain, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: H.M. General Register House, 1900), no. 912, p. 569.

authentic female queen can ever be located. Both Leslie and his detractors make their argument about Mary based on that which cannot be discovered—in Leslie’s case, the invisible body politic, and in her detractors’ case, the missing letters.

As Leslie’s pamphlet nears the end, it becomes questionable, despite his efforts to prove Mary’s authenticity, whether authenticity can ever be determined at all. Even a law of nature—on which the theory of the king’s two bodies rests—can apparently be counterfeited. When Leslie attacks those who argue that women who rule go against the law of nature, he claims that this law of nature is actually a counterfeit:

This counterfeate lawe of nature neither ys, nor euer was, nor as farre as reason maye reache to, euer shalbe. Yt shalbe inowghe for vs to o[ver]throwe & caste vnderfote this counterfeate lawe: to shewe and proue that women haue from time to time borne princelie regimente in the moste notable partes in the worlde (129r-v)

Leslie goes cites numerous examples of women—from the biblical Deborah to the Amazons—who reigned successfully, arguing that they prove any law of nature that bars women from rule to be false. Yet although Leslie clings to an idea of a transcendent natural law, his very concept of a “counterfeate lawe” points to the contingency of all laws. Constance Jordan argues, “Leslie, in fact, conceives of the law of nature as a product of historical process.”²⁷ Far from establishing authenticity, Leslie’s pamphlet introduces the idea of competing laws of nature, suggesting that a law’s validity can shift.

²⁷ Constance Jordan, “Woman’s Rule in Sixteenth-Century British Political Thought,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (1987): 445.

Leslie's argument, then, that that the Scottish rebels will be exposed for their plainly counterfeit activity becomes problematic. Leslie writes that "They shall at lenghte finde owte, and throwghlie perceau and knowe, theis mens dealings and doings, Who as yet cover theire fowle filthie lienge, detestable practizes, and traiterous enormities, withesuche a visarde of counterfeite false fained holines" (19v). Yet this is precisely the argument that Mary's detractors use against her. Buchanan's *Ane Detectiovn* argues that after Darnley was killed, Mary

beganne to set hir face, and with counterfaying of mournyng she labored to appease the hartes of the grudgyng pepill. . . . Quhen of the forty dayes that are apoyntit for the mournnyng, scarce twelue wer yet fully past, and the counterfaytyng wald nat frame half handsomely, & to disclose hir true affections so soone she was somewhat ashamit, at length takyng hart of grace vnto hir, and neglectyng sic trifles, she commeth to her own byace, and openly sheweth hir owne naturall conditions. (E2v-E3r)

Like Leslie, who argues that the Scottish rebels' counterfeit practices will become evident, Buchanan contends that Mary's counterfeit mourning quickly became transparent. Both writers claim how easy it is to counterfeit a woman, yet both insist how easy it is to recognize a counterfeit woman, calling into question whether female authenticity can be established at all. Their reasoning reveals the contingency of authenticity, which can be evident only in the speech acts that declare it.

The nature of Leslie and Buchanan's dispute over Mary—whether her mourning for Darnley is real or not—engages in a contemporary anxiety about determining the

authenticity of human passions, especially in women. Timothy Bright's *A Treatise of Melancholie* (1586) attempts to provide a physiological explanation for why people do things like sigh, sob, blush, and cry. In his chapter, "The causes of teares, and their saltnesse," Bright explains what produces crying, and although his treatise addresses melancholy in general, this chapter addresses mainly women, providing a humoral explanation of why women and children "are apt to teares": "They are almost altogether of a moist, rare, and tender body, especially of brayne and heart, which both being of that temper, carie the rest of the parts into like disposition: this is the cause why children are more apt to weepe, then those that are of greater yeares, and women more then men, the one hauing by youth the body moist, rare, & soft, the other by sex."²⁸ Bright details the bodily process through which tears are produced, emphasizing the passivity of the person crying: after the body "gathereth in one her spirits, and bloud, & calleth them in," the brain must release the "contracted substance, signifieth by shower of tears" (146-47). Bright insists on the authenticity of tears, "for tears cannot be counterfettet, because they rise not of any action or facultie voluntarie, but naturall" (148).

Yet despite Bright's descriptions of the naturalness of tears, his treatise reveals anxiety about whether or not melancholy can be feigned.²⁹ One of the purposes of his text is to determine "what the difference is betwixt natural melancholie, and that heauy hande

²⁸ Timothy Bright, *A Treatise of Melancholie*, reproduced from the 1586 edition printed by Thomas Vautrollier, with an introduction by Hardin Craig (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), 143-44, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by page number.

²⁹ For a reading of the contradictions in Bright's treatise, see Mary Thomas Crane, *Shakespeare's Brain: Reading with Cognitive Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 120-24. Crane argues, "In his attempts to uphold both a material theory of humoral psychology and an idealizing theory of an immaterial and transcendent soul, Bright includes lengthy, often contradictory descriptions of the internal workings of body, soul, and mind" (120). My reading of Bright is influenced by Crane's.

of God vpon the afflicted conscience, tormented with remorse of sinne, & feare of his iudgement” (“The Epistle Dedicatorie,” 3v). Bright attempts to separate those who have an involuntary reaction from those who have an invisible, sinister reason for appearing melancholic. And although Bright attempts to hold these two categories apart, many early modern writers—who express deep suspicion of women’s tears—question whether or not people could really tell the difference. While tears often indicate the sincerity of the tormented Petrarchan lover, for instance, the tears of the beloved generate uncertainty or even proof of falseness. As Othello becomes convinced of Desdemona’s faithlessness, he exclaims, “O, devil, devil! / If that the earth could teem with woman’s tears, / Each drop she falls would prove a crocodile.”³⁰ Bright’s insistence that tears must be real and yet his anxiety that grief may be false participate in this cultural unease about locating the authenticity of a woman’s behavior. The grief of Mary Queen of Scots—ardently defended by Leslie and ardently dismissed by Buchanan—calls into question the ability ever fully to secure the authority of a female queen, especially when that authority is so dependent on proving the authenticity of female behavior.

Ultimately, Leslie’s defense of Mary as an authentic woman and queen reveals the vexed entanglement between those two concepts. Leslie’s treatise exposes the contradictions inherent in trying to prove female authenticity. While on the one hand, Mary’s feminine conduct serves as evidence of her true role as queen, the easy duplication of this conduct threatens to undermine her very sovereignty. While Leslie insists that the counterfeits of Mary only further certify her queenly position, the text

³⁰ Shakespeare, *Othello*, 4.1.244-46.

reveals the tension in early modern culture between desiring validation in the female body and fearing that the female body—with its inherent duplicity—can never validate anything at all. Leslie’s anxiety about counterfeits, particularly as they apply to female behavior, suggests that the idea of female sovereignty is both threatened and propped up by the idea that there is a counterfeit woman with which to contrast the real one.

The Face of Falsehood: Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*

Just as Leslie’s pamphlet interrogates whether a woman can be validated as a real sovereign or not, Petrarchan literature throughout the sixteenth century repeatedly dwells on the question of how to determine the authenticity of a beloved mistress. The poems in Richard Tottel’s *Songes and Sonettes*, which were printed in eleven editions from 1557 to 1587, both obsessively praise the Petrarchan mistress and lament her falseness.³¹ The collection often juxtaposes poems with opposing reactions to women’s beauty. In one of Surrey’s poems, for instance, the speaker praises the beauty of Geraldine:

Honsdon did first present her to mine iyen:
 Bright is her hewe, and Geraldine she hight.

 Her beauty of kinde, her vertues from above.
 Happy is he, that can obtain her love.³²

³¹ Tottel’s *Songes and Sonettes* includes revised versions of poems by Wyatt, Surrey, and other unknown authors. Tottel was the first to publish these Petrarchan writers, making the “ungentle horders up of such tresure” available on to English readers on a broader scale (“To the reder,” in *Richard Tottel’s Songes and Sonettes: The Elizabethan Version*, ed. Paul A. Marquis, Renaissance English Text Society 7th Series 338 [Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2007], 1).

³² Marquis, *Richard Tottel’s Songes and Sonettes*, 8.

In the following poem, the speaker insists that female beauty is just a trap:

Brittle beautie, that nature made so fraile,
 Wherof the gift is small, and short the season,

 Slipper in sliding as is an eles taile,
 Hard to attaine, once gotten not geason,
 Jewel of jeopardie that perill doth assaile,
 False and untrue, enticed oft to treason.³³

In its treatment of the Petrarchan mistress, the collection suggests the impossibility of establishing true beauty from false, real women from those with “cloked doublenesse.”³⁴

In the 1580s and 1590s, when writers revived interest in Petrarchan poetry, the trope of the duplicitous woman often became literalized as sonneteers struggled to distinguish true mistresses from false doubles. One way that a sonneteer demonstrates the authenticity of his mistress is to introduce a false one who tries to entice him away. Yet in doing so, he exposes the close proximity of the real and the false mistress, who, after all, look exactly alike. In Barnabe Barnes’s *Parthenophil and Parthenophe* (1593), the speaker tells of his heart, represented as an unsuspecting “youthfull squier,” who cannot distinguish the real mistress (Parthenophe) from the “false mistresse” (Laya):

It chaunced after, that an youthfull squier,
 Such as in courting, could the crafty guise,
 Beheld light Laya, shee with fresh desier,

³³ Marquis, *Richard Tottel’s Songes and Sonettes*, 8-9.

³⁴ Marquis, *Richard Tottel’s Songes and Sonettes*, 54.

Hoping th'atchieument of some richer prise:
 Drew to the Courtier, who with tender kisse,
 (As are their guilefull fashions which dissemble)
 First him saluted, then with forged blisse
 Of doubtlesse hope, sweete wordes by pause did tremble.
 So whiles shee sleightly gloas'd, with her new pray,
 Mine hartes eye tending his false mistrisse traine:
 Vnyoak't himselfe, & closely scap't away,
 And to Parthenophe did poast amaine
 For liberall pardon, which she did obtaine:
 And iudge (Parthenophe) for thou canst tell,
 That his escape from Laya, pleas'd mee well.³⁵

Barnes's speaker, who helplessly watches the situation unfold, insists that the counterfeit woman is deceptive but ultimately exposes that her "tender kisse" and "sweete wordes" are indistinguishable from those coming from the real thing. Although the squire comes to his senses, rushing back to Parthenophe for "liberall pardon," the speaker elides exactly what it is that tips him off to Laya's guile, suggesting that Parthenophe's authenticity may be more slippery than the speaker admits.

Spenser's *Faerie Queene* offers the most extended treatment of female counterfeits in the sixteenth century. His poem registers the intertwined anxiety about assessing the authenticity of a Petrarchan mistress and of a female queen. Of course, the

³⁵ Barnabe Barnes, sonnet 5, in *Parthenophil and Parthenophe: A Critical Edition*, ed. Victor A. Doyno (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971), 5-6.

authenticity of the poem's namesake, the Faerie Queene, remains suspended because she is never present or even named.³⁶ Present only through her tantalizing traces (like the imprint she leaves after Arthur's dream) and endlessly pursued by Arthur, the Faerie Queene represents the ultimate elusive Petrarchan mistress. The figures who supposedly do reflect/refract Gloriana—such as Una, Florimell, Belpheobe, Britomart, and Mercilla—are all curiously doubled, suggesting that the only way to legitimate these sovereign women is to hold them against their false Petrarchan twins. Yet just as it remains impossible to determine whether the tears of Mary Queen of Scots are true or forged, the line between the doubled women fails to remain firm throughout the epic poem, and the false doubles threaten as much as validate their true versions. Ultimately, female authority for the characters of the *Faerie Queene* remains just as elusive as Gloriana herself—reliant on, yet never secured by, the shadow of female duplicity.

Spenser alerts his readers to his interest in doubled female bodies before the poem even begins in his letter to Raleigh:

In that Faery Queene I meane glory in my generall intention, but in my particular I conceiue the most excellent and glorious person of our soueraine the Queene, and her kingdome in Faery land. And yet in some places els, I doe otherwise shadow her. For considering she beareth two persons, the one of a most royall Queene or Empresse, the other of a most vertuous and beautifull Lady, this latter part in some places I doe expresse

³⁶ On Spenser's inability to name the Faerie Queene, see Elizabeth J. Bellamy, "The Vocative and the Vocational: The Unreadability of Elizabeth in the *Faerie Queene*," *English Literary History* 54, no. 1 (1987): 1-30. In her Derridean reading, Bellamy argues that Spenser's inability to name Elizabeth suggests that his engagement with language is an endless series of deferrals.

in Belpheobe, fashioning her name according to your owne excellent
concept of Cynthia, (Phoebe and Cynthia being both names of Diana.)³⁷

Referring to the concept of the king's two bodies, Spenser suggests the extent to which Petrarchism is an integral component of female sovereignty. Belpheobe, the only character Spenser specifically names as "shadowing" Elizabeth, is depicted as a desirable Petrarchan mistress in the excessive blazons that describe her and in her ability to frustrate the men, like Timias, who fall in love with her.³⁸

Yet the two bodies that seem to interest Spenser the most are not the body politic and body natural, but the numerous examples of doubled Petrarchan female characters throughout the poem. Mary Villeponteaux, for example, argues that although Elizabeth's use of the theory of the king's two bodies ostensibly compensated for her weaker female body natural, in actuality, public interest in the body natural was much stronger: "in Spenser's attempts to represent his queen, the private body usually supersedes the public one."³⁹ And these private bodies multiply when Spenser represents female authority; for every good woman the poem depicts, a mirrored bad one emerges. At one point in the poem, Spenser alludes to his anxiety about concentrating so much of his poem on

³⁷ Edmund Spenser, "Letter to Raleigh," in *The Faerie Queene*, 2nd ed., ed. A.C. Hamilton (London: Pearson, 2001), 716. All references to the poem come from this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text by book, canto, and stanza number.

³⁸ For a discussion on the blazons used to describe Belpheobe, see Montrose, "The Elizabethan Subject," 326-28.

³⁹ Mary Villeponteaux, "'Not as women wonted be': Spenser's Amazon Queen," in *Dissing Elizabeth: Negative Representations of Gloriana*, ed. Julia M. Walker (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 210. Montrose suggests that Belpheobe but not Gloriana appears as a character "at least in part because the beautiful and virtuous lady is more manipulable by the conventions of literary representation—notably those associated with Petrarchism—than is the empress, that erotic conventions structure Elizabethan relations of power in ways advantageous to the writing subject" ("The Elizabethan Subject," 325).

“wanton” women (3.9.1), but he justifies his focus on these women by arguing that they make the good women seem even better:

But neuer let th’ensample of the bad
 Offend the good: for good by paragone
 Of euill, may more notably be rad,
 As white seemes fayrer, macht with blacke attone;
 Ne all are shamed by the fault of one:
 For lo in heuen, whereas all goodnes is,
 Emongst the Angels, a whole legione
 Of wicked Sprightes did fall from happy blis;
 What wonder then, if one of women all did mis? (3.9.2)

Spenser articulates one of the key anxieties of the poem—the difficulty of interpreting good from bad—and this stanza indicates the gendered inflection of this anxiety—the fear that bad women can tarnish good simply through their proximity. Spenser maintains the difference between good and bad, yet he suggests that the only way to recognize good is to hold it up to its opposite. The depiction of good women and their doubles in the poem highlights the precarious position of female authority, at once legitimated and threatened by “th’ensample of the bad.”

Spenser’s initial treatment of female counterfeits comes at the very opening of the poem in the first canto of book 1. Here we meet a “louely Lady,” the prototype of the mistress in the *Faerie Queene*, and Spenser emphasizes both her sovereign and Petrarchan qualities from the outset (1.1.4). The yet unnamed Una “by descent from

Royall lynage came / Of ancient Kinges and Queenes” (1.1.5), and she also displays the characteristic Petrarchan white skin, “much whiter” than even the Asse who is “more white then snow” (1.1.4). Yet Una does not fully come into being until Archimago creates the false Una that tricks Redcrosse; as A.C. Hamilton observes, “She is named only now when her double appears” (1.1.45n). Spenser’s use of the language of counterfeiting suggests the extent to which the false Una—“th’ensample of the bad”—validates the real Una’s goodness with her stark contrast. Spenser describes her “false shewes” and her “feigned hew” (1.1.46.), and her wanton behavior makes Una’s chastity more apparent—her whiteness easier to “be rad.”

Yet the problem with false Una is that she so closely resembles the real Una that the characters cannot tell the difference. Even Archimago, who creates the false Una, “Was nigh beguiled with so goodly sight” (1.1.45). Noting that the false Una is dressed “all in white” (1.1.45), Spenser does not make white “fayrer, macht with blacke attone,” but actually matches white with white. The false Una, “Most like that virgin true, which for her knight him took” (1.1.49.9), not only upholds the real Una with her wicked contrast but also threatens to take her down with her similarity. In the opening canto of the poem, Spenser signals the complex function of the female counterfeit. Una needs the false Una for her legitimacy—for her very naming in the poem—yet is made vulnerable by that same process. Una’s sovereignty rests on, in Leslie’s words, “howe easie yt ys to some men to imitate & counterfaite any character” (11v) yet can never be secured by the specter of her counterfeit double.

Of course, women are not the only characters who are doubled in the *Faerie Queene*. Archimago, for instance, convincingly poses as Redcrosse in book 1, and Artegall uses “counterfet disguise” in book 5 to get revenge against Adicia (5.8.25). Yet these doubles do not pose the same erotic threat that the female doubles pose. The false Una nearly melts Redcrosse’s “manly hart” with her wantonness (1.1.47), and she enrages Redcrosse to the point at which he almost kills her. The false Una’s convincing performance leaves Una alone and at the mercy of a lion—who, ironically, can recognize better than Redcrosse Una’s “simple truth” (1.3.6).

Una is doubled yet again with the introduction of Duessa, another sexually threatening female character, in canto 2. The very names of the female protagonist and her rival—Una and Duessa—signal that female identity rests on the comparison to a counterfeit double. Singularity cannot exist without duplication. Interestingly, not only Una’s, but also Duessa’s sovereign status needs constant validation by the comparison to a female double. Like Una, Duessa claims to be “the sole daughter of an Emperour” in her story to Redcrosse (1.2.22). Yet Fradubio’s story reveals how insecure Duessa’s position is. Duessa is not satisfied with Fradubio’s assessment that “*Fralissa* was as faire, as faire mote bee, / And euer false *Duessa* seemde as faire as shee” (1.2.37). In order to prove her singularity, her role as “the fairest wight” (1.2.30), Duessa must invalidate her female rival by turning Fralissa’s beauty into “foule vgly forme” (1.2.38). Horrified by Fralissa’s “loathly visage” (1.2.39), Fradubio abandons her for Duessa.

Yet Fradubio's glimpse at Duessa bathing further suggests the instability of Duessa's singularity. Instead of a remarkable beauty, Fradubio spies a "filthy foule old woman":

Her neather partes misshapen, monstrous,
 Were hidd in water, that I could not see,
 But they did seeme more foule and hideous,
 Then womans shape man would beleue to bee. (1.2.41)

Just as Fradubio can exalt Duessa only when Fralissa is held up against her as ugly, so is Fralissa's trueness apparent only when he sees Duessa's monstrosity exposed. Curiously, though, Fradubio does not see Duessa's nether parts at all. As Melinda Gough argues, "despite the knight's (and perhaps even Spenser's) intentions, Fradubio's words only further frustrate interpretive certainty."⁴⁰ Duessa's status as evil witch remains suspended in Fradubio's equivocation, and the poem questions whether Duessa is really invalidated here as monstrous or whether her monstrosity is a product of Fradubio's own anxieties.

The extent to which Duessa's role as a counterfeit legitimates Una also remains uncertain. Admittedly, unlike Fradubio, the characters clearly see Duessa's exposed nether parts—where a "foxes taile" grows (1.8.48)—when she is stripped in canto 8. Spenser's description of Duessa, with her bald head, her "teeth out of her rotten gummes," her "sowre breath," her "dried dug," and her "wrizled skin" (1.8.47),

⁴⁰ Melinda J. Gough, "Her filthy feature open showne' in Ariosto, Spenser, and *Much Ado about Nothing*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 39, no. 1 (1999): 50.

represents a grotesque version of the blazon,⁴¹ and Spenser again uses language of counterfeiting to emphasize that Duessa is a false version of Una:

Which when the knights behend, amazd they were,
 And wondred at so fowle deformed wight.
 Such then (said *Vna*) as she seemeth here,
 Such is the face of falshood, such the sight
 Of fowle *Duessa*, when her borrowed light
 Is laid away, and counterfesaunce knowne.
 Thus when they had the witch disrobed quight,
 And all her filthy feature open showne,
 They let her goe at will, and wander waies vnknowne. (1.8.49)

That Una is the one repudiating Duessa suggests how closely linked these characters are and what is at stake here for Una's own reputation. If Duessa is "the face of falshood," then Una must be the face of truth, and if Duessa's beauty is "counterfesaunce," then Una's beauty must be real. Duessa's disappearance from the canto implies that two women—two versions of one another—cannot be in the same space at the same time. One must be eliminated to authenticate the other. Yet the terms of Duessa's elimination—banishment rather than death—render the resolution of this moment ambiguous. Duessa's liberty to "wander waies vnknowne" questions whether a female double can ever be fully eliminated or whether a female sovereign can ever be fully validated. As Duessa reemerges in the letter at the end of book 1 and Una is left

⁴¹ See Theresa M. Krier, *Gazing on Secret Sights: Spenser, Classical Imitation, and the Decorums of Vision* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 134-35.

languishing when Redcrosse goes off on another adventure, the reader is left to wonder which female character really has sovereign power. Una is written out of the poem, while Duessa's presence remains stubbornly persistent until her final elimination in book 5.

Britomart's encounter with Malecasta at the beginning of book 3 also illustrates the extent to which a Petrarchan double validates a female sovereign yet can never fully authenticate her. When Britomart encounters six knights fighting Redcrosse, she learns the reason that Redcrosse is "sore beset on euery side arownd" (3.1.21): he refuses to follow the rules established by the lady of the castle, Malecasta. The knights describe Malecasta as possessing "soueraine beautie," yet this quality needs constant validation (3.1.26). Each knight that enters the castle, according to Malecasta's law, must pledge lifelong service to her if he has no lady of his own and renounce his lady if he does:

But if he haue a Lady or a Loue,
Then must he her forgoe with fowle defame,
Or els with vs by dint of sword approue,
That she is fairer, then our fairest Dame,
As did this knight, before ye hether came. (3.1.27)

The contest that Redcrosse enters to prove Una's beauty suggests that a woman's fairness is a term always relative to another woman's. Malecasta can remain "our fairest Dame" only by forcefully discrediting her competitors. Spenser's description of Malecasta as having "soueraine beautie" suggests the link between these two concepts in early modern England. A character like Malecasta could hold onto her tenuous sovereignty only by proving her beauty—an equally tenuous characteristic.

Of course, Malecasta's ploys to assert her authenticity actually prove nothing at all, and Spenser emphasizes throughout the episode the difficulty of determining Malecasta's trueness as a woman. Spenser alerts the reader to one of Malecasta's devious traits: her wandering eyes. He writes,

She seemd a woman of great bountihed
 And of rare beautie, sauing that askaunce
 Her wanton eyes, ill signes of womanhed,
 Did roll too highly, and too often glaunce,
 Without regard of grace, or comely amenaunce. (3.1.41)

Yet her apparent duplicity remains undetected by her visitors. When Britomart refuses to take off her armor, Malecasta (who finds herself attracted to Britomart) puts on a show of grief:

And all attonce discovered her desire
 With sighes, and sobs, and plaints, and piteous grieffe,
 The outward sparkes of her inburning fire;
 Which spent in vaine, at last she told her briefe,
 That but if she did lend her short reliefe,
 And doe her comfort, she mote algates dye.
 But the chaste damzell, that had neuer priefe
 Of such malengine and fine forgerye,
 Did easely beleeeue her strong extremitye. (3.1.53)

Spenser attributes Malecasta's persuasiveness to Britomart's naïveté, arguing that Britomart was fooled only because she had no experience with such "fine forgerye." Yet Spenser's very description of Malecasta's behavior suggests that there is no way to distinguish real from false grief. The "sighes, and sobs, and plaints" are the same terms used to describe female characters in the poem who really do grieve. Britomart, for one, grieves in the next canto for the vision of Artegall with "sad sighes," "sorrowes deepe," and "teares" (3.2.28) and later delivers a formal complaint about her desire (3.4.8-10). Spenser's labeling of Malecasta's grief as a "forgerye" recalls Buchanan's accusation that Mary Queen of Scots displayed an "inconstant counterfeiting of mourning" for Darnley after he was murdered (M4r). Although Leslie fervently defends Mary's grief as real, both the texts about Mary and Spenser's poem suggest the impossibility of ever fully locating the boundary between real and false grief, constant and inconstant woman.

Moreover, nothing in the poem actually suggests that Malecasta's grief is forged at all. The events of the evening, if anything, point to the authenticity of Malecasta's desire for Britomart and her real frustration at Britomart's refusals. At the sight of Britomart, whom Malecasta believes is a man, Malecasta's "fickle hart concieued hasty fyre, / Like sparkes of fire, that fall in sc slender flex, / That shortly brent into extreme desyre" (3.1.47). Using the metaphor of fire, Spenser suggests that Malecasta's passion may be intense or even wicked, but it is certainly not insincere. Spenser describes her desire as "falsed fancy" (3.1.47), but the poem indicates that the only thing false about Malecasta is her promiscuity. At dinner, Malecasta can barely contain her feelings for Britomart, aggressively shooting glances to woo her beloved: "And aye betweene the

cups, she did prepare / Way to her loue, and secret darts did throw; / But *Britomart* would not such guilfull message know” (3.1.51). With his insistence that Malecasta’s longings are false, guileful, and forged at the same time that he implies that Malecasta *really* wants Britomart, Spenser exposes the ways in which a woman can be a counterfeit only by the act of being labeled as one. Just as Mary Queen of Scots’s position as counterfeit woman depends on those asserting it, so does Malecasta’s position as a guileful woman remain suspended in the speech acts that make it so.

In the end, even after Malecasta slips into Britomart’s bed to accost her beloved, Malecasta’s status as “fairest Dame” never gets resolved. Britomart quickly determines that she no longer wants to stay at a place “Where so loose life, and so vngentle trade / Was vsd of knights and Ladies seeming gent” (3.1.67), but Malecasta’s “soueraine beautie” remains an uncertain concept, always relative to the ladies she will hold up against her in the future. As Redcrosse and Britomart “tooke their steeds, and forth vpon their iourney went” (3.1.67), Malecasta stays at her castle forever to validate her fairness against the women whom her knights must disavow.

The Petrarchan underpinnings of Spenser’s female doublings are even more apparent in the story of the two Florimells. Literally fleeing her Petrarchan suitors, the real Florimell embodies the characteristics of a Petrarchan mistress with her “faire yellow locks” (3.1.16), her “stedfast chastitie” (3.5.8), and her “snowy cheeke” (3.7.9). Described as “the fairest Dame aliue” (3.1.18), Florimell provokes aggressive desire from nearly every man with whom she comes into contact, from the lusty foster to even Arthur

himself, who wishes that Florimell “mote bee / His faery Queene” (3.4.54).⁴² Yet despite her apparent singularity as the pinnacle of beauty, Florimell’s status as “fairest Dame”—like Malecasta’s—also has to be validated by an inferior double. The witch’s creation of the false, or snowy, Florimell for the enjoyment of her son parodies the Petrarchan standards by which Florimell’s beauty is assessed:

In stead of eyes two burning lampes she set
 In siluer sockets, shyning like the skyes,
 And a quicke mouing Spirit did arret
 To stirre and roll them, like to womens eyes;
 In stead of yellow lockes she did deuyse,
 With golden wyre to weaue her curled head;
 Yet golden wyre was not so yellow thryse
 As *Florimells* fayre heare: and in the stead
 Of life, she put a Spright to rule the carcass dead. (3.8.7)

A grotesque assemblage of female body parts, False Florimell, in Mihoko Suzuki’s words, “exposes the violent appropriation of woman implicit in the *blason*.”⁴³ Spenser indicates that the Petrarchan lady is merely a male fantasy. Operated by a male spirit,

⁴² Arthur’s desire for Florimell has troubled some feminist critics. Sheila T. Cavanagh argues that “the epic’s portrayal of his responses to women greatly problematize his status as a superior knight and can unsettle the reader’s understanding of the modes of behavior toward women seemingly offered as appropriate” (*Wanton Eyes and Chaste Desires: Female Sexuality in “The Faerie Queene”* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994], 14-15).

