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**ECHO-CRITICAL POETIC NARCISSISMS:  
BEING TRANSFORMED IN PETRARCA, RONSARD, AND SHAKESPEARE**

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by

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## **Abstract**

*Echo-critical Poetic Narcissisms:*

*Being Transformed in Petrarca, Ronsard, and Shakespeare*

Melissa Yinger

“Narcissism” is a term that was popularized by Freud in the twentieth century, but whose roots date back to the first century C.E., to a story from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. In Ovid’s story, Narcissus is a beautiful youth who falls in love with his own image in a pool and wastes away, leaving only the Narcissus flower in his place. Only slightly less famous is the story of Echo, with which Narcissus’s story is intertwined. Echo is a wood nymph who, in punishment for her garrulousness, is denied her ability to speak for herself and is permitted only to return the speech of others. But unlike other famous figures from the *Metamorphoses*, she undergoes more than one significant change. Later in life she has the supreme misfortune of one day coming across Narcissus by the mirror-pool and falling in love. When he spurns her, she too wastes away, becoming a disembodied voice that reverberates in forests and caves.

This project focuses on the Narcissus and Echo myth because, for some of the most canonical Renaissance poets - Francesco Petrarca, Pierre de Ronsard, and William Shakespeare - Narcissus is as important a figure as Orpheus or Apollo. A considerable body of scholarship has been devoted to Renaissance poets’ identifications with these two ancient figures, but less has been said about Narcissus’s role as a figure for thinking about what it means to be a poet. This is an important

topic for contemporary scholarship to pursue. As Heather Dubrow has argued, identifying with Orpheus or Apollo allows poets to consider the definition of the lyric genre and its potency as an art form. Identifying with Narcissus, however, presents an entirely different set of considerations, particularly about the ethical implications of the aesthetic values Narcissus represents.

This project has two goals. The first goal is to define the narcissistic aesthetic that Renaissance poets found so appealing. This aesthetic valorized sameness and fetishized mirror images, the formal poetic equivalents of which are rhyme, repetition, and chiasmus. The second goal of the project is to understand the presence of Echo in some of literature's most narcissistic moments. Because Narcissus's rejection of Echo causes her to melt into the landscape and live disembodied in forests and caves, she becomes the voice of the natural world in Renaissance poetry.

As an ontologically liminal figure, Echo is able to become a mediator between the human and non-human worlds, and allows poets to think through the stakes of an aesthetic that favors self-love and sameness over caring for non-human others. In Renaissance poetry, she gives voice to a nascent version of the central concerns of ecocriticism. To elucidate this important moment in the genealogy of the growing and evolving field of ecocriticism, *Echo-critical Poetic Narcissisms* seeks to define the parameters of what I call Echo-criticism, an ethical imperative in the period that questions but does not ultimately displace the era's narcissism.

For the poets included in this study, the Narcissus and Echo myth is a source of inspiration as well as anxiety. Significantly, their ambivalence about the myth is

mirrored in and perhaps shapes our ambivalence about humanism, which we associate with great art, on the one hand, and on the other, recognize as what Richard Schechner calls, “very arrogant, anthro[po]centric, expansionist, and high-energy ideology.” Renaissance poets’ engagement with the Narcissus and Echo myth brings this tension into focus and gives us a perspective from which to reevaluate our own aesthetic and ethical values.

The ambivalence about Renaissance humanism that these poets bring into focus is becoming magnified, as ecocriticism and posthumanism continue to influence the shape of the humanities. Like tectonic plates that bear stress, shift, and settle, we are again, as were the great humanists, in the midst of a shift. Will anthropocentrism continue to be the reigning worldview in the era of posthumanism? Can we separate positive versions of narcissism from the more ethically and environmentally dangerous forms? This project suggests that if we allow ourselves to learn from humanists’ engagement with this myth, their lessons could have an impact on the future of the humanities. A more nuanced understanding of humanism’s negotiations of aesthetics and ethics in these poetic contexts will make us more self-aware scholars of the humanities, and may inform our decisions regarding our responsibilities to and for others.

## Acknowledgments

This project is directed toward developing an appreciation of the various forms that beings and beauty take in Renaissance poetry, so I would like to first acknowledge the beings who have brought beauty to my life as the project took form.

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## Introduction: Putting the “Anth-” in “Anthropocentrism”<sup>1</sup>

“Anthropocentrism is a kind of species narcissism, an obsessive love of self.”

—Tom Tyler, “If Horses Had Hands”

“[W]e read ... poetry anthropomorphically in order to hold on to an idea of the human, at a time when humanities seem increasingly in question. The pathos of this lyric humanism is that we try to insert the human in the places—or poems—where it is least certain.”

—Yopie Prins, “Voice Inverse”

“Narcissism” is a term that was popularized by Sigmund Freud in the early twentieth century and that has remained relevant in the scholarly world and in popular culture ever since. Freud’s publication of his famous essay, “On Narcissism,” in 1914 started a conversation in psychoanalytic circles that would continue with Jacques Lacan in his “Mirror Stage” essays in 1936 and 1949, and with Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* in 1980. In 1979, Christopher Lasch, a cultural historian, expanded the reach of the term with his publication of *The Culture of Narcissism*, a

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<sup>1</sup> “Anth-” is a Greek prefix meaning “flower-like.” It is not etymologically linked to “anthro-,” the Greek prefix for “human-like,” but this project suggests some of the reasons why the two prefixes might be linked conceptually, even ontologically.

monograph that won the National Book Award in 1980 and went into mass market publication shortly after its release.

More recently, the importance of “narcissism” in popular culture has been evident in its frequent mention in news stories and on social media. The presidential candidacy of Donald Trump has brought the term into numerous headlines, as stories and editorials analyzing the candidate’s narcissism have appeared in *TIME*, *Vanity Fair*, *Forbes*, *The Huffington Post*, *The New York Times*, and beyond.<sup>2</sup> “Narcissism” also regularly appears in reference to the Millennial generation. Earlier this year, one particularly savvy photo editor even transformed John William Waterhouse’s famous Narcissus painting to reflect the importance of self-image in the era of the selfie (Figure 1).

Though narcissism has been an important cultural touchstone in the twentieth century, its roots date back to the first century CE, to a story from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. In Ovid’s story an Aonian nymph named Liriope is ravished by the river-god, Cephisus. She becomes pregnant with a son as a result of the rape, and as

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, “The Truth About Donald Trump’s Narcissism,” and “What Donald Trump Can Teach You About the Narcissists in Your Life,” both in *TIME*; “Donald Trump’s Narcissistic Personality Makes Him a Dangerous World Leader,” in *The Huffington Post*; “Is Donald Trump Actually a Narcissist? Therapist’s Weigh In!” in *Vanity Fair*, and spoiler alert, those who are willing to comment say the evidence suggests he is; “Donald Trump: Narcissist-In-Chief, Not Commander-In-Chief,” in *Forbes*; “Entering the orbit of a ‘total narcissist’: who’s who in Donald Trump’s inner circle,” in *The Guardian*; “Narcissist in chief: The danger of having Donald ‘Citizen’ Trump in the White House,” in *Salon*; and “Narcissism Is Increasing. So You’re Not So Special,” in *The New York Times*, which briefly touches on how special having a narcissistic candidate for president is, even if narcissism is so ubiquitous as to be unremarkable in other arenas. Even Fox News agrees with the diagnosis, though they cast it in a different light in “Don’t hate Donald Trump. Here’s why it’s time for a narcissistic president.”

she awaits the birth of Narcissus she consults the blind prophet Tiresias about what kind of life her son will live. She asks “if the boy would ever live to a ripe old age,” and Tiresias replies, ““Yes, if he never knows himself”” (Ovid 68). Liriope thinks Tiresias’s words strange, but Ovid’s narrator interjects to let us know, “Time proved them true—the way he died, the strangeness of his infatuation” (68).

Though, as we learn, many are infatuated with him, Narcissus spends most of his short life spurning the advances of potential lovers, because “in that slender stripling was pride so fierce no boy, no girl, could touch him” (68). It is not until he one day catches a glimpse of a beautiful image reflected in a pool in the woods that Narcissus’s strange infatuation takes hold. The Ovidian narrator tells us that on the fateful day, Narcissus grew thirsty while out hunting, and “as he tried to quench his thirst, inside him, deep within him, another thirst was growing, for he saw an image in the pool, and fell in love with that embodied hope, and found a substance in what was only shadow” (70).

The beautiful youth positions himself at the water’s edge in tender supplication for a kiss from the image, and we experience the dramatic irony of knowing what he does not—that he has fallen in love with an image of himself. When he finally has his epiphany—““He is myself! I feel it, I know my image now”” (70)—it is too late, and Tiresias’s omen proves to be correct. Narcissus melts like “yellow wax ... in the morning sunshine” (72), and where he stood, there is only the Narcissus flower, a yellow and white bloom belonging to the daffodil family (Figure 2).

The Narcissus myth has been woven into many different tapestries in the social imaginary, but the thread that inspired this project is the one woven into some of contemporary scholarship's characterizations of Renaissance humanism. I was struck some years ago when I read Richard Kearney's pat assessment of humanism in *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture*. In his analysis of Lacanian theories of the conscious and unconscious, he notes that narcissism is more than just a passing phase in ego development, and he then shifts his scope and explains, "[E]xtended into the realm of culture, narcissism is just another word for humanism" (259). What is striking is not the claim itself, but the manner in which it is delivered: as a passing comment that can be taken for granted and is not in need of explanation.

Indeed, the sentiment Kearney expresses has become a defining characteristic of antihumanism, which in his glossary to *Humanism*, Tony Davies notes is grounded in an ethical concern about humanist ideology. "Antihumanism," the glossary says, develops out of the belief that "humanism is a form of collective narcissism, blind to its own folly, absurdity and cruelty" (147). This association—or even conflation—of humanism with cultural or collective narcissism is sometimes traded for a shorter moniker—i.e., anthropocentrism.

While narcissism and anthropocentrism are not quite the same thing, the two are sometimes used interchangeably to denote an egocentric mode of engaging with the world. For instance, Richard Schechner, in a monograph that announces *The End of Humanism*, associates narcissism's arrogance with humanism's anthropocentrism when he writes that humanism is "a very arrogant, anthro[po]centric, expansionist,

and high-energy ideology” (10-11). In the first epigraph to this introduction, Tom Tyler views the relationship between anthropocentrism and narcissism from the other direction. Narcissism, he explains, is just a small-scale version of anthropocentrism. He argues that anthropocentrism is a kind of “species narcissism” that “is evident far too often in philosophy and contemporary critical thinking” (23). In allowing anthropocentrism to dominate our thinking, he explains, we “preclude the possibility of recognising or discovering new kinds of human-animal continuity” (24), but this last idea gives me pause. Does anthropocentrism necessarily entail a belief in the discontinuity of humans and other animals? This question opens onto a series of other questions that shape the direction in which this projects goes.

Taken together, the charges of anthropocentrism and narcissism that have been leveled against the humanist era raise three main questions that I am interested in addressing here. First, if the humanist era is anthropocentric, what is the nature of the human at its center? Second, psychoanalytic readings of the Narcissus figure aside, does Ovid’s myth provide a viable model for the way being is understood in the Renaissance? And third, in what other ways does the Ovidian myth signify in its various Renaissance contexts? In pursuit of answers to this last question, I cast a wide net—reading references to Narcissus in canonical and lesser-known works from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries—and try to remain open to the surprises I find there.

Because of the many ways the story of Narcissus has resonated since the early twentieth century, the ways in which the figure would have signified to a Renaissance

audience have become less obvious, even obscure. Thus, while contemporary ideas about narcissism and humanism have helped to shape this project, I am also interested in extricating Ovid's myth from contemporary discourse. One of the goals of this project, therefore, is to historicize the myth. Instead of relying primarily on the last century's critical work on Narcissus, I seek to recover some of the myth's meaning in the context of Renaissance poetics.

I dedicate a portion of chapter one to this end and argue that there are two strands of thought at work in Petrarca's engagement with the Narcissus myth, the medieval and the classical. Petrarca's readings of Narcissus are inflected with influences from the medieval Scholastic tradition, troubadour poetry, and the *Ovide Moralisé*. They also take their shape directly from Ovid's Latin text and are inflected with other ancient primary texts and images that interpret the myth.

In my exploration of what Narcissus meant in the ancient world, I look to literary texts, philosophy, and a few particularly telling frescoes in Pompeii. Pompeii preserves the greatest haul of Narcissus images from antiquity, and some significant patterns emerge in their portrayals of the Ovidian figure. Several of the images depict Narcissus staring at a stony face in the water, and Jas' Elsner notes that the reflected image sometimes resembles a Gorgon's head more than it does the beautiful youth who gazes fondly at it.

Elsner notes that Ovid says Narcissus is petrified when he sees the image in the water and explains, "Since the Gorgon's head turned anyone who looked at it into stone, this is a particularly appropriate characterisation of the reflection" (103).

Norman E. Land ties the stony image to other language in Ovid's text as he notes that Ovid compares Narcissus's image in the pool to "a sculpture of Parian marble" (10). In any case, the stony reflection that gazes back at Narcissus is markedly abstracted from the youth. It appears to be stylized in a way that emphasizes its artifice rather than its reflectiveness.

The stylization of the reflection as stone works together with another pattern that appears in the Pompeii frescoes: in many instances, Narcissus wears what appears to be a crown of laurel, the famous symbol of Apollo, the god of music and poetry. This pattern, taken in combination with the unrealistic stony reflection in the water, suggests that the first-century residents of Pompeii associated Narcissus with a number of the arts: sculpture, music and poetry, even fresco paintings. It seems likely, therefore, that he was associated with artifice in general. The relationship between Narcissus and his image is figured as a relationship between an artist and his art, and in the Renaissance, this identification of Narcissus with art inspires a whole range of aesthetic play in Petrarca and later poets' responses to him.

While my initial research included texts from a number of different genres, I eventually narrowed my focus to Narcissus references in poetry because the references also include these formal features that playfully recreate Narcissus's relationship to his mirror. In some cases, as in Ronsard's "La mort de Narcisse" in chapter two, the Narcissus references also sometimes produce a metapoetic moment that transforms the poem into a reflection-making device and identifies Narcissus as a

figure for the poet. Narcissistic identification, I found, appears in many of the most canonical texts in Renaissance literature.