⁴³ Mihoko Suzuki, *Metamorphoses of Helen: Authority, Difference, and the Epic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 177.

who knows how to imitate “the wyles of womens wits” (3.8.8.9), False Florimell is a character in drag, a puppet operated only to fulfill the desires of a lustful male onlooker.⁴⁴

Yet rather than simply validate the real Florimell’s status as “fairest Dame,” False Florimell only creates more confusion. Spenser implies that the real threat of her character is not that she is the opposite of Florimell, but that she is all too similar.⁴⁵ Like Leslie, who insists on the ease with which Mary Queen of Scots can be duplicated, Spenser points to the trouble that can be caused by counterfeiting Florimell, arguing

That euen Nature selfe enuide the same,
 And grudg’d to see the counterfet should shame
 The thing it selfe: In hand she boldly tooke
 To make another like the former Dame,
 Another *Florimell*, in shape and looke
 So liuely and so like, that many it mistooke. (3.8.5)

Spenser challenges Leslie’s assertion that a counterfeit double will always be exposed—that people will “throwghlie perceauē and knowe” the true woman from the false (19v)—by revealing that the real Florimell is indistinguishable from False Florimell. As critics have pointed out, False Florimell, like the real Florimell, inspires desire from lustful and good men alike—from Braggadochio to Scudamore—and sometimes appears even more

⁴⁴ For an argument that Spenser criticizes, rather than simply follows, Petrarchan traditions, see Patrick Cheney, “‘And Doubted Her to Deeme an Earthly Wight’: Male Neoplatonic ‘Magic’ and the Problem of Female Identity in Spenser’s Allegory of the Two Florimells,” *Studies in Philology* 86, no. 3 (1989): 310-40.

⁴⁵ While Thomas P. Roche, Jr. argues that False Florimell is a “fiend incarnate,” the opposite of Florimell because “Her beauty is only physical and has the power to inspire only lust” (*The Kindly Flame: A Study of the Third and Fourth Books of Spenser’s “Faerie Queene”* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964], 162), Cheney, “‘And Doubted Her,’” disputes this view, pointing out that “the False Florimell is consistently being perceived as the real Florimell by knights with generally virtuous souls” (312).

authentic than Florimell herself, as when Marinell believes False Florimell is more true than the real one: “with fast fixed eies / He gazed still vpon that snowy mayd; / Whom euer as he did the more auize, / The more to be true *Florimell* he did surmize” (5.3.18). False Florimell represents a clear danger to the real one, suggesting that Florimell’s authenticity may be as flimsy as the golden wire posing as False Florimell’s hair.

How, then, does Florimell’s authenticity become established in the poem if False Florimell is such a convincing Petrarchan beauty? Unlike Duessa, whose nether parts are grotesquely displayed, False Florimell never gets exposed. While Florimell’s girdle falls off False Florimell at Satyrane’s tournament (4.5.16-17), it falls off all the other women as well. Instead, False Florimell’s falseness—and by extension, Florimell’s trueness—becomes established by a speech act, when Artegall declares at Florimell’s nuptials,

As for this Ladie, which he sheweth here,

Is not (I wager) *Florimell* at all;

But some fayre Franion, fit for such a fere,

That by misfortune in his hand did fall.

For prooffe whereof, he bad them *Florimell* forth call. (5.3.22)

The “prooffe” that Artegall seeks comes from setting the two Florimells next to one another, the “blushing” Florimell (5.3.23) against the “snowy” False Florimell (5.3.24):

Then did he set her by that snowy one,

Like the true saint beside the image set,

Of both their beauties to make paragone,

And triall, whether should the honor get.

Streight way so soone as both together met,
 Th'enchanted Damzell vanisht into nought:
 Her snowy substance melted as with heat,
 Ne of that goodly hew remayned ought,
 But th'emptie girdle, which about her wast was wrought. (5.3.24)

False Florimell's last moments in the poem indicate that what sets her apart from Florimell is not her physical difference, but her very elimination. Only False Florimell's literal disappearance can validate the real Florimell's beauty, her place above the other women, and her right to marry Marinell. As Artegall crowns Florimell "fayrest *Florimell*" again by presenting her the girdle (5.3.27), Spenser suggests that the competition between two women must result in one's woman's eradication. When the two Florimells are in the same space together, one has to disappear.

Ironically, the one who is "uncased" in this canto is not False Florimell, but Braggadochio. Artegall and the other jousters at Florimell's wedding shave Braggadochio's beard, defile his coat, and break his sword as a way of shaming him and asserting their own masculinity. Only after the threats of Braggadochio and False Florimell have been contained, Spenser claims, can the merrymaking resume:

Now when these counterfeits were thus vncased
 Out of the foreside of their forgerie,
 And in the sight of all men cleane disgraced,
 All gan to iest and gibe full merilie
 At the remembrance of their knauerie. (5.3.39)

Yet this celebration at the end of the festivities feels uneasy for the reader, and the exposure of the counterfeits rests on the troubling incidents of disappearance and shaming. Spenser's hasty resolution to the problems that persist through three books of the poem points to the fragility of Florimell's authority, which relies on the precarious display of counterfeit doubles.

The battle between Britomart and Radigund even more forcefully suggests the instability of female authenticity. Spenser's use of Britomart and Radigund as doubles has long attracted critical attention.⁴⁶ Some, like Louis Montrose, suggest that Radigund's elimination contains the threat posed by Britomart's Amazon qualities: "To behead Radigund is to curb what was perceived to be a female ruler's natural inclination to capriciousness and thus to tyranny: the commonwealth is reformed by affirming the rule of law, as administered by a masculine political nation."⁴⁷ Others, like Suzuki, maintain that Radigund is portrayed sympathetically and that Radigund's beheading "does not allow Spenser's heroine simply to exorcize from herself the troubling qualities of tyranny and violence; she annihilates what is vital in herself as well as what is problematic, for the two are inextricably linked."⁴⁸ Yet Spenser's use of Radigund as Britomart's counterfeit double *both* validates and undermines Britomart's position as sovereign. Britomart needs Radigund to authenticate her own female rule, yet as critics have pointed out, she problematically disappears from the poem shortly after she kills Radigund.

⁴⁶ See, for instance, Louis Montrose, "Spenser and the Elizabethan Political Imaginary," *English Literary History* 69, no. 4 (2002): 907-46; Suzuki, *Metamorphoses of Helen*, 177-95; Mary R. Bowman, "'She there as Princess rained': Spenser's Figure of Elizabeth," *Renaissance Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (1990): 509-28; and Susanne Woods, "Spenser and the Problem of Women's Rule," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (1985): 140-58.

⁴⁷ Montrose, "Spenser," 936.

⁴⁸ Suzuki, *Metamorphoses of Helen*, 186.

Moreover, Spenser's depiction of these women suggests a close affinity between their Petrarchan desirability and their ability to rule. Their Petrarchan characteristics—their fairness, their cruelty—both give them and threaten their positions of power. Of course, both characters embody the subject positions of the scorned male lover as much as the cruel mistress. In book 3, Britomart delivers a Petrarchan complaint about her desire for Artegall in which she laments that love and fortune, both blind, are guiding her against the tide and wind, and she prays for the god of the wind to bring her ship, “ere it be rent, / Vnto the gladsome port of her intent” (3.4.10).⁴⁹ And Radigund is the scorned lover who creates her society of Amazons when she realizes that Bellodant “ne would / For ought or nought be wonne vnto her will” (5.4.30).

Yet it is their positions as elusive Petrarchan mistresses that link Britomart and Radigund most forcefully. As critics have discussed, Spenser draws the most overt comparison between the two characters during their battles with Artegall when he knocks off their helmets to reveal their beauty. Both are depicted in terms of mingled blood and sweat—highlighting the red and white in their faces—and both are compared to the moon. And both paralyze Artegall to the point at which he cannot fight them anymore. As Susanne Woods notes, Radigund “wins, not because of her skill, but because of her

⁴⁹ For an analysis of Britomart's complaint in relation to sonnet 189 of Petrarch's *Rime sparse*, see Susanne Lindgren Wofford, “Britomart's Petrarchan Lament: Allegory and Narrative in *The Faerie Queene* III, iv,” *Comparative Literature* 39, no. 1 (1987): 28-57. For a reading of the poem's engagement with Petrarchism in book 3, particularly in the House of Busirane, see Lauren Silberman, *Transforming Desire: Erotic Knowledge in Books III and IV of “The Faerie Queene”* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 58-67. Silberman argues that while Busirane tries to play the conventional Petrarchan poet, Amoret's role as “a desiring subject” (63) and Britomart's rescue show “the limitations of Busirane's authorial control” (66-67).

beauty.”⁵⁰ While Britomart defeats Artegall once without her beauty, her Petrarchan features tip the balance in her favor in her encounter with him in book 4, canto 6, causing “trembling horror” that “made ech member quake, and manly hart to quayle” (4.6.22). Just as the false Una threatens to unman Redcrosse with her seductive behavior, so does the beauty of Britomart and Radigund neutralize Artegall’s otherwise fierce masculinity.

Spenser makes efforts to oppose the two women even as his descriptions collapse their distinctions. Justifying Artegall’s acquiescence to Radigund, Spenser writes,

So was he ouercome, not ouercome,
 But to her yeilded of his owne accord;
 Yet was he iustly damned by the doome
 Of his owne mouth, that spake so warelesse word,
 To be her thrall, and seruice her afford.
 For though that he first victorie obtayned,
 Yet after by abandoning his sword,
 He wilfull lost, that he before attayned.
 No fayrer conquest, then that with goodwill is gayned. (5.5.17)

Parsing the odd phrasing of this stanza, editors have also attempted to hold Britomart and Radigund apart. As Hamilton explains, “One difference is his prior agreement to be Radigund’s thrall if defeated. Another is that Britomart seeks his love, Radigund his servitude” (5.5.17n). Yet the assertion that Artegall was “ouercome, not ouercome” still

⁵⁰ Susanne Woods, “Amazonian Tyranny: Spenser’s Radigund and Diachronic Mimesis,” in *Playing with Gender: A Renaissance Pursuit*, ed. Jean R. Brink, Maryanne C. Horowitz, and Allison P. Coudert (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 55.

makes little sense. The doubleness of this phrase registers the doubleness of Britomart and Radigund in the poem, and although Spenser claims that Artegall “wilfull lost” to Radigund, the poem suggests that Artegall has much less agency in regards to these women. In the battle with Britomart, Spenser describes Artegall’s “powrelesse arme benumbd with secret feare” (4.6.21), and in battle with Radigund, Spenser notes that Artegall’s heart “Empierced was with pittifull regard” (5.5.13.2). Spenser suggests that much of their sovereign power stems from their Petrarchan ability cruelly to place Artegall under their subjection.

As with the other Spenserian female doubles, though, only one can survive when they meet. In their climactic encounter, Spenser indicates that although Radigund’s sovereignty has been demonized in the poem, she can become truly illegitimate only through her elimination. As they meet face to face, Britomart and Radigund reveal their likeness even more intensely: “As when a Tygre and a Lionesse / Are met at spoyling of some hungry pray, / Both challenge it with equal greedinesse” (5.7.30). While as Hamilton observes, a tiger (representing Radigund) is “noted for its cruelty” and a lioness (representing Britomart) can be seen as “the royal beast” (5.7.30n), the emphasis on their similarity is striking: they challenge each other “with equal greedinesse.”⁵¹ The only way for Britomart to establish her authority is to kill her opponent:

Where being layd, the wrothfull Britonesse
 Stayd not, till she came to her selfe againe,
 But in reuenge both of her loues distresse,

⁵¹ Suzuki, *Metamorphoses of Helen*, remarks that Britomart’s “wrothfull” slaying of Radigund (5.7.34) “underscores the similarity rather than the difference between the two women” (185).

And her late vile reproch, though vaunted vaine,
 And also of her wound, which sore did paine,
 She with one stroke both head and helmet cleft.
 Which dreadfull sight, when all her warlike traine
 There present saw, each one of sence bereft,
 Fled fast into the towne, and her sole victor left. (5.7.34)

“Sole victor left”: Spenser makes clear that there can be room for only one female sovereign, and Britomart’s victory establishes her authenticity by eliminating her rival. The way in which she defeats Radigund gives the sense of an execution; Britomart delivers the blow when Radigund is unconscious and has no chance to strike back.

Only after Radigund is beheaded can Britomart fully assert her sovereignty and reign “as Princess” (5.7.42). Of course, her reign is short-lived and unpalatable to many critics, who view Britomart’s repeal of the “liberty of women” as exposing Spenser’s anxiety about female rule (5.7.42). Britomart also ceases to be desirable to Artegall in the very next canto, when Spenser asserts he is not susceptible to the “wondrous powre” of “wemens fairre aspect” (5.8.2). Artegall then “left his loue, albe her strong request, / Faire *Britomart* in languor and vnrest, / And rode him selfe vpon his first intent” (5.7.3). Like Una, left languishing by Redcrosse in book 1, Britomart is forced to put her desires on hold indefinitely, and she never returns in the poem.⁵² Britomart’s encounter with Radigund illustrates the very precariousness of female sovereignty in the early modern period. Britomart’s sovereignty depends on Radigund’s similarity and then elimination—

⁵² Suzuki, *Metamorphoses of Helen*, argues that “the scapegoating of Radigund works ultimately to destroy Britomart as well” (188).

yet the moment of sovereign assertion, the moment when Britomart remains the “sole victor left,” reveals sovereignty’s fragility.

One of the most topical depictions of female sovereignty comes during Duessa’s trial in book 5. This episode, corresponding to the trial of Mary Queen of Scots, represents a clearly allegorical moment of the text. As in the real trial, Duessa is convicted for her crimes against the state, and as in Elizabeth’s speeches on Mary, Mercilla vacillates about executing a fellow queen. Yet as in all the other depictions of female doubles, the line between good queen and bad queen becomes quite thin. Mercilla’s legitimacy as a sovereign rests not only on her ability to eliminate Duessa but also on her very likeness to her. As John Staines argues, although critics have long assumed that Spenser’s depiction of Mercilla is merely a propaganda piece for Elizabeth, the episode also reveals how all political power is maintained through guileful rhetoric.⁵³ Far from simply demonstrating Mercilla’s sovereign transcendence, the trial of Duessa depicts how dependent Mercilla is on her female counterpart.

Even before Duessa is introduced in the canto, the description of Mercilla’s court echoes that of another “mayden Queene”—Lucifera of book 1 (1.4.8). Spenser’s language depicts a space almost identical to Lucifera’s residence: both are “a stately pallace,” both have towers “glistening with gold,” and both feature queens over which “a cloth of state was spred” and who themselves shine “Glistring like gold” (1.4.4, 8; 5.9.21, 28). Hamilton notes that such details “expose its parody in Lucifera’s ‘stately Pallace’” (5.9.21n), yet the verbatim descriptions suggest that neither court can fully parody the

⁵³ John D. Staines, “Elizabeth, Mercilla, and the Rhetoric of Propaganda in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31, no. 2 (2001): 283-312.

other. Spenser's assertions that *Lucifera* is "proud" (1.4.12) and that *Mercilla* is "Angel-like" (5.9.29) are both founded on the same evidence, intimating that their opposition stems from their similarity rather than their difference. *Mercilla* and *Lucifera* are versions of one another, and as with the two *Florimells*, *Mercilla*'s legitimacy becomes established merely from setting her against her false double—and by naming *Lucifera* "proud"—rather than by actually proving *Lucifera*'s inauthenticity.

Duessa, too, appears remarkably similar to *Mercilla* rather than opposed to her. At first, *Duessa* gains support from the people attending the trial:

Then was there brought, as prisoner to the barre,
A Ladie of great countenance and place,
But that she it with foule abuse did marre;
Yet did appeare rare beautie in her face" (5.9.38)

Not the exposed "wrinkled hag" of book 1 (1.8.46), *Duessa*'s beauty rivals *Mercilla*'s. And although *Duessa*'s prosecutor, *Zele*, charges her with beguiling many knights, the most serious charge against her is her likeness to *Mercilla*—her attempt to usurp the throne and take her place: "how for to de pryue / *Mercilla* of her crowne, by her aspyred, / That she might it vnto her selfe deryue" (5.9.41). What is most threatening about *Duessa* is her interchangeability with *Mercilla*.

Despite *Mercilla*'s hesitation—the "perling drops" she sheds for *Duessa* (5.9.50)—it is clear that *Duessa* needs to be eliminated for *Mercilla* to endure as queen. Yet unlike the graphic execution of *Radigund*, the execution of *Duessa* almost slips by without notice. Her sentence left unresolved at the end of canto 9, it nearly evades

articulation at the beginning of canto 10. After three stanzas defending mercy, Spenser goes onto describe Duessa's death in an equivocal way:

Much more it prayed was of those two knights;
 The noble Prince, and righteous *Artegall*,
 When they had seene and heard a doome a rights
 Against *Duessa*, damned by them all;
 But by her tempred without grieve or gall,
 Till strong constraint did her thereto enforce.
 And yet euen then ruing her wilfull fall,
 With much more then needfull naturall remorse,
 And yeelding the last honour to her wretched corse. (5.10.4)

This stanza effaces the complexities of the trial. Spenser represents Arthur and *Artegall*, who had previously taken opposing positions on Duessa's sentence, as of the same mind here, praising her execution. Spenser also represents Duessa as almost volunteering for her death, noting her "wilfull fall." Perhaps most striking about this stanza is the way in which Duessa dies—or does not die. Spenser never articulates the moment of her execution; instead, Duessa's "wretched corse" just shows up in the last line. Just as Mary Queen of Scots was executed out of the public's eye at Fotheringay Castle, so does Duessa quietly disappear, certifying *Mercilla's* reign simply through her disappearing act.

As *Mercilla*, too, disappears from the text at this moment, Spenser reminds the reader how tenuous female authority remains in early modern culture. *Mercilla* needs her Petrarchan double to secure her own sovereignty, but making her disappear also risks

eliminating her own rule. This danger perhaps explains Elizabeth's nineteen-year procrastination in deciding to eliminate her own counterfeit double, Mary Queen of Scots, and it also points to the delicate dance that both queens performed to try to prove their authenticity and maintain a position of power.

Like Two Milkmaids: Elizabeth and Mary

Elizabeth's first experience in female doubling came early in life when she was cast as the counterfeit woman. When Elizabeth was imprisoned by her sister, Mary Tudor, in 1554, her life was in grave danger. Accused of complicity in the Wyatt rebellion, whose leaders sought to assassinate Mary and put Elizabeth on the throne, Elizabeth could have easily been convicted and executed. As a Protestant heir to the throne, Elizabeth threatened everything Mary's Catholic reign represented. Recognizing this threat, Elizabeth implored her sister in a letter to allow her plead her case in person:

If any ever did try this old saying, "that a king's word was more than another man's oath," I most humbly beseech your Majesty to verify it to me, and to remember your last promise and my last demand, that I be not condemned without answer and due proof, which it seems that I now am; for without cause proved, I am by your Council from you commanded to go to the Tower, a place more wanted for a false traitor than a true subject, . . . And therefore I humbly beseech your Majesty to let me answer afore yourself, and not suffer me to trust to your Councillors, yea, and that afore I go to the Tower, if it be possible; . . . I pray God the like evil persuasions

persuade not one sister against the other, and all for that they have heard false report, and the truth unknown.⁵⁴

Realizing the difficulty in distinguishing between “a false traitor and a true subject,” Elizabeth wants to make her presence known so that she does not, like False Florimell, disappear. Rather than distinguish herself from Mary, Elizabeth emphasizes their proximity, even indivisibility, as sisters. Her tactics worked. Mary did not execute Elizabeth, and Elizabeth became queen only a few years later.

In 1568, Elizabeth found herself in a situation very similar to that of Mary Tudor when her cousin and self-proclaimed heir to the English throne Mary Queen of Scots crossed the English border. The parallels between Elizabeth’s early letter to Mary Tudor and the letters from Mary Queen of Scots to Elizabeth are striking. As Elizabeth had done to her own sister, Mary begs Elizabeth to admit her into her presence. In letters dated from May to July 1568, Mary pleads to Elizabeth “to send to fetch me as soon as you possibly can,” desires “to come in person to lay my complaint before you,” and demands to “come to you to make my moan to you; the which being heard, I would declare unto you mine innocency, and then require your ayde.”⁵⁵ Mary repeatedly emphasizes her likeness to Elizabeth—as “sisters” and as regnant queens: “I beseech you, since you see that subjects favour subjects, you, a queen, my sister and cousin, to favour your equal.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Elizabeth I, *The Letters of Queen Elizabeth I*, ed. G.B. Harrison (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1968), 19-20.

⁵⁵ Mary Stuart, *Letters of Mary, Queen of Scots, and Documents Connected With Her Personal History*, with an introduction by Agnes Strickland, vol. 1 (London: Henry Colburn, 1842), pp. 43, 45, 60-61. Mary’s letters were originally written in French.

⁵⁶ Stuart, *Letters of Mary, Queen of Scots*, vol. 1, p. 57.

Addressing most of her letters to “Madam my good sister,” Mary holds a mirror up to Elizabeth’s face, trying to force Elizabeth to see what they have in common.

Yet unlike Mary Tudor, who conceded to her sister’s request to make her presence known, Elizabeth fostered a strategy of absence with Mary Queen of Scots. Many of their letters display Petrarchan characteristics as Mary desperately pursues Elizabeth while Elizabeth performs the role of the inaccessible mistress. Although she denies to Elizabeth her involvement with the Petrarchan letters and sonnets of the Casket Letters, writing that “I know nothing about them, and have never written such silly things, even if I had imagined them,”⁵⁷ Mary frequently uses Petrarchan conceits in her letters to Elizabeth to describe her forsakenness. For example, in September 1568, Mary writes, “I have said what I had upon my heart to your vice-chamberlain, entreating you not to let me be lost for want of a safe port; for like a vessel driven by all the winds, so am I, not knowing where to find a haven, unless, taking into your kind consideration my long voyage, you bring me into a safe harbour.”⁵⁸ In October 1569, she emphasizes her unrequited love, pleading to Elizabeth to “not leave me to waste away here in tears and complaints caused by the disease for which I came to seek the remedy.”⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Mary Stuart, *Letters of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland*, trans. William Turnbull (London: Charles Dolman, 1845), 170.

⁵⁸ Stuart, *Letters of Mary, Queen of Scots*, vol. 1, p. 76. Other Petrarchan writers that use the trope of the troubled ship include Wyatt, Surrey, and Spenser. Elizabeth uses a similar Petrarchan trope when she pleads to her brother, Edward: “Like as a shipman in stormy weather plucks down the sails, tarrying for better wind, so did I, most noble king, in my unfortunate chance a Thursday pluck down the high sails of my joy and comfort, and do trust one day that as troublesome waves have repulsed me backward, so a gentle wind will bring me forward to my haven” (Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 38). Jennifer Summit examines the use of Petrarchan poetics in the letters between Mary and Elizabeth, arguing that these texts “demonstrate the ways in which both queens adapted poetic topoi as well as the conventions associated with the private writing of ladies to construct a language of female rulership” (*Lost Property: The Woman Writer and English Literary History, 1380-1589* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 194).

⁵⁹ Stuart, *Letters of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland*, 174.

As the years pass with no favorable results, Mary's tone grows even more passionate. In October 1570, she portrays herself as committed lover:

Then, Madam my good sister, do not refuse this my very humble request to see you before my departure, so as to remove from me all fear of being undeservedly in your disfavour; and thus, relying altogether on your goodwill, I shall have an indissoluble bond of friendship between us twain sufficient to shut the mouths of our mutual enemies who might pretend to the contrary; and, by the same means, I shall discover to you the secrets of my heart, of which I have given some insight, but darkly, to Mr. Cecil your secretary; . . . I shall devote myself more and more to love, honour, and obey you, which I am resolved to do nevertheless⁶⁰

Using the language of marital vows, Mary blurs the line between political alliance and erotic love. She portrays herself both as submitting to Elizabeth's will (fearful "of being undeservedly in your disfavour") and as controlling information that would be beneficial to Elizabeth ("I shall discover to you the secrets of my heart").

Elizabeth, on the other hand, plays the part of the cruel Petrarchan mistress who never fulfils Mary's desires yet always leaves open the possibility of doing so. In her letters, which are far outnumbered by Mary's, Elizabeth rejects Mary's requests to see her—yet never absolutely. In a letter dated June 8, 1568, Elizabeth responds to several successive letters from Mary desperately seeking her audience:

⁶⁰ Stuart, *Letters of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland*, 178.

Madame: I learn by your letter and by my lort Herry's your desire to justify yourself in my presence of the things charged against you. O madame, there is no creature living more desirous to hear it than I, or who will more readily lend her ears to such answer as shall acquit your honour. But whatever my regard for you, I can never be careless of my own reputation. . . . If you find it strange not to see me, you must make a metamorphose of our persons, and then you will see it would be malayse for me to receive you before your justification. But once honourably acquitted of this crime, I swear to you before God, that among all worldly pleasures that will hold the first rank.⁶¹

Instructing Mary to put herself in her shoes—to “make a metamorphose of our persons”—Elizabeth stresses her interchangeability with Mary and her closeness as twinned sisters. Yet for Elizabeth to maintain power, she must ensure that the meeting of her double is indefinitely deferred. Never foreclosing the possibility of a meeting and always leaving open the channels of desire, Elizabeth suspends her commitments to her cousin in perpetual ambiguity.

Mary's letters to Elizabeth make clear that the very threat Mary denies—tainting Elizabeth's authority with her proximity—is the one that Elizabeth fears most. In a provocatively phrased letter dated July 5, 1568, Mary articulates—even as she disavows—the very concerns Elizabeth expresses about her presence:

⁶¹ United Kingdom, Public Record Office, “Elizabeth to Mary,” 8 June 1568, *Calendar of State Papers Relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots 1547-1603*, ed. Joseph Bain, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: H.M. General Register House, 1900), no. 692, p. 426.

Good sister, be of another mind. Even the heart and all shall be yours, and at your commandment. I thought to have satisfied you wholly, if I might have seen you. Alas! do not as the serpent that stoppeth his hearing, for I am no enchanter, but your sister and natural cousin. . . . I am not of the nature of the basilisk, and less of the cameleon's, to turn you to my likeness: and though I should be so dangerous and curst as men say, you are sufficiently armed with constancy and with justice, which I require of God, who give you grace to use it well, with long and happy life.⁶²

Mary claims that she is not inconstant, yet her language suggests the powerful currency of these tropes against women. The terms that she uses—basilisk, chameleon—pervade Petrarchan literature as metaphors for feminine danger. The basilisk, for example, whose glance was thought to be deadly, recurs as an image of female erotic power over men. In sonnet 47 of John Davies's *Wittes Pilgrimage* (1605), the speaker begins, "The fatall beames thou dartest from thine Eyes / (Like *Basilisks* work on me, in effect."⁶³

And the chameleon, known for its ability to live without food for long periods of time and thus "eat the air,"⁶⁴ also develops a reputation for its ability to change the color of its skin and becomes a metaphor for the fickleness of women. In *The Forrest of Fancy* (1579), a collection of poems (many about the cruelty of womankind), one of the poems refers to women as chameleon-like in their "wily wayes":

⁶² Stuart, *Letters of Mary, Queen of Scots*, vol. 1, p. 90.

⁶³ John Davies, sonnet 47, in *Wittes Pilgrimage, (by Poeticall Essaies) Through a World of amorous Sonnets, Soule-passions, and other Passages, Diuine, Philosophicall, Morall, Poeticall, and Politicall* (London: Iohn Brown, [1605]), E1v.

⁶⁴ In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, when Claudius asks, "How fares our cousin Hamlet?" Hamlet replies, "Excellent, i' faith, of the chameleon's dish: I eat the air, promise-cramm'd" (3.2.93-94).

They can condicions chaunge,
 to cause their friendes vnrest,
 As the Chameleon chaungeth hue,
 When as it likes him best,
 If that they be disposde,
 pore louers to allure,
 They can as wily wayes inuent,
 their purpose to procure.⁶⁵

Mary appeals to Elizabeth's constancy, a quality that both male and female Petrarchan lovers profess despite the trials of love,⁶⁶ as an antidote to any female threat that may come her way, but her evocation of the "wily" dangers of women proves a powerful articulation of the very associations Elizabeth wishes to avoid.

Yet despite the evident dangers of Mary's presence, Elizabeth nevertheless emphasizes her associations with her rival, suggesting that she depends her double just as much as she is threatened by her. Just as Leslie authenticates Mary by emphasizing those who counterfeit her, so does Elizabeth highlight the ways in which Mary replicates her own sovereignty—even as she keeps Mary at arm's length. For instance, James Melville,

⁶⁵ H.C., "The abiect Louer complaineth of the crueltie and disdainfull lookes of his Lady," in *The Forrest of Fancy. Wherein is contained very prety Apothegmes, and pleasaunt histories, both in meeter and prose, Songes, Sonets, epigrams and epistles, of diuerse matter and in diuerse manner. With sundry other deuises, no lesse pithye then pleasaunt and profytable* (London: Thomas Purfoote, 1579), I3r.

⁶⁶ Male speakers frequently profess their constancy, but female speakers also lay claim to this quality. The female speaker of the Casket sonnets affirms her constancy to Bothwell in sonnet 1: "Que reste il plus pour prouuer ma constance?" ("What else is there to prove my constancy?") (MacRobert, *Mary, Queen of Scots and the Casket Letters*, 196, 200). Pamphilia of Mary Wroth's *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* (1621) instructs future lovers in her concluding sonnet, "And thus leave off, what's past showes you can love, / Now lett your constancy your honor prove" (*The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth*, ed. Josephine A. Roberts [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983], P103. See Chapter Four of this dissertation for an extended analysis of Wroth's use of this term.

Mary's English ambassador, records in 1564 a conversation in which Elizabeth aggressively demands that he compare the beauty and talents of the two queens:

Her hair was more reddish than yellow, curled in appearance naturally. Then she entered to discern what colour of hair was reputed best; and whether my queen's hair or her's was best; and which of them two was fairest. I answered that the fairness of them both was not their worst faults. But she was earnest with me to declare which of them I thought fairest. I said she was the fairest queen in England and ours the fairest queen in Scotland. Yet she was earnest. I answered they were both the fairest ladies of their courts and that Her Majesty was whiter, but our queen was very lovely. She enquired which of them was of highest stature. I said, our queen. Then, saith she, she is too high and that herself was neither too high nor too low. Then she asked what kind of exercises she used. I answered that [when] I was despatched out of Scotland, the queen was lately come from the Highland hunting; that when she had leisure from the affairs of her country she read upon good books, the histories of diverse countries, and sometimes would play upon the lute and virginals. She asked if she played well. I said, reasonably for a queen.⁶⁷

With its fairy tale quality, Elizabeth's language suggests that for a woman to be a true queen—the fairest one of all—she has to be compared to a false queen. Just as Malecasta's status as the "fairest Dame" relies on her comparison to the ladies whom her

⁶⁷ James Melville, *The Memoirs of James Melville of Halhill*, ed. Gordon Donaldson (London: The Folio Society, 1969), 38.

knights disavow, Elizabeth's status as the only female sovereign of England relies on her comparison to an inferior counterpart. Elizabeth's persistent inquiries about Mary's hair, height, and musical abilities imply that as much as Mary is a menace to Elizabeth's reign, she is also a necessary component of it. Elizabeth needs Mary to authenticate her own validity as queen. Shakespeare echoes this conversation in *Antony and Cleopatra*, when Cleopatra demands that her messenger compare her features to Octavia's:

Go to the fellow, good Alexas; bid him
Report the feature of Octavia, her years,
Her inclination; let him not leave out
The color of her hair. Bring me word quickly.

.....

Bid you Alexas

Bring me word how tall she is.⁶⁸

Like Elizabeth, Cleopatra recognizes the fragility of her authority as queen, which is always dependent on the construction of an inferior copy. Cleopatra must distance herself from Octavia, asserting her superior traits, yet at the same time insinuate her closeness.

Even in her prevarications, scoldings, and rejections of Mary's suits, Elizabeth remains careful to emphasize her close sisterhood to Mary. In her letters to Mary, she uses the same language of affection and familial bonds that Mary uses, even when Elizabeth can barely veil her fury. In Elizabeth's 1567 letter to Mary responding to

⁶⁸ Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, 2.5.111-18.

Darnley's shocking death, Elizabeth sternly warns Mary not to marry Bothwell, yet she still maintains their likeness as queens:

I do not write so vehemently out of doubt that I have, but out of the affection that I bear you in particular. For I am not ignorant that you have no wiser counselors than myself. . . .

. . . Praying the Creator to give you the grace to recognize this traitor and protect yourself from him as from the ministers of Satan, with my very heartfelt recommendations to you, very dear sister.⁶⁹

Even through her bossiness, Elizabeth refuses to abandon the sisterly tropes that characterize their correspondence, suggesting their value to her.

As Mary's threat to Elizabeth grows, Elizabeth still appropriates the language of sisterhood to represent her relationship with her cousin. After the Northern Rebellion of 1569-70, in which Thomas Howard plotted to marry Mary and to take the English throne, Elizabeth passionately proclaims her generosity toward her undeserving "good sister": "Good madame, what wrong did I ever s[ee]k to you or yours in the former part of my reign, when y[ou] know what was sought against me, even to the sp[oil] of my crown from me? . . . And what moved me thereto but my natural inclination towards you, with whom I desired to live as a neighbor and a good sister?"⁷⁰ Elizabeth deftly mirrors Mary's pleas in her letters, putting herself in the role of the trusting victim who is at the mercy of the actions of her sister.

⁶⁹ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 116-17.

⁷⁰ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 122.

Elizabeth's most extended—and most public—use of the language of female doubling comes in her two speeches about Mary's conviction of treason late in 1586. First delivered to Parliament and later revised for publication, these speeches make the case for Elizabeth's genuine affinity with her rival cousin at a time when Elizabeth's authenticity as a queen is most at stake. The purpose of these speeches was to address Parliament's growing pressure to execute Mary and to delay giving them a response—to leave them lingering with her “answer answerless.”⁷¹ Yet Elizabeth's desire to disseminate these speeches to a wider audience—along with her conspicuous use of the language of doubling—suggest that these speeches were also a way for her to demonstrate her legitimacy as queen. Her emphasis on her closeness to Mary works not only to diminish her culpability in the inevitable execution of another sovereign queen but also to highlight her genuineness in the face of the false female other.

Toward the beginning of her first speech, she emphasizes her likeness to Mary, subtly reminding Parliament that as a princess, she had suffered a similar tyranny under her own sister, Mary Tudor: “And now, albeit I find my life hath been full dangerously sought and death contrived by such as no desert procured, yet am I therein so clear from malice . . . as I protest it is and hath been my grievous thought that one not different in

⁷¹ Elizabeth, *Collected Works*, 204. Two versions of both of Elizabeth's speeches on Mary are printed in *Collected Works*. Leah Marcus argues that the revisions in Elizabeth's second speech “tame the sharp language” of the original version: “The revised speech as it circulated at court and went off to the publisher was loftier, more general, less inflammatory, but also more noncommittal in terms of what it promised to her petitioners” (“From Oral Delivery to Print in the Speeches of Elizabeth I,” in *Print, Manuscript, and Performance: The Changing Relations of the Media in Early Modern England*, ed. Arthur F. Marotti and Michael D. Bristol [Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000], 40, 43). However, unless otherwise noted, the versions that I cite in this essay are the second versions of the speeches because they are the ones most widely known both to the contemporary public and to scholars today and because they reflect some of Elizabeth's emendations that she made in crafting her voice for the public.

sex, of like estate, and my near kin, should fall into so great a crime.”⁷² Elizabeth uses the proximity of her cousin to draw attention to her own innocence. She also uses the striking image of milkmaids to suggest an unspoiled bond between the two queens. She argues that were it not for the welfare of her subjects—if her “own life were only in danger and not the whole estate of [their] religion and well-doings”—her relationship with Mary would be as unencumbered “as two milkmaids with pails upon [their] arms.”⁷³ Elizabeth thus suggests not only that she would selflessly sacrifice herself for the good of her people but also that the affairs of the state rather than her own selfish vengeance interfere with an idyllic relationship with her cousin.

The image of the milkmaids has attracted the attention of several scholars. Janel Mueller contends that her reference to the two queens as “milkmaids” is a genuine but unsuccessful fantasy: “That hypothetical private construction proves a failure and an illusion.”⁷⁴ Laurie Shannon argues that Elizabeth’s use of the milkmaid image points to Elizabeth’s subordination of her private desires to her public obligations. If she were a milkmaid, she could pardon Mary, but since she is not, she must “indicate a complete dedication of the private self to her subjects’ good.”⁷⁵ Yet rather than just a private

⁷² Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 192.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Janel Mueller, “Virtue and Virtuality: Gender in the Self-Representations of Queen Elizabeth I,” in *Form and Reform in Renaissance England: Essays in Honor of Barbara Kiefer Lewalski*, ed. Amy Boesky and Mary Thomas Crane (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000), 231. Fictionalized queens in early modern drama also use the image of the milkmaid as a fantasy of an escape to a simpler life, perhaps in reference to Elizabeth’s famous speech. See Elizabeth Cary’s *The Tragedy of Mariam* (1.1.57-8) and Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* (4.15.73-75). Mueller claims that Elizabeth’s milkmaid images likely “had autobiographical origins,” citing both John Foxe’s and Thomas Platter’s accounts of her desire to be a milkmaid when she was imprisoned by her sister, Mary Tudor (243-44n31).

⁷⁵ Laurie Shannon, *Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 153. Shannon argues that for private citizens, the concept of friendship could be empowering, offering “a utopian version of polity” in which two friends, as equals, could operate

fantasy that Elizabeth must disavow to retain public authority, the milkmaid association is very much connected to her success as a female sovereign at this moment. Elizabeth's emphasis on the twinned milkmaids suggests the extent to which female sovereignty relies on the language of doubling for its authenticity. Like Una, Britomart, or Mercilla, Elizabeth must imply her closeness to Mary—rather than her opposition to her—in order to secure her position as true queen.

Elizabeth's likening herself and Mary to milkmaids also highlights the ways in which the body natural is intertwined with Elizabeth's construction of female sovereignty. In comparing Mary to a milkmaid, she relegates Mary to the body natural, yet in doing so she ties herself to the body natural as well. Elizabeth's reliance on a striking image like the one of milkmaids suggests that the concept of the body politic can never fully compensate for the body natural, especially when that body is female. Elizabeth depends on the body natural to authenticate her sovereignty, using the image of the milkmaids to enhance her own authority, yet she also exposes the tenuousness of that sovereignty, which rests on the thin line between proving she is the true woman and Mary is the false one. Elizabeth suggests that she cannot always make her female body natural disappear, and because of that, she must validate it by tying it to another, inferior copy.

Elizabeth also stages her authenticity through the performance of her grief. As with Mary and so many of Spenser's characters, female grief was often under suspicion for being counterfeit. Elizabeth suggests that the only way she can validate her grief as true is by setting it against the image of the false woman:

as "two sovereigns" (141). For actual sovereigns, however, the concept of friendship threatened to undermine their authority because of "the monarch's subordination of public office to private love" (142).

But I must tell you one thing more: that in this last act of Parliament you have brought me to a narrow strait, that I must give direction for her death, which cannot be to me but a most grievous and irksome burdon. And lest you might mistake mine absence from this Parliament . . . yet hath it not been the doubt of any such danger or occasion that kept me from thence, but only the griet grief to hear this cause spoken of; especially that such a one of state and kin should need to so open a declaration, and that this nation should be spotted with blots of disloyalty. Wherein the less is my grief, for that I hope the better part is mine; and those of the worse not much to be accounted of; for that in seeking my destruction, they might have spoiled their own souls.⁷⁶

Elizabeth's "great grief" becomes genuine only in contrast to Mary's "blots of disloyalty," and conversely, Mary spoils her own soul in seeking the "destruction" of the truly grieving Elizabeth. Again, Elizabeth points to her affinity with Mary—"one of state and kin"—only to suggest how her female double, exposed as disloyal, props up her own authority as queen.

Elizabeth continues to appropriate the language of doubling in her second speech, even more vehemently objecting to the idea of killing one who is so like herself: "What will they not now say when it shall be spread that for the safety of her life, a maiden queen could be content to spill the blood even of her own kinswoman?"⁷⁷ Yet she also shows her awareness of the thin line she treads between being the true queen and being

⁷⁶ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 194.

⁷⁷ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 201.

labeled the counterfeit. In one version of her second speech, she insists that she is not the one making false shows: “If there be any that think I have prolonged the time of purpose to make a counterfeit show of clemency, they do me the most undeserved wrong, as He knoweth, which is the searcher of the most secret thoughts of the heart.”⁷⁸ Aware of how Mary’s display of grief for Darnley became hotly contested and questioned, Elizabeth recognizes that her own grief could easily be branded forged, and she uses a number of techniques to stave off that charge.

One trope she consistently uses in this speech to authenticate her position is the complaint, a trope often associated with female speakers:

I have strived more this day than ever in my life, whether I should speak or use silence. If I speak and not complain, I shall dissemble; if I hold my peace, your labor taken were full vain. For me to make my moan were strange and rare; for I suppose you shall find few that for their own particular will cumber you with such a care. Yet such, I protest, hath been my greedy desire and hungry will that of your consultation might have fallen out some other means to work my safety joined with your assurance than that for which you are become such earnest suitors as I protest I must needs, though not of you, but unto you, and of the cause. . . .

And since now it is resolved that my surety cannot be established without a princess’s end, I have just cause to complain that I, who have in my time pardoned so many rebels, winked at so many treasons, and either

⁷⁸ Quoted in Lewis, *The Trial of Mary Queen of Scots*, 111.

not produced them or altogether slipped them over with silence, should now be forced to this proceeding against such a person.⁷⁹

The female complaint was a trope long established in English literature; speakers like Jane Shore in *The Mirror for Magistrates* (1563), Rosamond in Samuel Daniel's *Complaint of Rosamond* (1592), and Britomart give long complaints about their sufferings. While some critics have interpreted the female complaint as a mode of passivity for women, other scholarship has pointed to the complaint as a vehicle through which female speakers can achieve legitimacy.⁸⁰ Elizabeth seems aware of both possibilities here. Acknowledging that "For me to make my moan were strange and rare," she recognizes the risk that a complaint will appear self-indulgent, or perhaps even forged. Yet she also suggests—through her convoluted syntax—that the complaint is the only way she can respond to a crisis of such magnitude—to a crisis that cannot be resolved "without a princess's end." Elizabeth appropriates this form as one way of validating her grief for her cousin as true.

What is even more interesting about Elizabeth's use of the complaint in this speech are the ways in which Elizabeth echoes Mary's own pleas in her letters to Elizabeth. Time and again, Mary begged Elizabeth to let her come make her complaint. In May 1568, for instance, Mary writes, "I wished above all to come in person to lay my

⁷⁹ Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 200-201.

⁸⁰ In his study of the female complaint, Götz Schmitz argues that women characters lack a public, politicized voice: "The women's concern is with private, rather than public issues; they look into their own mirrors" (*The Fall of Women in Early English Narrative Verse* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990], viii). For an alternate view, see Mary Jo Kietzman, who argues, "Spoken by women or other socially marginal figures . . . , complaints enable authors to represent subjects who achieve a degree of self-determination by becoming fully conscious of their constrained situation when they recreate it in a complaint narrative" ("What is Hecuba to Him or [S]he to Hecuba? Lucrece's Complaint and Shakespearean Poetic Agency," *Modern Philology* 97, no. 1 [1999]: 26n20). See Chapter Three of this dissertation for an extended analysis of the female complaint poems of the 1590s.

complaint before you, as well on account of our near relationship, equality of rank, and professed friendship,” and in November 1569, Mary pleadingly writes to Elizabeth, “now that you listen to the malice of my rebels, as the Bishop of Ross informs me, refusing to hear the just complaint of her who has placed herself voluntarily in your power, and thrown herself into your arms, I have presumed once more to try my fortune, and to appeal to the queen my good sister herself.”⁸¹ In using the language of the complaint, Elizabeth co-opts Mary’s own pleas. Like Britomart, who becomes queen of the Amazons only after Radigund has been beheaded, Elizabeth can appropriate Mary’s position and language only after her threat has been eliminated.

While Mary was still alive, though, she remained too much of a threat to Elizabeth to see her in person, which is why Elizabeth could not risk being present at her trial. As Spenser shows, when two female sovereigns are in the same room, one has to disappear, and Elizabeth could not gamble on being the one who is eliminated. Scholars have rightly pointed to the tactical reasons behind Elizabeth’s evasiveness here. As Jayne Lewis argues, killing another sovereign sets a very bad precedent, striking “at Elizabeth’s queenly authority in a complicated way—not just by subjecting the queen’s will to that of Parliament but, more subtly, by forcing her to *want* to divest herself of a royal prerogative that she, not unlike Mary, held dear.”⁸² Yet Elizabeth’s reluctance to show herself literally reflected by her sister/rival is also rooted in the Petrarchan context that informs their relationship. Like a Petrarchan mistress, whose legitimacy was slippery and often required the comparison to a false female other, Elizabeth carefully stage-managed

⁸¹ Stuart, *Letters of Mary, Queen of Scots*, vol. 1, pp. 45, 111.

⁸² Lewis, *The Trial of Mary Queen of Scots*, 33.

her relationship with Mary in order to secure her own tenuous power as a female sovereign. Elizabeth needed Mary to authenticate her own queenship, but in finally eliminating her female counterfeit, Elizabeth also risked eliminating her own authority—disappearing herself like Una, Britomart, or Mercilla once their false doubles were exposed. Elizabeth instead elected to manage her own absence at Mary's trial, ensuring that she was not the one eliminated in their rivalry and that Mary's sisterly closeness to her—so vital to her reign for the past nineteen years—did not come too close.

CHAPTER THREE

Old Wives' Tales, the Petrarchan Complaint, and *The Winter's Tale*

In *The Winter's Tale*, Hermione appears in two ghostly manifestations: once in Antigonus's dream, and again in the last scene when she emerges from what the audience thought was her death. As a female ghost, Hermione is an unusual figure in early modern literature. Most ghosts of the period, critics point out, were male, particularly the revenge ghosts that dominated the London stage. Frances Dolan emphasizes the "dearth of female ghosts both before and after the Reformation, in continental Europe as well as in England" and argues that the female ghosts who do appear in literature are disappointingly passive, refraining "from reproaching, menacing, or intervening," unlike their male counterparts.¹ For Dolan, Hermione's role as revenge ghost is frustratingly weak, and she asserts that Hermione neither defends herself nor expresses anger in her appearance in Antigonus's dream: "*The Winter's Tale* robs its female protagonist of rage and vengefulness even as it so provocatively links her to the spectral and iconic."² Like Valerie Traub and Abbe Blum, Dolan sees Hermione's "death" as a way of immobilizing her desirability so that she can be fully possessed by her husband.³

¹ Frances E. Dolan, "Hermione's Ghost: Catholicism, the Feminine, and the Undead," in *The Impact of Feminism in English Renaissance Studies*, ed. Dymna Callaghan (Houndsmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 222, 223.

² Dolan, "Hermione's Ghost," 230.

³ Valerie Traub, *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama* (New York: Routledge, 1992), esp. chap. 1, "Jewels, Statues, and Corpses: Containment of Female Erotic Power"; and Abbe Blum, "'Strike all that look upon with mar[b]le': Monumentalizing Women in Shakespeare's Plays," in *The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print: Counterbalancing the Canon*, ed. Anne M. Haselkorn and Betty S. Travitsky (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), 99-118.

Yet critics have largely ignored two popular early modern contexts in which women figure widely as ghosts and as participants in supernatural encounters. One is the Protestant literature that condemns ghosts—along with demons, spirits, goblins, fairies, witches, and the like—as “old wives’ tales.”⁴ Women, according to these writers, are both the culprits in transmitting the stories and the false images themselves. In *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), Reginald Scot writes that “in our childhood our mothers maids have so terrified us” with stories of the supernatural “that we are afraid of our owne shadowes.” He also writes that “spirits most often and specialiie take the shape of women.”⁵ Protestant writers also argued that women were more susceptible to believing in ghosts. In *Of Ghostes and Spirites Walking by Nyght*, first translated into English in 1572, Lewes Lavater argues, “Wemen, which for the most parte are naturally geuen to feare than men, . . . do more often suppose they see or heare this or that thing, than men do. And so do yong wemen, bicause commonly they are afrayde.”⁶ The young maiden became an especially prominent figure in early modern stories about the supernatural, which detail the erotic encounters she has with apparitions at the same time that they argue that those encounters did not happen at all. In these cases, writing texts that deride

⁴ The term “old wives’ tale” dates back at least to Plato’s reference to the *mythos graos* that nurses told children to frighten them (Plato, *Gorgias*, ed. E.R. Dodds [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959], 527a5), but the term first appeared in English in Reformist texts, which use the phrase to belittle what they perceived as Catholic superstition. Its earliest use recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (2010) comes from the Wycliffite Bible (1395) in 1 Tim. 4:7: “eschewe thou vncouenable fablis, and elde wymmenus fablis” (*OED Online*, s.v. “old woman,” 1b). See Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1994), for the earliest uses of the term “old wives’ tale” (12-14).

⁵ Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, with an introduction by the Rev. Montague Summers (New York: Dover, 1972), bk. 8, chap. 15, p. 86.

⁶ Lewes Lavater, *Of Ghostes and Spirites Walking by Nyght*, trans. R.H. (London: Henry Benneyman for Richard Watkyns, 1572), ed. with an introduction by J. Dover Wilson and May Yardley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929), 14, hereafter cited parenthetically by page number in the text.

Catholic superstitions as old wives' tales becomes a way to participate in the dangers of the erotic female body—open, desiring, vocal, and sensual—all the while insisting that this body is not really there. Despite the derogatory nature of the term “old wives' tales,” its use also constituted a space of pleasure—if illicit pleasure—for these writers.⁷

The other early modern context that features female ghosts is the complaint poems of the 1590s, such as Samuel Daniel's *Complaint of Rosamond* (1592) and Thomas Lodge's *Complaint of Elstred* (1593). Influenced by the complaint of Jane Shore in *The Mirror for Magistrates* (1563) and often appended to sonnet sequences, these narrative poems feature female speakers who speak from the grave about their sinful sexuality. Unlike Petrarchan mistresses in the sonnets—stony figures who inflict cruelty on their suitors—the speakers of the complaint emerge as an open, pleasure-seeking characters who actively elicit sexual relationships with powerful men. The frame of the ghost story enabled writers to push the figure of the Petrarchan mistress beyond her conventional icy boundaries and evoke a different kind of absent presence than that ascribed to the distant Petrarchan beloved of the sonnets. As a ghost, the speaker of the complaint could evoke full bodily and sensual presence—the unfulfilled fantasy of the sonnet speaker—while maintaining her characteristic unavailability. The female complaint allowed the Petrarchan mistress to be both virtuous and loose, desirable and desiring, admirable and wanton.

⁷ Mary Ellen Lamb, *The Popular Culture of Shakespeare, Spenser, and Jonson* (London: Routledge, 2006), suggests that the term “old wives' tale” could be seen as a cover for a “lingering desire” in these writers, and she argues that these tale-telling women—women of childbearing years if they were wetnurses—could not have been old: “In the recollection of childhood, some of these ‘mumping beldams’ were surely remembered as beautiful young women, who seemed at the time to be as powerful as the magical fays of the stories they once told” (52).

Shakespeare's use of the figure of the female ghost—as well as the frame of the old wives' tale—in *The Winter's Tale* draws upon these contemporary representations of ghostly eroticism and allows Hermione to return as a speaking, desiring Petrarchan figure. Much of the criticism of the play has focused on the anxieties that Hermione's maternal body produces, but the play also suggests that her role as Petrarchan mistress—the beautiful woman Leontes fears he can never entirely possess—equally unleashes the panicked distrust of her faithfulness. Leontes cannot accommodate a Petrarchan mistress who speaks back, who delights in her own praise, and who reveals her own desires, and her elimination in act 3 seems to set up a context in which Leontes, as Petrarchan lover, can worship the absent presence of his beloved who is now safely distant. Yet Hermione's return to the play—first as a ghost in Antigonus's dream and then as a ghostly presence seemingly summoned from the dead—opens up a space in which Hermione can speak and still be admired. The question of whether Hermione's body is fully present—which the play leaves hauntingly lingering—makes possible a Petrarchan female figure who expresses her own desires. Like the Protestant tracts on ghosts, the play calls into question whether Hermione's seemingly supernatural return from the dead is real. And like the female speaker of the complaint poems, Hermione seems at once dead and living, and this in-between state permits the figure of the woman on a pedestal who embraces her own suitor.

At the end of the play, Hermione transforms into a figure that recalls both old wife and young maiden. Not just a frustrated revenge ghost or an immobilized statue, Hermione returns as an animated character whose presence eludes Leontes's full control.

This chapter examines the discourses—both Protestant and Petrarchan—that make such a figure possible. Like Askew and Elizabeth I, Shakespeare highlights the liminality of the figure of the mistress—in this case, enabled by her ghostly presence—to suggest that the body of the mistress need not always be in full possession of her desiring suitor. Instead, he points to the contexts in which women may articulate their own erotic desires—and yet still remain desirable figures in the eyes of those who encounter them.

Desire and Protestant Skepticism

The Protestants who wrote about ghost stories and other related beliefs in the supernatural in early modern England were officially skeptical, even sarcastic, about them, writing about how gullible and foolish people were to believe popish tricks. In *The Terrors of the Night* (1594), Thomas Nashe declares, “Fie, fie, was euer poore fellow so farre benighted in an old wiues tale of diuells and vrchins.”⁸ Yet their texts about Catholic occultism also display an intense fascination with these stories and especially with the young women who experienced—or who were tricked into thinking they experienced—confrontations with the supernatural. Horrified at these women’s erotic encounters and at the Catholic priests’ lustful abuse of their bodies, these writers nevertheless obsessively return to the dangerous female sexuality of these girls, suggesting that the frame of the ghost story invites attention to what is illicit—and thus exciting—about the desirable female body.

⁸ Thomas Nashe, *The Terrors of the night Or, A Discourse of Apparitions* (London: Iohn Danter, 1594), Hv. Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), examines how both writers of the Protestant Reformation and later writers of the emerging seventeenth-century scientific culture helped to secure “old wives’ tales” as a term that signified “all the erroneous and superstitious rubbish which needed to be stripped away from the essence of truth” (176).

Reginald's Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584) demonstrates the excess with which Protestant writers detail the very supernatural beings they abhor, and it also points to the female body as the locus of interest for these writers. Although most of his text is dedicated to deriding the idea of witchcraft as a Catholic superstition, he also names the source of irrational fear in most adults: the tales told by their mothers' maids. In a famous passage, Scot names the goblins, witches, demons, and fairies that have so disturbed him—yet his rambling and wildly lengthy taxonomy suggests the pleasurable hold these stories have on his imagination:

It is a common saieng; A lion feareth no bugs. But in our childhood our mothers maids have so terrified us with an ouglie divell having hornes on his head, fier in his mouth, and a taile in his breech, eies like a bason, fanges like a dog, clawes like a beare, a skin like a Niger, and a voice roring like a lion, whereby we start and are afraid when we heare one crie Bough: and they have so fraied us with bull beggers, spirits, witches, urchens, elves, hags, fairies, satyrs, pans, faunes, sylens, kit with the cansticke, tritons, centaurs, dwarfes, giants, imps, calcars, conjurors, nymphes, changlings, *Incubus*, Robin good-fellowe, the spoorne, the mare, the man in the oke, the hell waine, the fierdrake, the puckle, Tom thombe, hob goblin, Tom tumbler, boneles, and such other bugs, that we are afraid of our owne shadowes: . . . For right grave writers report, that spirits most often and speciallie take the shape of women appearing to monks, &c: . . . Well, thanks be to God, this wretched and cowardlie infidelitie,

since the preaching of the gospell, is in part forgotten: and doubtles, the rest of those illusions will in short time (by Gods grace) be detected and vanish awaie.⁹

With his declaration that these illusions will eventually “be detected and vanish awaie,” Scot reveals one of the central paradoxes of Protestant attitudes toward the supernatural. In order to erase all that causes him anxiety—the long list of supernatural beings including witches, fairies, ghosts, and devils—he must first evoke, even indulge in, them. It is not enough to say they do not exist. In order to vanish, they must first be recalled, described, conjured. And Scot’s excess in his descriptions betrays his own pleasure in the act of recollection. This passage is quoted at length because of the sheer glut of his list of the supernatural beings with which “our childhood mothers maids” filled his head; the creatures he insists should be disavowed are the very ones he cannot resist naming, cataloguing, and vividly illustrating. Ironically, much of the detailed information that scholars have today regarding the specific stories told about the supernatural in early modern England comes from those, like Scot, who most vehemently opposed them.¹⁰

Scot’s statement that “spirits most often and speciallie take the shape of women appearing to monks &c” also suggests how strongly Protestant writers associate the threat of the supernatural with the temptation of young, desirable women. In this passage,

⁹ Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, bk. 8, chap. 15. pp. 86-87.