The argument I make with regard to Narcissus develops out of my sense that for some canonical poets—Francesco Petrarca, Pierre de Ronsard, and William Shakespeare—Narcissus is as important a figure as Orpheus or Apollo. A considerable body of scholarship has been devoted to Renaissance poets' identifications with these two ancient figures, but less been said about Narcissus's role as a figure for thinking about what it means to be a poet. This is an important topic for contemporary scholarship to pursue. As Heather Dubrow has argued, identifying with Orpheus or Apollo allows poets to consider the definition of the lyric genre and its potency as an art form.<sup>3</sup> Identifying with Narcissus entails some of the same preoccupations. However, it also presents other concerns, particularly about the ethical implications of the aesthetic values Narcissus represents.

This project contributes to existing scholarship on Narcissus's significance to Renaissance poets' identification with the self-loving youth by illuminating his classical ties to art and artistry and defining the parameters of the narcissistic aesthetic these poets found so appealing. The Narcissus myth inspires poets to produce a poetics of the mirror, or what I call here a "narcissistic aesthetic," which develops its beauty out of mirroring figures such as rhyme, repetition, and chiasmus.

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<sup>3</sup> See *The Challenges of Orpheus: Lyric Poetry and Early Modern England*, in which Dubrow argues that poets' identification with Orpheus allows them to develop a sense of the potency of lyric that nonetheless vacillates through their shifting senses of their own presence or absence in verse. See especially pages 34-48.

Narcissus's self-love becomes aestheticized, formalized, and stylized—and transformed into flowers of poesy.

Ronsard's contribution to the narcissistic aesthetic tradition is to open it to the imaginative possibilities inherent in the flower in the myth as well as the mirror. In "La mort de Narcisse," Narcissus's reflection is not the only figure for his art. Art is also figured in the Narcissus flower. Ronsard makes the flower that Narcissus becomes a placeholder for Narcissus and the poem as a whole. By the end of the poem, the flower droops under the weight of its manifold significations as it stands in for the poem, Narcissus, and the poet-as-Narcissus. Ronsard trades one metaphor for another, and whereas the poem-as-mirror metaphor keeps the poet-as-Narcissus and poem-as-mirror separate, the poem-as-flower collapses all these different figures into the singular image of the flower. Ronsard's poem offers one of the best demonstrations of the narcissistic aesthetic—the complete collapse of difference into similitude; the synthesis of many disparate elements—mythic boy/poet/poem/mirror—into the flower symbol.

As it turns out, the stakes of using Narcissus as a model for poetic identity are rather high. Ullrich Langer claims that in his engagement with the myth, Ronsard "celebrates self-reflection as poetic production" (5-6). But for Ronsard and the other poets in this study, poetic narcissism entails a certain degree of ambivalence and even anxiety. This is evident in the tone of Ronsard's Narcissus poem and in the fact that the poetic identity he constructs for himself

is in the form of an elegy. It is also sometimes evident in poets' engagements with the other half of Ovid's Narcissus myth, Echo's story.

Echo is one of Narcissus's many rejected lovers, but her story is developed by Ovid in a way that his other admirers' stories are not. The Ovidian narrator explains that Echo pursues Narcissus in the woods, but she is unable to initiate conversation with him because she once used her voice to distract the goddess Juno while Jove engaged in various acts of infidelity. As a result of Echo's abuse of speech, Juno denies her the ability to talk, but gives her "the power to answer in the words she last had heard" (68).

Upon seeing Narcissus, Echo longs to "come near with coaxing speeches, make soft entreaties to him! But her nature sternly forbids; the one thing not forbidden is to make answers" (69). So she waits for Narcissus to speak, and then she strategically repeats part of what he says in order to convey to him her intentions. He says, "'Is anybody here?' and 'Here!' said Echo" (69). When she tries to touch him, "'Keep your hands off,' he cried, 'and do not touch me! I would die before I give you a chance at me,'" to which she replies, "'I give you a chance at me,'" but he again rejects her, and the Ovidian narrator tells us, "that was all she said thereafter" (69).

In shame and despair at being rejected, she goes into hiding "in the leafy forests" and "in lonely caves" (69). "Her body dries and shrivels," the narrator explains, "till voice only and bones remain, and then she is voice only for the bones are turned to stone" (69). Echo's body fades into the landscape, but her loss of embodiment is not equated with death. After her desiccation, the narrator says, "She

hides in woods and no one sees her now along the mountains, but all may hear her, for her voice is living” (69).

Echo, like Narcissus, appears in some of the most canonical poems in Renaissance literature, and contemporary scholarship has generally addressed her significance in one of two ways. The first is to read her story in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* with the intent of understanding what she signifies as a figure for repetition. These analyses have gained traction in philosophy and poststructuralist theory. Jacques Derrida and Gayatri Spivak, for instance, both read Echo’s speech patterns in Ovid’s tale and claim that she demonstrates that difference can emerge in the act of repetition.

A second direction analyses of Echo have gone, specifically in the field of Renaissance literature, is to focus on her significance as a figure for literary transmission. Because her transformation in Ovid makes her a figure for repetition, Renaissance poets sometimes invoke her name as they repeat the voices of the past. She therefore allows poets to grapple with their senses of themselves in the face of the vast literary tradition with which they engage—an experience that, as Sean Keilen notes, can leave poets feeling both “augmented and diminished” (91). Judith Deitch and Jonathan Goldberg have both written of Echo as a figure for literary transmission and humanist imitative practices. In chapter three, I build on their research as I analyze how Echo’s repetitions coincide with Shakespeare’s own repetitions of Petrarca in *Venus and Adonis*.

The poem's echoes of Petrarca not only produce a moment in which the narrator defines himself, developing his poetic voice in opposition to Petrarca's. It also produces a moment in which the narrator meditates on the type of being Petrarca models. Significantly, the poem portrays Petrarca as an egoist who obscures the difference of that which he gazes upon. In this moment, Shakespeare's poem articulates a critique of the Petrarchan speaker that many modern critics have shared. Thomas Greene, for instance, claims Petrarca is often "on the verge of solipsism" in his poems, and that he seems unable to refer to anything outside of himself. Commenting on how the speaker turns his landscape into much-beloved images of himself rather than recognizing its otherness, Greene explains, "There is a capacity for reference beyond the consciousness which gives it being," but the struggle to refer to the real landscape is "repeatedly frustrated by the poet's imperial ego" (109). In *Venus and Adonis*, Shakespeare turns Venus into a Petrarchan poet and lends her a similar sort of egoism.

Shakespeare's epyllion represents Petrarchan being as ego- and anthropocentric. This means that the poem characterizes the "father of humanism" in the same way I have noted contemporary criticism sometimes characterizes humanism. Some contemporary criticism, moreover, draws a connecting line from what it reads as Petrarchan egoism to humanism. Giuseppe Mazzotta, for instance, claims,

It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of the poet's selfhood in the *Canzoniere*: one might even say that few other poets

are as tenaciously intent as Petrarch on making the self the locus of singular and significant experiences and so obsessively bent on registering its variable moods. (271)

“Critics,” he explains, “have long spoken of Petrarch’s humanism and modernity precisely in terms of his discovery of the centrality of the self” (270).

Mazzotta’s claim demonstrates the varying levels at which conversations about being in Petrarca’s *Rime* play out. Mazzotta observes that our senses of Petrarchan being contribute to our senses of both humanism and modernity, just as our senses of humanism and modernity contribute to our readings of Petrarca. Petrarca is retroactively posited as an origin for a particular mode of being, and at the same time, our assumptions that humanism and modernity are ego- and anthropocentric are brought to bear on readings of Petrarca, whose humanism, I suggest, may be of an altogether different breed.

This is not to say that the Petrarchan speaker is not egocentric or a narcissist—readings that argue this case are generally persuasive—but rather, I wish to suggest that it is worth revisiting Petrarca and thinking about exactly what kind of being is at the center of his master work, particularly since the stakes, as Mazzotta’s reading makes clear, are so high. Is it significant, for instance, that Petrarca identifies his poetic voice not with Narcissus, but with Echo? In this project, I take this identification seriously and explore what it might mean in the context of Renaissance humanism and narcissistic poetics. I consider what kind of being the Petrarchan speaker imagines for himself when he identifies with Echo.

Echo's transformation in Ovid turns her into an ontologically liminal figure. When Ovid writes, "sonus est, qui vivit in illa" (3.401)—"it is sound that lives in Echo"—we learn that Echo's being is made up of voice *and* the container that allows her voice to sound, the "forests, valleys, thickets, and other natural enclosures that can serve as echo chambers" (Shapiro 215). This means that she is not merely disembodied voice. Rather, she is made up of an anthropomorphic voice and the nonhuman natural environment. She is more than anthropomorphic being. The enclosures that contain her in Renaissance poetry often include anthropomorphic beings, as well as anthomorphic and theriomorphic beings.<sup>4</sup>

Because Narcissus's rejection of Echo causes her to melt into the landscape and live disembodied in forests and caves, she is often associated with the voice of the natural world in Renaissance poetry. As an ontologically liminal figure, she becomes a mediator between the human and nonhuman worlds. She also acts as a kind of barometer for measuring the strength of the barrier between humans and nonhumans. Sometimes the boundaries are permeable, while sometimes the spaces between species stretch and extend Echo to a breaking point.

In the *Canzoniere* where the speaker identifies with Echo, the boundaries between different orders of being seem permeable and porous, which allows Petrarchan being to admit difference and change. Over the course of the sequence, he becomes water, wax, fire, rock, eagle, deer, and so on. If the Petrarchan speaker is

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<sup>4</sup> "Anthomorphic" is a neologism that recent ecocritical scholarship has used to refer to plant-like forms. See, for instance, A. Goldwyn, who pairs it with "zoomorphic."

self-centered, it is important to note that that self is made up of both human and what we might consider nonhuman beings and things. The speaker may provide one of the popular paradigms for being in the humanist era, but that being may be less human than has often been assumed. As Yopie Prins argues, “[W]e read ... poetry anthropomorphically in order to hold on to an idea of the human ... in the places—or poems—where it is least certain” (46).

Borrowing a page from recent studies in ecocriticism, I incorporate readings of the philosophical constructs that may have influenced his definitions of the human. Rebecca Bushnell writes of the popular belief in antiquity and the Renaissance that humans are microcosms that contain the infinite potential of the universe. “The microcosm/macrocosm model,” she explains, “both centers and dissolves the human and is fundamentally dynamic and unstable” (329). The humanist era, she continues, “was indeed less an age of order and more one of ‘resemblance’ ... While man was imagined at the center of creation, everything in creation touched and reflected other things” (329). This model for understanding the nature of the human being and the human’s place in the world emphasizes the human’s “lack of distinction,” she argues, and demonstrates humans’ connection to nature (329). This is perhaps why it made sense for Petrarca to identify his poetic speaker with that most liminal of beings, Echo.

And yet, despite the fact that it is possible to read the *Canzoniere* as producing a poetic voice attesting to the harmonious integration of humans with nature, later poets engaging in this poetic tradition express their anxieties about the

human/nonhuman relations they see presented there. Echo, instead of providing a figure for the poet as she does in Petrarca's verse, serves as a mediator between humans and nonhumans, which Ronsard and Shakespeare both are given to depicting as distinct orders of being. That is to say, as the boundaries between orders of being become reified, Echo's liminality, instead of reflecting the transformative nature of the human, instead is used to move across and think about the space between humans and nonhumans.

In Ronsard's poetry, we encounter competing understandings of being, a testament to the complicated legacy he inherits from the Petrarchan speaker. Whereas in his Narcissus poem, he seems to collapse the human into nature, appropriating the beauty of the flower in the interest of culture, in his bucolic poetry and later elegies, Echo seems to underscore the difference between human and nonhuman nature as she mediates across a divide. In Ronsard's oeuvre and in many examples in Renaissance poetry after Petrarca, Echo is the voice of the nonhuman beings, or rather a hybrid voice that speaks across the gap between humans and nonhumans, challenging humans to care for nonhuman others.

Very often, Echo ushers in the ethical concerns that allow poets to think through the stakes of an aesthetic that favors self-love and sameness over caring for nonhuman others. She gives voice to a nascent version of the central concerns of ecocriticism: respecting and caring for the natural world, preventing the suffering or loss of other creatures, and preserving ecosystems. To elucidate this important moment in the genealogy of the growing and evolving field of ecocriticism, I seek to

define the parameters of what I call Echo-criticism, an ethical imperative in the period that questions but does not ultimately displace the era's narcissism.

Interest in Echo and all she signifies is growing in literary scholarship and philosophy, and it is important to take a renewed interest in Narcissus and narcissism instead of allowing them to recede into the background. When we speak of our current moment as posthuman, we are generally acknowledging a decentering of the human and are engaging in an interrogation of narcissism and anthropocentrism. Jesse Battan writes about the prevalence of narcissism in contemporary criticism. "[T]he concept of narcissism," he explains, "has provided a theme for many forms of cultural criticism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century" (199). As we enter the era of Echo, however, we may find our senses of Narcissus and narcissism to be in need of revision. It is worth revisiting his significance in Renaissance contexts. His presence there may sometimes surprise us, so with *Echo-critical Poetic Narcissisms*, I hope to shed light on the various types of being that the Narcissus and Echo myth allows Renaissance poets to carve out for themselves, some fluid, some fixed, some perplexingly both at once.

In chapter one, "Transpositions of Being in Petrarca's *Rime sparse*," I argue that while the Petrarchan speaker can and has persuasively been read according to his narcissism or egoism, the *Canzoniere* sustains different and even opposite readings as well. Narcissus, I suggest, acts as an aesthetic model for Petrarca rather than an ontological one, and Echo may get us much closer to understanding the Petrarchan speaker. The second half of the chapter focuses on the speaker's identification with

Echo and explores how his ontological liminality makes it difficult to determine whether his relationships with the beings and things of the natural world are intersubjective or intrasubjective. I explain that while Petrarca's speaker seems to obscure the otherness of everything he gazes upon by turning it into versions of himself, this may be more a reflection of his fluidity than his egoism. The boundaries between the self and non-self are porous and admit enough transformative change in Petrarca's sonnet sequence that it becomes difficult to differentiate the humans from the nonhumans. Rather than representing two terms whose oppositionality defines them, "human" and "nonhuman" instead appear to be mutually constitutive.

In chapter two, "Aesthetics and Ecology in Ronsard's Elegies for Narcissus and the Gâtine," I analyze the formal features surrounding the metapoetic moment at the center of "La mort de Narcisse," the moment when the poetic speaker looks into the mirror of the text, recognizes himself in Narcissus, and turns the poem into the narcissus flower. These transformations enact the collapse of difference into sameness, distilling all into the singular image of the flower at the conclusion of the poem. Ronsard expresses his anxieties about what the implications of this collapse of difference may be through his engagement with the figure of Echo.

Echo appears most frequently in his bucolic poetry and his poems for the Gâtine. The versions of being we read in these poems are more bounded, I argue, and as the boundaries harden, the forces of nature and culture become increasingly antithetical. Ronsard's intervention into the battle between nature and culture is to transform poetry into a hybrid space that accommodates both sides of the divide and

to create a poetic voice that mediates between the opposing forces that threaten to tear it apart. As with Petrarca, Narcissus serves as an aesthetic model for Ronsard, but he identifies Echo with the poetic voice of the nonhuman natural world, a voice he fears will be silenced if nature and culture continue to be polarized. He develops an echo-critical poetic voice in an effort to bridge a gap that he fears is widening.

In chapter three, “Excess and Echoing Hollows in *Venus and Adonis*,” I argue that Shakespeare’s epyllion provides an extended meditation on Petrarchan being as it humanizes Venus and transforms her into a poet figure like the one we might encounter in the *Canzoniere*. As part of this meditation, Shakespeare’s narrator critically distances himself from the Petrarchan Venus and produces his own poetic voice through his negation of her and the tradition she represents. I also argue that the narrator’s voice bears traces of Petrarca despite his efforts to distance himself, and through his negation of something that has clearly become a part of himself, he inscribes within his poetic being what Giorgio Agamben calls an “intimate caesura” (15). This space of the non-self within the self is constitutive of being in Shakespeare’s poem. This perception of being shapes the poetic voice’s relationship to Petrarca, whom the poem reads as representative of an unethical engagement with nonhumans, which shows Shakespeare reads Petrarca differently than I do.

The fluidity that I read in the Petrarchan is replayed in the poem, but through the mode of parody. The Petrarchan Venus’s sense of her interconnectedness with others beings and things is met with the ridicule of the echo-critical narrative voice. The narrator insists that the nonhumans surrounding Venus are other, and he

underscores her alienation from these others. With this version of being, the poem suggests, humans are closed off from other animals, and from their own animality. The poem figures this type of being as fragmented or wounded, and rather than presenting us with a form of closure, it suggests that poetry serves the function of offering us consolation.

For the poets included in this study, the Narcissus and Echo myth is a source of inspiration and anxiety. Significantly, their ambivalence about the myth is mirrored in and perhaps shapes our ambivalence about humanism, which we associate with great art on the one hand, and on the other, recognize as “arrogant, anthro[po]centric, [and] expansionist” (Schechner 10-11). Renaissance poets’ engagement with the Narcissus and Echo myth brings this tension into focus and gives us a perspective from which to reevaluate our own aesthetic and ethical values.

Shakespeare, Ronsard, and Petrarca might usher in, shape, or thrive in a humanist setting that centers the self, a human subject, and makes it the “measure of all things.” Their poetry also indicates that they have reservations about this though, which echoes or even magnifies Ovid’s ambivalence about the appropriation of nature for the sake of culture in the *Metamorphoses*. The poets I discuss here might glorify human artistry, but in reading some of their best examples of it, we are encouraged to remember not the flower as figure for the poem, but real flowers. We are encouraged to read the poem, not for, or not *only* for, the ways it resonates with a poet figure’s song like a human voice in a cave, but for the cave itself.

The ambivalence about Renaissance humanism that these poets bring into focus is magnified as ecocriticism and posthumanism continue to influence the shape of the humanities. Like tectonic plates that bear stress, shift, and settle, we are again, as were the great humanists, in the midst of a shift. Will anthropocentrism continue to be the reigning worldview in the era of posthumanism, and if so, what will be the nature of the human at its center? Can we separate positive versions of narcissism from the more ethically and environmentally dangerous forms? This project suggests that if we allow ourselves to learn from humanists' engagement with this myth, their lessons could have an impact on the future of the humanities. A more nuanced understanding of the human to which humanism is tethered, and of the era's negotiations of aesthetics and ethics will make us more self-aware scholars of the humanities and may inform our decisions regarding our responsibilities to and for others.

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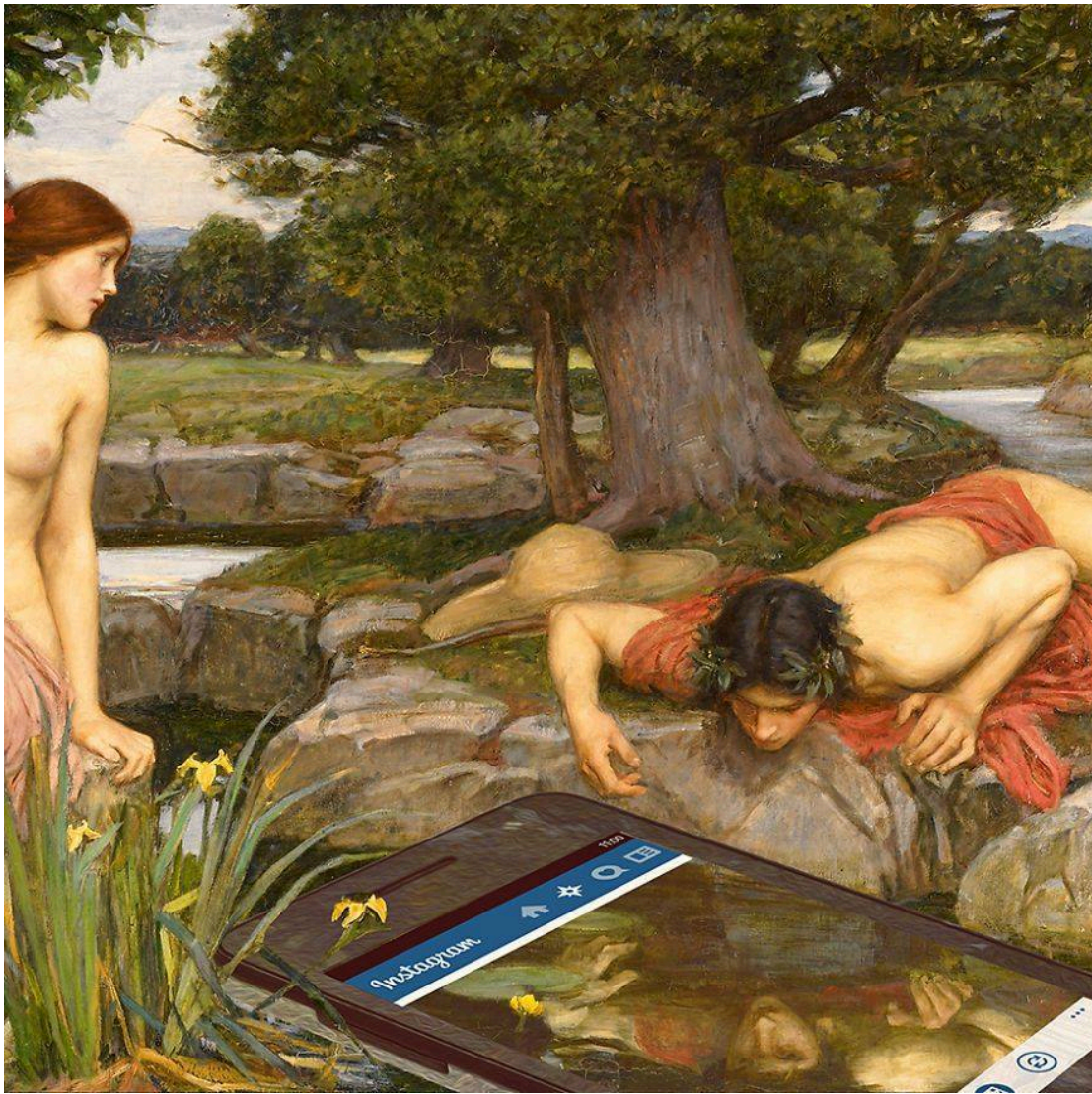
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**FIGURE 1**



No title, from a Facebook post by JR Sanders.

**FIGURE 2**



“Narcissus Golden Echo,” from John Scheepers’s Online Catalogue

Chapter 1: Transpositions of Being in Petrarca's *Rime sparse*

S'egli è che 'n dura pietra alcun somigli  
talor l'immagin d'ogni altri a se stesso,  
squalido e smorto spesso  
il fo, com'i' son fatto da costei.  
E par ch'esempio pigli  
ognor da me, ch'i' penso di far lei.

- Michelangelo, from *Rime* 242<sup>5</sup>

Many of the central concerns of this chapter are condensed into the few lines from Michelangelo cited above. Michelangelo's poem meditates on the contours of love and desire, aesthetics, and, albeit indirectly, the artist's connection to others, both the humans he wishes to represent and the nonhuman elements that contribute to his art—the hard stone that begins to take on his features even as he has already begun to embody its qualities in his dreary, ashen face. It becomes unclear who is transforming whom in these lines. Is the artist imprinting himself on his materials? Or are the materials shaping him? Is he making his beloved in his own image, or is he bearing the marks of his interactions with her? These questions are at the core of what I want to consider in a larger context, the context of Petrarca's *Rime sparse*. I

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<sup>5</sup> “Since it is true that, in hard stone, one will at times / make the image of someone else look like himself, / I often make her [appear] dreary / and ashen, just as I'm made by this woman; / and I seem to keep taking myself / as a model, whenever I think of depicting her” (Trans. James M. Saslow)

focus on his engagement with Ovid's Narcissus and Echo myth in pursuit of answers to these questions.

Scholars of Renaissance literature who take an interest in Petrarca's uses of Ovidian myth in the *Rime sparse* often end up grappling with his treatment of the Narcissus and Echo myth. One of the striking tendencies of the criticism on this topic is its focus on the narcissistic qualities of the Petrarchan speaker in spite of his explicit identification with Echo. I want to suggest that this is because our understandings of Renaissance humanism and our understandings of ourselves have made Narcissus more legible, while the function of Echo in the *Rime* has remained somewhat enigmatic. But as I have suggested in the introduction to this project, the paradigms of understanding are shifting, and the legibility of these two figures is beginning to reverse.

A great deal of critical work has been produced on the significance of Narcissus in the *Rime*. This work spans a range of topics, from poetics and aesthetics to psychology and psychoanalysis. Some scholars' analyses of how Petrarca engages with the Narcissus myth move across all of these fields. Mia Cocco, for instance, views Petrarchan poetics through a narcissistic lens while exploring what kind of subject is envisioned in the *Rime*'s play of mirrors. She claims, "Petrarch's poetics can be best described as the poetics of the mirror, because each image is defined by the existence of its own reflection" (21). Cocco builds on the influential work of scholars such as Robert Durling and Thomas Greene as she points to the ways that the Petrarchan speaker and Laura are images of each other. She notes, for example, that

line 14 of *Canzoniere* 190 “establishes an analogy between Laura and Narcissus” as it describes a moment “quand’io caddi ne l’acqua et ella sparve” [“when I fell into the water and she disappeared”].

Cocco also moves from a formalist reading of Petrarca’s explicit reference to Narcissus’s story in *Rime* 45 to a psychoanalytic reading of another Narcissus moment in the Petrarchan oeuvre. She notes, “Six centuries before Lacan, Petrarch maintained that mirrors were fundamental instruments of knowledge, as passages in the *Secretum* reveal: ‘Mirrors were invented so that men might know themselves ... Many took first notice of themselves through mirrors...’ To look at oneself in the mirror is to know oneself” (21). While Augustine’s comments to Francesco in the *Secretum* uphold the Lacanian theory of subject formation as Cocco suggests, the explicit and implicit allusions to Narcissus in the *Rime* may not. Narcissus’s story and the arc of the Petrarchan speaker in the *Rime* suggest that Augustine’s last point is not always true. Both Narcissus and the Petrarchan speaker fall prey to misrecognition, believing that their mirror images are other to themselves while we experience the dramatic irony of knowing otherwise. Narcissus eventually acquires self-knowledge, but it is unclear whether the Petrarchan speaker ever does.

Thus, the psychoanalytic reading Cocco offers works in one Petrarchan context, but perhaps not in the context of the *Rime*. For a psychoanalytic reading of the poems through their relation to Narcissus, we might turn instead to Carla Freccero. Using Freud’s formulation of the role of identification and desire in subject formation as a foundation, Freccero points out that the lyric “I” and the beloved in the

*Rime* do not form according to a “dyadic relation between a subject and an object that is other” (23). Instead, the speaker’s subject formation bespeaks a fundamental overlap in the lines of identification and desire, presenting us with “a split subject, a subject whose object is the creation of that subject” (23). As with Cocco, the psychoanalytic reading opens into an analysis of poetics; Petrarca’s poems, Freccero explains, celebrate “the interchangeability of ego-ideals and objects of desire - a narcissistic poetics” (28).

Narcissus’s story has long been recognized for its role in shaping the *Rime*’s poetics. Freccero’s “narcissistic poetics” might be compared to Cocco’s “poetics of the mirror,” and both might be brought into conversation with another essential essay on Petrarchan poetics by John Freccero, in which he refers to the work’s “autoreflexive poetics” (38). This chapter builds upon the work of this scholarship by analyzing the contours of the autoreflexive, narcissistic poetics that underwrite the *Rime*’s aesthetic force. As I explain in the introduction, in Renaissance poetics, Narcissus’s self-love becomes aestheticized. His story provides the scenario through which the era’s aesthetic ideology becomes most fully realized and distilled. Self-love becomes transformed and expands into the aestheticization of sameness, which manifests itself in poems about Narcissus through the elevated use of formal mirrors such as repetition, puns, and chiasmus. In this chapter, I point to the roots of this narcissistic aesthetic, which Petrarca develops in his Narcissus poems and throughout the *Rime*, and which later poets such as Ronsard and Shakespeare imitate and expand in their own poetic allusions to Narcissus.

While the arguments in this chapter are deeply indebted to the extensive scholarship on Petrarca's engagement with the Narcissus myth, existing analyses of his allusions to Echo have staked out different territory from that which I intend to cover. Scholarship on Petrarca and Echo has focused on how Echo figures as a paradigm for literary production and transmission, or on how the speaker's identification with her relates to other myths from the *Metamorphoses*. JoAnn DellaNeva offers one of the best examples of the former in her comparison of the two versions of metatextual language associated with Narcissus and Echo in the *Rime*. Narcissus, she suggests, is a figure for self-referential or autoreflexive writing, and though she does not explicitly reference John Freccero's essay, we are again reminded of his description of how the laurel/Laura pairing works to form an autoreflexive poetics. In exploring the limitations of this form of poetics, DellaNova shifts her focus to Echo:

The process of writing autoreflexive literature is thus like gazing into a mirror: for poets desire to see projected back to them their own image, an exact reproduction of themselves. But complete self-referentiality in writing is impossible, for the poet's words must have a referent and must depend on previous speech if they are to convey meaning to the reader. It seems, then, that the visual image of the reflecting glass must be complemented by its aural anti-type: the echo, a series of repetitive sounds which reverberate throughout the caverns of past literary texts. (202)

Echo, for DellaNeva, represents imitative poetics, the parts of the literary text that repeat its precursors. This type of repetition, in its purest form, DellaNeva claims, would result in an absence of originality. Neither a narcissistic poetics nor a purely imitative poetics, she suggests, would communicate anything between the poet and the reader. As she explains, “Narcissus and Echo ... are similar to the two poles of literary discourse - the completely autonomous and the wholly imitative - which must be reconciled if the poem is to be both writable and readable” (203).