¹⁰ Scholars note the scattered nature of the records of folk stories, which were largely passed down through oral transmission, and they point to Scot as a valuable source of information on this topic. Scot is the sole written source for several stories. K.M. Briggs, *The Anatomy of Puck: An Examination of Fairy Beliefs among Shakespeare’s Contemporaries and Successors* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), writes that “Scot himself mentions several fairies not known to folk tradition, which were probably authentic” (21). Eleanor Prosser, *Hamlet and Revenge* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1967), writes, “Even skeptics who frankly doubted the appearance of ghosts of any type probably were familiar with ghost lore. Reginald Scot may have intended to destroy ‘the absurd opinions’ of papists and witchmongers, but his *Discoverie of Witchcraft* actually provided a tantalizing summary of them” (117).

Scot's anxiety gradually moves from the "mothers maids" who told him such stories to the "shape of women appearing to monks" that figure widely in these stories. The "grave" writer to whom Scot refers in the margins here is Lavater, who, in his quest to debunk the Catholic concept of ghosts, writes about monks who trick women into believing that they are ghosts so that they will sleep with them. Ironically, Scot misreads Lavater; it is not the women who appear to the monks, but the monks who appear to the women. Scot's interest in this aspect of Lavater's treatise—his notable misreading—shows the proximity between young women's bodies and the supernatural in these Protestant texts—and it also shows how easily anxiety about the figure of the ghost slips into anxiety about young erotic women.

Like Scot's *Discoverie*, Lavater's *Of Ghostes* sets out to debunk Catholic superstition, firmly refuting the idea that people can come back from the dead. According to Lavater, who likens ghosts to "olde wyues tales" (br), "the soules neither of the faithful nor of infidels do wander any longer on the earth, when they be once seuered from the bodies" (114). Yet even as he denies ghosts' existence in the Catholic sense, Lavater devotes most of the text to ghost stories, instructing readers how to tell which spirits are real, how to tell which spirits are good, and how to behave when they encounter spirits.¹¹

¹¹ Looking at the persistence and popularity of ghost stories in early modern England—which appear both in numerous ballads and in revenge tragedies—scholars have argued that Catholic views on ghosts remained intertwined with Protestant thinking throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), concludes that the "Reformation failed to eradicate a widely held belief in the possibility of the dead seeking communion with the living" (261). Prosser, *Hamlet and Revenge*, points to the proximity of Catholic and Protestant positions on spirits, arguing that although Protestants did not believe in ghosts, both Catholics and Protestants believed in spirits who wandered the earth, and both groups were equally anxious about determining whether spirits were good or bad (106). See also Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), who argues for the importance of purgatory as an imaginative concept in early modern literature.

For a Protestant thinker who does not believe in ghosts, he demonstrates in his treatise how much he loves to talk about them.

Lavater tells several stories near the beginning of his treatise about monks and priests who pretend to be ghosts in order to gain access to the women they desire. He tells the story from Josephus about the ancient Roman knight Mundus, who, inflamed with “louers madnesse,” lusted after a “very riche and exceeding beautiful” Paulina, a married woman (23). When he could not allure Paulina away from her husband with money, Mundus hires a “mayde cunning in many artes” to devise a way for Mundus to enjoy Paulina, and this maid tricks Paulina into believing that the god Anubis has come and “vouchsaued to loue hir” (24-25). A devoted worshipper at the Temple of Isis, Paulina agrees to his demands and sleeps with Mundus, only to find out later that she has been deceived and that her chastity has been undone. Lavater tells another story of a German priest who was “farre in loue with an honest and faire mayden” who resisted his attempts “to haue defloured hir” (42). In response, the priest dresses as the Virgin Mary, appearing to the woman and telling her “that there was a certain holy and religious man, which had heretofore asked a thing at hir handes in the very same place, which she had hitherto denied him, but now it was hir pleasure, if he required the same again, she should in any wise graunt it, if she wold atteyn euerlasting life” (42). Believing the vision, the woman, “supposing she should do high seruice to the virgin Mary, fulfilleth the lust of that wicked knaue” (42-43).

On the one hand, Lavater’s recountings of these false visions expose the ridiculousness of these priests and of Catholicism. Lavater writes, “It might be declared

in many words what loue is able to do. Now bicause Monks and priests liue idly, abounding in all wantonnesse, and yet are restrayned from holy mariage, what maruell is it if at this time also they faine and counterfeite many visions, that they might therby the easier enjoy their loue?" (46). Yet the comic nature and the sheer number of these stories (all of which follow the same pattern) suggest that there is more to these tales than a simple denouncement of Catholicism. Lavater's language of "maruell" also invites the reader to participate in the pleasures of the illicit sexuality in these stories. Lavater's animated descriptions of Mundus's "louers madnesse inflamed" and "the rage of his loue" incite pleasurable identification as well as pious condemnation from the reader. The stories emphasize the tragedy of these women losing their chastity, but they also detail beautiful, seductive women who choose to believe and who choose to engage in forbidden sexual encounters to fulfill their religious fantasies. Lavater says of Paulina, "And so all that night she satisfied the yong mans desire, supposing she had done pleasure vnto the God" (25), and when the German woman sees whom she believes to be the Virgin Mary, "The mayden by & by blazed it about all the citie" (42). Lavater's censure of the counterfeit papist visions enables him to detail the delights of women's desires while at the same time suggesting that they do not really exist because they are produced by false pretenses.

Barnabe Rich's pamphlet, *The true report of a late practise enterprised by a Papist with a yong Maiden in Wales* (1582), vividly demonstrates how ghost stories enabled writers to enact the pleasures of the female Petrarchan body while at the same time distancing themselves from the dangers of those pleasures. The purpose of the

pamphlet is to discredit the visions of a young woman, Elizabeth Orton, who recently confessed in church that she had been seduced by a papist. Rich, who was “an eye witsse” to Orton’s public confession, became curious about her, and through his “intelligence” he obtained “a Pamphlet that was secretly spread, wherin was described the maner of her Visions, penned by some Archpapist that was ashamed to put to his owne name.”¹² Rich prints this unnamed priest’s account of Orton’s visions ostensibly to show how ridiculous they are, sarcastically instructing the reader to say his *pater nosters* and *Ave Marias* and arguing that exposing this account to the world will undoubtedly reveal its foolishness: “Were it not pittie then that so worthie a worke as this, should be still thus smothered vp amongst our Catholikes? the whiche questionles if it were published and brought to light, could not bee but accompted of, euen amongst children and fooles” (B1r). Yet even as Rich frames the priest’s account as a preposterous old wives’ tale, his decision to print it in full suggests that something about it excites, intrigues, even titillates him. Rich’s incorporation of the priest’s account into his own not only discredits Orton’s Catholic visions as absurd but also participates in the erotic delights that the her visions evoke.

The priest tells of Orton’s visions of Christ, the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, and the ghosts of her dead family members as well as of her experience of purgatory and her conversion to Catholicism, but the focal point in all these accounts is Orton’s eroticized body. The priest emphasizes throughout his narrative Orton’s tears, eyes,

¹² Barnabe Rich, *The true report of a late practise enterprised by a Papist with a yong Maiden in Wales, accompted emongst our Catholiques in those partes for a greater Prophetise, then euer was the Holie Maide of Kent, till now on Sundaie beyng the iiii. of Marche this present yere 1582* (London: Robert Walley, 1582), A3r, B1r, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by page number.

mouth, skin, and breasts, pointing to the pleasurable pain of Orton's experiences. For instance, in her encounter with the Virgin Mary, Orton seeks forgiveness for her sins and enters purgatorial fires to cleanse herself:

it seemed more terrible then a womans paines in trauaile with Childe, or a man when the stitch teareth his bodie in peeces, and woundeth the harte to death: In so much that the beholders wondered greatly, how her yong and tender fleshe could indure the same, for she burned within as well as without, that the heate broyled vp to her mouthe, and her skinne scorched with suche excessiue heate, that hardly could any man abide to touche her to be briefe, for very paine her eyes were couered with a mist, and her mouthe fomed, that all the companie assistauntes dispaired of her life, and were fore greued to see so heauie a spectacle, and to heare so pittifull a voyce pearcyng their eares, oh, oh, oh, O good Lorde I burne, good Lorde I burne. (B4v)

In one sense, the description of Orton is grotesque, with her foaming mouth and scorched skin, yet like the martyrs in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, Orton's body is rendered blazoned, spectacular, and desirable. Although the witnesses are described as "greued" to see Orton in such pain, the priest also depicts a scene that compels an audience not to look away. Orton's sensationalized body parts and her erotic moaning prompt the reader to see her as an alluring subject.

Orton's description of an encounter with another vision, in fact, portrays her own body in explicitly Petrarchan terms:

and loe this while appeared vnto me, a goodly faire birde, hauyng the bodie of a Sparhauke, the face of a Man, the beake of a Pigion, and the feathers of diuers colours, makyng greate speede towards me, lightyng vppon my breast, and with his winges couered the same, and very softly first laid his bill on my forehead, then on myne eyes, lippes and breast, that being doen, he declared that he was a messenger from God, charging me to bee readie at an houres warning, and to aske them forgiuenesse whom I had offended, and so vanished awaie from my sight. (C1v-C2r)

The bird creature that lands on Orton's body is interested not only in her sins but also in her erotic features. The downward trajectory of the bird's caresses—the forehead, the eyes, the lips, and finally the breast—suggests that Orton's religious encounter is also a sexual encounter. The priest's narrative details a blazon of Orton's body, but instead of an icy, distant, and scornful beloved, Orton is depicted as a mistress who welcomes consummation of her lover's desires.

Far from a passive recipient of advances from these ghost visions, Orton vigorously pursues an erotic connection with the figures she sees. One of the most charged moments of the priest's accounts—and thus one of the most threatening moments for Rich—occurs when Orton embraces Christ. The priest writes,

she saied with very great vehemencie, O Lord, he reacheth his hand towards me, let me goe to hym, let me imbrace hym, wherewith immediatly by meare force in dispite of them all, she rose vpon her feete, and spreadyng bothe armes she ioyned them againe fast to her stomacke,

vtteryng these wordes: I haue haue hym now in armes, O good Lord I haue thee, *Jesus*, help me, leaue me not sweete *Jesus* leaue mee not: neuer ceasyng to call vpon his holie name. (C3v)

The context of the supernatural allows a space for the threatening female body to be described as an erotic agent who speaks with “great vehemencie,” spreading her arms and commanding Jesus to stay. Not just a desirable Petrarchan love object, Orton is represented here as a desiring subject, transgressing the bounds of acceptable female behavior. Orton’s behavior represents the wish-fulfillment of Petrarchan narratives; Orton is not simply a beautiful, hard-hearted idol, but a pleasure-seeking woman who fervently accepts the suit of her pursuing lover—Christ.

Unsurprisingly, this behavior is what most offends Rich’s sensibilities. Although he dismisses Orton as “but a sillie Maiden” who experiences “Patheticall extasies,” her erotic behavior provokes real interest, excitement, and anxiety, and Rich returns to the female body as a central focus in the pamphlet (E1v). After the priest’s narrative concludes, Rich expresses his shock at Orton’s presumption to touch the body of Christ, something even Mary Magdalene dared not do: “When Marie Magdalen went to the Sepulchre with teares to seeke Christe, to whom although he firste shewed hym self, yet she might not so muche as once to touche hym, yet our yonge Prophetesse, who as our authour affirmeth was ignoraunt, an heretique, . . . and yet she might bee suffered to imbrace Christe in her armes” (E2v). Rich is also dismayed at the behavior of the Virgin Mary in the priest’s account, and he contests the idea that Mary would instruct Orton to endure purgatory’s fires to cleanse her sins because God’s forgiveness should be enough:

“she that was wont to bee called our Ladie of Pitie, is now become a gentilwoman of too much crueltie. . . . I perceiue the Prouerbe to bee true, the house is too vnquiet where the good wife weares the breeches, and yet you see it is so in heauen” (E2r-v). Rich is troubled by the thought of Orton and the Virgin as figures who exemplify what is threatening about the female body—its openness, its attractiveness, its potential to speak, demand, or desire—and promptly deems them disorderly. In Rich’s eyes, the Catholic priest has monstrously transformed the Virgin into a Petrarchan mistress—“a gentilwoman of too much crueltie”—and has allowed this figure to run amok with her power to control others around her—to wear the breeches.

Yet despite Rich’s argument that the story of Orton’s visions are laughable—“what Asse but would haue been ashamed to haue penned doune so ridiculous a matter” (E1r)—his inclusion of the priest’s narrative, which exceeds the length of Rich’s own text, points to the pleasure of such an account. To be sure, Rich safely contains the account by labeling it an old wives’ tale, suggesting that those who would believe in such a story are gullible fools: “thou seest that the greatest fortification of our holie Fathers doctrine, consisteth in Dreames, olde Wiues tales, Vnknowen scriptures, Traditions of menne, straunge Miracles, Fables, and Follies” (D4v-E1r). Rich cautions the reader not to be swept away by the tricks of the Catholic Church: “Let not forlorne hope misleade you, or fained miracles withdraw you, nor olde wiues prophesies so misgouerne you” (E4r). Yet his indulgence in this account—the literary authority he grants the priest by allowing him to tell his story—as well as the obsessive attention he places on Orton’s body suggest the enticing nature of Orton’s erotic encounters with the supernatural—even as Rich

officially disavows them. His repeated admonitions to heed the dangers of old wives' tales only certify their appeal in the first place, and his insistence that these tales are mere silly fables also serves as an advertisement for the pleasures old wives' tales can afford.

Samuel Harsnett's *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (1603) also demonstrates the anxiety and titillation produced by the stories of young women experiencing supernatural visions. Written at the request of Elizabeth's government, the treatise addresses the Catholic exorcisms that took place at Denham in 1586. Like Scot, Lavater, and Rich, Harsnett cynically portrays Catholic beliefs on supernatural beings, and he appends to his text the examinations of three women—Sara Williams, Fiddell Williams, and Anne Smith—who had been subjected to the exorcisms seventeen years ago and who, like Elizabeth Orton, now confessed that what they had experienced was popish trickery. Harsnett's text is most often studied today in relation to Shakespeare's *King Lear*, which borrows heavily from Harsnett, and recent scholars have been particularly interested in Harsnett's use of theatrical language in denouncing the Catholic practice of exorcism.¹³ Yet Harsnett's text is equally interesting in its obsessive return to the young girls' erotic bodies, particularly Sara's experience with the priests who directed her exorcisms. Harsnett's anxiety about what the priests did to Sara's body and his inability to let it go point to the excitement produced by women's encounters with the supernatural even as Harsnett vehemently insists on the horrible impropriety of the priests' lust.

¹³ See, for instance, Stephen Greenblatt, "Shakespeare and the Exorcists," in *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 94-128.

The moment to which Harsnett so often returns originates from Sara's examinations, when she describes the priests' handling of her body during the exorcisms:

when she was otherwise evil at ease by reason of their bad usage of her, they would in the end (when they were weary with dealing with her) say that the wicked spirits were gone downe into her legge, and sometimes into her foote, and that they should rest there for that time. And again, when they tooke her in hand the next time, they would begin to hunt the devil from the foote to bring him upwards, of purpose as they said to cause him, when they had him in her head, to goe out of her mouth, eares, eyes, or nose. And the manner of their hunting of him was to folow him with their hands (as they did pretend) all along the parts of her body. At one time, when it began to be with this examine according to the manner of women (as since she hath perceaved), whereby she was much troubled, the priests did pretend that the devil did rest in the most secret part of her body. Where-upon they devised to apply the reliques unto it, and gave her such sliber-sawces as made her (as she was perswaded) much worse then otherwise she thinketh she should have beene.¹⁴

Not only the actions of the priests but also the pornographic nature of Sara's description shock Harsnett, so much so that he claims he cannot even repeat it. Horrified at what has happened to her, he states, "Some of these devil-lodges in *Sara* and *Fid*, without a

¹⁴ Samuel Harsnett, *A Declaration of egregious Popish Impostures, to with-draw the harts of her Maiesties Subiects from their allegiance, and from the truth of Christian Religion professed in England, vnder the pretence of casting out deuils* (London: James Roberts, 1603), in *Shakespeare, Harsnett, and the Devils of Denham*, by F.W. Brownlow (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1993), 349-50. Hereafter, I cite Brownlow's edition parenthetically in the text by page number.

praeface of deprecation to your modesty, I must not once name for feare of [a] check from your chast eares, and a change of colour in mine inke and paper at such uncouth termes. I will onely leape over this kennell of turpitude with a note of unsavorie smels, and remitt you to that clause of *Sara Williams* relation, who as a woman hath touched it as modestly as she can” (251). His language suggests strong revulsion, and his text literally evades the repetition of the sexual event, “leaping” over the “kennell of turpitude” in order to dodge the “check” from the readers’ “chast eares.” He characterizes what happened to Sara’s body—or perhaps her body itself—as filthy, stinky, and loathsome, and he suggests extreme fear of being tainted by its presence in his text.

Yet despite his disgust for Sara’s erotic encounter with the priests and his insistence that the event is too horrible even to mention, Harsnett compulsively returns to that moment, increasing the erotic intensity of his own language even as he condemns the actions. In one part of the text, Harsnett describes in great detail how one priest lent Sara his stockings and then proceeded to take them off publicly during the exorcism in search of the devil:

Dibdale, Saras ghostly Father, had of his fatherly kindnesse lent his ghostly child a payre of his old stockins that happilie had seene *Venice* and *Rome*; she as a spiritual token of his carnall kindnes doth weare them on her legs. See thys odoriferous vertue, in what exceeding measure it had discended downe and filled the very seames of *Dibdales* hose. *Saras* devil had been very turbulent and stirring in her body, and was to be delivered downe to his baser lodge; he assed quietly downe til he came at her knee,

and coming downe hil too fast, slipt ere he was aware into *Saras* legge, where finding himselfe caught within the priests hose beeing on her legge, he plunges and tumbles like a Salmon taken in a net, and cries harro ho, out alas, pul off, pul off, off in all hast with the priests hose, or els he must marre all, for there he could not stay: and all hast was made accordingly to ease the poore devil of his paine, and let him lie at his repose; and was not this a goodly ginne to catch a Woodcocke withall, and cause him to shoote out of his long bil and cry *O the vertue of the priesthood, ô the power of the Catholique Church*, when they saw with their owne eyes the hose hastily snatched off, heard with their owne long eares *Saras* devil cry, oh, beheld her legge quiet when it was bare without the hose, and observed how reverently the priests touched, handled, and bestowed the hose when it was off, and with what elevation of their eyes to heaven they finished the wonder. (265)

Although he claims that he is horrified at Dibdale's actions, Harsnett's language suggests excitement as well as disdain: "turbulent and stirring in her body," "he plunges and tumbles," "the hose hastily snatched off," "beheld her legge." His rhetoric becomes more heated as the passage goes on, climaxing at the revelation of Sara's bare leg to a group of people and the priest's fondling of the stocking. Like Lavater, who uses the language of "maruell" to describe the priests who trick young maidens into sleeping with them, Harsnett talks about the "wonder" of Dibdale's advances. Although he condemns

Dibdale, Harsnett also betrays his own intense fascination with Sara's erotic female body on display in this moment.

Later in the text, Harsnett argues that he is compelled—by Sara herself—to return to the moment of sexual violation. He suggests that he struggles with Sara's text, and he quotes from her examinations in order to avoid speaking the unspeakable himself:

Heere I had concluded this part of the Pageant, but that *Sara* nips me by the eare, and tells me that I have forgotten a special point of reliqueservice, and points me to her deposition, which when I had turned my booke and reade over, I pointed at her againe, and willed her to pen that point her selfe; therefore thus she tels her owne tale.

At one time (saith she) when it began to be with me after the manner of women, the Priests did pretend that the devill did rest in the most secret part of my body, whereuppon they devised to apply the reliques unto that place. Good God, what doe we heare? Or is it but a dreame? Or have we eares to heare such impious unnatural villanie? (297)

Ironically, in a text that ridicules the idea of being possessed, Harsnett suggests that he is possessed by the figure of Sara, who (quite provocatively) “nips” him “by the eare” and coerces him to read her deposition again against his will. To evade responsibility for speaking about her erotic body, he “willed her pen” to tell “her own tale,” repeating the titillating moment from her examinations by setting it apart in italics. Interestingly, while the examination is in the third person, Harsnett changes her text to the first person (altering “the devil did rest in the most secret part of her body” for instance, to “my

body”), as if to announce even more cogently her ownership of this text and his distance from it. Yet the effect is to tie him more indelibly to this moment of erotic excitement; his exclamations of disbelief (“is it but a dreame?”) only implicate him further in the fantasies that the priests’ handling of Sara initially conjures. Harsnett may denounce the ideas of devils, exorcisms, and ghosts as papist superstitions, but doing so allows him to indulge in the thrill of the “secret part” of Sara’s body that he insists interests only the licentious priests.

Taken together, the texts of Scot, Lavater, Rich, and Harsnett reveal fascinating intersections between the erotic female body and early modern Protestant texts on the supernatural. Although officially repulsed by the ideas of both sexualized women and the supernatural, these writers demonstrate that the denouncement of Catholic ghosts, demons, or spirits opens up a space for indulging in the pleasures of the female body usually foreclosed to them. Talking about how silly ghosts are allows these writers to elaborate on women who desired their suitors instead of denied them, who invited erotic attention to their bodies instead of shunned it, and who pursued forbidden sexual relationships—even if they thought they were doing so for the benefit of God. Protestant ghost stories enact a fantasy about the erotic female body not typically afforded in Petrarchan literature: the Petrarchan woman who loves back. Although Scot, Lavater, Rich, and Harsnett express extreme anxiety about the women involved in erotic exploits with the supernatural, they also show their inability to resist indulging in the idea of the Petrarchan mistress who herself seeks pleasure.

Ghosts of the Female Complaint

In the 1590s, when the genre of the female complaint spiked in popularity, women figure prominently in ghost lore not just as witnesses to the supernatural but also as ghosts themselves. The context of the female complaint is different from that of the Protestant ghost story in that the female complaint embraces rather than eschews the figure of the ghost, but the effect is the same. In both kinds of narratives, the frame of the ghost story allows an engagement with the erotic Petrarchan body not otherwise possible because of the pretext that questions the reality of that female body.

Samuel Daniel's *Complaint of Rosamond* inaugurated the vogue of female complaint poems published in the 1590s. The complaint is appended to his Petrarchan sonnet sequence *Delia*, which details the sonnet speaker's conventional pursuit of the alluring woman who rejects him. In the sonnets, the speaker emphasizes the two characteristics in Delia that are typical of the Petrarchan mistress: fairness and cruelty. In sonnet 5, the speaker says, "With fairest hand, the sweet vnkindest maide, / Castes water-cold disdain vpon my face," and in the following sonnet he famously writes, "Faire is my loue, and cruell as sh'is faire."¹⁵ The speaker also emphasizes her hard heart, as when in sonnet 13 he says, "Hard is her hart and woe is me therefore. / O happie he that ioy'd his stone and arte, / Vnhappy I to loue a stony harte." Repeatedly, the speaker points to the disjunction between the beautiful body he craves and the rejection he receives. In sonnet 23, he laments, "Ile praise her face, and blame her flintie hart."

¹⁵ Samuel Daniel, sonnets 5 and 6, in *Poems and "A Defence of Ryme,"* ed. Arthur Colby Sprague (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930). All references to Daniel's poetry are to this edition; *The Complaint of Rosamond* is cited parenthetically by line number in the text.

Rosamond, too, is a Petrarchan mistress. Beautiful and desirable, she is a female figure whom Wendy Wall calls “a double for Delia” who exposes the dangers of Petrarchism to women.¹⁶ Ostensibly, that is the purpose of Rosamond’s complaint: “To teach to others,” Rosamond says, “what I learnt too late” (67). Yet the frame of the complaint—in which a dead woman disavows her erotic past to gain sympathy—enables Rosamond to behave in ways that Delia cannot. Delighting in her own body and seeking forbidden relationships, Rosamond enacts the fantasy of the Petrarchan woman who loves back—all because as a ghost, her body is not really there at all.

From the beginning of the complaint, Rosamond emphasizes her ghostly status, claiming that because of her bad reputation on earth, she is denied “transport to the sweet Elisean rest” (9). She points to her purgatorial state, emphasizing her “myserable ghost” (29) and stating that “My poore afflicted ghost comes here to plaine it” (2). She asserts that Delia’s pity—“her sigh among the rest” (44)—would alleviate her torment, and she insists on her regret for her “slippry state” (65), warning other women to learn from her “frailtie” (68). Yet her narrative about her sinful past suggests her delight in—much more than her remorse for—her beauty and desirability:

For whilst the sunn-shine of my fortune lasted,
 I ioy’d the happiest warmth, the sweetest heat
 That euer yet imperious beautie tasted,
 I had what glory euer flesh could get” (71-74)

¹⁶ Wendy Wall, *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 256. Wall argues that the female complaint elevates the authority of the male Petrarchan poet from seducer to the restorer of the fallen woman who preserves her legacy for posterity.

Full of language of the senses—“warmth,” “sweetest heat,” “tasted,” “flesh”—Rosamond’s description of her youth suggests that she revels in her former glory much more than seeks forgiveness for it. What begins as narrative spoken by a forlorn ghost develops into an account of Rosamond’s indulgence in her own desiring female body.

Rosamond, in fact, explains that her reason for moving from the country to the city was the pleasure in being seen and admired by others:

And Country home kept me from being eyde,
Where best vnknowne I spent my sweetest dayes;
Till that my frindes mine honour sought to rayse,
To higher place, which greater credite yeeldes,
Deeming such beauty was vnfit for feeldes. (87-91)

Unlike Delia, aloof to the gazes of her suitor, Rosamond is acutely aware of the eyes that seek her body. Not only an object of the male lover who blazons her body, Rosamond blazons her own body, relishing in the allure of each body part. Noting how a comet in the sky “Drawes all mens eyes with wonder to behold it,” Rosamond argues that “So did my speech when rubies did vnfold it; / So did the blasing of my blush appeere, / T’ amaze the world, that holds such sights so deere” (114, 117-19). While such descriptions only further paralyze Delia, whose frigidness forecloses any possibility of reciprocation, the blazon titillates Rosamond, who participates in the pleasures of her erotic appeal.

And Rosamond quickly discovers the power inherent in that beauty: “What might I then not doe whose powre was such? / What cannot women doe that know theyr powre?” (127-28). Although she earlier claims that her complaint serves to warn women

not to follow her path, here she suggests that knowledge of her own authority compels her to pursue conquests. Her language becomes martial as she describes the thrill of captivating the highest prize of all: Henry II. Rosamond delights in that despite her lower station, “A Crowne was at my feete, Scepters obaide mee” (156), and she describes her beauty as more powerful than the warlike king:

For after all his victories in *Fraunce*,
 Tryumphing in the honour of his deedes:
 Vnmatch'd by sword, was vanquisht by a glaunce,
 And hotter warres within his bosom breedes:
 Warres whom whole Legions of desires feedes
 Against all which my chastity opposes,
 The fielde of honour, vertue neuer loses. (162-68)

With her fierce “glaunce,” Rosamond wields phallic dominance over the king, penetrating him with the rays that beam from her eyes: “No armour might bee founde that coule defend, / Transpearcing rayes of Christall-pointed eyes” (169-70). Rosamond’s desire for power is encouraged by the old matron, who urges Rosamond to give her chastity to Henry: “Doost thou not see how that thy King thy *Ioue*, / Lightens foorth glory on thy darke estate” (232-33). Using *carpe diem* logic, the matron exhorts Rosamond to use her beauty while it lasts—“Thou must not thinke thy flowre can alwayes flourish, / And that thy beautie will be still admired” (239-40)—and argues that it is more important to seem chaste than to be chaste: “And seeme the chast, which is the cheefest arte, / For what we seeme each sees, none knows our harte” (286-87). Unlike many *carpe diem*

addressees in early modern literature, Rosamond is persuaded by the argument and becomes Henry's mistress.¹⁷

Once she gives into temptation, however, Rosamond—like the biblical Eve—discovers that the reality of this pleasure does not live up to its promise. She describes her eyes being opened once she entered Henry's "loathed bed" (441): "My nakedness had prou'd my senses liers. / Now opned were mine eyes to looke therein, / For first we taste the fruite, then see our sin" (446-48). After she engages in a relationship with Henry, he builds her a "stately Pallace" to hide her away from the court, and Rosamond experiences the tedium of confinement rather than the freedom of erotic pleasure (463). Yet Rosamond's tone, rather than remorseful about her newly discovered "sin," is instead enraged that her beauty must now be shut up from the world. Far from repentant, Rosamond is mournful that she is deprived of her ability to play the Petrarchan mistress:

What greater torment euer could haue beene,
Then to inforce the fayre to liue retired?
For what is Beuatie if it be not seene,
Or what is't to be seene vnlesse admired?
And though admyred, vnlesse in loue desired?
Neuer were cheeks of Roses, locks of Amber,
Ordayn'd to liue imprisoned in a Chamber. (505-11)

¹⁷ Elizabeth Harris Sagaser, "Sporting the While: Carpe Diem and the Cruel Fair in Samuel Daniel's *Delia* and *The Complaint of Rosamond*," *Exemplaria* 10, no. 1 (1998): 145-70, argues that Daniel valorizes the figure of the beautiful woman who seizes instead of rejects the *carpe diem* logic "of living fully in the moment" (147). I agree with Sagaser that "instead of asserting that women should be modest and silent," Daniel's poetry "admits that they would do well to recognize, enjoy, and use the power of their beauty" (148), but I believe the frame of the ghost story is crucial in enabling this kind of female figure.