While DellaNeva’s presents a compelling argument about how Echo and Narcissus fit into Petrarchan poetics, her interpretative framework leads her to a labored reading of the Ovidian myth. She writes: “the nymph Echo was deprived of her voice and forced to repeat only the egotistical words spoken by Narcissus, who rejected her love. Echo’s inability to achieve linguistic autonomy resulted in despair: the nymph wasted away until she was reduced to a mere disembodied voice” (202). It may be true that Echo is a figure for imitative literary production, but DellaNeva goes one step too far when she supports this idea by suggesting Echo’s transformation into a disembodied voice occurs as a result of her despair over losing “linguistic autonomy.” Echo loses vocal autonomy long before she loses her body, and in fact, despite Juno’s punishment that allows her only to repeat the words of others, the Ovidian text conveys that she does fairly well for herself. “Corpus adhuc Echo, non vox erat et tamen usum / garrula non alium, quam nunc habet, oris habebat, / reddere de multis ut verba novissima posset,” Ovid writes (3.359-61) [“Echo still had a body then and was not merely a voice. But though she was garrulous, she had no other trick

of speech than she has now: she can repeat the last words out of many].<sup>6</sup> The Ovidian text focuses on what she *can* do rather than lingering over her limitations.

Her final transformation into a disembodied voice does not occur until Narcissus spurns her. Ovid writes:

... spreta latet silvis pudibundaque frondibus ora  
protegit et solis ex illo vivit in antris;  
sed tamen haeret amor crescitque dolore repulsae;  
extenuant vigiles corpus miserabile curae  
adducitque cutem macies et in aera sucus  
corporis omnis abit; vox tantum atque ossa supersunt:  
vox manet, ossa ferunt lapidis traxisse figuram.  
inde latet silvis nulloque in monte videtur,  
omnibus auditur: sonus est, qui vivit in illa. (393-401)

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<sup>6</sup> There has long been a debate among scholars about whether Echo's punishment effectively denies her linguistic autonomy, or whether she is able to somehow subvert the punishment. Jacques Derrida argues Echo's speech is a site of subversion in *Rogues*. He claims Echo "lets be heard by whoever wants to hear it, by whoever might love hearing it, something other than what she seems to be saying" (xii). Gayatri Spivak makes a similar claim in her close reading of Ovid's text. Echo, she argues, marks the failure of repetition. Echo's "punishment fails," she explains, in order "to mark *différance*" (26). Lynn Enterline claims, "Echo's subtly subversive repetitions became commonplace in the mythographic vocabulary of Renaissance self-representation" (*Rhetoric* 12). Scholars who read Echo as a figure for literary imitation, on the other hand, argue that Echo's transformation represents a loss of autonomy and that she therefore embodies authors' anxieties about moving beyond their predecessors and finding their unique voices. Guiseppe Mazzotta writes that in the *Rime*, "the poet is Echo, an emblem of the disembodied voice alluding to its own hollowness" ('Canzoniere' 282). He associates Echo with derivativeness and loss when he notes that she is "damned to repeat sounds, and to "speak [her] losses" only (296).

[ Scorned, she wanders in the woods and hides her face in shame among the leaves, and from that time on lives in lonely caves. But still her love endures, increased by the sadness of rejection. Her sleepless thoughts waste her sad form, and her body's strength vanishes into the air. Only her bones and the sound of her voice are left. Her voice remains, her bones, they say, were changed to shapes of stone. She hides in the woods, no longer to be seen on the hills, but to be heard by everyone. It is sound that lives in her.]

The Ovidian text is fairly clear that Echo wastes away because of her unrequited love, and the pain of unrequited love seems to be the primary concern of the Petrarchan speaker in those poems in which he identifies with Echo, explicitly or implicitly.

Though he does sometimes take liberties with the texts he imitates or references, Petrarca is a good close reader of Ovid. The speaker and Echo share the pain of unrequited love and of having a scornful beloved. The sense of the speaker's correspondence with Echo is also strengthened because her transformation establishes her strong connection with the nonhuman natural world. The Petrarchan speaker, like the Petrarca we meet in the *Epistolae*, often seems more at home with nonhumans than humans. Moreover, the series of Ovidian transformation he undergoes over the course of *Rime* 23, the transformation *canzone*, establish his sense of an ontological connection with what we might perceive as the nonhuman natural world. In the poem and elsewhere in the *Rime*, the speaker experiences transformations that turn him to water, stone, and so on. Echo's transformation connects her to these natural elements

and to the human world. She begins as an anthropomorphic figure and ends as a disembodied voice, detached from bones that have turned to stone, and given to rebounding off of rocks and trees to be heard.

Like Echo, the Petrarchan speaker seeks refuge in a natural environment made up of forests, fountains, and mountains. Some of the more persuasive readings of Echo's role in the *Rime*, therefore, are those that focus on how the speaker imagines his voice echoing within and around this natural environment. Marianne Shapiro and Michael Shapiro provide one such example of this reading as they analyze the echo more generally rather than Echo, the proper noun. They explain, "Nature speaks in Petrarchan song, or at least, it echoes" (215). "The speaker of the poem," they continue,

will expect the sonorities of his words to rebound from mountains, valleys, or streams. The echo effects themselves are another species of recurrence. This kind of auditory image is closely associated with Petrarch's preference for forests, valleys, thickets, and other natural enclosures that can serve as echo chambers. (215)

The distinction Shapiro and Shapiro establish here is between nature as a mere surface that returns one's voice, and nature as a source of containment. When Ovid writes, "sonus est, qui vivit in illa" (3.401)—"it is sound that lives in Echo"—we learn that Echo's being is made up of voice *and* the container that allows her voice to sound, the "forests, valleys, thickets, and other natural enclosures that can serve as echo chambers." She is not pure voice, but rather voice lives in her. The elements of

the natural world, in other words, are not ontologically other to the anthropomorphic figure of Echo. The same may be true, I will argue, for the Petrarchan speaker who identifies with her.

As I note above, scholarship on Echo's role in the *Rime* also often focuses on Echo's relationship to other mythic figures. This scholarship, particularly when it focuses on the *Rime*'s allusions to Medusa or other figures connected to stone, reveals the dark side of the speaker's feelings of containment within nature. Albert Rivero, for instance, claims that "the most important feature" of Echo's story for Petrarca's purposes is "the fact that Echo became a stone as a result of her passion," and through this intertwining of myth, Petrarca "reminds us once again of Laura's role as Medusa" (105). The speaker becomes paralyzed and petrified as a result of his gaze upon Laura, Rivero suggests, and Medusa, he argues, "stands for the inordinate concern with the earthly (on the sexual level, desire for the lady's physical being)" (107).<sup>7</sup> Because of the denseness of signification in Petrarca's works, sometimes the speaker's petrification reads in the way Rivero suggests, and other times it refers to

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<sup>7</sup> Orpheus is another Ovidian figure who transforms into stone. For the significance of the speaker's petrification with regard to the Orpheus myth, see Thérèse Migraine-George, especially page 231. Migraine-George notes that the stoniness of the speaker is in conversation with the Medusa and Orpheus myths, and also with Dante's *rime petrose*. There is a large body of critical material associating the petrification of the speaker with the *petrose* tradition. In his introduction to his translation of the *Canzoniere*, Robert Durling connects Petrarca's Narcissus and Medusa allusions as he explains,

The lover is fascinated with the complexity of his own psychological processes; the image that turns him to stone in the *Rime sparse* is a projection of them onto the outside world. The idea that the lover's fixated gaze on the beloved turns him into a statue is emphasized in Ovid's account of Narcissus, who stares at his image in the pool ... This is an ultimate form of the Medusa, a perception that hovers over the *Rime sparse*, that endlessly polished mirror of the poet's soul. (31)

See Matina Lauster for a more in-depth analysis of the Medusa allusions.

the transformations of Orpheus or Echo. Sometimes it refers to being trapped in a sepulcher (see, for instance, 323.10). Sometimes, all of these readings are tenable in a single poem. Amid the ambiguity, however, is a clear “concern with the earthly,” to use Rivero’s phrase. The speaker alternates between perceiving his connection to the earthly as a liberation and seeing it as a form of entrapment.

This alternation is indicative of one of the larger ambiguities in the *Rime*: whether the speaker is part of or apart from the rest of the natural world. What are we to make of his insistence that he has become stone? Are the beings and things in the natural world, beings and things that we might refer to as nonhuman beings and things, actually part of the anthropomorphic speaker of the *Rime*? Our answer to these questions about the ontological status of the speaker affect whether or not we see his interactions with so-called others as intersubjective relations and subject-object relations, or intrasubjective relations. Later poets such as Ronsard and Shakespeare respond to Petrarca’s engagement with the myth in a way that associates the figure of Echo with ethical questions pertaining to human/nonhuman relations, but our responses to the ontological questions listed above determine whether the *Rime* can concern itself with such an ethics. That is, if the beings and things we may perceive as other to the speaker are instead part of him, then the ethical questions later poets ask are irrelevant in the Petrarchan context, or rather, are unthinkable.

Petrarca’s engagement with the Narcissus and Echo myth becomes a touchpoint for later struggles between aesthetics and ethics in literary contexts. Chapters two and three analyze examples of what I call Echo-critical poetic

narcissisms, examples in which Narcissus provides a model for aesthetics and Echo opens up a series of ethical questions about the stakes of narcissistic aesthetics with regard to humans' relationship to the natural world. In much Renaissance poetry after Petrarca, Echo becomes the voice of nonhuman beings, or rather the hybrid voice that speaks across the divide between humans and nonhumans, challenging humans to care for nonhuman others. This ethics-oriented role for Echo may not be present in Petrarca's poetry because the narcissistic Petrarchan speaker identifies with Echo, thus neutralizing her subversive potential, the subtle alterity she possesses in the Ovidian myth. Does Petrarca's rendering of Echo's story reflect the strength of the speaker's narcissism, his ability to turn all potential sources of alterity into much beloved images of himself? This reading finds support in existing criticism that understands the Petrarchan speaker as a self-centered egoist or else as the father of humanism, where humanism is understood as an anthropocentric vision of the universe that subsumes everyone and everything under the sign of the human.

The implicit criticism in such a reading, however, is challenged by the uncertainty Petrarca builds into his depiction of the boundaries of his speaker, which then troubles the definition of the human in the collection. While Echo-criticism may be absent from his poems, I will suggest that the Echo-critical may not be needed as a tool for interrogating the relationship between humans and nonhumans because for Petrarca, these two orders of being might not make up entirely distinct ontological categories. Instead of being a mediator between two orders of being, Echo might be read as an indication of the ontological integration of what we read as distinct orders

of being and of the hybridity of the so-called human in a formative text in the development of humanism.

In the next two chapters, I will focus on two poets' responses to Petrarca's engagement with the Narcissus and Echo myth, first from the French poet, Pierre de Ronsard, and second from the English poet, William Shakespeare. In the intervening centuries between Petrarca and these two poets, the categories of being that make up the human and nonhuman become reified, and thus the role of Echo requires revision. These revisions introduce an Echo-critical stance from which to interrogate the stakes of narcissism and anthropocentrism, a stance that may be unavailable to Petrarca, though he certainly begins to build its foundations.

### I. Dissonant Interpretations of Narcissus in Petrarca's Works

Petrarca's engagement with the Narcissus myth is also complicated and ambiguous, but whereas the role of Echo in the *Rime* points to an indeterminable ontological quandary, the role of Narcissus can be unraveled. There are two strains of thought at work in Petrarca's engagement with the story of Narcissus: the medieval - which includes the Scholastic tradition, troubadour poetry, and the *Ovide Moralisé* -, and the classical - including Ovid and other primary texts and images. While Petrarca earns his title as the "father of humanism" because of his embracing of the latter, his works nonetheless remain influenced by the former. He may be the father of humanism, but he is also a child of the Middle Ages. As the various allusions to

Narcissus in the *Rime sparse* make clear, however, these two strains of thought are often more dissonant than harmonious.

Given Petrarca's reputation as a classical scholar, it may be easy to overlook the fact that he was likely influenced by popular medieval versions of Ovid's myths in addition to the original Latin. One of Petrarca's earliest exposures to Ovid may have been from the *Ovide Moralisé*, the famous retelling of the myths that cloaked them in allegory and offered moral lessons that stabilized the meanings of the text's complex transformations. The *Ovide Moralisé* dates from the first quarter of the fourteenth century and was a source of inspiration for many of France's creative writers at the time. Petrarca, whose family was in exile from Florence, grew up near Avignon, where the influence of the French Ovid would surely have been felt rather strongly. Despite his habitation in France, Petrarca always claimed to be unfamiliar with the language, but such claims were likely symptomatic of his pride in his Florentine roots rather than statements of truth. It would be difficult for a student as gifted in languages as Petrarca was to remain ignorant of a language with which he was surrounded. The *Ovide Moralisé*, moreover, had a long reach. Its moralizing readings of the myths influenced French poets such as Guillaume de Machaut, Eustache Deschamps, and Christine de Pisan, and may also have helped shape the moral mythic readings Fiammetta offers in a text by the same name, written by Petrarca's close friend, Giovanni Boccaccio.

The influence of these sorts of readings of the myths can be felt in Petrarca's own poetry in those moments that distill the complex Ovidian narrative into lessons.

In *Rime* 45, a poem to which I will return, the Petrarchan speaker reduces the story of Narcissus to a warning about the high stakes of pride and vanity. The warning the speaker offers is reminiscent of the *Ovide Moralisé*, which condenses Narcissus's story and then explains,

... Narcisus, le biau, le gent,  
Fu grans la bone renomee,  
S'il la vausist avoir amee,  
Mes il fu tant outrecuidiez,  
Plains d'orgueil et de sens vuidiez,  
Qu'il perdi dou siecle la grace. (1504-9)

[Narcissus, the beautiful, the fair, would have had a great reputation if he had allowed it by having loved, but he was so presumptuous, so full of pride and of empty of sense, that he lost a century of grace.]<sup>8</sup>

These lines teach a lesson about the cost of pride and are perhaps the lines the Petrarchan speaker seeks to invoke when he warns Laura that she is becoming too preoccupied with her own beauty as she gazes into her mirror:

Certo, se vi rimembra di Narcisso,  
questo et quel corso ad un termino vanno -  
ben che di sì bel fior sia indegna l'erba. (45.12-14)

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<sup>8</sup> My translation.

[Certainly, if you remember Narcissus, this and that course lead to one goal - although the grass is unworthy of so lovely a flower.]<sup>9</sup>

Since the Ovidian speaker rarely comments on the stories he tells, and never does so in a moralizing fashion, this reference to Narcissus is a clearer echo of the French adaptation of Ovid than of the Latin original.

The same poem from the *Rime* offers a strong indication of one of Petrarca's other medieval influences. The poem begins with a reference to Laura's mirror, which the speaker characterizes as "Il mio adversario" (45.1). As Giuseppe Mazzotta explains, Laura's mirror here bears a strong resemblance to the *losengier*, or rival lover in troubadour poetry (*Worlds* 64-5). Though troubadour poetry was no longer at the height of its popularity, troubadour music would have still lingered in the open spaces of cities like Avignon during Petrarca's lifetime.

The medieval figure of the *losengier* and the moral exegesis inspired by the *Ovide Moralisé* become mingled with the Narcissus myth in *Rime* 45, but the two traditions exist alongside or simultaneously and in tension with the myth's classical origins. To understand what the myth meant to classical audiences, and thus to understand the interpretation that was of the greatest significance to Petrarca, I turn now to various depictions of Narcissus from the classical era, both in images and in texts. These images and texts elucidate a particular reading of the myth that has long since been obscured but that is of primary importance in the *Rime*.

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<sup>9</sup> All translations from the *Rime sparse* are Robert Durling's unless otherwise noted.

## II. Narcissus in the Pompeii Frescoes

Renaissance and contemporary depictions of Narcissus exist in abundance. In one of the most famous modern examples, John William Waterhouse portrays Narcissus lying on his stomach, gazing at his reflection in the pool while Echo stares longingly from behind a tree. In earlier examples, such as Nicholas Poussin's "Écho et Narcisse" (ca. 1629-30), Narcissus is again prostrate, perhaps peering sideways at his image in the water, though we are not able to see what he is looking at. In many Renaissance portrayals, the object of Narcissus's gaze is not visible.<sup>10</sup> Others, such as Caravaggio's "Narcissus" from 1597, include the reflection.

There is a notable difference between the artistic renderings of the mythic figure in the Renaissance and after, and those produced during the classical era. Many of the surviving ancient images of Narcissus were found in the ruins of Pompeii, where "about fifty murals depicting Narcissus survive" (Blakemore and Jennett). In a fresco recovered from the home of Marcus Lucretius Fronto, Narcissus gazes at a stony image of himself, eerily reminiscent of the ashy faces preserved in plaster casts in the ruins of that famous city (Figure 1). The same is true of *Pompeii VII.15.2* (Figure 2) and of another Pompeiian fresco discovered in Loreius Tiburtinus's house, sometimes referred to as the home of Octavius Quarto (Figure 3). In each of these frescoes, Narcissus's reflection in the water looks more like a stony mask than a realistic reflection.

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<sup>10</sup> See also, for example, Leonardo da Vinci's "Narcissus" (1495), Antonio da Trento's chiaroscuro woodcut (ca. 1527-30), and Francesco Curradi's "Narcissus" (seventeenth century).

As Jas' Elsner notes in his analysis of the fresco in Figure 3, “the reflected face of Narcissus, upside-down at the bottom-centre of the visual field, seems to resemble not so much the slender youth as a Gorgon’s head” (103). Elsner explains, “Since the Gorgon’s head turned anyone who looked at it into stone, this is a particularly appropriate characterisation of the reflection which petrified Narcissus” (103). He claims that the stony reflection “picks up a series of images” from the classical texts on Narcissus, citing examples from Ovid, Philostratus, and Callistratus.

In Ovid’s telling of the tale, Narcissus is so enamored with the image in the stone that he becomes petrified:

hic puer et studio venandi lassus et aestu  
procubuit faciemque loci fontemque secutus,  
dumque sitim sedare cupit, sitis altera crevit,                   415  
dumque bibit, visae correptus imagine formae  
spem sine corpore amat, corpus putat esse, quod umbra est.  
adstupet ipse sibi vultuque inmotus eodem  
haeret, ut e Pario formatum marmore signum ... (3.413-9)

[“There as he stooped to quench his thirst another thirst increased.  
While he is drinking he beholds himself reflected in the mirrored  
pool—and loves; loves an imagined body which contains no  
substance, for he deems the mirrored shade a thing of life to love. He

cannot move, for so he marvels at himself, and lies with countenance unchanged, as if indeed a statue carved of Parian marble.”<sup>11</sup>

Though this particular moment in the Narcissus myth points to yet another possible valence for Petrarca’s references to petrification in the *Rime*, there is a significant difference between the stone in Narcissus’s story and that in the Echo, Medusa, and Orpheus myths. Whereas these three figures are at the center of stories where someone becomes stone, Narcissus only becomes *like* stone.

Narcissus’s story is, in part, a story about representation. Norman E. Land outlines the pre- and early modern roots of Narcissus’s long association with the arts. Like Elsner he notes that Ovid compares Narcissus’s image in the pool to “a sculpture of Parian marble” (“Narcissus Pictor” 10, *Metamorphoses* 3.418-9), the image that takes on literal value in the stony image in the Pompeiian frescoes, but he points to other classical interpretations of Narcissus as an artist, noting examples from Quintilian and Philostratus as well. Citing an instructive passage from the latter, Land explains, “Philostratus, a Greek Sophist of the third century A.D. ... describes a painting of Narcissus in a villa of his host at Naples. Philostratus writes that ‘the pool [of water in the picture] paints Narcissus,’ just as the painting ... represents the mythological figure. In other words, Philostratus likens the surface of the pool depicted in the picture to the surface of the actual painting” (10).

As Land points out, the fifteenth-century Italian humanist Leon Battista Alberti likewise compares the image in Narcissus’s fountain to painting. Painting,

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<sup>11</sup> Brooke More’s translation.

Alberti claims, enables one's "embracing by means of art the surface of the pool" (Land 10). Narcissus believes that what he sees in the pool is real, and painting, according to Alberti, should be similarly deceptive, or rather, seductive. Such a reading of the myth places the artist in the position of Narcissus, the artwork in the place of the reflected image, and the viewer in the position of the spectator who intrudes on the intimate scene between Narcissus and his image (in Ovid's version, this would make us Echo). Alberti compares the triangulation in the myth to the relationship between painter, painting, and viewer, but for Ovid, the three points might represent Ovid himself, the *Metamorphoses*, and the reader. For the Pompeiian artists, they represent the fresco painter himself, the fresco on the stony wall, and the viewer. More generally, they can be understood to represent artists, their artifice, and their audiences.

The association of the Narcissus myth with the arts in general is further supported by a second pattern in the Pompeii frescoes: Narcissus is wearing what appears to be a crown of laurel in many of the examples (Figures 1 and 2). The co-presence of the laurel crown with the unrealistic stony reflection suggest that the first-century residents of Pompeii associated Narcissus with sculpture and poetry, even fresco paintings, and most likely with artifice in general. We may tend to associate Narcissus with vanity and selfishness, subject formation, desire, and even a psychoanalytic syndrome, but these frescoes suggest that Ovid's near contemporaries associated him instead with aesthetic production. He, like Orpheus, was a figure for the arts and artists.

### III. Seeing Double: Petrarca's Narcissus Poems

*Rime* 45 is at once one of the most medieval and one of the most classical poems in the collection. As noted above, it bears remnants of the troubadour tradition in its positioning of the speaker against a rival in love. Petrarca, of course, plays with the tradition by transforming the rival male lover into a mirror in which the beloved gazes, becoming enamored with her own image. It is also medieval because of its moralization of the Narcissus myth. At the same time, the poem is classical because of its autoreflexive elements, which engage with the Narcissus myth by forming a unique pattern for artistic representation, a poetics of the mirror that aestheticize sameness and similitude.

Petrarca writes:

*Rime* 45

Il mio avversario in cui veder solete  
gli occhi vostri ch'Amore e 'l Ciel onora  
colle non sue bellezze v'innamora  
più che 'n guisa mortal soavi et liete.

Per consiglio di lui, Donna, m'avete  
scacciato del mio dolce albergo fora:  
misero esilio! avegna ch' i' non fora  
d'abitar degno ove voi sola siete.

Ma s'io v'era con saldi chiovi fisso,  
non dovea specchio farvi per mio danno  
a voi stessa piacendo aspra et superba.

Certo, se vi rimembra di Narcisso,  
questo et quel corso ad un termino vanno -  
ben che di sì bel fior sia indegna l'erba.

[My adversary in whom you are wont to see your eyes, which Love  
and Heaven honor, enamors you with beauties not his but sweet and  
happy beyond mortal guise.

By his counsel, Lady, you have driven me out of my sweet dwelling:  
miserable exile! even though I may not be worthy to dwell where you  
alone are.

But if I had been nailed there firmly, a mirror should not have made  
you, because you pleased yourself, harsh and proud to my harm.

Certainly, if you remember Narcissus, this and that course lead to one  
goal—although the grass is unworthy of so lovely a flower]

The poem contains Petrarca's first explicit reference to Narcissus and presents us with a series of doubles. It follows a typical Petrarchan rhyme scheme— *abba abba cde cde*—, and not the equally prevalent *abba abba cdc dcd* pattern. Significantly, this rhyme scheme offers a formal parallel of the double figures of the boy and his image described in the myth Petrarca places at the center of the poem. The first quatrain finds its double in the second half of the octave, and the tercet does the same in the poem's sestet. The structure of the poem and its rhymes thus locate two formal mirrors—another set of doubles—between lines four and five, and between lines 11 and 12.

Another instance of formal doubling appears in the second quatrain in the rhyming words at the ends of lines six and seven. Rather than presenting us with two words that share the same endings, he includes the homonyms, “fora” and “fora.” The first “fora” refers to an area outside the speaker's dwelling, and the second is an archaic form of the future tense of the verb “essere” [to be]. This is not the only place that Petrarca creates a mirror effect by rhyming two like words in consecutive lines. The same formal quality appears in thirteen other places in the *Rime* apart from the *sestine*,<sup>12</sup> but the connection of the mirroring technique is nowhere so relevant to the subject matter of the poem as it is in *Rime* 45, and this must be why the technique is imitated by later poets when they write about Narcissus. Ronsard and Shakespeare imitate this technique of Petrarca's when they write about Narcissus, and both will

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<sup>12</sup> See 15.4-5, 18.2-3, 18.4-5, 18.6-7, 94.6-7, 124.2-3, 222.4-5, 225.2-3, 257.4-5, 264.26-7, 291.4-5, 330.2-3, and 366.86-7.

expand upon Petrarca's poetics by adding chiasmus to their lines and by incorporating more repetition and more imagistic and sonic pairs.

Petrarca offers several other patterns and techniques in *Rime* 45 contributing to the narcissistic aesthetic that will become so influential for these later poets. In one of the poem's more puzzling lines—"questo et quel corso ad un termino vanno" (13)—Petrarca briefly mentions an idea that will become of primary significance to Ronsard in his further development of the narcissistic aesthetic.<sup>13</sup> In these lines, the speaker is reminding Laura of Narcissus's story and noting that different paths lead to a single end. The line is peculiar in the context of the poem. What could the speaker be referring to when he warns that this and that lead to the same thing? The referents for "questo et quel corso" in the poem are ambiguous, but "questo ... corso" could refer to Laura's vain preoccupation with her image in the mirror, and "quel corso" could refer to Narcissus's vain desire. The single end both will have moved toward if Laura does not heed the speaker's warning is their transformation into flowers.

But this reading is not entirely satisfying, because the previous line locates "questo et quel corso" within the Narcissus myth itself: "Certo, se vi rimembra di Narcisso, / questo et quel corso ad un termino vanno." What, within the story of Narcissus, could provide the referents for two paths the Petrarchan speaker describes? Because the line refers to two actions or ideas, this and that, it seems to pluralize Narcissus's journey toward his transformation. It could be, however, that "questo et quel corso" does not correspond to actual narrative events in Narcissus's story, but

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<sup>13</sup> See Chapter 2, especially pages 66-73.

instead conveys how the transformation in the story results in the reduction of difference into singularity. The double figures of Narcissus - the boy and his image - the story about vain desire, the painful entrance into self-knowledge and eventual loss; all of these things become distilled into the flower symbol. This is certainly the reading of the myth Ronsard will provide in his elegy for Narcissus, and he may find the roots of this interpretation in Petrarca.

The poem also contributes to the development of a narcissistic aesthetic through its incorporation of structural mirrors. It follows the arc of Narcissus's drama, beginning with "il mio adversario" or the mirror image, and ending in the grass or "l'erba" that holds the flower, but Petrarca is innovative in his structuring of the story. The poem has a mirroring structure in that at the end of the octave, the speaker is concerned about whether he is worthy to be with Laura, while at the end of the sestet he worries about the worthiness of the grass to hold her transformed state. In these lines, though the agents change, the fundamental theme remains the same. Who or what is worthy to be with Laura? Who or what is "degnò" or "indegnò" (8, 14). The repetition of the root word, "degnò" at the ends of the structural units that make up the sonnet formally enact the event of Narcissus looking into the mirroring fountain: repetition and inversion, a doubling that conceptually reverses the second term.

This is also one of Petrarca's most sonically sophisticated poems. The power of the rhymed structure that holds together the sonnet form is strengthened in this poem through the added presence of internal rhymes - "adversario in cui" rhymes

with “consiglio di lui,” creating a midline rhyme between the first lines of the quatrains (1, 5). Part of the rhyme might be carried through the middles of other lines as “del mio,” “esilio” and “specchio” also appear in a structurally parallel location in later lines (6, 7, 10). Additional internal rhymes or half-rhymes appear with “per mio danno” and “termino vanno” (10, 13). The pleasure we derive from these patterns points to the tension between the two strains of thought present in Petrarca’s engagement with Narcissus. In accordance with the medieval tradition, the speaker moralizes Narcissus’s story in which he finds beauty in sameness, but at the same time, as per the classical tradition, the poem patterns itself after the myth and aestheticizes it. The poem’s formal features, which contribute to its aesthetic appeal, subtly locate beauty along lines of sameness.