Instead of disavowing her beautiful wives, she laments their loss. And instead of taking responsibility for her actions, she assigns blame to others. Although she begins the complaint by warning women not to make her choice, Rosamond insists that becoming Henry's mistress was not her fault at all. She places blame on the matron who uses enticing language "To ouerthrow a poore vnskilful mayde" (308). And she places blame on Henry, whom she claims puts her in a double bind: "But what? he is my King and may constraine me, / Whether I yeelde or not I liue defamed" (337-38). Rosamond expresses not regret for making a sinful choice but regret for her loss of power.

At the end of the poem, Henry's queen learns of Rosamond and forces her to kill herself with poison. Rosamond justifies her suicide by claiming that she must atone for her sinful behavior: "That body which my lusts did violate, / Must sacrifice it selfe t'appease the wrong" (600-601). Her language suggests, though, mourning for the pleasure that she lost just as much as for her chastity. Her death enables Rosamond to obtain what she initially sought: erotic attention from the king. When Henry finds Rosamond dead from the poison, he lavishes her dead body with kisses:

Thus as these passions doe him ouer-whelme,
 He drawes him neere my bodie to behold it:
 And as the Vine married vnto the Elme
 With strict imbraces, so doth he infold it;
 And as he in hys carefull armes doth hold it,
 Viewing the face that euen death commends,
 On sencelesse lips, millions of kysses spends. (659-65)

Safely distant from her body as a ghost and referring to her body as “it,” Rosamond speaks of desire fulfilled—overwhelming passions, entangled bodies, millions of kisses. On the one hand, Rosamond’s death contains her erotic behavior because, after all, she is not really participating. As Rosamond asks for Delia’s pity at the end of the narrative, her ghost—along with the erotic threat of her Petrarchan body—“vanisht” from the poet’s sight (736). Yet her vanishing body unleashes Rosamond’s sexual arousal as much as it limits it. This disappearing act allows Rosamond, as a female speaker, to address openly erotic desires in which she otherwise would not be able to indulge.

Like *Delia*, Thomas Lodge’s *Phillis* conventionally portrays the Petrarchan mistress as beautiful but hard-hearted. The speaker in *Phillis* routinely blames his misfortunes on the coldness of his beloved. In sonnet 3, he laments, “But ah the stringes of hir hard heart are strained, / Beyond the harmonie of my desires.”¹⁸ Like the speaker in *Delia*, the speaker in *Phillis* wonders how Phillis could be “so faire and bee so cruel” (C4v), complaining that “She scorns my faith, she laughs at my sad layes” (F2v). He repeatedly calls attention to Phillis’s “fatall frownes” (B4v), “hir tiranie” (C2v), and her “disdaine” (C4v). By contrast, the appended *Complaint of Elstred* features a female speaker who becomes the mistress of two powerful men and who actively seeks both the pleasures of these relationships and the status that comes with them. Although this complaint, like *The Complaint of Rosamond*, ostensibly serves as a warning to women

¹⁸ Thomas Lodge, *Phillis: Honoured with Pastorall Sonnets, Elegies, and amorous delights. Where-vnto is annexed, the tragicall complaynt of Elstred* (London, Iohn Busbie, 1593), B3r, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by page number.

not to follow the wayward path Elstred took, it also advertises Elstred's behavior as fulfilling—even if it had deadly consequences.

Of course, Elstred's bodily pleasures are curtailed by the fact that as a ghost, Elstred really has no body at all. The narrative begins as she approaches the poet with the ghost of her daughter, Sabrina, from the river Severen as a “wofull vision” (H4r), emphasizing her spectral presence:

What said I, buried? *I* in siluer waue.
 What said I, shrowded? *I* in liquid sheete.
 The water both my winding sheete and graue,
 Which stifling me, for pittie seemd to greete. (H4v)

In her liquid form, Elstred lacks the bodily substance that renders a Petrarchan mistress like Phillis—with her characteristic hardness—so threatening. Elstred distances herself from the threat her body poses by disavowing her behavior, claiming, as Rosamond does, that her complaint will help other women learn from her mistakes and “auoyde my fall”:

Let wofull *Elstred* weepe her wretched state,
 Whose storie merrits some regard to haue.
 Who once inthron'd, and now to fortune thrall,
 May teach successions to auoyde my fall. (H4r)

With Elstred's self-repudiation and her ghostly form, the narrative works to restrain the dangers of Elstred's Petrarchan body.

Yet the tone that Elstred adopts is far more indulgent than ashamed. Like Rosamond, Elstred delights in being seen, and she speaks proudly of her ability to attract

suitors: “With me all natures ritches issued forth. / They that beheld, admird, and did presage / By infancie, the honours of myne age” (H4v). Her first suitor is the German knight, Humber, who “saw me in my prime: / All like a mayden-rose, as yet vntainted, / Where-with each touch desires to be acquainted” (Ir). Elstred makes it clear that she decides to become one of Humber’s mistresses not only because she fulfills his desires but also because he fulfills hers:

His power, his person farre beyond report,
 His promise to enstall me in a throne:
 His working words which mercy might extort,
 Had power to fashion loue where first was none:
 So that two Damsels with my selfe agreed,
 To waight from him our fortunes and good speed. (Iv)

Elstred’s language suggests immense attraction, not regret. She is infatuated with his power, his way with words, and his ability to “enstall [her] in a throne.” Elstred indicates an understanding of how her beauty can advance her political goals. She and the other mistresses leave Germany with Humber to invade Britain with high hopes for their future.

Unfortunately, Humber’s conquest is unsuccessful, and Humber along with two of his mistresses are executed. Elstred herself is about to be killed when she begs the English king Lochrine to spare her life, using her female body provocatively to persuade him: “And whilst *I* rent my carelesse-scattered locks, / Those tricked trammels where true loue was tangled, / *At Lochrines* breast for mercy fancie knocks” (I4r). Lochrine becomes enamored and takes Elstred as his mistress. Yet what might have begun as a ploy to save

her life develops into a passionate love affair. Elstred describes her relationship with Locrine with language never used to depict Phillis:

*Each kisse I lent him, breathed Indian balme
To cure his woundes, to breake affections cheines
He had Loues *Moly* growing on my pappes,
To charme a hell of sorrow and mishappes. (I4v)*

With their emphasis on Elstred's kiss, breath, and breasts, the bodily descriptions here overlap with the blazon, yet the conventional iciness of the Petrarchan mistress melts away with Elstred's delight in her own bodily charms. Even when Elstred is robbed of her crown when Locrine is obligated to marry Guendolen, Elstred still takes pleasure in their relationship. Forced to live in a cave, Elstred does not, like Rosamond, lament her enclosure, but "payd him trybute for those gifts he sent me, / With all the sweets that God and nature lent me" (K2v). Eventually, they have a child together in that cave, Sabrina, for whom Elstred is thankful: "A pretty babe for me to stay withall, / A louely child for hym to play withall" (K2v).

Interestingly, it is Guendolen rather than Elstred who takes on the conventional hard-heartedness of the Petrarchan mistress in the narrative. Determined to get rid of Locrine's mistress, Guendolen raises an army against Locrine, and Locrine is killed in battle. When Elstred finds Locrine, she clings to his dead body, trying to revive him with her kisses, and her body is depicted as permeable, open, and fluid. Elstred describes her "flood-like weeping" and her sucking of Locrine's wounds (K4v). By contrast, Guendolen is described as having the attribute so often ascribed to Petrarchan mistresses

like Delia or Phillis: a flinty heart. As she sentences Elstred and her daughter to death by drowning, she is numb to the pleas of the women condemned to die:

This said, she wild the Ministers to bind
 Our tender armes: and now pale feare addrest
 Our wayning roses, quite beyond theyr kind,
 To flie our cheekes, and helpe our hearts opprest.
 Feare sommond teares, teares came, and stroue to stint
 A ceaslesse hate, within a hart of flint. (Lv)

The narrative displaces the conventional Petrarchan stoniness onto Guendolen, contrasting her hard heart with the “tender armes” of Elstred and Sabrina and the abundant tears that flow from their eyes. This displacement allows Elstred to play the role of the desirable woman while at the same time being capable of expressing passion, tenderness, and desire herself.

At the end, though, as Elstred once again pleas for her life, she attempts to recast herself as resistant to the relationships that she had actively pursued. She tells Guendolen that “It was not I, it was thy husbands youth / That made him loue, and traind him to the lure” (L2r). Despite Elstred’s erotic advances, the pleasure she took in the relationship, and her grief for Lochrine, the narrative still attempts to portray her as an unwilling lover, forced into the relationship because of her weakness as a woman:

My sexe was weake, my sences farre more weaker,
 Afflictions taught me to accept occasion:
 I am a poore vnwilling wedlock breaker,

I was vnable to withstand inuasion:

For where the Conquerer crau'd, I knew full well

He could commaund, if so *I* should rebell. (L2v)

Like Rosamond, who insists on being compelled to become Henry's lover, and like the young maidens tricked into sleeping with lustful priests or forced into performing exorcisms, Elstred suddenly and unconvincingly becomes the "vnwilling wedlock breaker," a victim of shameless, conquering men rather than a participant in her own erotic exploits. Elstred's statement not only contradicts her earlier behavior toward Locrine—when she seduced him with her "careless-scattered locks," (I4r), laid in "lystes of pleasure" in their secret cave (K2v), and desperately sucked his wounds to "reuiue his ceaslesse sleeping" (K4v)—but also contradicts the intent of the narrative, which is to teach young maidens "to auoyde my fall" (H4r). If there was no way to avoid Elstred's relationships with Humber and Locrine, then there would be nothing to teach young maidens, who, as "weake" women, would be as susceptible to male advances as Elstred.

These textual contradictions suggest that the narrative struggles to cope with the figure of the open, desiring, and pleasure-seeking Petrarchan woman that the frame of the female complaint has allowed. Elstred's story concludes not with an endlessly desiring woman, but with a female character who must disappear, returning to the bodiless form in which the reader originally finds her. After Elstred finishes speaking, she and her daughter "sought their Tomb / Within the waues, and suncke vnto the bottome" (L4r). Yet far from containing Elstred's passion, Elstred's ghostliness allows Lodge to push the figure of the Petrarchan mistress beyond iciness found in the sonnets. As a ghost, Elstred

could slip into the role of desiring lover all while proclaiming passive virtue—and while remaining conventionally unavailable as she disappears into the water.

Of course, Rosamond's and Elstred's claims to virtue were suspect even by some of their rival female complainers, like Matilda of Michael Drayton's *Matilda* (1594). Matilda emphasizes her chastity and tells the story of how she resisted King John's advances, eventually killing herself with poison rather than submitting herself to him. Matilda chastises Rosamond, Elstred, and Jane Shore for their sexual behavior, concluding, "Thus looser wantons, still are praisd of many, / Vice oft findes friendes, but vertue seldome any."¹⁹ Yet the popularity of the genre—which also includes poems such as Anthony Chute's *Beawtie dishonoured written vnder the title of Shores Wife* (1593), Hadrian Dorrell's *Willobie His Avisa* (1594), and Thomas Middleton's *The Ghost of Lucrece* (1600)—points to the appeal of the female complaint as a forum for representing Petrarchan female figures who are themselves enticed by erotic experience and for engaging in the pleasures of the female body usually closed off in Petrarchan narratives.²⁰ By giving their speakers the liminal status of ghosts, writers of the female complaint represent Petrarchan women—chaste or not—who draw attention to themselves as desiring female subjects.

¹⁹ Michael Drayton, *Matilda. The faire and chaste Daughter of the Lord Robert Fitzwater* (London: James Roberts, 1594), B2r.

²⁰ For an overview of female complaint poems that appeared in the 1590s, see Hallett Smith, *Elizabethan Poetry: A Study in Conventions, Meaning, and Expression* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952), 102-26. See also John Kerrigan, ed., *Motives of Woe: Shakespeare and the "Female Complaint,"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

Hermione's Ghostly Return

At the end of Hermione's trial, after Hermione has swooned at the news of Mamillius's death, Paulina emphatically declares,

I say she's dead; I'll swear't. If word nor oath
 Prevail not, go and see. If you can bring
 Tincture or lustre in her lip, her eye,
 Heat outwardly or breath within, I'll serve you
 As I would do the gods.²¹

As Paulina blazons Hermione's body to prove that it is dead, the play suggests that Hermione's Petrarchan desirability ceases to be threatening only when Hermione has no capability of desiring back. As several critics argue, Hermione joins other Shakespearean heroines like Ophelia and Desdemona, who can be fully embraced by their lovers only after their deaths.²² Leontes repentantly responds to Paulina, "Once a day I'll visit / The chapel where they lie, and tears shed there / Shall be my recreation" (3.2.238-40). Yet what is different about this play is that despite her threatening eroticism, Hermione does come back as a desiring female subject—first as a ghost in Antigonus's dream, and then as a statue-turned-woman at the play's close. The play's use of the ghost story—an old wives' tale, according to Protestants—is the frame that allows Hermione to return as a Petrarchan beloved who takes her husband back. By conspicuously calling into question

²¹ William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans and J. J. M. Tobin, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 3.2.203-207. Subsequent references to the play are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text by act, scene, and line number.

²² Laurie A. Finke, "Painting Women: Images of Femininity in Jacobean Tragedy," *Theatre Journal* 36, no. 3 (1984): 357-70, argues that "The Petrarchan lady of the Renaissance . . . must be killed into art so that she may remain forever present and forever beautiful" (361). For similar arguments about *The Winter's Tale*, see Traub, *Desire and Anxiety*; and Blum, "'Strike all that look upon with mar[b]le.'"

the reality of Hermione's body at the end of the play—and indeed by framing the entire play as a winter's tale, that which is superstitious, childlike, or untrue—Shakespeare, like the writers of Protestant ghost stories and female complaints, can accommodate the threat of the Petrarchan mistress who has her own desires, too.

From the beginning of the play, Shakespeare places Hermione's character within a Petrarchan framework.²³ In his deconstructive reading, Howard Felperin calls the state of the play one of “linguistic indeterminacy” in which readers of the play can never know whether outward appearances coincide with inward reality or whether suspicions about behavior are founded or merely false.²⁴ This is also the condition of the Petrarchan mistress. Despite (or perhaps because of) the Petrarchan lover's excessive cataloguing of her alluring body parts, the Petrarchan beloved's authenticity is always in doubt because there is no way to verify what her true desires are. When Hermione implores Leontes to tell her when she first spoke well to him, he replies, “Why, that was when / Three crabbed months had sour'd themselves to death, / Ere I could make thee open thy white hand, / [And] clap thyself my love; then didst thou utter, / ‘I am yours for ever’” (1.2.101-105). Yet it is precisely Hermione's openness as a Petrarchan mistress, signified by her “white hand,” that leads Leontes to fear that she can never be fully his.

²³ Scholars have made passing references to Hermione's Petrarchan qualities, but they have not fully examined her as a Petrarchan mistress. In their reading of the play in light of Anne Boleyn's trial, for instance, M. Lindsay Kaplan and Katherine Eggert argue that the moment in which Leontes notes Hermione's and Polixenes's “paddling palms, and pinching fingers” “reiterates Henry's *ex post facto* conversion of Anne's Petrarchan flirtations with male courtiers into sexual, rather than social, intercourse” (“‘Good queen, my lord, good queen’: Sexual Slander and the Trials of Female Authority in *The Winter's Tale*,” *Renaissance Drama*, n.s., 25 [1994]: 98). I agree that this moment intersects with Petrarchan discourse, but I do not believe that the sexual and the social aspects of Petrarchism are as separate as Kaplan and Eggert suggest.

²⁴ Howard Felperin, “‘Tongue-tied our queen?': The Deconstruction of Presence in *The Winter's Tale*,” in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (New York: Methuen, 1985), 8.

Hermione's acceptance of Leontes's suit at once gives Leontes the very thing he desires and unleashes his anxieties about the thing he cannot control: a Petrarchan mistress who desires back.

In the first act of the play, Hermione delights in her own erotic body and in her power to allure, behaving more like Rosamond or Elstred than like Delia or Phillis. Her boldness, for instance, toward Polixenes as she implores him to stay in Sicilia suggests her pleasure in her power to attract and persuade:

Verily,
 You shall not go; a lady's "verily" is
 As potent as a lord's. Will you go yet?
 Force me to keep you as a prisoner,
 Not like a guest: so you shall pay your fees
 When you depart, and save your thanks. How say you?
 My prisoner? or my guest? (1.2.50-55)

Like Rosamond, who relishes her ability to conquer Henry with her attractive body, Hermione embraces the role of Polixenes's jailer. She asserts the power of her own language, implying it is capable of holding another man captive.²⁵ She suggests that her status as a "lady"—her appealing body and her courtly charm—puts her on equal footing

²⁵ There has been much scholarship on the homology between female speech and promiscuity, a link that Hermione seems not to recognize in this moment. See, for instance, Peter Stallybrass, "Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed," in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 123-42. Lynn Enterline, "'You speak a language that I understand not': The Rhetoric of Animation in *The Winter's Tale*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (1997): 17-44, argues that Hermione's powerful speech challenges the Ovidian-Petrarchan tradition in which the male poetic voice is grounded on female silence: "The king aspires to order all linguistic exchanges in Sicily, but Hermione's voice teaches him that any such ordering properly belongs to no one" (27).

with male combativeness, and her provocative charge, “But let him swear so, and he shall not stay, / We’ll thwack him hence with distaffs” (1.2.36-37), turns a traditional domestic female instrument into a weapon. In this exchange, Hermione revels not just in the role of the pleasing love object, but also in the considerable muscle she wields from the position.

Hermione also expresses pleasure in the thing that the Petrarchan mistress usually disdains: praise. When Leontes tells Hermione that she once spoke just as well as she does now to Polixenes, Hermione cannot contain herself, pressing him to flatter her:

I prithee tell me; cram ’s with praise, and make ’s
 As fat as tame things. One good deed dying tongueless
 Slaughters a thousand waiting upon that.
 Our praises are our wages. You may ride ’s
 With one soft kiss a thousand furlongs ere
 With spur we heat an acre. But to th’ goal:
 My last good deed was to entreat his stay;
 What was my first? It has an elder sister,
 Or I mistake you. O, would her name were Grace!
 But once before I spoke to th’ purpose? when?
 Nay, let me have’t; I long. (1.2.91-101)

Hermione’s use of the first person plural indicates not an individual need to be affirmed but an association with the larger figure of the courtly woman whose identity is formed from the attention paid to her by male suitors. Her response to Leontes suggests that she understands that the Petrarchan mistress comes into being only through admiration, and

her impatience points to her delight in performing that role. The erotic undertones of her language—“cram ’s with praise,” “You may ride ’s,” “I long”—imply that Hermione feels that women have equal claim to the pleasures of courtship and that the receiving end can also be reciprocating. Hermione uses her body not to reject attention but to accept it, as Leontes’s description of her “paddling palms and pinching fingers” suggests (1.2.115).

Yet Hermione’s embracing of this role only increases Leontes’s anxiety and contributes to her vulnerability—as the thing Leontes can never fully possess. Leontes’s epithet, “O thou thing!” (2.1.82), reveals how much Leontes has objectified Hermione, and his increasingly frantic blazons show the close proximity between the language of praise and the language of violent obsession. Attempting to persuade Camillo of his wife’s unfaithfulness, Leontes relies on outward female bodily signs to prove what has gone on behind closed doors:

Is whispering nothing?

Is leaning cheek to cheek? is meeting noses?

Kissing with inside lip? stopping the career

Of laughter with a sigh (a note infallible

Of breaking honesty?) horsing foot on foot?

Skulking in corners? wishing clocks more swift? (1.2.284-89)

Leontes turns the language of praise that Hermione so craved into the language of vicious jealousy. His insistence on knowing the meaning of Hermione’s bodily gestures stems from the radical instability of those gestures, the anxiety that “whispering,” “Kissing,” and “laughter” can never be interpreted with any certainty. Even Hermione’s whiteness,

which Leontes had coveted as a sign of her fidelity, becomes endlessly contaminable, a marker of the uncertainty that Hermione's desire brings. Leontes says to Camillo,

Dost think I am so muddy, so unsettled,
 To appoint myself in this vexation, sully
 The purity and whiteness of my sheets
 (Which to preserve is sleep, which being spotted
 Is goads, thorns, nettles, tails of wasps),
 Give scandal to the blood o' th' Prince my son
 (Who I do think is mine and love as mine),
 Without ripe moving to't? Would I do this? (1.2.325-32)

Although Leontes refers to his own ability to “sully / The purity and whiteness of my sheets,” his remark recalls the whiteness of Hermione's opening hand. The frenzy of his language, which piles one repulsive object onto another, implicitly displaces the qualities Leontes disowns—“muddy,” “unsettled,” “spotted”—onto his wife. His speech suggests that the features that idealize the Petrarchan mistress are the same ones that make her vulnerable because of the ease with which they can be perceived as tainted. Like Rosamond, Hermione is incarcerated for the boldness with which she reciprocates the Petrarchan advances made to her.

Hermione's status as a mother only corroborates the anxiety produced by her role as a Petrarchan mistress.²⁶ Scholars have traced the intersections between maternal and

²⁶ For the anxieties produced by Hermione's role as a mother, see Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, "Hamlet" to "The Tempest"* (New York: Routledge, 1992); and Michelle Ephraim, “Hermione's Suspicious Body: Adultery and Superfetation in *The Winter's*

Petrarchan figures.²⁷ Philip Sidney, for instance, frequently writes in *Astrophil and Stella* of Astrophil being infantilized by Stella's charms. In sonnet 11, Astrophil tells Love,

So when thou saw'st, in nature's cabinet,
Stella, thou straight look'st babies in her eyes,
In her cheek's pit thou did'st thy pit-fold set,
And in her breast bo-peep or couching lies.²⁸

Sonnet speakers frequently express the fear that their beloveds will take away their power by turning them into children, and they characterize their mistresses as having maternal influence gone awry.

Leontes expresses this same fear of infantilization when he looks at Mamillius, wondering whether he sees himself in his son or only Hermione: "Looking on the lines / Of my boy's face, me thoughts I did recoil / Twenty-three years, and saw myself unbreech'd / In my green velvet coat, my dagger muzzled" (1.2.153-56). Leontes's suspicions about Hermione evoke the fear in Leontes of the days, as Gail Kern Paster says, when he was "still in the world of women and wearing the skirts of infancy."²⁹

Leontes tells Hermione, "I am glad you did not nurse him. / Though he does bear some signs of me, yet you / Have too much blood in him" (2.1.56-58), referring to the early

Tale," in *Performing Maternity in Early Modern England*, ed. Kathryn M. Moncrief and Kathryn R. McPherson (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 45-58.

²⁷ See, for instance, Naomi J. Miller, "Playing 'the mother's part': Shakespeare's Sonnets and Early Modern Codes of Maternity," in *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Critical Essays*, ed. James Schiffer (New York: Garland, 1999), 347-67.

²⁸ Sir Philip Sidney, sonnet 11, in *A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). For an argument that questions the critical tendency to frame *Astrophil and Stella* as a sequence about masculine mastery, see Catherine Bates, "Astrophil and the Manic Wit of the Abject Male," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 41, no. 1 (2001): 1-24.

²⁹ Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 265.

modern idea that mothers can corrupt children through their breast milk.³⁰ Just as the Petrarchan mistress provokes anxiety about what may or may not be lurking underneath her beautiful body, so does the figure of the mother provoke anxiety about the invisible links between her and her child.

Hermione's emphasis on her role as a mother in her trial, then, as dignified as it is, only contributes to Leontes's suspicions about her role as a lover. In a speech that she knows cannot prove her innocence, Hermione lays claim to the only thing that she feels can corroborate her guiltless position: her maternal body. She says,

My second joy

And first-fruits of my body, from his presence
I am barr'd, like one infectious. My third comfort
(Starr'd most unluckily) is from my breast
(The innocent milk in it most innocent mouth)
Hal'd out to murther; myself on every post
Proclaim'd a strumpet; with immodest hatred
The child-bed privilege denied, which 'longs
To women of all fashion; lastly, hurried
Here to this place, i' th' open air, before
I have got strength of limit. (3.2.96-106)

³⁰ For more on the relationship between *The Winter's Tale* and early modern concepts of nursing, see Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*; and Donna C. Woodford, "Nursing and Influence in *Pandosto* and *The Winter's Tale*," in Moncrief and McPherson, *Performing Maternity*, 183-95.

Even as Hermione proclaims her right as a woman to her children, her language suggests the very things that make her body suspicious. Her shock at being treated “like one infectious” only points to the fear that all women’s bodies are corrupting and impossible to control, and her insistence of the “innocent milk” that should be flowing from her breast only highlights the culture’s suspicions of all breast milk as tainted. Hermione’s eloquent grief for her lost children fails to change Leontes’s mind, and even the oracle, which proclaims that “Hermione is chaste” (3.2.131), is labeled “mere falsehood” by Leontes. Only Hermione’s immobilized body, freed from its threats of circulation and contamination, can convince Leontes that Hermione is innocent after all.

It is amazing, then, that Hermione is allowed to return in the play given the threat that her Petrarchan body poses to Leontes. Yet this is precisely what the frame of the ghost story allows. Hermione first returns as the ghost in Antigonus’s dream, and the play conspicuously questions the reality of this figure. Antigonus opens his monologue about the dream much like a Protestant who is confronting the question of whether ghosts exist:

I have heard (but not believ’d) the spirits o’ th’ dead
 May walk again. If such thing be, thy mother
 Appear’d to me last night; for ne’er was dream
 So like a waking. (3.3.16-19)

Like Lavater or other ghost theorists of the sixteenth century, Antigonus officially expresses his skepticism about ghosts—“I have heard (but not believ’d)” —yet remains open to the possibility of supernatural encounters. Lavater’s treatise dismisses people’s beliefs in ghosts, yet the bulk of his text is devoted to instructing the reader what to do

when encountering a spirit and how to tell a good spirit from a bad one. Lavater says, “What souer the cause is, it may be proued, by witsnesse of many writers, & by dayly experience also, that spirites and straunge sightes doo sometyme appeare, and that in veye deede many straunge and maruellous things doo happen” (9). Antigonus’s speech keeps the reality of Hermione’s ghost suspended, opening up space for Hermione’s desirable female presence to return in ways less threatening than her living body.

If Hermione’s Petrarchan body caused so much anxiety in the first half of the play, in Antigonus’s dream it provokes only awe and admiration. Antigonus says,

To me comes a creature,
 Sometimes her head on one side, some another—
 I never saw a vessel of like sorrow,
 So fill’d, and so becoming; in pure white robes,
 Like very sanctity, she did approach
 My cabin where I lay (3.3.19-24)

As in the beginning of the play, Hermione’s presence provokes anxiety, yet here its effects are benign. Antigonus expresses pity for the attractive, yet dignified, “vessel” that approaches him, describing her as “so becoming.” Here, Hermione’s Petrarchan whiteness in the “pure white robes” she dons transcends the bodily pureness that Leontes feels is endlessly corruptible and instead approaches allegory, becoming, Antigonus says, “Like very sanctity.” As a ghost, Hermione can both exhibit corporeal form—as a filled vessel wearing robes—and evade it, as “She melted into air” (3.3.37).