Another poem in the *Rime*, *Rime* 190, picks up where *Rime* 45 leaves off. The first quatrain of the octave brings us back to the “erba” that ends *Rime* 45 and introduces a white doe into the scene:

Una candida cerva sopra l’erba  
verde m’apparve con duo corna d’oro  
fra due riviere all’ombra d’un alloro,  
levando ‘l sole a la stagione acerba. (1-4)

[A white doe on the green grass appeared to me, with two golden horns, between two rivers, in the shade of a laurel, when the sun was rising in the unripe season.]

This poem can be read in conversation with *Rime* 45 for a number of reasons. In addition to sharing a place in the grass, the poem uses some of the same aesthetic techniques as the first Narcissus poem. Again, Petrarca includes repetition with inversion in the form of a conceptual negation when he rhymes “acerba” (acerbic or harsh) and “disacerba” (mitigating or appeasing) in the last lines of the two quatrains (4, 8). The poem also, according to Cocco, alludes to the story of Narcissus in its final tercet as the speaker explains, “... era ‘l sol già vòlto al mezzo giorno, / gli occhi miei stanchi di mirar, non sazi, / quand’ io caddi ne l’acqua et ella sparve” (12-4) [... the sun had already turned at midday; my eyes were tired by looking but not sated, when I fell into the water, and she disappeared]. Cocco claims the poem “establishes an analogy between Laura and Narcissus” as it describes a moment “quand’io caddi ne l’acqua et ella sparve” (21). The image of the speaker looking at the doe that represents Laura is meant to invoke the image of Narcissus gazing at his reflection, Cocco suggests. The doe doesn’t disappear because the speaker’s falling into the water has startled her. Instead, she disappears because the speaker has disturbed the surface of the water in which he sees her image. This suggests that the Laura-doe is an image of the speaker, who is or is like Narcissus.

If we accept that this poem is part of a pair of Narcissus poems that includes *Rime* 45, a new reading presents itself for that puzzling penultimate line about “questo et quel corso” (45.13). *Rime* 190 begins by placing the speaker between two rivers. In his gloss on these lines, Durling claims these two rivers represent the Sorgue and Durance (336). Since “corso” is also a word used to refer to a waterway

such as a river, “questo et quel corso” may refer to the two rivers invoked also in the later poem. These two poems may be working in tandem to transpose the Narcissus myth into Petrarca’s own locale. He says in a letter to Philippe de Cabassoles that his home near Vacluse is his new Helicon,<sup>14</sup> and this is a point I will return to. The unique way in which Petrarca appropriates myth and imprints it onto his immediate surroundings will be an important topic, both in this chapter’s discussion of Echo and in the next chapter’s analysis of Ronsard’s poetics.

Several other poems in the *Rime* make similarly oblique references to the Narcissus myth, and they put various features of the narcissistic aesthetic into play as they do so. *Rime* 94 contributes to the development of this aesthetic and to the reification of its qualities. In the first quatrain the speaker describes his captivation with the image of the beloved in terms that are relatively characteristic of neoplatonic and, as Maria Ruvoldt notes, even medical beliefs about the workings of love: “... giugne per gli occhi al cor profondo / l’imagin donna, ogni altra indi si parte, / et le vertù che l’anima comparte / lascian le membra quasi immobil pondo ...” (1-4) [...through my eyes to my deepest heart comes the image that masters me, every other departs, and the powers that the soul distributes leave the members an almost immobile weight...]. Ruvoldt explains,

The Petrarchan model posits an exchange of glances, through which ‘amorous rays’ pass from the lady’s eyes into the eyes of her beloved,

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<sup>14</sup> The letter is a miscellaneous one that he did not include in his collections of letters. It begins “Exul ab Italia,” and in it he writes that Vacluse “shall be fatherland and Helicon. Here have I brought the Muses to find rest and refuge” (Wilkins 179-80).

penetrating his soul. Renaissance medical texts confirm that these  
'rays of love' were believed to have material existence, allowing love  
(in the form of a visual impression) to enter and affect the body. (85)

The first quatrain of *Rime* 94 is consistent with popular discourse and also with  
Petrarca's own descriptions of the workings of love elsewhere in the *Rime*.<sup>15</sup>

After the volta, however, the language in the poem becomes more striking.  
The speaker explains, "quinci in duo volti un color morto appare, / perché 'l vigor che  
vivi gli mostrava / da nessun lato è più là dove stava" (9-11) [hence in two faces one  
dead color appears, for the vigor that showed them to be alive is no longer, on either  
side, where it was initially]. The final tercet clarifies that the "duo volti" are the faces  
of two lovers. The gray, death-like face Petrarca describes here is reminiscent of the  
image in the water in the Pompeii frescoes, and of the Parian marble Ovid says  
Narcissus becomes when he gazes upon his image.

Petrarca describes a similar scene in *Rime* 124, where the split image doesn't  
contain two faces, but instead reflects the fracturing of the speaker. In the poem's  
final lines, again tormented by love, he sees himself broken in half in a glass: "Lasso,  
non di diamante ma d'un vetro / veggio di man cadermi ogni speranza / et tutt' i miei  
pensier romper nel mezzo" (12-4) [Alas, I see all hope fall from my hands, made not  
of diamond but even of glass, and I see all my thoughts break in half]. Though

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<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, *Rime* 3 where the speaker explains "Trovammi Amor del tutto disarmato,  
/ et aperta la via per gli occhi al core / che di lagrime son fatti uscio et varco" (9-11) [Love  
found me altogether disarmed, and the way open through my eyes to my heart, my eyes  
which are now the portal and passageway of tears].

Durling takes some liberties here with the translation, we can see that the image invoked by these lines can be read in two different ways. They might ask us to picture the speaker's hopes turning to glass and breaking as they fall to the ground. Alternatively, they may ask us to picture his hopes turning to glass and becoming a reflective surface in which he appears to be broken in half or doubled. The latter image, which would ask us to picture him as a Narcissus figure, is supported by the poem's incorporation of a linguistic mirror — "volta" appearing at the end of lines two and three — which tend to appear alongside references to Narcissus.

Similarly, the strength of the Narcissus allusion in *Rime* 94 increases as a result of the numerous doubles in the poem, and because of the self-reflexive quality of the last tercet. The doubles appear in the linguistic mirror made up by "parte" (6-7) and in the two pairs of eyes that gaze at each other, which themselves are doubled when we learn that the speaker was reminded of his own situation when he sees it reflected in another pair of lovers. A self-reflexive quality emerges as the speaker explains that he is thinking of his own painful love experience because "di questo in quel dì mi ricordava / ch' i' vidi duo amanti trasformare / et far qual io mi soglio in vista fare" (12-4) [this I remembered on that day when I saw two lovers be transformed and become in their faces what I often become]. A more literal translation of line nine can go in two directions: "On that day I was reminded of this" or "On that day I recorded this." The second translation opens the possibility of another layer of self-reflexivity. The line can refer to the speaker's memory, and/or it can refer to the poem itself, where the memory is recorded. These two possible

readings contained within a single line offer an example of why Petrarca's poetry feels at once capacious and confining. The first self-reflexive reading would shrink the imaginative space of the poem to only its literal space while the second self-reflexive reading offers a way out.

This conflicted sense of capaciousness and confinement might describe the experience of the *Rime* as a whole because of Petrarca's use of a notably small vocabulary in his composition of the poems. The continued repetition of the same words seems to shrink the imaginative space of the poem. At the same time, because individual words take on new meanings each time they are used, each poem seems to refer outside itself to other poems in the *Rime*, and often to other texts and times as well. His repetition of the same words and images adds a density to the collection's language that is unmatched by authors who write long works with a diverse vocabulary.

The material remnants of the *Rime* offer insight into Petrarca's writing processes and suggest he revised to simplify his language. As Teodolinda Barolini notes, "Petrarch left behind clear documentation of the ways he went about writing his lyric sequence" (3). In fact, there is clear evidence, in Petrarca's revisions, that he made an effort to reduce the linguistic variety in his poetry.<sup>16</sup> Gianfranco Contini famously contrasted the rich variety of the language in Dante's *Commedia*, a variety he referred to as *plurilinguismo*, to the limited vocabulary Petrarca uses in the *Rime*. Stephen Sartorelli condenses Contini's development of these poles of linguistic

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<sup>16</sup> See Contini, pp. 5-32.

variability in the following terms: Contini uses *plurilinguismo* to refer to “the poetic language issuing from Dante and consisting of a highly diverse lexicon of terms, registers, and even morphologies (including dialect) that varied and shifted according to expressive need, situation, location, and so on,” while he uses *monolinguisimo* to refer to “the tradition of poetic usage issuing from Petrarch and consisting of a highly limited vocabulary of terms and expressions for specific lyric situations that, through their repeated use over time, conferred an enriched repertoire of associations on a rarefied verbal fabric” (27-8).

The virtuosity required to successfully carry off the kind of project Petrarca endeavors to achieve with a limited vocabulary is embodied in the *sestina*, a highly repetitive and notoriously difficult form. Petrarca writes eight *sestine* for the *Rime*, and even composes a double *sestina* in *Rime* 332.<sup>17</sup> The *sestina* form includes linguistic mirrors that bridge the space between stanzas, so for example in *Rime* 22, “alba” ends the last line of the first stanza and the first line of the next, “giorno” ends the last line of the second stanza and the first line of the third, and so on. This pattern carries on throughout the *sestina* until the *tornada*, the final tercet where the form becomes condensed, and each line ends in one of the words that made up the final three linguistic mirrors. The fact that the double *sestina* with its tightly knit formal elements is one of Petrarca’s most virtuosic performances in the collection is symptomatic of the work’s aesthetic valuing of sameness. Patterns oriented toward

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<sup>17</sup> *Rime* 22, 30, 66, 80, 142, 214, 237, and 239 comprise the collection’s *sestine*.

sameness, duplication, or repetition more generally, are the source of the poetry's aesthetic appeal. Less is more.

This large-scale aesthetic appeal of the *Rime* appears in a condensed form in *Rime* 18 as well. Some of Petrarca's most playful experimentation with linguistic mirrors occurs in this poem, where the end rhymes of the lines contain many repetitions and homonyms:

*Rime* 18

Quand'io son tutto vòlto in quella parte  
Ove 'l bel viso di Madonna luce;  
E m'è rimasta nel pensier la luce  
Che m'arde e strugge dentro a parte a parte;  
I', che temo del cor che mi si parte,                   5  
E veggio presso il fin della mia luce,  
Vommene in guisa d'orbo senza luce,  
Che non sa 've si vada, e pur si parte.

Così davanti ai colpi della Morte  
Fuggo; ma non sì ratto che 'l desio                   10  
Meco non venga, come venir sole.  
Tacito vo; chè le parole morte  
Farian pianger la gente; ed i' desio  
Che le lagrime mie si spargan sole.

[When I am all turned toward the place where shines my lady's lovely face, and in my thought the light remains that burns and melts me within bit by bit, since I fear for my heart, which is breaking, and see my days near their end, I go without light like a blind man who does not know where to go and still departs.

Thus I flee before the blows of death, but not so quickly that my desire does not come with me, as it is accustomed; I go silent; for my dead words would make people weep, and I desire my tears to be shed in solitude.]

The line endings in this poem consist of only five words: “parte” (1, 4, 5, 8), “luce” (3, 4, 6, 7), “morte” (9, 12), “desio” (10, 13), and “sole” (11, 14). This sort of limited variability condenses the peculiar sense of confinement and depth that the *monolinguisism* of the rest of the *Rime* achieves.

The poem also offers a subtle allusion to the Narcissus myth as the speaker describes being so on fire with desire that he is melting (3-4). In the first quatrain, the speaker describes a time,

Quand' io son tutto volto in quella parte  
ove 'l bel viso di Madonna luce,  
et m'è rimasa nel pensier la luce  
che m'arde et strugge dentro a parte a parte. (1-4)

[... when I am all turned toward the place where shines my lady's lovely face, and in my thought the light remains that burns and melts me within bit by bit].

These lines are more than a little reminiscent of the lines that describe the beginning of Narcissus's transformation in Ovid:

quae simul adspexit liquefacta rursus in unda,  
non tulit ulterius, sed ut intabescere flavae  
igne levi cerae matutinaeque pruinae  
sole tepente solent, sic attenuatus amore  
liquitur et tecto paulatim carpitur igni ... (3.486-90)

[When as glass again the rippling waters smoothed, and when such beauty in the stream the youth observed, no more could he endure. As in the flame the yellow wax, or as the hoar-frost melts in early morning 'neath the genial sun; so did he pine away, by love consumed, and slowly wasted by a hidden flame.]

Because of the density of Petrarca's language, wax, like stone, invokes more than one mythic reference. Lynn Enterline reminds us that wax plays an important part in the Pygmalion myth as well, the warmth from Pygmalion's hands softening the marble statue as if she were made of wax (8). But the situation in *Rime* 18 more closely mirrors Narcissus's than Pygmalion's.

The poem describes the speaker's entrapment, his inability to escape his desire or his beloved, which Narcissus experiences more poignantly than other mythic

figures since he is the one that he desires. After Narcissus realizes that he is the one he sees reflected in the water, he cries out, “flammas moveoque feroque. / quid faciam? roger anne rogem? quid deinde rogabo? / quod cupio mecum est: inopem me copia fecit. / o utinam a nostro secedere corpore possem!” (3.464-7)[I am burning with love for myself. I move and bear the flames. What shall I do? Surely not court and be courted? Why court then? What I want I have. My riches make me poor. O I wish I could leave my own body!]. The feeling of confinement or entrapment in desire is a feeling Narcissus and the speaker share. Petrarca gives readers a sense of this feeling in the tightly woven space of the poem, which seems smaller because it is written with even less linguistic variation than an average Petrarchan sonnet.

While this feeling is inflected with negativity in Narcissus’s story, its transposition into the formal elements of poetry yield pleasure. Petrarca’s poems aestheticize his speaker’s suffering. The speaker’s inability to escape the painful experience of desire is mirrored in our sense of linguistic entrapment, but readers of the *Rime* have often delighted in the very formal qualities that constitute the trap. That is to say, the narcissistic aesthetic that shapes some of the *Rime*’s most enchanting and poignant moments derives from a delight in repetition and sameness. That sameness does not appear merely in the linguistic mirrors that tend to appear in poems that allude to Narcissus and elsewhere throughout the *Rime*, but also in the *Rime*’s most famously beautiful qualities and moments. *Rime* 197 also helps to bring the collection’s governing aesthetic into focus:

L’aura celeste che ’n quel verde lauro

spira ov' Amor ferì nel fianco Apollo  
et a me pose un dolce giogo al collo,  
tal che mia libertà tardi restauro,  
po quello in me che nel gran vecchio mauro           5  
Medusa quando in selce transformollo;  
né posso dal bel nodo omai dar crollo  
là 've il sol perde, non pur l'ambra o l'auro.  
dico le chiome bionde e 'l crespo laccio  
che sì soavemente lega et stringe           10  
l'alma, che d'umiltate et non d'altro armo.  
L'ombra sua sola fa 'l mio cor un ghiaccio  
et di bianca paura il viso tinge,  
ma gli occhi ànno vertù di farne un marmo.

[The heavenly breeze that breathes in that green laurel, where Love smote Apollo in the side and on my neck placed a sweet yoke so that I restore my liberty only late, has the power over me that Medusa had over the old Moorish giant, when she turned him to flint; nor can I shake loose that lovely knot by which the sun is surpassed, not to say amber or gold: I mean the blond locks and the curling snare that so softly bind tight my soul, which I arm with humility and nothing else. Her very shadow turns my heart to ice and tinges my face with white fear, but her eyes have the power to turn it to marble.]

This poem captures the conflicted experiences of the speaker and the reader. The speaker, finding himself tightly bound and ensnared by the beloved, aestheticizes his fetters. He is confined in a “dolce giogo,” and “bel nodo,” made of “l’ambra o l’auro,” “le chiome bionde e ‘l cresco laccio / che sì soavemente lega et stringe / l’alma.” His pleasurable confinement becomes ours as we become tied up in the sonic similarities that hold the poem together. “L’aura” is tied to “l’auro,” which is tied to “Laura,” and these interweaving threads make up the fabric that entangles and delights us. Like Narcissus, we find beauty in sameness, and this is what motivates our habit of finding pleasure in the puns on Laura’s name.

Our share in the speaker’s conflicted feelings of pleasure and pain also derives from the line endings. All but two lines end with an “-o” sound, and this repetition mingles pleasure and pain as we enjoy its aesthetic effect while potentially experiencing discomfort from the enclosing effect of the repeated “o.” We are invited to develop a sense of pained empathy for what the repeated “o” conveys about the speaker’s woe.

The magnification of woe in the speaker’s repeated “o”s turns the poem into an echo chamber in which his feelings resonate. This poem’s repetitions turn it into a small-scale version of the entire collection, since the *Rime* has often been compared to a labyrinth or echo chamber, and even explicitly characterizes itself in this way. Barolini notes that Petrarca revised *Rime* 211 to include the following reference to his first glimpse of Laura: “Mille trecento ventisette, a punto / su l’ora prima, il dì sesto d’aprile, / nel laberinto entrai, né veggio ond’esca” (6) [“One thousand three hundred

twenty-seven, exactly at the first hour of the sixth day of April, I entered the labyrinth, nor do I see where I may get out of it”].<sup>18</sup> Mazzotta claims “the metaphor of the labyrinth . . . best describes the *Canzoniere*.” He notes, “The metaphor is particularly apt because it also suggests the poet’s experience of being locked in a cosmos of his own creation from which there are no exits (as sonnet LXXXIX dramatizes) and where the only thing left for the poet is to call and make his voice resonate” (*Worlds* 295). Mazzotta thereby suggests that the labyrinthine quality of the *Rime* turns it into the echo chamber in which the Petrarchan speaker’s voice resonates. He then notes that Echo is one of “the paradigms of the poet’s voice” (296), a point Petrarca himself supports in *Rime* 23 and in the poems that associate Laura with Narcissus and by extension associate the speaker with Echo.

But we know that the poems that associate Laura with Narcissus just as often point to the speaker’s own connection to that figure rather than to the figure of Echo. In fact, the *Rime* simultaneously upholds the speaker’s link to both figures. Durling offers an equation for understanding this complicated intertwining when he notes that despite the speaker’s identification with Echo in *Rime* 23, there is another “implicit connection (Petrarch = Echo means Laura = Narcissus; if Laura’s image = Narcissus’ image, Petrarch = Narcissus) [that] is both established and evaded” (31-2). He also notes that this connection is characteristic of Petrarchan poetics; the myths in the *Rime* “constantly blend into one another” (Durling 32).

He describes the processes whereby this blending takes place:

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<sup>18</sup> Barolini’s translation.

Each of the major emblems for Laura thus at some time or other also stands for the lover, and vice versa. If Laura is the laurel, the lover turns into a laurel; if she is the beautiful deer he is hunting, he is an Actaeon (and, again, in 323 she is torn by dogs); if he becomes a fountain of tears, she is a fountain of inspiration (but is it Narcissus' pool?); if like Echo he becomes merely a voice, she dies, and he is left to imagine her voice in dreams. The myths are constantly being transformed. (32)

The spaces between figures expand and contract as one reads the *Rime*, just as the spaces between individual lines and poems are reconfigured as a result of their shared use of a small number of words and images. Exact repetition, repetition with inversion, puns, linguistic and imagistic doubles, sonic groups and pairs, and self-reflexivity are all characteristic of the narcissistic aesthetic Petrarca develops in the *Rime*. These characteristics have pronounced effects on the experience of reading Petrarca's work. The intertwining of shared qualities across multiple poems may alternately or simultaneously make one feel delighted and claustrophobic.

These endless repetitions of shared qualities that threaten to exclude variation and difference from the world of the poetry also leads to what Sturm-Maddox refers to as "the shadow of narcissism ... [that] hovers over the collection as a whole" (*Laurels* 122). The overlap in the poems' uses of language and figuration lends itself to the collection's self-reflexive quality. John Freccero argues that the self-reflexive quality of the poems exists alongside a more allegorical form that locates meaning in

the collection within the framework of a Christian typology. The fig tree is the emblem of the latter sort of signification, and the laurel is the emblem of the self-reflexive, or autoreflexive, which is more relevant in the context of the collection's narcissism.

In his discussion of Petrarca's autoreflexive poetics, Freccero notes that we tend to think that "words point to things," but in the *Rime*, Petrarca creates a world in which words instead refer only to other words within the collection. The laurel is the emblem for this type of signification, and is one of the unique contributions of Petrarchan poetics. As Freccero explains,

[F]or the laurel to be truly unique, it cannot *mean* anything: its referentiality must be neutralized if it is to remain the property of its creator. Petrarch makes of it the emblem of the mirror relationship *Laura-Lauro*, which is to say, the poetic lady created by the poet, who in turn creates him as poet laureate. (37)

The self-contained relationship Petrarca develops in which the laurel's meaning ends in Laura and vice-versa produces the Petrarchan speaker as an effect while also appearing to be produced by him. As Catherine Bates explains in her gloss of this passage, the

'emptying out' of the sign in order to develop the fetishistic worship of a dazzling poetic surface that is entirely self-reflecting and self-made is, Freccero argues, a calculated strategy on the poet's part: the means by which Petrarch (thereby perhaps justifying his claim to be the first

‘modern’ poet) works toward the fashioning and creation of a poetic identity. (94)

The inescapability of this signifying system gives the work its labyrinthine quality and is the reason why all of the words and ideas in the *Rime* seem to flow out from the speaker and to refer back to him.

This is where the “fundamental charge of narcissism” that readers bring to bear on the *Rime* comes from. The self-reflexive, closed system of signification the *Rime* represents makes it unclear whether the speaker’s relationships to other beings and things are intersubjective or intrasubjective. Bates notes the shift in recent criticism toward the latter interpretation. The Petrarchan dialectic, she explains, was once “conceived of as being played out *intersubjectively* ... By contrast, other ... more recent, readings of Petrarch ... shift to seeing this dialectic as being played out *intrasubjectively*” (95). Carla Freccero provides an example of the latter interpretation as she argues that “what is articulated in the Petrarchan lyric ‘exchange’ between an ‘I’ and a ‘you’ or ‘she’ is as much a relation of identification as of desire” (24). The *Rime*’s “you”s, “she”s, and even its “it”s can be read as parts of or extensions of the speaker who organizes their place in the poetic landscape.

At the same time, it is entirely possible to read the “you”s, “she”s, and “it”s as separate from the speaker, referents that point to a world outside the poetry. It has become an outmoded interpretation, but readers for centuries sought out real evidence

of the existence of Laura,<sup>19</sup> and the poems certainly make reference to real places, such as the Sorgue and Durance. This tension between the referential and figurative qualities of the poetry is at the heart of a quandary that makes Petrarchan narcissism worthy of revisiting for later poets and for contemporary scholars. Are the other beings and things that seem to be reflections of the speaker different from or extensions of him? Are these other beings and things part of him, or does he do violence to their difference and autonomy through his distorted, potentially pathological perception? Are both possibilities tenable?

The Petrarchan speaker's egoism seems, on the one hand, to be like a black hole; the gravitational pull of his perspective is so strong that it absorbs everything his thoughts or gaze touches upon; the speaker takes all things into himself; he turns other beings and things into versions of himself. However, the apparent strength of these acts of transformation of other beings and things into versions of the Petrarchan ego is directly proportional to the strength of the boundaries between the ego and others. We read those boundaries as fixed and read his movement across or through them as feats of strength.

Instead, we might read those boundaries as porous, a reading that is nowhere called for more clearly than in *Rime* 23 with its manifold transformations. If we take the speaker's shape shifting seriously, this poem is not so much about transformation - insofar as that word implies that form has fixed boundaries that can be moved across

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<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, Ruth Mulhauser's work on the French Petrarch, which describes the efforts by various people, including King Francis I and Maurice Scève, to locate the real home and tomb of Laura (24-6).

- as it is about the continually metamorphic movement of being. The in-betweenness and instability of the speaker in this poem is what is behind his identification with the enigmatic figure of Echo. She provides a mythic paradigm for what we might read as the ontological liminality of the Petrarchan speaker, just as he will provide one of the literary paradigms for the human at the center of humanism.

*Rime 23, Rime 323* — a poem often paired with 23 and read as Laura's transformation *canzone* — and many of Petrarca's letters speak to the shifting boundaries between what we might recognize as humans and nonhumans. What we recognize as human and nonhuman can be read as integrated beings for Petrarca. If we take seriously the various metamorphoses the Petrarchan speaker experiences, we must read the speaker either as a hybrid being or as a being in flux. The categories of being are not quite reified in Petrarca's works, making them waver at the border of hybridity and fluidity. The separation of categories that brings humans and nonhumans as we know them into being does not exist as a fully formed idea in Petrarca's work.

Petrarca is called the "father of humanism" because something innovative and influential appears to be happening in his work with regard to how we understand ourselves and what it means to be human. As Bates notes, he has been called "the first modern poet" because he develops "a calculated strategy... toward the fashioning and creation of a poetic identity" (94), but the ontological status of that identity is not entirely clear. His being is more elastic than the modern human, more variable, and more accommodating of otherness.

We can see a difference between the human in his work and the human in the works of the poets who respond to him. Humanism, with its distinct categories of being, is not fully articulated in Petrarca's work. But in the works of Ronsard and Shakespeare, these categories have hardened, thus bringing into focus the ethical quandary that haunts their engagement with the Narcissus and Echo myth. Once humans become distinct from other beings and things, we then have to become concerned with our interactions with them. Are we behaving ethically? Are we effectively caring for others? For Petrarca, it is unclear whether the beings and things in the speaker's environment are in fact *other* beings and things.

#### IV. Echo and Ontology in the *Rime*

Echo provides a good barometer for determining whether humans and nonhumans—to use the language of modernity—are distinct or integrated orders of being. Her transformation in Ovid allows her to transcend the space of the human body and makes her identity at once human and nonhuman. Her voice, while keeping her anthropomorphic identity intact, must respond to a human voice and must bounce off of a nonhuman surface in order to be heard. Her voice moves between humans and nonhumans. She is either a figure for how being works, if what moderns see as humans and nonhumans are integrated, or she is a bridge across the gap between two orders of being and she ushers in humans' ethical concerns with the treatment of others.

In the *Rime*, Echo is an ambiguous figure. In the collection's most explicit reference to her, she serves as a figure for the elasticity of being. This reference occurs in *Rime* 23, the famous transformation poem, which is also the first and longest *canzone* in the collection. The speaker undergoes six different Ovidian transformations over the course of the poem. The six transformations the poem describes are compared to Daphne's, Cygnus's, Battus's, Byblis's, Echo's, and Actaeon's. Other myths are invoked, but these are the six that shape the speaker's shifting form.

The poem makes two references to Echo. The first reference is diffuse, calling to mind neither the nymph's story nor her proper name. The vague outline of an echo is present as the Petrarchan speaker tells us that he will make an effort to share the story of his suffering, even though, as he explains, “[i]l mio duro scempio / sia scripto altrove, sí che mille penne / ne son già stanche, et quasi in ogni valle / rimbombi il suon de' miei gravi sospiri, / ch'aquistan fede a la penosa vita” (23.10-4) [“my harsh undoing is written elsewhere so that a thousand pens are already tired by it, and almost every valley echoes to the sound of my heavy sighs which prove how painful my life is”]. How are we to read this instance of echoing? Is the speaker's belief that the valleys echo with his pain a reflection of his solipsism? Thomas Greene, one of Petrarca's best readers, claims Petrarca is often “on the verge of solipsism” in his poems, and that this tends to prevent him from referring to anything outside himself (123). “There is a capacity for reference beyond the consciousness which gives it being,” he explains, but the struggle to refer to the real landscape is

“repeatedly frustrated by the poet’s imperial ego” (109). With this interpretation, the valleys that echo the speaker’s suffering only exist insofar as they are extensions of his own condition.

The natural landscape, Greene suggests, is often overwhelmed by the Petrarchan ego or it recedes into the background as Petrarca turns toward allegory and figuration. In his analysis of Petrarca’s famous letter on his ascent of Mont Ventoux, Greene claims that the “material mountain [seeks] to achieve objectivity against the drift toward allegoresis in the writer’s sensibility” (109). He explains that the Ventoux letter opens up “a possibility of interchange between self and nature,” but “concludes with the turn to Saint Augustine, and this turn then leads to a moral judgment upon the ascent that will bring the traveler down the mountain sorrowful and repentant. The mountain, as we last see it, is blurred by Christian symbolism” (110). He continues:

There might have been—and the text briefly allows us to hope for it—an original, secular experience in which Petrarch would have perceived something external decisively, in which the admirable impulse to commit this heady, experimental act would have flowered in authentic contact with the nonself. That contact would then inevitably have led, since we are dealing with Petrarch, to a new situating of the self, and this consequence in turn might have perpetuated the interplay between inner and outer realms. But the letter threatens rather to fall into the opposite cycle, also approached in

the *Canzoniere*, a sterile, narcissistic sequence wherein the external, if it is apprehended at all, triggers a purely internal series of delusions and disillusion. (110)

Greene's interpretations of Petrarca's poems and the letter on Mont Ventoux problematically rely on an anthropocentric reading here. If we do not take for granted that the boundaries between humans and nonhumans have fully formed for Petrarca, there can be no critique of his failure to encounter nature as other. A non-anthropocentric reading is entirely possible instead. What reads as a troubling and solipsistic encounter of the self with its own reflection instead might be read as an intrasubjective encounter that gives us insight into a particular critical moment in the history of ontology.