Of course, Hermione's ghost is not completely harmless at this moment as she prophesizes that Antigonus will never see Paulina again and disappears "with shrieks" (3.3.36). Hermione takes on aspects of a revenge ghost here, and Antigonus is frightened by as much as he is attracted to Hermione's presence, becoming convinced—despite his initial skepticism—that Hermione's ghost is real: "Dreams are toys, / Yet for this once, yea, superstitiously, / I will be sqar'd by this" (3.3.39-41). Yet more than a failed representation of a ghost from a revenge tragedy, Hermione's ghost seems much more tied to the Protestant debates about ghosts and believability—and the place of the female body in those debates.³¹ Like the ghost stories that officially denounce ghosts as papist tricks yet fixate on the young women's bodies that experience visions, Antigonus's dream open up a space for indulging in Hermione's body, which when alive had been the source of suspicion at court. Officially, Antigonus deems that Hermione is guilty, and he is uneasy about "superstitiously" believing in that which he ought to know is not true, yet his description of the encounter suggests wonder and esteem for the mournful, beautiful, and "pure" figure of Hermione. The play's interrogation of whether or not the vision of Hermione is *really* her enables her Petrarchan body to return as a speaking, moving, and desiring subject—qualities that earlier could provoke only mistrust.

In Hermione's second reappearance in the last scene of the play, she comes back, of course, not as a ghost, but as a woman who had been alive all along. Logically

³¹ Hermione's ghost is an exception to most ghosts on the early modern stage. Prosser, *Hamlet and Revenge*, argues that most stage ghosts are connected to Senecan revenge conventions rather than to Christian ideas of the supernatural. By her account, of the fifty-one ghosts that appear onstage in England from 1560 to 1610, "only four ghosts in the entire period are placed even vaguely in Christian perspective" (257). Prosser does not include Hermione in her count, presumably because she does not actually appear onstage as a ghost.

speaking, readers and viewers of the play should dismiss the ghost of Antigonus's dream as just that—a dream. Yet rather than merely contradict each other, these two figures of Hermione are very much connected. Like the figure of Hermione in Antigonus's dream, the Hermione who returns as an animated statue is set in a context of that which is implausible. Just as Antigonus admits “superstitiously” to believe in his dream, so does Perdita assert, “And do not say 'tis superstition, that / I kneel, and then implore her blessing” (5.3.43-44). And although what takes place in the last act of the play *really* happens, Paulina calls into question the reality of Hermione's body by suggesting that the entire performance may be just an “old tale”: “That she is living, / Were it but told you, should be hooted at / Like an old tale; but it appears she lives, / Though yet she speak not” (5.3.115-18). Paulina, who orchestrates the unveiling of Hermione's statue, assures Leontes that Hermione really has been hiding away for sixteen years, but she provokes speculation otherwise by failing firmly to refute the possibility of the supernatural, saying only that she “appears” to live. By framing the entire play—and especially the last act—as an old wives' tale, or a ghost story, Shakespeare invites both the questioning of Hermione's living presence and the indulgence in the pleasure of that presence.

The term “old tale” returns at the end of the play with notable frequency.³² The gentlemen who narrate the offstage reunion between Leontes and Perdita in act 5, scene 2 twice refer to the stories they tell as old tales. The second gentleman says, “This news,

³² Mary Ellen Lamb, “Engendering the Narrative Act: Old Wives' Tales in *The Winter's Tale*, *Macbeth*, and *The Tempest*,” *Criticism* 40, no. 4 (1998): 529-53, argues that “these allusions expose the power of childhood tales as prototypes for the fictions of the stage” (529). I agree with her assessment that the attention to old tales in *The Winter's Tale* both recuperates the female world associated with tales by filling the audience with wonder and points to “the continuing threat of the power of women's tales” (537), but my emphasis is more on the kind of Petrarchan subject that the frame of the old wives' tale enables at the end of the play.

which is call'd true, is so like an old tale, that the verity of it is in strong suspicion" (5.2.27-29). And the third gentleman, when questioned about Antigonus, says, "Like an old tale still, which will have matter to rehearse, though credit be asleep and not an ear open: he was torn to pieces with a bear" (5.2.61-63). Their language retains the derogatory tone toward old tales as something effeminate, childlike, and silly, yet they also betray the attractiveness—even illicitness—of indulging in something that should not be real. Like the Protestant writers who call stories about the supernatural old wives' tales and yet cannot refrain from elaborating on the erotic details of the women who experience their encounters, the gentlemen claim that these stories should be relegated to the fantastical yet openly express their pleasure in them. Even an event as terrible as being "torn to pieces with a bear" is narrated with relish as well as horror—indicating, perhaps, the wide overlap of those two emotions.

The very implausibility of Hermione's return from the dead, then, opens up a space in which her Petrarchan subjectivity can be enjoyed rather than be seen solely as threatening. Hermione's statue has often been seen in the Ovidian context from which Shakespeare's play draws, and many scholars have noted the contrast between her statuesque demeanor and her earlier animated self. Peter Erickson writes, "When at last Hermione is revived, her original vitality and vivacity are not recovered."³³ Hermione's immobilized body, like Pygmalion's, is now able to be repossessed at the end of the play by her male maker. And it is clear in the last act that Leontes, in desiring Hermione to return, can think only of her motionless, Petrarchan body parts. He says to Paulina, "O,

³³ Peter B. Erickson, "Patriarchal Structures in *The Winter's Tale*," *PMLA* 97, no. 5 (1982): 825.

that ever I / Had squar'd me to thy counsel! then, even now, / I might have look'd upon my queen's full eyes, / Have taken treasure from her lips—" (5.1.51-54).

Yet Hermione's body at the end of the play returns animated and "warm" rather than stony and cold. Hermione is "stone no more" as she descends from her pedestal (5.3.99), a vibrant, desiring subject like Elizabeth Orton, Sara Williams, Rosamond, or Elstred. True, Leontes's descriptions of the statue parody the Petrarchan blazon when he remarks, "The very life seems warm upon her lip" (5.3.66) or exclaims, "What fine chisel / Could ever yet cut breath?" (5.3.78-79). His emphasis on warmth and liveliness, however, points to Leontes's desire for a woman who circulates rather than one who just stands still, and the play accommodates in this moment a Petrarchan female figure other than one who is immobilized and fragmented.

The very actions that earlier in the play proved Hermione's guilt in Leontes's eyes now certify her virtue. When Camillo remarks that "She hangs about [Leontes's] neck," Hermione is represented as a desiring, sensual figure (5.3.112). Whether or not her embrace suggests her forgiveness, it certainly signifies her indulgence in her own erotic gesture. Paulina even characterizes Hermione as the aggressor in the relationship, saying to Leontes, "When she was young, you woo'd her; now in age, / Is she become the suitor?" (5.3.108-109). Just as Rosamond and Elstred conquer their kings with their desirable bodies, so does Hermione, as a ghostlike figure that comes back from the dead, occupy the role of the pursuing lover. Unlike Leontes's earlier yearning for Hermione's jewel-like eyes and treasure-like lips, here Hermione is depicted as tender, open, and fluid, as when Hermione commands the gods, "look down / And from your sacred vials

pour your graces / Upon my daughter's head!" (5.3.121-23). Although Hermione is silent to Leontes, her original loquaciousness returns with her impetuous questioning to Perdita:

Tell me, mine own,
 Where hast thou been preserv'd? where liv'd? how found
 Thy father's court? for thou shalt hear that I,
 Knowing by Paulina the oracle
 Gave hope thou wast in being, have preserv'd
 Myself to see the issue." (5.3.123-28)

Her language of "preserving" herself recalls the description of a corpse, yet her garrulousness suggests animation and vigor. In her liminal status of dead-yet-living, Hermione transcends Leontes's desires to possess her as a treasured statue and becomes an effusive, insatiable figure who pursues her desires.

Critics have also seen the statue in the context of Catholic iconography, and scholars have argued that the play participates—at least on some level—in questioning Protestant iconoclasm.³⁴ With its attention to "magic" (5.3.38), "faith" (5.3.95), "sacred vials" (5.3.122), and the miraculous statue, the last scene of the play seems to suggest that the old wives' tales that the Protestants so vehemently derided are actually true and that kneeling to Hermione's statue, as Perdita does, is not to believe in superstition or false idols. Yet the fantastic nature of Hermione's revival indicates that the play's relationship to the miraculous ending is much more indeterminate. Neither fully real nor fully unreal, Hermione's presence exists only in the fantasy space of the old wives' tale.

³⁴ See, for instance, Michael O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early-Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

The play does not completely embrace Protestant skepticism or Catholic “superstition,” and that place of uncertainty—where Polixenes questions whether Hermione is “stol’n from the dead” (5.3.115)—enables the liminality in which Hermione can return as a speaking, desiring subject. As a genre that produces both doubt and curiosity, disbelief and fascination, the old wives’ tale allows the kind of attention on the erotic, desiring female body—the fantasy of the Petrarchan mistress who enjoys her own desirability—that would otherwise be foreclosed.

Of course, Hermione’s spectacular return does not eliminate all the anxieties that Hermione’s Petrarchan body elicits, and Leontes’s last words stubbornly resist closure:

Good Paulina,

Lead us from hence, where we may leisurely

Each one demand, and answer to his part

Perform’d in this wide gap of time, since first

We were dissever’d. Hastily lead away. (5.3.151-55)

After submitting himself to Paulina’s instruction for so long, Leontes returns to his place of command, and the hastiness of the last line subtly recalls the rashness that compelled Leontes to accuse Hermione of adultery in the first place. The swift conclusion raises the question of whether Hermione’s body, as it becomes fully living once again, will cause the same kind of panicked jealousy that it earlier generated. But if her ghostly return does not completely erase the anxieties that her body creates, the last scene of the play demonstrates that it can at least suspend them. As a form inherently unreal yet intensely appealing, the old wives’ tale becomes the vehicle through which the play can explore

alternatives to Hermione's subjectivity other than what her disappearance at her trial initially suggests. As a figure "stol'n from the dead," Hermione can legitimate her presence as a Petrarchan mistress who affirms her own desirability—all because she may not be *really* there at all.

CHAPTER FOUR

Questioning Constancy in Mary Wroth's *Urania*

In *The Examinations of Anne Askew*, John Bale frequently uses the term constancy to describe Askew. In the *lattré examinacyon*, he remarks, “And in the ende she sheweth the stronge stomacke of a most Christen martyr, in that she is neyther desyerouse of the deathe, neyther yet standeth in feare of the vyolence or extremyte thereof. What a constancye was thys of a woman, frayle, tendre, yonge and most delycyouslye brought up?”¹ Bale even includes the “Constancye of Anne Askewe” as a line in his index, suggesting that this was a characteristic he consciously highlighted—and one for which readers might have been looking.² Bale often emphasizes Askew’s material body—her femininity, tenderness, and pained experiences of torture—to demonstrate her constancy. By contrast, Askew never uses the word constancy in her own account of her examinations. Although she expresses her Protestant devotion as zealously as her editor, she much more elusively portrays her identity as a martyr and a woman. Like the figures of Elizabeth I and Hermione in *The Winter’s Tale*, Askew appropriates the liminality of the Petrarchan mistress—a figure neither fully absent nor fully present—to assert a position of control in the text within which she operates. Only when these female figures withhold their full presence—in Askew’s muted description of her torture, for instance, or Elizabeth’s empty chair in the trial of Mary Queen of Scots,

¹ Beilin, *Examinations*, 106-107.

² Beilin, *Examinations*, 159.

or Hermione's ghostly return to the play—can they maintain authority without the vulnerability of their material bodies.

It may seem surprising, then, that the last writer I address in this project and the first woman to write a Petrarchan sonnet sequence in English, Mary Wroth, imagines a heroine who so intensely embraces the idea of constancy. Unlike Askew, who conspicuously avoids the term, Wroth's Pamphilia obsessively articulates a desire for constancy, a trait that so many male sonnet speakers claim for themselves in the 1590s. Critics of Wroth's works have argued that Wroth's use of constancy in both her prose romance, *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, and her appended sonnet sequence, *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, marks a reappropriation of the term.³ While male lovers typically profess their constancy, they usually accuse women of inconstancy, and so by associating her female protagonist with constancy, Wroth makes that Petrarchan quality available to women. With her emphasis on philandering men and faithful women, Wroth seems to turn the tables on Petrarchan conventions, resignifying constancy from an impossibility for women to a strong female identity.

³ Elaine V. Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), argues that Wroth transforms constancy into a "heroic virtue" (208) and "develops Pamphilia into the embodiment of constancy" (217) in the *Urania* and in *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, and many critics have followed with similar assessments of Wroth's treatment of the term. See, for instance, Mary Ellen Lamb, *Gender and Authorship in the Sidney Circle* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), who argues that "Pamphilia provides a model of heroism for women in her unswerving loyalty to the lover who has forsaken her" (165) and that constancy is "one of the few heroic forms of self available to Renaissance women" (169); Maureen Quilligan, "The Constant Subject: Instability and Female Authority in Wroth's *Urania* Poems," in *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth-Century English Poetry*, ed. Elizabeth D. Harvey and Katharine Eisaman Maus (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), who sees constancy as "an act of willful self-definition" (323); and Elizabeth Hanson, "Boredom and Whoredom: Reading Renaissance Women's Sonnet Sequences," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 10, no. 1 (1997): 165-91, who states that constancy "functions meta-discursively as a claim for a credible position from which to speak, for the authority in other words of a desiring, reflecting, writing subject. To be constant is to establish a self whose meaning isn't at the mercy of whatever code is prevailing at the moment" (182).

Yet Wroth's extended exploration of the term in the *Urania* suggests that Pamphilia's association with constancy may not be all that positive. Although critics often note the closeness of Pamphilia's story to Wroth's own biography, this chapter posits that Wroth does not necessarily endorse Pamphilia's adherence to this ideal. The female characters linked to constancy—including not only Pamphilia but also characters such as Limena, Bellamira, and Nereana—are often disempowered from their devotion, finding their options more limited than the women who renounce this value. Wroth suggests that constancy may be just as problematic for women as the inconstancy of which they are so often accused in the sonnets. Constant women in the *Urania* feel compelled either to exhibit full bodily presence—such as Limena, who must forever prove her constancy through displays of bodily pain—or to absent themselves completely—such as Pamphilia, who neglects her role as queen by withdrawing herself from court, or Bellamira, who spends the remainder of her days enclosed in a cave. Wroth's female characters who endorse constancy forego the liminality of the role of the Petrarchan mistress, becoming entrapped by Petrarchan conventions rather than exercising their flexibility.

Wroth suggests that the mistake that these characters make is to believe that constancy is a real and coherent virtue, rather than a construct that entails contradictions and inconsistencies. Wroth's obsessive focus on constancy reveals that it is a term with a history—and that it circulates in several contradictory contexts. Petrarchan literature imported the term from at least two sixteenth-century discourses: the martyrology of writers like Bale and John Foxe, who emphasized martyrs' constancy through the display

of their pain, and the stoicism revived by humanists, who valued the Roman concept of *constantia* as a way to conquer emotions. Constancy is thus a term that is strained between something that is marked on the body—a martyr in pain—and something that exists apart from the body—a quality of the mind.

In her sprawling narrative, Wroth explores the term constancy and the tensions created by its varied connotations, from martyred resonances to stoic suggestions. Wroth takes a long look at what it means for a character to declare herself constant or to label someone else constant, and unlike sonnet sequences, which unquestioningly endorse constancy, the prose romance adopts the humanist mode of debate to test the value of the term. In characters like Limena, Wroth literalizes the martyr metaphor, interrogating what the implications are for women who must forever show bodily signs of their constancy. And in characters like Urania, who engages in debates about the value of constancy in an inconstant world, Wroth shows constancy to be a term in question rather than a fixed identity. Debate in the *Urania* enables female characters not just to be held to an impossible ideal of constancy or to be accused of being forever inconstant. Instead, female characters are part of the process of debating constancy, and their debates allow the text to question the assumed merits of constancy, especially for women. The *Urania* entertains the possibility that constancy is an identity trap, or, as one shepherd boy puts it when pressed by Pamphilia, “the foolishhest unprofitable whining vertue” (571). Although Pamphilia fervently defends constancy, the text as a whole does not, and Wroth reveals the contradictions, dangers, and even absurdities of embracing constancy as an identity.

Wroth shows that constancy is a term pulled apart not only by its historical uses but also by literary convention. It is true that at the end of Wroth's sonnet sequence, Pamphilia suggests that the constancy she embraces has empowered her, enabling her to come to terms with the trials of love she has experienced. Declaring her "muse now happy," she leaves love poetry—"the discourse of Venus"—to "young beeginers," and she uses the term constancy to describe herself. Directing her muse, she finishes the sequence by stating, "And thus leave off, what's past shoves you can love, / Now lett your constancy your honor prove."⁴ Here, Wroth suggests that Pamphilia has achieved constancy: her love for Amphilanthus will no longer torment her, she has taken the high road, and she is over him.

Yet part of the reason constancy becomes so incoherent in the *Urania* is that the idea of constancy is virtually incompatible with romance.⁵ In a discourse that Patricia Parker describes as "the dilated, or dilatory, space of a form which simultaneously moves towards and delays definitive resolution or presence," the expectation that a character remain constant is simply too high.⁶ With its endless deferrals, spiraling plotlines, and

⁴ *The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth*, ed. Josephine A. Roberts (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), P103. I use Roberts's numbering of the sequence.

⁵ In using this term, I do not suggest that romance is a coherent genre, but follow Barbara Fuchs in her suggestion that romance is "a literary and textual *strategy*" that "describes a concatenation of both narratological elements and literary topoi, including idealization, the marvelous, narrative delay, wandering, and obscured identity" (*Romance, The New Critical Idiom* [New York: Routledge, 2004], 9). In her overview of romance, Fuchs incorporates the archetypal theories of Northrop Frye, who argues that romance is a *mythos* rather than a genre (*Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957]; and *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976]), with the poststructuralist thinking of Patricia Parker, who argues that romance "simultaneously quests for and postpones a particular end, objective, or object" (*Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979], 4).

⁶ Parker, *Inescapable Romance*, 14. See also A.C. Hamilton, "Elizabethan Romance: The Example of Prose Fiction," *English Literary History* 49, no. 2 (1982): 287-99, who argues that "In contrast to comedy and tragedy in which there is a plot with a beginning, middle, and end unfolding inexorably in five acts, in romance there is a variety of distinct, always surprising episodes" (297). This is not to say that all romance

resistance to closure, romance provides an inhospitable environment for constant behavior. Although the *Urania*, like other prose romances, includes sonnets within the text, Wroth makes an unusual move in publishing an entire sonnet sequence appended to her romance. By juxtaposing the sonnets with the prose romance, Wroth shows constancy to be not a universal term but a term shaped and altered by literary conventions. While in the tightly-knit form of the sonnet, Pamphilia can jubilantly proclaim her constancy, in the prose romance, that same term proves a fiction that easily comes undone. The varied ways in which the term constancy is invoked in the *Urania* troubles the idea in the last sonnet that Pamphilia's identification with constancy is secure—or even desirable. Wroth suggests that although these discourses draw from the same concepts and figures, they also reveal them to be much more malleable, contradictory, and situationally specific. Wroth ultimately produces two different Pamphiliads in two different discourses: one lover in the sonnets, who performatively announces her constancy, and another lover in the romance, who exposes the complicated resonances of such an utterance.

Constancy in the Sixteenth Century

Constancy was a term that came late to English Petrarchism. Early Petrarchan imitators in England like Wyatt and Surrey almost never used the Latinate word, instead

resists closure. Looking at popular writers such as Robert Greene, Thomas Lodge, and Thomas Nashe, Steve Mentz argues that “the defining feature of Elizabethan fiction, the feature that distinguishes it from its medieval ancestors and connects it to the modern novel, is simply large-scale narrative coherence” (*Romance for Sale in Early Modern England* [Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006], 11). Wroth's *Urania*, however, follows a much more chivalric pattern.

relying on terms like “trouth” “faithful” or “steadfast” to express the concept of fidelity.⁷ In the Elizabethan period, constancy became a commonplace term, appearing in almost every sonnet sequence of the 1590s.⁸ Often, the male lover declares himself constant amid the turmoil of his unrequited love. In William Percy’s *Sonnets to the Fairest Coelia* (1594), for instance, the speaker asserts, “One solace I shall find when I am over, / It will be knowne I dy'de a constant louer.”⁹ In Richard Linche’s *Diella* (1596), the speaker proclaims, “Constant haue I been, still in fancie fast, / ordayn’d by heuens to dote vpon thy faire.”¹⁰ And in William Smith’s *Chloris* (1596), the speaker writes, “So though my loue and life by hir are crost; / My hart shall still be constant firme and true.”¹¹ When describing women, Petrarchan writers often use constancy to suggest either that women are too unyielding—hard-hearted like Delia or Phillis—or that they are liars for claiming constancy at all. In Edmund Spenser’s *Amoretti* (1595), the speaker states that even though he shows her his pain,

⁷ See, for instance, Wyatt’s poems XIX and XLIII in the *Collected Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt*, ed. Kenneth Muir and Patricia Thomson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1969). Thomas Greene argues that the word “trouth” is one of the terms that distinguishes Wyatt from Petrarch and that the changing meanings of the word mark “the moral, social, and linguistic disarray caused by the disappearance of medieval ethical-political norms” (*The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982], 255). Petrarch uses the word “constant” only once in the *Rime sparse*, in poem 357: “Né minacce temer debbo di morte, / che ’l Re sofferse con più grave pena / per farme a seguitar constante et forte” [“Nor do I fear the threats of death, which the King suffered with worse paine in order to make me constant and strong in following Him”] (*Petrarch’s Lyric Poems: The “Rime sparse” and Other Lyrics*, trans. and ed. Robert M. Durling [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976], 554-55).

⁸ The term constancy appears, for instance, in the sonnet sequences of Philip Sidney (*Astrophil and Stella* 51), Edmund Spenser (*Amoretti* 54 and 84), William Shakespeare (sonnets 105, 117, and 152), Barnabe Barnes (*Parthenophil and Parthenophe* 16), Bartholomew Griffin (*Sonnets to Fidessa* 9, 56, and 61), William Smith (*Chloris* 28, 31, and 35), William Percy (*Sonnets to the Fairest Coelia* 19), and Richard Linche (*Diella* 35).

⁹ William Percy, sonnet 19, in *Sonnets to the Fairest Coelia* (London: Adam Islip, 1594), C4r.

¹⁰ Richard Linche, sonnet 35, in *Diella* (London: Henry Olney, 1596), D2v.

¹¹ William Smith, sonnet 31, in *Chloris, or the Complaint of the passionate despised Shepheard* (London: Edm. Bollifant, 1596), C2v.

Yet she beholding me with constant eye,
 Delights not in my mirth nor rues my smart:
 But when I laugh she mocks, and when I cry
 She laughs, and hardens evermore her heart.¹²

In Shakespeare's sonnets to the dark lady, constancy is only ever a deception:

For I have sworn deep oaths of thy deep kindness,
 Oaths of thy love, thy truth, thy constancy,

 For I have sworn thee fair: more perjur'd I,
 To swear against the truth so foul a lie!¹³

What all these sonnets share is the use of the term constancy as a performative utterance in which their speakers declare themselves constant or their beloveds inconstant.

Petrarchan writers imported the term constancy as it gained popularity in other discourses, notably martyrology and humanism. Sixteenth-century Protestant sermons, for instance, commonly use the phrase "constant martyr of Christ," and the term reached an especially wide audience when John Foxe used constancy to describe the martyrs in *Acts and Monuments*. Foxe draws from a long tradition of extolling Christian martyrs for their constant devotion to their faith in the face of death, and he follows writers of ancient Rome who appropriated the stoic term *constantia* to describe Christian suffering.¹⁴ In

¹² Edmund Spenser, sonnet 54, in *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. William A. Oram et al (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

¹³ William Shakespeare, sonnet 152, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans and J. J. M. Tobin, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

¹⁴ Catharine Edwards, *Death in Ancient Rome* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), discusses some of the ways in which Christian martyrs appropriate pagan concepts for their own uses. For instance,

“Ad Martyras” (“An Address to the Martyrs”), Tertullian pays tribute to “haec exempla constantiae” (“these examples of constancy”) who die not for “gloriae causum” (“the motive of glory”) but who face adversity “constanter” (“with constancy”); the writer of the “Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis” (“The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas”) describes how Perpetua “constantia repugnauit” (“strenuously resisted”) the robes of the priests of Saturn at her execution; and in his *Peristephanon Liber (Crowns of Martyrs)*, Prudentius remarks on the arresting constancy of martyrs in pain: “tali repressus cognitor constantia / cessare poenam praecipit” (“Checked by such firmness of spirit, the judge orders that the torture rest”).¹⁵

For martyrologists, violence done to—and endured by—the body testifies to the martyr’s constancy.¹⁶ Foxe writes of the early Christian martyr Julitta, “The ioyful Martyr embraceth the sentence as a thing most swete and delectable She addresseth her selfe to the flames, in countenance, iesture, and wordes, declaring the ioye of her hart, coupled with singular constancie.”¹⁷ Foxe’s poem on Askew’s death in his Latin *Rerum Ecclesiae Gestarum Commentarii* is entitled “In Annae Askevae Constantissimae foeminae &

in *De spectaculis*, Tertullian condemns Roman spectacles yet celebrates the spectacles of Christian martyrdom: “Tertullian at least finds the seductive allure of the spectacles traditionally provided by the Roman state impossible to evade altogether. All he can do is offer a Christian substitute” (208).

¹⁵ Tertullian, “Ad Martyras,” in *Tertulliani Quae Supersunt Omnia*, ed. Franz Oehler, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1853), 13-14; Tertullian, “An Address to the Martyrs,” in *Tertullian*, trans. Rev. C. Dodgson, vol. 1, Library of the Fathers (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1842), 156-57; “Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae and Felicitatis,” in *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, trans. Herbert Musurillo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 126-27; *Prudentius*, vol. 2, trans. H.J. Thomson, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 266-67.

¹⁶ Janel Mueller argues that in Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*, pain helps constitute the selfhood of the martyrs, contrary to Elaine Scarry’s influential study that asserts that torture “enforces the unmaking of the victim’s world, self, and voice” (“Pain, Persecution, and the Construction of Selfhood in Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*,” in *Religion and Culture in Renaissance England*, ed. Claire McEachern and Debora Shuger [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 161).

¹⁷ John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments [...] The Variorum Edition* (1570 edition), [online] (hriOnline, Sheffield), p. 120, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by page number. Available from: <http://www.hrionline.shef.ac.uk/foxe/>. [Accessed: 06.23.2010].

martyris bustum, Epitaphium Sapphicum, I.F.,” and it emphasizes Askew’s constancy through her tortured erotic body—“her tendons untied” and her “chaste body.”¹⁸ Writers like Foxe emphasize martyrs’ bodies in pain—their countenance, gestures, and words, as he notes, and often the grotesque details of their executions—to verify their inward faith to God and to the Protestant cause.

By the end of the sixteenth century, Petrarchan writers often used the trope of martyrdom as a metaphor for the pain of unrequited love; constant martyr and constant lover became conflated figures. A famous Nicholas Hilliard miniature shows a young lover in front of a background of flames, and an emblem in Otto Van Veen’s *Amorum Emblemata* (1608) depicts Cupid burning on the stake. The opposing poem, “Love in enduring death,” praises Cupid for remaining constant despite torment by his beloved: “Yet constant hee remaynes, whyle hee hath anie breath, / True loue in death it self, none can vnconstant know.”¹⁹ The pain of a martyr became an emblem, or a sign with which to demonstrate the undying devotion of the lover. In *Parthenophil and Parthenophe*, Barnabe Barnes writes,

Parthenophe mine harts soueraine,
Why doest thou my delightes delay?
And with thy crosse vnkindnesse killes,
Mine hart bound martyr to thy willes?²⁰

¹⁸ Beilin, *Examinations*, 193-94.

¹⁹ Otto van Veen, *Amorum Emblematum* (Antwerp, 1608), 184-85.

²⁰ Barnabe Barnes, sestina 2, in *Parthenophil and Parthenophe: A Critical Edition*, ed. Victor A. Doyno (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971), 91.

Wroth herself frequently uses the martyr metaphor in both her sonnets and her romance. In the first sonnet of *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, Pamphilia declares that Cupid has “martir’d my poore hart” (P1). Petrarchan writers evoked outward suffering to prove inward suffering, and they used the figure of the martyr to signify the impassioned helplessness of someone overcome by love.

Humanist scholars also used the term constancy widely in the sixteenth century when they became interested in philosophers like Seneca, Tacitus, and Cicero, who emphasize the stoic virtue *constantia*. In 1586, the Flemish humanist Justus Lipsius wrote *De Constantia*, which was first translated into English as *Two Bookes of Constancie* in 1594 and went through several editions in early modern England. A fictional dialogue between the character “Lipsius” and his wiser friend Langius on the virtues of constancy, *Two Bookes of Constancie* seeks to teach the reader how to deal with adversity. Instructing his naïve friend, who wishes to flee his war-torn country, Langius defines constancy as “*a right and immouable strength of the minde, neither lifted vp, nor pressed downe with externall or casuall accidentes.*”²¹ Constancy was a concept that promised power to the individual over the changeability of the world, and it began to appear with frequency in English texts in the late sixteenth century.²² Lipsius was a correspondent with both Philip and Robert Sidney, and many of the same humanists that

²¹ Iustus Lipsius, *Two Bookes of Constancie*, trans. Iohn Stradling (London: Richard Iohnes, 1594), 9, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by page number.

²² Note that translations of the Bible in the 1580s use the term “constant” more than any other English Bible: The Rheims-Douai Bible (1582-1610) uses the term 46 times, and the Geneva Bible (1587) uses it 40 times, mostly in the marginal notes. See *The Bible in English (990-1970)*, online database, Chadwyck-Healey Literature Collections (ProQuest, 1997-2010).

showed interest in Roman constancy began to use the term in their Petrarchan writings.²³ The sonnet sequences of the 1590s frequently adopt the term to describe both the Petrarchan lover, who is constant in his love despite cruelty of the world, and the beloved, who is criticized for her inconstancy. In *Idea*, Michael Drayton writes of the unshakable male lover: “Thus the world doth and evermore shall reel; / Yet to my Goddess am I constant ever.”²⁴ Like Langius’s description of the constant man, Drayton’s lover is “immouable” in the face of external cruelty.

Yet the figure of the impassioned martyred lover is in many ways incompatible with the dispassionate stoic lover. While the constant martyr demonstrates affection with the body, the constant stoic is supposed to subdue it with the mind. In *Two Bookes of Constancie*, Langius instructs Lipsius to “change your owne mind wrongfully subjected to affections” (7). According to Langius, desire, joy, fear and sorrow are the “foure principall affections which doe greatly disquiet the life of man,” and “constancie of the minde resteth, as it were, in an euen ballance, these affections” (15). Yet these “affections” are what define a Petrarchan lover; to be a constant lover is to express desire for the beloved, joy at her beauty, fear of her loss, and sorrow because of her rejection. In *The Arte of English Poesie*, George Puttenham writes that love “requireth a forme of Poesie variable, inconstant, affected, curious and most witty of any others, whereof the ioyes were to be vttered in one sorte, the sorrowes in an other, and by the many formes of

²³ On Lipsius’s relationship with the Sidneys and other English humanists, see Adriana McCrea, *Constant Minds: Political Virtue and the Lipsian Paradigm in England, 1584-1650* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

²⁴ Michael Drayton, *Idea*, sonnet 51, in *Poems: By Michael Drayton, Esquire* (London: W. Stansby for John Smethwicke, 1619), 270.

Poesie, the many moodes and pangs of louers, throughly to be discovered.”²⁵ While sonnet writers evoke “constancy” as a fixed quality for its characters (“to my Goddess am I constant ever”), the term actually represents a contradiction in meanings, an uneasy tension between the effusive display of emotion and the suppression of it.

The convention of debate was one way that humanists explored these tensions without ever resolving them. Although Langius asserts that constancy is an unchanging concept, Lipsius’s persistent questions expose fissures in the term. Their long dialogue suggests that constancy is an idea in process that requires intellectual labor, and it also entertains the possibility that constancy may mean more than just one thing. As Yvonne Bruce points out, constancy “is a vexed term, not only because it resists stable definition, as any abstraction does, but also because its meaning is fluid in both classical and early modern understanding of Stoicism.” From Guillaume Du Vair’s exhortation to maintain happiness through “a constant disposition of will” to Michel de Montaigne’s definition of constancy as a “languishing and wavering dance,” constancy as a term fractures into contradictory meanings.²⁶ The format of the debate in particular highlights the unfinished nature of the concept, and Lipsius’s conversation with Langius raises the possibility—however strongly refuted—that constancy may have negative consequences, from the acceptance of evil to the display of pride. The characters’ disputes lay bare both the instabilities of the term and the questions of its merits.

²⁵ George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, ed. Gladys Doidge Willcock and Alice Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), bk. 1, chap. 22, p. 45.

²⁶ Yvonne Bruce, “‘That which Marreth All’: Constancy and Gender in *The Virtuous Octavia*,” *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 22 (2009): 42-43. Bruce provides a helpful overview of the many contradictory definitions of constancy during this time, including those of Cicero, Joseph Hall, Du Vair, Montaigne, Gabriel Powell, and Lipsius.

One of the largest tensions in Lipsius's *Two Bookes of Constancie* is whether constancy is passive—something you have—or active—something you do. Langius begins by telling Lipsius that constancy is internal, “*a right and immouable strength of the minde*” (9), yet he emphasizes that to be constant, Lipsius must effect change rather than take orders. He explains the difference, for instance, between pity and mercy. Pity, according to Langius, is something “which must be despised of him that is wise and constant” because it means simply to bewail the misfortunes of others rather than to aid people in their misery (29). He instead advocates for mercy, which means to help rather than just to “waxe watry” at others’ pain (29): “I permit MERCY, but not pittying. I call MERCY, *An inclination of the minde to succour the necessitie or miserie of another. . . .* He that is trulie mercifull in deed . . . will performe more in workes than in wordes: and will stretch out vnto the poore and needy his hand, rather than his tongue” (29-30). Constancy means to do rather than to sit idly, to change the world rather than to accept evil. Langius even promises that constancy will empower him to become like a sovereign: “Thou shalt be a king indeed free indeed, only subiect vnto God, enfranchized from the seruile yoke of Fortune and affections” (13-14). Far from a state of just accepting the world as it comes, constancy demands and enables complete control.

Yet Langius complicates these assertions by suggesting that Lipsius needs to endure rather than resist miseries because they are always sent by God: “Think you that God giueth vs onely pleasing and profitable things? No: he sendeth likewise noisome and hurtful: . . . From heauen (*Lipsius*) from heauen are all these miseries sent” (33-34). Contrary to his claim that a constant man must change the world—must “performe more

in workes than in wordes”—here Langius argues that Lipsius should accept all bad things as part of God’s plan. No longer sovereign because of his constancy, Lipsius is subjected to any miseries God imposes on him. Lipsius naturally asks, then, if all things are a result of God’s destiny, why should he try to solve any of his country’s problems? “Why doo wee not leaue all to that greate masterlesse Lord, and sit still our selues with our handes in our bosomes?” (55). Langius answers by insisting that destiny of course does not work alone: “Who tolde thee that Destiny worketh alone without coadiuuant and meane causes? It is Destiny thou shouldest haue children: yet first thou must sowe the seede in thy wiues garden” (56). To be constant, Lipsius must carefully discern between helping his country while there is still hope and yielding to God’s destiny when there is not:

Howe knowest thou that? What canst thou tell whether this be onelie a light fit of a feuer, or a deeper disease vnto death? Therefore put to thy helping hand, and (as the prouerbe is,) hope still whiles breath is in the sicke bodie. But if thou see by certain and infallible tokens that the fatall alteration of the State is come, with mee this saying shall preuaile, *Not to fight against God.* (56-57)

Like a physician, Lipsius is supposed to make the crucial distinction between a patient able to recover and a patient beyond hope.

Yet what exactly are these “certain and infallible tokens” that supposedly alert Lipsius when to resist and when to give in? Langius never says. Rather than securing a firm line between action and passivity, Langius posits an ambiguous and variable boundary that may be difficult to interpret. Constancy, as it turns out, changes depending

on the circumstances. Far more than an “*immoueable strength of the minde*,” constancy becomes, as the dialogue develops, a shifting role that Lipsius must negotiate in order to perform effectively. Many early modern writers, in fact, became anxious about verifying “true” constancy as opposed to false, and constancy was described not as an inner quality at all but as a trait that must be demonstrated, like martyrdom, with outward signs. James I, for instance, was skeptical of Lipsius, who changed religions several times, thus displaying inconstant behavior. In the 1599 edition of *Basilikon Doron*, James rails against “that proud inconstant LIPSIVS,” and in later editions he contrasts true constancy with the hypocrisy of stoic writers: “Keepe true constancie, not onely in your kindenesse towards honest men; but being also *inuicti animi* against all aduersities: not with that Stoicke insensible stupiditie, wherewith many in our daies, preassing to winne honour, in imitating that ancient sect, by their inconstant behaiour in their owne liues, belies their profession.”²⁷ “True” constancy, according to James, is measured by what you do rather than just by how you think.

Langius walks a similar fault line when instructing Lipsius on how much intellectual labor goes into cultivating constancy. On the one hand, diligent study is necessary to craft the mindset that will battle inconstant Fortune. Langius scolds Lipsius for admiring his garden, accusing him of being attracted only to its outward beauty. He insists that gardens should be places of intellectual work rather than idleness:

²⁷ *Basilikon Doron: Devided into Three Bookes* (Edinburgh: Robert Walde-graue, 1599), 117; *Basilikon Doron. Or His Maiesties Instrvcions to His Dearest Sonne Henry the Prince* (London: Felix Kyngston, 1603), 97-98.

Here let al the learned meditate and write: here let the Philosophers argue & dispute of contentation, constancie, life, and death. . . . Here I either plie my selfe with diligent and earnest reading, or els sowe in my heart some seed of good cogitations, and thereby lay vp some wholsome lessons in my minde, as it were weapons in an armorie, which are alwayes ready with me at hand against the force and mutabilitie of Fortune. (65-66)

Readying constancy is like preparing for battle, requiring industry rather than laziness, inquisitiveness rather than acceptance. Langius insists that Lipsius cannot attain constancy simply by wishing it but must earn it: “Doest thou betake thy selfe to wishing, rather than doing? . . . Thou must bestow thy labour with al, and (as the saying is, ioyne handes with heart. Seeke, read, learne” (70).

Yet when Lipsius participates in this very intellectualism, pressing Langius on the logic of constancy, Langius grows more and more impatient. When Lipsius urges Langius to explain why God’s punishment is unequal, Langius is offended that Lipsius even asked: “Wandring minde! What meanest thou by this curious carefulnesse? . . . Of this onlely I am assured, that Gods will is a cause aboue all causes; . . . God hath pardoned: God hath punished: what wilt thou haue more? . . . And art thou more bold with God? Fie vpon such peruerse curiositie” (88). Although constancy requires intellectual “labour,” curiosity is “peruerse.” Langius becomes harsher to Lipsius as he continues, angrily emphasizing that it is not for Lipsius to try to understand God’s wisdom. When Lipsius asks why some evil men go unpunished, Langius responds, “Nay, thou bewrayest hereby thy blockishnes. For who art thou that dost not only appoint God

how, but also prescribe him when to punish?” (90-91). Lipsius cannot strike the right balance, in Langius’s judgment, between understanding constancy and questioning God’s plan. Although constancy requires intellectual work, Langius scolds Lipsius for any question that tries to comprehend God’s logic.

One of the most surprising revelations of the text comes when Langius, the mouthpiece for constancy, tells Lipsius that he is actually not a constant person at all. John Stradling, the translator of the treatise, advertises to the reader that the text is a kind of self-help manual that enables readers to adopt the practices of constancy: “if thou take vnto thee the armour and wepons here offered, hauing an indifferent courage of thine owne, thou shalt assuredly remaine a conquerour of those selfe affections” (“The Epistle to the Reader”). Lipsius assumes that because of Langius’s confidence, Langius is a model of constancy that he can imitate: “And with his last profound and constant talk, I confesse he made me amazed. Yet recalling my self, Oh happie man (said I) both in tranquillitie and troubles! O more than manly courage in a man! which wold to God I were able in some measure to imitate, and to creepe after your footsteps, although I came farre behind” (67). Yet Langius scolds Lipsius for his assumption, calling into question whether the constancy he preaches can ever be achieved:

Here *Langius* reprehending me, what talke you of imitating? you may easily exceed me: and not onely follow, but far passe mee. For I my selfe (*Lipsius*) haue trode but verie little in this path of Constancie and vertue. Neither am I to bee compared as yet to valiant and good men, but perchance am a little better than the most effeminate and worst sort. But

thou, whose towardlines is lusty and quick, set thy selfe forwards, & vnder my conduct enter into this high-way which leadeth directly to *Stablenes* and *Constancie*. (67)

Although Langius clings to the idea that constancy can be realized in someone as promising as Lipsius, his language suggests that this realization is actually quite uncertain. In sharp contrast to his earlier characterization of constancy as an “*immoueable strength of the minde*” (9), here constancy is a journey in motion, a “high-way” that can only promise stability. Far from an attribute that describes a person, constancy is, in Langius’s depiction, always in the process of becoming. If the authority figure on constancy cannot ever get there, the text casts doubt on the possibility of anyone else getting there either.

As one who calls himself “effeminate” and yet the one who can guide Lipsius to manly constancy “vnder [his] conduct,” Langius also unsettles his own categorization of constancy as an active masculine virtue. More than expressing false modesty, Langius puts pressure on his attempts to gender constancy as male. On the one hand, Langius sets up a rigid binary in the dialogue, arguing that in order to achieve constancy, Lipsius must accept his afflictions like a man and eschew effeminate “dandling”:

Thinkest thou that [God] will handle his schollers tenderly? that he will dandle them with delights vpon his knee? No, he will not doe so. Mothers for the most do corrupt their children, and make them wantons with tender bringing vp: but their fathers hold them in aw with more seuerity. God is our father, therefore he loueth vs truly yet with seuerity. If thou wilt be a

Marriner, thou must be taught in tempests. If a souldier, in perils. If thou
bee a man indeed, why refusest thou afflictions? seeing ther is none other
way to constancy. (78)

Constancy, according to Langius, is a form of toughness, an extension of humanist pedagogy that views physical punishment as a means to mastery. A constant subject is a male subject, who must repel female attempts to “corrupt” his constancy. Yet at other moments in the text, the line between masculine and feminine is much less clear. Langius instructs Lipsius that learning is incomplete without wisdom, and he portrays the constant subject here as an empty feminine vessel that must be impregnated with manly wisdom: “For as some trees will beare no fruite, except they grow neere vnto others that be of the male kind: No more wil these tender Virgins (I mean good letters) vnlesse they be conioyned with the manly courage of wisdom” (69). Just as Langius’s depiction of constancy vacillates between action and passivity, so does it waver between the masculine endurance of pain and the feminine acceptance of a virile presence.

Langius’s gender metaphors become even more confused when he describes wisdom. Although wisdom is “manly,” it is also personified as a woman shortly thereafter: “Apply thy selfe to wisdom, which may amend thy euill maners, set at rest and beautifie thy distempered and vnleane mind: She only is able to imprint vertue, & to work the impression of CONSTANCIE in thee, and to set open vnto thee the Temple of A GOOD MIND” (69). Curiously, the impregnating force is female, able “to imprint,” “to work the impression,” and “to set open.” Lipsius’s treatise sends mixed messages about whether constancy is something within the body—an inner virtue that needs to be

demonstrated—or something outside the body that must be imprinted on it. Lipsius gives contradictory suggestions about where constancy originates and how it can be verified.

In the end, the structure of the debate refuses to settle the contradictions that the text reveals. Although the text ostensibly serves as a guide for the reader to help cultivate constancy, it is unclear whether the reader should believe the older, supposedly wiser Langius who nevertheless cannot achieve constancy himself, or the younger, more naïve Lipsius who seems so easily swayed yet asks some of the most pointed, logical questions about the implications of embracing constancy. It is not even clear if constancy has any ability to perform its most revered stoic function, which is to control emotion. While Langius argues that “vaine delightes doe kindle and enflame in vs the fewell of affections” (6), Lipsius remarks shortly thereafter that in hearing Langius’s “earnest” words on constancy, he was “enflamed with a sparke of this good fire” (14). Constancy, while supposedly quenching the flames of passion, is also the source of passion, perhaps explaining its frequent appropriation in both martyrological and Petrarchan discourses. Lipsius’s treatise leaves the questions it raises unresolved: how constancy is produced, what the effects of constancy are, or whether constancy is a force of good or of evil.

In what follows, I analyze some of the moments in the *Urania* that interrogate the term constancy. I argue that in many of the same ways that Lipsius’s treatise calls attention to the irresolvable tensions in the term, so does Wroth’s text point to the pull between the term as a passive quality that characters have and a more malleable concept that must be negotiated. In some instances, Wroth seems to tow the stoic line, as when Leandrus advises Parselius, who complains to him after an imprisonment. Leandrus tells

Parselius, “be confident, the Heavens ordaine all things for the best, then doe not repine, you have made your selfe already famous sufficient to gaine sorrow for your end and revenge; be then brave and resolute, and make bold Death (by your constant suffering) quake to assaile you.”²⁸ Like Langius, Leandrus advocates for constancy in the face of adversity, but even here, constancy straddles the line between passive acceptance of “suffering” and active defiance of death. Wroth’s text rigorously tests and exposes the complications of the term constancy, especially for its women characters.

Constant Martyrs in the *Urania*

The very first tale in the romance is of a constant woman, Limena, yet ironically, even in a character who so perfectly represents constancy, constancy is remarkably difficult to locate. Wroth seems less interested in the idea that Limena is “constant” than in how she came to be so. The parodic nature of the episode suggests that Limena is not intrinsically constant at all; instead, constancy is something that must be written on her body, almost always through suffering. Limena’s martyrdom is necessary to demonstrate her constancy, and although Wroth narrates a happy ending for this character, she also emphasizes that her happiness must be purchased with pain.

On the surface, Limena seems inherently to embody constancy. In love with Perissus, whom Urania finds lamenting in a cave, but married against her will to Philargus, Limena remains true to Perissus even under threats of death from her husband,

²⁸ Mary Wroth, *The First Part of the Countess of Montgomery’s Urania*, ed. Josephine A. Roberts (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1995), 405. All quotations from the *Urania* will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text by page number.

who suspects she is not being faithful. Yet Perissus's description of Limena to Urania indicates that constancy is not an inner quality of Limena, but an outward performance that must be tested. He bewails, "O deere Limena, loving Limena, worthy Limena, and more rare, constant Limena: perfections delicately faign'd to be in women were verified in thee" (4). His comment about the "faign'd" constancy in other women suggests an anxiety about the authenticity of constancy, which, despite being an inner virtue, must be "verified" by outward signs. Like James I, who anxiously works to establish "true" constancy against the imposters who only claim it, Perissus anxiously maintains the boundary between false constancy and true constancy—yet fails to articulate exactly how to tell the difference. Just as Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots struggle to prove their authenticity in a culture that blurs the distinction between true and false women, so does Wroth highlight the difficulty for any female character fully to prove her constancy.

Oddly, despite Perissus's many professions of Limena's "modest constancy, and constant determination" (13), Perissus argues that Limena loses her constancy once she is dead. Believing that Philargus has killed her, he vows to live his life in despair and tells Urania, "No, shee is dead, and with her is all vertue, and beauteous constancy gone" (15). This statement, of course, does not make much sense, for why would Limena become inconstant once she is dead? Perissus's logic here suggests that constancy exists only when it is demonstrably verifiable, and the phrase "beauteous constancy" conflates, even confuses, outward beauty with an inner quality. Far from a stable virtue, constancy can appear and disappear. Here, constancy is not just remaining steady despite the world's troubles; it is also projecting a pretty face.

The torturing of Limena later in the romance shows how much Limena's body in pain produces the constancy that she is supposedly just conveying. Parselius comes across Limena, bound to a pillar by her hair, naked from the waist up, being whipped by her husband. Here she is the emblem from van Veen's book, martyred in her constant love for Perissus. Parsellius's pornographic admiration for her at this moment points to the close correlation between Limena's Petrarchan beauty and her constant martyrdom:

The Morean Prince [Parselius] staid to behold, and beholding did admire the exquisitenes of that sad beautie, but more then that did the cruelty of the armed man seeme wonderful, for leading her to a pillar which stood on the sand (a fit place that the sea might stil wash the memorie of such inhumanity) he tied her to it by the haire, which was of great length, and the Sun-like brightnesse. Then pulled hee off a mantle which she wore, leaving her from the girdle upwards al naked, her soft, daintie white hands hee fastened behind her, with a cord about both wrists, in a manner of a crosse, as testimony of her cruellest Martyrdome. (84)

Martyrdom, and hence constancy, are not self evident, as this passage shows, but require "testimony." In Limena's case, the most convincing evidence comes from her suffering beauty—her hair of "Sun-like brightnesse" tied to a pillar, her naked breasts, her "soft, daintie white hands" bound with a cord. Like Foxe's description of Cicelie Ormes in *Acts and Monuments*, which points to Ormes's Petrarchan beauty as proof of her true martyrdom, Wroth shows the close correlation between feminized bodily pain and inner virtue. When Parselius fights Philargus to free Limena, he accidentally nicks Limena's

breast in a moment that recalls Britomart's wounding: "it a little rased her on the left side, which shee perceiving, looking on it, and seeing how the bloud did trickle in some (though few) drops, 'Many more then these,' said shee, 'have I inwardly shed for thee my deare Perissus'" (84). Outward bodily signs serve as proof for inward emotions.

Yet these things of course do not prove anything, and Wroth highlights the bizarreness of Philargus's sudden change of heart about his wife. After Parselius defeats Philargus, he abruptly reverses his judgment of Limena: "Now are mine eyes open to the injuries done to vertuous Limena, her chastity appeares before my dying sight, whereto before, my eyes were dimme, and eares deafe, seeing and hearing nothing, but base falshoods, being govern'd by so strong and undeserved Jealousie" (85). Chastity is of course distinguished from constancy in this text; Limena can be constant to one man—Perissus—while being chaste to another—Philargus. Yet both concepts are invisible on the body and thus must be marked in some way to signify their presence. Philargus's emphasis on the senses, especially sight, suggests that Limena has offered visual proof of her chastity, and yet her outward appearance is the same as it was a few minutes ago, before Parselius came to rescue her. Wroth posits a confusing relationship between inner and outer here; Limena's martyred body first proves her guilt to Philargus, and then suddenly her innocence. If Limena's chastity becomes something that can be proven or disproven with the same outward sign, then Wroth suggests that women cannot ever prove their faithfulness definitively.

Limena has a happy ending, but Wroth calls attention to the problematic ways that constancy is made into an identity for women. Limena gets to marry her true love,

becoming Queen of Sicily, and when she makes brief appearances throughout the narrative, she is usually associated with constancy, as when Pamphilia accepts her pledge of service from “you most happy Queene, the rare vertue of matchlesse and loyall constancy” (149). Yet even after she is promised to Perissus with her dying husband’s blessing, Limena continues to showcase her wounds, suggesting that her role as constant lover is never completely secure. She tells the rest of her story of her torture, showing her scars as evidence for her love of Perissus: “‘When I had put off all my apparell but one little Petticote, he opened my breast, and gave me many wounds, the markes you may here discern’ (letting the Mantle fall againe a little lower, to shew the cruell remembrance of his crueltie) which although they were whole, yet made they newe hurts in the loving heart of Perissus” (87). The role of martyr becomes one that Limena cannot stop herself from playing. Curiously, her wounds are not even there any more (“they were whole”), yet the gesture alone of showing where they were testifies to her love of Perissus, making “new hurts” in his “loving heart.” Wroth points to both the compulsory and compulsive element of performance in constituting Limena’s constancy, which must be rehearsed over and over through the demonstration of Limena’s pain.

Throughout the *Urania*, Wroth highlights the suffering that women must demonstrate publicly again and again—so much so that they become caught in a masochistic cycle of witnessing their constant devotion.²⁹ Although Pamphilia is

²⁹ While most critics view Pamphilia’s devotion to constancy as a positive reappropriation of the term, Melissa E. Sanchez, “The Politics of Masochism in Mary Wroth’s *Urania*,” *English Literary History* 74, no. 2 (2007): 449-78, sees *Urania* as the voice of reason in the text and Pamphilia’s masochism as politically dangerous to her country: “Pamphilia’s masochistic passion for Amphilanthus is rooted in her refusal to distinguish between romantic ideals of love and its actual effects” (465).

described as being alone, she is often “alone” in an extremely public way.³⁰ When Amphilanthus comes to rescue Pamphilia from the Theater of Enchantment, for instance, he comes surrounded by his former girlfriends Musalina, Lucenia, and the Queen of Bulgaria. While the other princesses in the theater are reunited with their lovers, Amphilanthus’s rejection of Pamphilia becomes painfully apparent:

now they perfectly saw and knew, misery to them that were subjects to it,
and such did Pamphilia feele, who returning to the seate, she had before
sate in, not only as she did alone, but viewed by all to be so. They
infinitely wished for the finall end, and she for hers; directly before her sat
Musalina, and the halfe fulfiller of the Adventure, a sad spectacle, but she
must and did indure it (442)

Pamphilia’s constancy at this moment is not private suffering but a public performance, carried out, no less, in a theater. Her aloneness becomes a “sad spectacle” that is “viewed by all,” and Wroth suggests that the constancy Pamphilia displays for Amphilanthus is part of her public image. While Pamphilia’s feelings may be genuine, her relationship with Amphilanthus is never just between the two of them, instead extending into her persona as steadfast queen.

Pamphilia’s displays of suffering become entwined with her identity as a woman, and Wroth suggests that she even revels in the image she projects as a martyr. When she

³⁰ Jeffrey Masten argues that Wroth’s sonnet sequence and romance suggest a woman’s withdrawal from the circulation (“‘Shall I turn blabb’: Circulation, Gender, and Subjectivity in Mary Wroth’s Sonnets,” in *Reading Mary Wroth: Representing Alternatives in Early Modern England*, ed. Naomi J. Miller and Gary Waller [Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991], 67-87). Other scholars have contested the idea that Wroth does not participate in the public sphere. See Rosalind Smith, “Lady Mary Wroth’s *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*: The Politics of Withdrawal,” *English Literary Renaissance* 30, no. 3 (2000): 408-31.

comes across the wedding of Alarina, for instance, who had previously taken a vow of chastity, Pamphilia wonders if she is the only one who can maintain constancy:

“‘Alasse,’ said she, ‘can there not live two constant women all at one time? yet Pamphilia be thou still just, and though but thy selfe, and so alone to suffer glory in such martyrdome’” (482). Like Limena, who obsessively points to her scars to prove her devotion to Perissus, Pamphilia repeatedly performs her own suffering to “glory” in her constancy for Amphilanthus. Not just a passive acceptance of suffering, Pamphilia actively seeks to project her image, wearing black clothes and conspicuously shunning the company of others. Yet Wroth emphasizes that this endless display of suffering can also entrap Pamphilia in her own misery. Wroth points to the decay of Pamphilia’s beauty, for instance, as she lets herself go: Pamphilia “now wore only black, and in wearing that as carelesse, as before extreame curious, her hayre that was before, but with greatest care dressed, shee onely kept cleane, and neglectively wore it, no jewels came about her; so as she was a mourner in stead of the most sumptuous habits shee was wont to honour the Court withall” (461). Far from the spectacular monarch she once was, Pamphilia becomes locked in a state of self-pity and neglect.

Wroth suggests that the association between constancy and martyrdom does not ever fully prove a lover’s suffering, but it compels the lover to rehearse that suffering over and over again in a public way. In a long interior monologue, Pamphilia wonders whether she was born to suffer: “else why was this rare excellent qualitie of constancy allotted thee?” (464). Far from a solitary condition, Pamphilia’s constancy requires

repeated public display. In an apostrophe to Amphilanthus, she makes clear that everyone around her is aware of her constancy:

you might yet most cruell man have shewed more gratefulnessse, and I have been contented, no colour you have to excuse that with all, for you knew my love, you seemed to cherish it, all eyes saw it too, for my face shewed it, I strove for nothing more then meanes to declare it, mine eyes did looke for meanes, to shew how they and I were won by you, my lipps have parted from themselves to let my tongue make true confession of that you then seemd with expressfull joy, and content to entertaine. (464)

With her sonnets that she carves on trees for others to discover, her complaints she makes for others to overhear, and her disheveled self-presentation, Pamphilia ensures that “all eyes saw it too.” Wroth suggests that rather than become freed with her devotion to constancy, Pamphilia becomes trapped into compulsively demonstrating her sorrow.

Yet all these demonstrations ultimately prove nothing. Pamphilia questions why Amphilanthus cannot see her pain despite her endless displays of suffering: “the Heavens will yet for me witnes my unchanged heart, and unstained affection: the aire hath been, and is so fild with my complaints and protestations, as I wonder it doth not like Ordinance rattle in your eares” (464). Wroth implies that that no matter how many “complaints and protestations” Pamphilia makes, her constancy can never be fully verified, and like Limena, she is caught in a cycle of forever pointing to her wounds. Pamphilia says in her monologue that her passions “have left this poore body a loyall

sacrifice to love” (465), and for Wroth, that seems to be the point: Pamphilia’s constancy spurs an endless display of pain, leaving her identity calcified as a sacrificial martyr.

For women in the *Urania*, constancy more often prompts perpetual mourning than singular spectacles of pain. Amphilanthus and Ollorandus come across Bellamira, whose story shadows Pamphilia’s, in “mourning attire, her faire eyes shewing more grieffe, then her apparrell sadnesse” (377). Bellamira tells them about her love for a man whom she could not have. Under her father’s coercion, she married another man and had a child with him, and afterward she discovered that her original lover had been false to her despite her constancy to him throughout her marriage. Before her marriage, she “performed a vowed sacrifice, which was a lock of haire that I had worne constantly many yeares; this haire was his, . . . The vow was, that if ever I should be so unfortunate, as to marry any but himselve, that morning before my marriage to burne it to my losse and love” (387-88). Even after she was widowed and discovered her lover’s faithlessness, she still professed her constancy to him: “truly can I not hate this man, but love him stil so wel, as if he could looke backe on me with love, all former illls should be forgotten, but that cannot be, such an unfortunate strangnes hath beene betwixt us, as wee never meete” (390). Like Pamphilia, Bellamira devotes her life to a man who will never be faithful.

Yet Wroth suggests that Bellamira’s constancy entraps her to a miserable existence. When Bellamira’s husband and son died, and after she discovered that her lover had been false all along, Bellamira decides to confine herself to a cave:

Into this Cave I then confined my selfe, and hence I have not stirred,
further then you finde me, nor will, heere purposing to end, and with my

deereſt ſon be laid, who only was to me conſtant in affection; and to him, daily doe I perform thoſe rights belonging to the dead, after the manner of our country; In theſe parts can you finde no more then now you ſee, my miſerable ſpectacle (389)

Bellamira caſts herſelf as a martyr, emphasizing her “miſerable ſpectacle,” but curiouſly, ſhe is a ſpectacle in the dark where no one can ſee her. For Wroth, conſtant martyrdom does not ſimply teſtify to the lover’s ſuffering, but muſt be painfully reiterated over and over again—even if no one is watching. Bellamira muſt “daily perform” the mourning rights to her dead ſon, the only perſon in her life who has reciprocated her conſtancy, yet ſhe can never fully prove her conſtancy to her miſſing audience.

For Bellamira, conſtancy is not an empowering virtue, but an enſlaving one. She tells Amphilanthus, “Dull I have been called, for conſtancy is now termed ſo, and his aſſurance of my faith made him leave mee, a thing he thinks ſoone wonne, or rather held at pleaſure, confident aſſurance of firmneſſe, growing to contempt; and this courſe doe unfortunat poore conſtant lovers run” (381). Bellamira’s revelation of her conſtancy to her lover made her vulnerable to him, who took it as a ſign of weakneſſe rather than ſtrength. Her echo of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is a bitterly ironic one, for while the lovers’ miſfortunes get reſolved at the end of Shakespeare’s play, Bellamira is left abandoned for her conſtancy.

In Protestant works, martyrdom was a tool for inſpiring others and effecting change; the ſpectacle of a martyr’s pain was invoked to encourage others to follow the cauſe. In *Acts and Monuments*, Foxe writes, “And though we repute not their aſhes,

chaynes, and swerdes in the stede of reliques: yet let vs yelde thus much vnto theyr commemoration, to glorify the Lord in his Saintes, and imitate their death (as much as we may) with like constancy, or theyr lyues at the least with like innocency” (12). Wroth shows that in romance, however, constancy prompts the endless repetition of suffering rather than a glorious blaze. During one of Pamphilia’s tormented fits of passion, Wroth writes, “being alone she thus began, or rather continued her complaints which could have no new beginning never having end” (467). Instead of shaping a spectacular female identity, Pamphilia’s constant martyrdom leads her to a life of ceaseless suffering.

Constancy as Debate in the *Urania*

While the stories of constant martyrs in the *Urania* show the process by which women can become entrapped by their very impassioned professions of constancy, the debates on constancy between the characters also question the virtue—and the coherence—of the term. The sonnets of the period suggest that constancy is an either/or condition: a lover is either constant or is not. Yet the debates in the *Urania* show that the connotations that the term constancy has accumulated make it difficult for characters to agree what constancy is or whether it is a virtue or a vice. The conversations in the romance send mixed signals about whether constancy produces or controls passion, whether it is a masculine stoic virtue or a feminine erotic weakness, and whether it constitutes authority or takes it away. The figure of the constant martyr shows how easily constancy can lock women into identities of unhappiness, yet the debates on constancy reveal that a character’s association with constancy is never fully secure. Far from the

uncontested virtue of the sonnets, constancy in the romance is an ideal of more questionable value, one that the characters mistrust as much as they embrace.

In many ways, Wroth shows constancy to be a stoic ideal that controls excessive passion, which can be detrimental, even dangerous, to the characters of the romance. She describes Pamphilia, who is the character most associated with constancy, as “the most silent and discreetly retir’d of any Princesse” (61). Like Langius, who argues that constancy is a masculine virtue, several characters call Pamphilia “Masculine” or “manlike” in her behavior (468, 570). When Rosindy instructs the incarcerated Parselius, “make bold Death (by your constant suffering) quake to assaile you” (405), Wroth seems to suggest that constancy can conquer emotion. When Amphilanthus jousts with the King of Celicia, he feels strengthened by Pamphilia’s display of constancy: “The Emperour marking her, had inwardly new power and might given him by her constancy, and strong affection” (566). Just as Langius promises Lipsius that constancy will make him like a king, Wroth shows here the almost magical powers of constancy to infuse Amphilanthus with his needed strength of mind.

Yet many characters question the association between constancy and stoic control when constancy becomes entangled with Petrarchan discourse. For instance, when Rosindy and Selarinus go for a walk, Selarinus discloses his love for Rosindy’s sister, Philistella, who is trapped at the Theater of Enchantment: “O Philistella, treasure of the truest sweetnesse; why art thou lost, and I in thee? Why was ever cruell fortune turned on thee, and why alone wert thou made excellent to bee fallen into this misery?” (411). Yet Rosindy cautions him on his excessive emotion: ““This passion,’ said Rosindy, ‘so well

fits your love, as I must commend it, and be no way angry with your choller, your constant affection to my sister, moves in mee as much love as I desire to have from my best friend; yet I would have you temperate in your sufferings” (411). Rather than subduing affection, constancy actually has the danger of producing too much affection. Wroth reveals constancy as a term that splits at the seams; she shows how the stoic and the Petrarchan connotations of constancy both coexist and work against each other at the same time. Not the either/or identity of the sonnets, constancy in the romance is a contradictory ideal, at once evoking the control of passion and its excess.

Urania’s debate with Pamphilia about her love for Amphilanthus constitutes one of the most sustained challenges to constancy in the text. Like Rosindy, Urania characterizes constancy as producing slavish devotion to passion rather than “discreet” control of it, and she charges Pamphilia with weakness:

Where is that judgment, and discreet govern’d spirit for which this and all other places that have beene happy with the knowledge of your name, hath made you famous? will you now fall under the low groanes of the meanest esteemed passion? Where is that resolution, which full of brave knowledge, despised the greatest Princes when they wore loves livery; must this sinke, while his tossing follies swimme? shall your excellent vertues bee drowned in the Sea of weaknesse? call your powers together, you that have been admired for a Masculine spirit, will you descened below the poorest Femenine in love? (468)

Although in Lipsius's treatise, Langius promises that constancy will ensure sovereignty, here Urania argues that a constant lover is a bad ruler. In matters of love, constancy encourages an ungoverned spirit and enslavement to "the low groanes of the meanest esteemed passion." Urania questions, "how can you command others, that cannot master your selfe; or make laws, that cannot counsel, or soveraignise over a poore thought?" (468). She tells Pamphilia to stop crying and to man up, opposing constancy with the power Pamphilia needs to wield in order to govern effectively.

Yet Urania does not simply encourage Pamphilia to be masculine in an essential way. Instead, she suggests that in her stubborn adherence to constancy, Pamphilia forfeits the flexibility to perform different gender roles. Urania encourages Pamphilia not only to be masculine but also to embrace the feminine role of Petrarchan mistress, prodding her to summon her "resolution" to despise great princes again. Urania's argument recalls an earlier moment in the romance in which Pamphilia scornfully rejects Steriamus. When Steriamus confronts Pamphilia, he holds a mirror up to her face to show her the cause of his pain, but Pamphilia will yield to none of his desires: "She (with seeing her face, saw my cause of torment) said as little as I: onely taking the Glasse turn'd the other side, which was dull like my gaines, and with as much scorne and contempt, as could appeare in so much beauty (like as if the Sun would in spite shew himselfe in a storme), she turnd from me" (69). Urania suggests that the best way for Pamphilia to gain power is not to subvert Petrarchan conventions, claiming male constancy for herself, but to take control of the conventions of the mistress already available to her. Urania reminds Pamphilia of the appeal of the role of the Petrarchan mistress, suggesting that it has the potential to

empower as well as entrap women. Urania sees the promise of Pamphilia's elusiveness; she suggests that she remain present enough to maintain the desire of suitors yet always retain the power to turn her suitors away.

Pamphilia refutes Urania's charges, ardently defending both love and constancy as virtues. She points out that she is not alone in her devotion to constancy, "that the wisest, bravest, and most excellent men have been lovers, and are subject to this passion" (469). She maintains constancy as a virtue worth protecting, portraying her body as a sanctuary to this ideal: "Pamphilia must be of a new composition before she can let such thoughts fall into her constant breast, which is a Sanctuary of zealous affection, and so well hath love instructed me, as I can never leave my master nor his precepts, but still maintaine a vertuous constancy" (470). Pamphilia's intense devotion to this concept suggests that she draws pleasure—however perverse—from her constancy to Amphilanthus and that she constructs a virtuous identity from her very privation.

Yet Urania opposes Pamphilia's zeal by arguing that this attitude only further entraps those who bind themselves to it:

"Tis pittie," said Urania, "that ever that fruitlesse thing Constancy was taught you as a vertue, since for vertues sake you will love it, as having true possession of your soule, but understand, this vertue hath limits to hold it in, being a vertue, but thus that it is a vice in them that breake it, but those with whom it is broken, are by the breach free to leave or choose again where more staidnes may be found; besides tis a dangerous thing to hold that opinion, which in time will prove flat heresie." (470)

Urania posits “virtue” and “vice” as relative rather than absolute terms. Virtues, she claims, exist only because of the limits that make them so, and vices are only what virtues arbitrarily exclude. She urges Pamphilia to stop defining herself so narrowly, and she sees the destructiveness of those who confine themselves to lives of misery in the name of constancy. Urania is confident that the value of constancy will come under public scrutiny and eventually “prove flat heresie.”

Wroth leaves it unclear who wins the debate. On the one hand, both Urania and Pamphilia present compelling testimony. Urania’s logic seems to sear through the emotional turbidity of Pamphilia’s feelings for Amphilanthus, yet Pamphilia’s devotion to her “Sanctuary of zealous affection” seems admirably to defy Urania’s cynicism. On the other hand, both women problematize their arguments. Although many of Urania’s points are cogent critiques of Pamphilia’s solipsistic behavior, others appear specious. She scolds Pamphilia, for instance, for letting her beauty fade because of her constancy: “beautie is besides a vertue counted among men of that excellent worth, as it wil draw their hearts as Adamants doe Iron: yet in this the comparison is not so proper, their hearts too tender to resist an easier invitement, but I say beauty will sooner compasse ones desires in love, then any other vertue, since that is the attractive power” (468). Although Urania rightly points to the self-destruction that results from Pamphilia’s constancy—her conspicuous absence—she also suggests that beauty—her fully present body—is the only way to remain attractive to other men. For Urania, the big loss for Pamphilia is her place in the love market, and she advises her to guard her “attractive power.”

Yet Pamphilia's defense of constancy also poses problems for the reader.

Pamphilia once again identifies herself as a martyr, suggesting that she has locked herself into a masochistic state of misery: "I am so wholly his as it is past mistaking, the wound being given mee deeply by his unkindnes which martyrs mee" (470). Pamphilia's logic seems circular as she tries to explain why she remains constant to Amphilanthus:

To leave him for being false, would shew my love was not for his sake, but mine owne, that because he loved me, I therefore loved him, but when hee leaves I can doe so to. O no deere Cousen I loved him for himselfe, and would have loved him had hee not loved mee, and will love though he dispise me; this is true love (470)

Pamphilia claims that her love is for "his sake," yet it is unchanging despite Amphilanthus's reaction. Therefore, her love cannot be for him if he does not respond to it; it can be only for her own pleasure or pain. Her claim that her love for Amphilanthus is for him alone seems delusional, and her constancy appears a misguided fantasy rather than just a steadfast love.

The end of the debate leaves unresolved, then, exactly what constancy means and how virtuous it is. Wroth's inclusion of a humanist debate unveils the complexity of a term that might otherwise be taken at face value in Petrarchan discourse, and it also reveals the place of women in this discourse to be contested rather than fixed.

Pamphilia's uncertain roles—as constant lover or Petrarchan mistress, as in control of her emotions or controlled by them, as devoted to constancy or devoted to pride—suggest that her relationship to constancy is always negotiated and tested.

Wroth includes another debate when Pamphilia and Amphilanthus go hunting and meet a shepherd boy who does not know their true identities. They prod him to find out what people think of Pamphilia as a queen and receive a remarkably candid response:

she is upright and just, in her government mild, and loving to her subjects, she loves all good exercises as well abroad, as at home; shee hath indeed they say, a brave and manlike spirit, and wonderous wise shee is; yet for all these good parts, shee could not keepe out of Cupids clawes, but was mightily in love, and is still as it is mutterd about with a gallant man, a brave fighting man, for whose sake she refused all others, and lately the King of Celicia her next neighbor; but for all her wisdome, there I believe she was ill advised to refuse him, for he came with such an Army against her, to have her by force, as had like to have marrd all (570-71)

The shepherd takes constancy out of its narcissism and reminds Pamphilia that her love life has material consequences for her people. While in *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, Pamphilia's constancy affects only her and perhaps (as her last sonnet suggests) future sonnet writers, in the *Urania*, her constancy has political implications. The shepherd is particularly critical of her recent decision to turn down the King of Celicia, who aggressively pursued her hand in marriage. The shepherd worries that her rejection of him will lead to a war and an occupation; while Pamphilia may suffer emotionally for her unfulfilled love for Amphilanthus, the shepherd suggests that her people will suffer physically from the bloodshed of war.

Like Urania's challenge to Pamphilia's constancy, the shepherd's blunt remarks shatter the idea that constancy is universally revered. Although the shepherd initially insists that "no pride dwells in" Pamphilia, he also suggests that her constancy produces quite selfish behavior: "'for mine owne part I would the Queen were of our mind' (whereat they [Pamphilia and Amphilanthus] both laughed); 'for I protest,' said he, 'I thinke varietie the sweetest pleasure under Heaven, and constancy the foolishhest unprofitable whining vertue'" (571). Wroth highlights the distance that constancy fosters between Pamphilia and her people; Pamphilia's and Amphilanthus's condescending laughter implies that the shepherd's remarks are not being taken seriously. Yet Wroth's inclusion of the shepherd's scathing criticism reinforces the possibility that constancy may have damaging consequences. As in the debate between Urania and Pamphilia, Wroth does not definitively resolve the issue here, but she does emphasize that constancy is contested, not unanimously admired.

Constancy and Romance Conventions

Far from a universal Petrarchan virtue, constancy is a concept that just does not work in the romance setting. Two of the episodes in the *Urania* that most highlight romance conventions—the rescue at the Throne of Love at the close of book 1 and the vision at the Hell of Deceit near the end of book 3—both invoke constancy as an ideal and suggest that it is incompatible with romance. Constancy emerges in the *Urania* as a construct strained by the romance conventions of the marvelous, narrative deferral, and resistance to closure.

The climactic episode of the first book is Pamphilia's rescue of the ladies trapped in the Throne of Love, and in this incident, Wroth posits constancy both as a saving grace and as an ideal that falls apart. At the Throne of Love, located on an island with people of "barbarousnes" (46), there are three towers: the Tower of Love, represented by Cupid; the Tower of Desire, represented by Venus; and the Tower of Constancy, represented by the female figure *Constancy* herself, who is "holding in her hand the Keyes of the Pallace" (48). When a group of characters are shipwrecked on this island, they drink from the river, which awakens passions within them, and several of them, including Urania and Selarina, get locked in the towers. Like Lipsius, Wroth draws from humanist ideas by opposing constancy to the "affections": love and desire. According to an "aged Man," only "the valiantest Knight"—or Amphilanthus—and "the loyallest Lady"—or Pamphilia—can "open that gate, when all these Charmes shal have conclusion" (48-49). Wroth thus suggests that constancy can triumph over affection and that the relationship between these two characters can set right the petty passions of the other characters.

And on some level, that is what happens when Pamphilia and Amphilanthus come to the Throne of Love and release the prisoners. Yet the separation between constancy and other affections seems less secure when the two characters who most painfully desire each other come together:

Both then at once extremely loving, and love in extremity in them, made the Gate flie open to them, who passed to the last Tower, where *Constancy* stood holding the keyes, which Pamphilia tooke; at which instant *Constancy* vanished, as metamorphosing her self into her breast. (169)

Rather than a stable figure, *Constancy* is fleeting, able to be “metamorphosed” into Pamphilia’s breast. While critics often interpret this moment as one in which Pamphilia becomes constancy herself,³¹ the ephemeral nature of constancy is unsettling. Interestingly, authority over Pamphilia and Amphilanthus at this moment comes from love, not constancy. When *Constancy* vanishes, they make their way into a garden of love, where they hear a voice instructing Pamphilia to release all the ladies and Amphilanthus to release all the knights:

Loyallest, and therefore most incomparable Pamphilia, release the Ladies, who must to your worth, with all other of your sexe, yeeld right preheminance: and thou Amphilanthus, the valliantest and worthiest of thy sexe, give freedome to the Knights, who with all other, must confesse thee matchlesse; and thus is *Love* by love and worth released. (169-70)

Love, however, is what supposedly got the prisoners into this mess in the first place, and Wroth blurs love, desire, and constancy, which had previously been made distinct. Pamphilia and Amphilanthus’s “extremity” in their love suggests that they are figures of passion rather than moderation and restraint. Their constancy seems more a performance of grandeur rather than a concept much different from the desire the prisoners had displayed. In the same breath, Wroth conceives of Pamphilia and Amphilanthus both as exceptional and as bound to the same base desires as everyone else.

In this episode, Wroth imagines constancy both as a magical solution to everyone’s love problems and as an ephemeral fantasy. As much as the allegorical figure

³¹ Beilin, *Redeeming Eve*, writes, “The very virtue itself now has its seat in Pamphilia’s heart, inextricably tying her future course to its precepts” (219-20).

Constancy seems to provide stasis and closure, Wroth quickly pulls the narrative back into the romance mode of delay and digression. Book 1 ends not with the triumph of constancy, but with another sea voyage after Polarchos implores Amphilanthus and his party to help him win his desired Princess of Rhodes:

then the banquet ended, they tooke leave of the kind King of Ciprus, and his company, all the rest taking ship with Pamphilia, sailing directly to Rodes, where they received unspeakable welcome, being feasted there eight dayes together, and for show of their true welcome, the Duke of that Iland bestowed his consent for the marriage of his daughter, with her long beloved friend Polarchos, whose joy and content was such, as the other amorous Knights wish to know. Then tooke they their leaves of the Duke, and all the Rodean Knights and Ladies, taking their way to Delos, Polarchos promising within short time to attend them in Morea. (174)

In the *Urania*, constancy cannot stand still for long. Like Pamphilia's declaration, "let me be ordaind, or licensed to be the true patterne of true constancy" (244), much of the romance is in the subjunctive mood: a promise, a journey, a wish. Fulfillment usually leads to separation, and Wroth suggests that rather than just a passive mode of acceptance, constancy is, as Langius states, a "high-way," or an ideal always in process.

In a later episode, Pamphilia's encounter with the Hell of Deceit, Wroth shows even more skepticism toward the ability of constancy to exist in romance. This episode begins when Pamphilia and Amphilanthus get separated on a hunting trip. Although Pamphilia initially thinks she has been abandoned again, dreaming that Amphilanthus

leaves her for Lucenia, when she goes out searching for him, she traces a trail of fresh blood and finds Amphilanthus's armor cut to pieces, next to a slain boar and a slain gentleman. She believes that Amphilanthus has been killed, but when Polarchos enters, they put Amphilanthus's armor on a series of stones, and the scene is magically transformed into the Hell of Deceit. Pamphilia pulls on an iron ring that appears and watches amazed at what she sees:

at last she saw Musalina sitting in a Chaire of Gold, a Crowne on her head,
and Lucenia holding a sword, which Musalina tooke in her hand, and
before them Amphilanthus was standing, with his heart ript open, and
Pamphilia written in it, Musalina ready with the point of the sworde to
conclude all, by razing that name out, and so his heart as the wound to
perish. (583)

At this climactic moment of the romance, Wroth invokes the image she has used all along to represent the suffering of love: the constant martyr. Like Pamphilia at the beginning of the sonnet sequence, whose heart is martyred, Amphilanthus stands ready to lose his heart if Pamphilia's rivals raze out her name.

Yet Amphilanthus is of course not constant at all, and Wroth makes it clear that this space of the Hell of Deceit—the epitome of the romantic marvelous—has no room for constancy. When Pamphilia tries to enter to save Amphilanthus, she is thrown out:

Faine she would, nay there was no remedy, but she would goe in to helpe
him, flames, fier, Hell it selfe not being frightfull enough to keepe her from
passing through to him; so with as firme, and as hot flames as those she

saw, and more bravely and truly burning, she ran into the fire, but presently she was throwne out again in a swoond, and the doore shut; when she came to her selfe, cursing her destinie, meaning to attempt againe, shee saw the stone whole, and where the way into it was, there were these words written.

Faithfull lovers keepe from hence

None but false ones here can enter:

This conclusion that from whence

Falsehood flowes: and such may venter. (583-84)

As Pamphilia is barred entrance, Wroth suggests that constancy is literally thrown out of the romance universe. Pamphilia desperately wants to be the constant heroine that can save Amphilanthus from his erotic threats, yet the narrative will not allow her to play that role. The romance instead relegates her to a passive observer, excluded from the very passionate mode that seemingly brought her into being.

Both *Pamphilia and Amphilanthus* and the *Urania* end with declarations of constancy. Yet the magical, unreal quality of the romance casts doubts on the efficacy of constancy, suggesting that it may be just a temporary fiction rather than an enduring ideal. In the last pages of the first part of the *Urania*, Pamphilia is reunited with Amphilanthus in a moment that seems to prepare the reader for triumphant closure. The scene begins when Pamphilia goes to a stream, dropping her tears into it as she mourns the loss of Amphilanthus:

so farre shee went till shee came to a dainty Spring, issuing out of a stony banke upon pibbles, and making on them a murmuring, sweetely dolefull

tune, cleere the water was running on gravell; and such was fit for her cleere eyes to looke upon, weepe shee did, teares falling into the streame, not much increasing the bignes of it, though abundantly they fell, but certainly inriching it with rare sweetnes, and dropping into it such vertue as appeared after in some that dranke of it, for at that very instant there arrived a Knight armed on horsebacke (659-60)

Wroth's description of their reunion creates an enchanted scene in which Pamphilia's teardrops make the water into a magical potion that initiates Amphilanthus's appearance—seemingly out of thin air. Pamphilia and Amphilanthus passionately embrace each other, “forgiving, nay forgetting all injuries” (660). The stream becomes like the river of Lethe, inducing the lovers to forget themselves.

Wroth suggests that their reunion is almost too perfect to be true. As they embrace, Wroth uses the term constancy for the last time in the first part of the romance:

never was such affection exprest, never so truly felt, to the company, they together returned, he leading her, or rather imbracing her with his conquering armes, and protesting the water he dranke being mixed with her teares, had so infused constancy and perfect truth of love in it, as in him it had wrought the like effect. (660)

Reminiscent of the lovers who drink from the river on the island, “whereof they had but drunk, when in them several Passions did instantly abound” (49), Amphilanthus's constancy stems from the magically infused water. Wroth suggests that in order for Pamphilia to get Amphilanthus to exhibit constancy, she must drug him, putting him

under the spell of her charmed tears. Far from a fortified inner strength, constancy is an enchanted fiction in romance, a fleeting “effect” rather than an unchanging ideal.

And Wroth suggests that this effect may not last long. In her famous mid-sentence ending to the romance, Pamphilia and Amphilanthus set off for yet another journey, preparing for their next inevitable separation:

this still continuing all living in pleasure, speech is of the Germans journey,
Amphilanthus must goe, but intreates Pamphilia to goe as far as Italy with
him, to visit the matchles Queene his mother, she consents, for what can
she denye him? all things are prepared for the journey, all now merry,
contented, nothing amisse; greife forsaken, sadnes cast off, Pamphilia is the
Queene of all content; Amphilanthus joying worthily in her; And (661)

The constancy this couple displays—and that Wroth so insistently proclaims—is at odds with the forward motion of the journey on which they are about to embark as well as the concluding coordinating conjunction “And.”³² Wroth’s incomplete sentence thrusts the narrative into another (still incomplete) second part of the romance, in which Pamphilia and Amphilanthus do not marry despite their promise to do so. Both marry other characters, straining their professed constancy to its breaking point.

³² On Wroth’s conclusion to the romance, see Colleen Ruth Rosenfeld, “Wroth’s Clause,” *English Literary History* 76, no. 4 (2009): 1049-71, who argues that the “‘dangling ‘And’” prioritizes the tenuousness of connective tissue over the periodic *telos*” (1051); Gavin Alexander, “Sidney’s Interruptions,” *Studies in Philology* 98, no. 2 (2001): 184-204, who looks at the Sidneian use of *aposiopesis*, “the figure of not finishing what you started” (185); Graham Parry, “Lady Mary Wroth’s *Urania*,” *Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society* 21, no. 4 (1975): 51-60, who argues that the ending of the *Urania* is an imitation of the incomplete ending of Sidney’s *Arcadia*; and Josephine Roberts, “Textual Introduction,” in *The First Part of the Countess of Montgomery’s Urania*, cv-cxx.

In the end, constancy in the *Urania* is illusory. Wroth's narrative exposes both the contradictions in the term that fray its coherence and the fictions that stitch it together. From a bodily sign that must be perpetually displayed to an inner stoic virtue that can never be proven to a magical ideal that can never exist, constancy eludes the reader even as it is obsessively declared. When the reader turns the pages to the sonnets, he or she brings to them a loaded term, one that does not sit well with Pamphilia's claim at the end of her sequence—like so many Petrarchan lovers that came before her—that she will prove her constancy. Wroth shows the complicated history of that performative utterance, dispelling the seemingly fixed identity that sonnet speakers so often claim.

CONCLUSION

Mary Wroth was one of the last writers in the early modern period to write a Petrarchan sonnet sequence, and she is often regarded as a throwback to a tradition whose heyday has already passed. Yet this dissertation has argued that Petrarchism in England was never a discourse confined to the sonnet writing of the sixteenth century. Instead, it proved a much more flexible set of conventions that were transformed and shaped by the discourses with which it came into contact. Writers used Petrarchan conventions throughout the early modern period to navigate power struggles, to declare or contest authenticity, to settle crises of authority, and, of course, to wrestle with desire and gender identity. Wroth's engagement with Petrarchism both in verse and in prose fiction is only the beginning of Petrarchan writing in the seventeenth century. From George Herbert's and John Milton's religious sonnets to the narratives of Margaret Cavendish and Aphra Behn, later writers continue to invoke Petrarchan conventions to grapple with their own religious, social, and colonial concerns. More work remains to be done on the implications of Petrarchan conventions in later texts like these.

It is my hope that this dissertation opens up a conversation about the complex uses of Petrarchism in early modern England, particularly the wide range of possibilities for the role of the mistress. As the texts of Askew, Elizabeth I, Shakespeare, and Wroth demonstrate, the conventions of the mistress had the potential to constrict women, but they also had the capacity to give women a sense of authority, authenticity, erotic power, and pleasure—even if these were only fleeting. More than an assemblage of body parts,

the figure of the Petrarchan mistress proved a performative role that was appropriated in a multitude of contexts, genres, and discourses. This dissertation has explored some of the representational possibilities that Petrarchan conventions enabled for women in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries—from Reformist to queen—and seeks to encourage further study on this generative discourse in the early modern period and beyond.

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