Many critics have found in their readings of Petrarca examples of the Romantic idea of the pathetic fallacy.<sup>20</sup> Such readings are tenable if we perceive the speaker and the natural world upon which he imprints his voice as ontologically separate. Alternatively, we might read the anthropomorphic speaker and the valleys that echo with his sighs as ontologically integrated beings, modeled after Echo, who is made up of human voice and the natural world. *Rime* 23 reimagines her transformation as the speaker prays to his beloved for mercy but is instead changed by her: "i nervi et l'ossa / mi volse in dura selce, et così scossa / voce rimasi de l'antiche some, / chiamando Morte et lei sola per nome" (23.137-40) [she turned my

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<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, pp. 134-5; Frederic J. Jones, pp. 232-3; and Peter Hainsworth, pp. 134-5.

sinews and bones into hard flint, and thus I remained a voice shaken from my former burden, calling Death and only her by name]. Petrarca's representation of the speaker's transformation here is more ontologically ambiguous than Ovid's description of Echo's. Whereas Ovid shows that Echo's voice and the environment that contains her are part of her being, Petrarca is not clear about whether the speaker is pure voice or is a voice and more. We are invited to question the ontological status of the speaker because he exhibits his own curiosity on the matter just before his first transformation. "Lasso, che son? che fui," he asks (30) [Alas, what am I? what was I?]. Our confusion is a reflection of his confusion, which derives from his shifting form.

The being of the speaker of *Rime* 23 presents us with an experience of the uncanny because he seems at once familiar and confounding. He is, on the one hand, stably human and ontologically knowable, and yet he undergoes a series of transformations that defy our expectations for the human form. What we might be tempted to write off as mere figuration becomes unsettling when we reflect on the speaker's tone toward his changes. He recounts his transformation into a fountain like Byblis as follows:

... io senti' me tutto venir meno  
et farmi una fontana a piè d'un faggio'  
gran tempo umido tenni quel viaggio.  
Chi udi mai d'uom vero nascer fonte?  
e parlo cose manifeste et conte. (23.116-20)

[I felt myself entirely melt and become a fountain at the foot of a beech; long time did I keep that damp journey. Who ever heard of a spring being born from a real man?]

There is, of course, something playful in this description. The image provided here is of a man so distraught with painful desire that he cries torrentially, releasing a fountain of water from his eyes. His insistence on the literalness of this transformation is striking however, and in spite of the playfulness, it has the real effect of reminding us that humans are made up of the same materials as the rest of the natural world, and that these materials move and make up different forms at different times.

In *Rime* 23, the shifting shape of the speaker is mirrored in the shifting shape of the poem. This canzone is the longest poem in the collection, and is also one of its most formally variable. Of the 366 poems in the *Rime*, 317 are sonnets, 29 are *canzoni*, nine are *sestine*, seven are *ballate*, and four are madrigals. The *canzoni* tend to be more fluid than the other poetic forms. As Durling notes, Petrarca “developed a new flexibility, sinuousness, and variety in the canzone” (11). Though they generally maintain a hendecasyllabic meter, the rhyme scheme and stanza length are highly variable. Petrarca alternates six-line and 14-line stanzas, and though the rhyme schemes within these smaller units remain consistent, the spacing of the end-rhymes across these stanzas feels more erratic than it does in the other poetic forms. If we feel lost at sea amid the speaker’s numerous transformations, focusing on the form is unlikely to make us feel like we’ve found stable ground. Compared to the poems that

develop the narcissistic aesthetic so important to future generations of poets, the transformation *canzone* feels like an imaginatively sweeping, flexuous song.

But there is a pattern that shapes the poem, and there at times seems to be a stable being at the center of the manifold transformations in *Rime* 23. Greene claims, “the fundamental subject of the *Canzoniere* is not so much or not only the psychology of the speaker as the *ontology* of his selfhood, the struggle to discern a self or compose a self which could stand as a fixed and knowable substance” (124). What this comment points to is the embryonic flux in which the Petrarchan speaker takes shape. What is produced over the course of the collection is not a fully formed subject that we can psychologize (even if it teaches us something about psychology), but an experiment in producing a being made up of a “fixed and knowable substance.”

Whatever fixity we perceive in the *Rime*, however, exists in tension with the indeterminable fluidity of being, apparent in the shifting shape of the poems and the transformations of the speaker. Greene notes that an “impression of oxymoronic irresolution ... seems to govern so much of his work, a coexistence of opposites that seldom find an equilibrium, giving way one to the other in a fatal succession which Petrarch’s art can render brilliantly but not bring to rest” (109). In *Rime* 23, amid the flux of physical transformation, the soul emerges as a fixed point; “L’alma ... / ... / simile al suo fattor stato ritene” (121-3) [The soul ... keeps a state like to its Maker]. Memory also provides stability: “... la memoria ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... e’ ten di me quel d’entro, et io la scorza” (23.15-20) [“memory ... holds what is within me,

and I only the shell”]. But even these two sources of fixity are given over to fluidity. The soul, Petrarca writes, seeks mercy and repentance so it can become more God-like (23.121-31). It, therefore, transforms. While the soul transforms as it ascends toward God, memory transforms because it degrades; memory, we learn, may be fallible because the speaker’s torments and anguish make him forget himself (15-20). Thus, the moving and fixed parts of being remain in tension with each other and with themselves. When the boundaries of being are so tenuous, it is impossible to determine where the speaker ends and other beings and things begin. The size of the gap between the speaking being and others is continually fluctuating and undeterminable in *Rime* 23 and throughout the Petrarchan oeuvre.

Durling claims “Poem 23 is echoed and balanced by poem 323,” another of Petrarca’s *canzoni* (32). The difference is that the female beloved is the shape shifter in the latter poem. There are, however, many similarities between the two poems. *Rime* 323, like 23, “describes six emblematic visions ... all instances of abrupt mutability” (Durling 32), and thematically picks up where 23 left off. At the end of *Rime* 23, the Petrarchan speaker describes his transformation into a stag and tells us that he is still pursued by his hounds. *Rime* 323 begins with a woman, presumably Laura, being torn apart by hounds. As Durling notes, “Each of the major emblems for Laura thus at some time or other also stands for the lover, and vice versa” (32). The myths Petrarca takes up “constantly blend into one another” (Durling 32), and the same can be said of the speaker and Laura.

The same can also be said of these two figures' relation to the natural world that surrounds them. Sara Sturm-Maddox mentions the "oft-noted fusion of Laura with the natural world" (*Metamorphoses* 29), and Giuseppe Mazzotta points to the ways in which the speaker "seeks the loneliness of the countryside," but instead "is integrated within the landscape" (*Worlds* 44). Mazzotta's focus is on those moments in the poems where the speaker inscribes his thoughts and feelings on his environment, as in the first echoing moment in *Rime* 23, but we might also look to the same poem's transformations when thinking about this claim. Mazzotta further argues, "The mirroring of the self in nature does not mark, however, a state of repose in the illusion of a regained unity between man and nature" (44). But we might remember that the speaker turns into a laurel tree, a swan, a fountain, and so on. If there is not a return to unity with nature, it is only because the speaker never left it.

Michelangelo would say that Laura and the speaker's environment become mirrors of the speaker himself because one inevitably begins to recreate oneself when trying to produce the image of a loved one. What Petrarca's poems suggest is that the artist who seems to give shape to the loved one or thing is also changed as a result of his love. If the speaker changes Laura and is changed by her, the same might be said of his relationship with the natural world around him. Alberti, in his famous reading of Narcissus as an artist, "wanted to locate the origins of art in the mysterious and the mythic as well as to establish the profound desire of artists to embrace nature, which like Narcissus and God, they create (or re-create) in their own image in art" (Land "Narcissus" 10). Art brings together the image of the artist, myth, and nature, either

transcending the boundaries between them or pointing to the mutual origins of all three. We can read the Petrarchan speaker in the space between these two understandings of what art does. While the being of the speaker and his relation to nature may remain unclear, what is clear is that the poetic representations of the natural world are in conversation with a long classical tradition invested in representing humans' appreciation of nature.

Petrarca writes of his appreciation of nature in many of his letters, particularly of his feelings toward Vacluse, the fountain that forms the mouth of the Sorgue. For instance, in *Epistolae Familiares* XI.4, addressed to Philippe de Cabassoles, he writes:

Valle locus Clausa toto michi nullus in orbe  
gratior aut studiis aptior ora meis.

Valle puer Clausa fueram iuvenemque reversum  
fovit in aprico vallis amena sinu.

Valle vir in Clausa meliores dulciter annos  
exegi et vite candida fila mee.

Calle senex Clausa supremum ducere tempus  
et Clausa cupio, te duce, Valle mori.

[No place in the whole world is dearer to me than the Vale Enclosed, and none more favorable for my toils. In my boyhood I visited the Vale Enclosed, and in my youth, when I returned, the lovely valley cherished me in its sunny bosom. In my manhood I spent my best

years sweetly in the Vale Enclosed, while the threads of my life were white. In my old age I desire to live out in the Vale Enclosed my allotted time, and in the Enclosed Vale, under thy guidance, to die.]<sup>21</sup>

What is notable here, apart from the love Petrarca expresses for his home near Vaucluse, which also happens to be the setting for much of the *Rime*,<sup>22</sup> is that the love he describes is reciprocal. Not only is the place he describes dear to him, but it cherishes him as well, and if love is transformative, then this description of one human's relationship to the natural world suggests the humans and nature are mutually transforming each other, moving together.

And yet, future generations of poets are troubled by the version of humanity they inherit from Petrarca and their other humanist forebears. Petrarca himself seems unsettled by his role in producing a troubled and troubling version of humanity when he writes of the battles between the Nymphs and the Muses in his letters. In

*Epistolae Metricae* 3.1, Petrarca writes:

Est mihi cum nymphis bellum de finibus ingens  
auditum fortasse tibi : mons horridus auras  
excipit ac nimbos, et in aethera cornibus exit ;  
ima tenent fontes, nympharum nobile regnum.  
Sorgia surgit ibi, querulis placidissimus undis,

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<sup>21</sup> Translated by Ernest Hatch Wilkins.

<sup>22</sup> See Mazzotta, *Worlds*, especially p. 173 where he explains that “Petrarch’s landscape ... is a particularized, concrete topography: we are near the source of the Sorgue River, where the original vision of Laura occurred.”

et gelida predulcis aqua ; spectabile monstrum

alveus ut virides vitreo tegit anthe smaragdos.

Hic mihi saxosae rigidus telluris agellus

contigit : hinc lites, hinc semina prima duelli.

Namque ego, quod profugis sedes erat apta Camenis,

concives hic esse meas, mecumque tumultus,

insulsique dedi convicia temnere vulgi.

Contra ille : indignum facinus graviterque ferendum,

exulibus sua jura dari ... (1-14)

[I am at war with the Nymphs, as you may have heard: 'Tis a mighty

war, for ground we both desire. There is a mountain here, all rocks

and cliffs: around its lofty crest the winds and clouds forgather; at its

base the Nymphs maintain their realm, the Fount from which the

Sorgue issues with murmuring waters, cool and sweet, so clear they

scarcely hide the emeralds that gleam, so fair to see, in the river bed.

And there I had a small and stony field, the cause of our contention

and our war: for here, I thought, there might be made a place for the

fleeing Muses, and I bade them come to dwell with me, and with me to

despise the noise and tumult of the silly crowd. But to the Nymphs it

seemed a grievous wrong, not to be borne, that I, but newly come,

should take from them part of their citadel...]

In this letter, the Nymphs represent the uncorrupted natural world, while the Muses represent the world of poetry and culture. An epic battle between the two forces ensues because Petrarca has entered the Nymphs' territory and tried to make a home for the Muses. By establishing these two forces as antithetical, Petrarca inscribes an ontological gap in human nature. The purification of nature and culture is underway, and the boundaries between humans, the creators of culture, and the natural world, a place of immanence that transcends humanity and culture, are beginning to harden.

As the space of an ontological gap between humans and nonhumans becomes ever larger in succeeding generations, Echo, the bridge between the two, becomes stretched and strained to the point of breaking. It is the fear of this break and what it would signify that compels later poets to respond to Petrarca, marking him as a source of inspiration and as a point of departure, and thereby securing his place at the threshold of the new humanist poetics.

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**FIGURE 1**



Pompeii Fresco found at Marcus Lucretius Fronto's House

**FIGURE 2**



Pompeii Fresco VII.15.2

**FIGURE 3**



Pompeii Fresco found at Loreius Tiburtinus's/Octavius Quarto's House

## Chapter 2: Aesthetics and Ecology in Ronsard's Elegies for Narcissus and the Gâtine

“We need to start subjectifying nature, because look where objectification has gotten us.”

—Ursula Le Guin, “In Deep Admiration”

“...we are what the beauty and force of poems reach toward, we've a chance to recognize and lighten our footprint in a world where all of nature matters vitally.”

— John Felstiner, *Can Poetry Save the Earth?*

The first epigraph to this chapter comes from Ursula Le Guin's keynote speech for an interdisciplinary conference at UCSC called “Anthropocene: Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet.” The conference was interested in gaining multiple perspectives on whether and how humans can provide solutions to the problems we have ourselves created by systematically and perhaps irrevocably damaging the planet. Le Guin, best known as a writer of poetry and science fiction, entered a movie theater in downtown Santa Cruz and spoke about the role the arts, specifically poetry, might have in the battle against ourselves. The theater was not large enough to hold everyone who wanted to listen. A live feed of the talk was transmitted to a large lecture hall on the UCSC campus full of faculty, students, and other members of the greater Santa Cruz community.

When she proposed midway through her talk that we need “the language of science and poetry if we are going to avoid falling into ignorant irresponsibility,” I

never doubted her statement, never wondered whether poetry could save us from ignorant irresponsibility. Rather, I wondered *how* poetry could save us. What does poetry need to do to ameliorate the current situation and can ecocritical poetic interventions affect positive change in the physical world? One of Le Guin's answers to this question appears in the epigraph above: "we need to subjectify nature." But what does subjectifying nature entail, I wondered. "One way to do this," she explained, "is to start thinking of the natural world as fellow beings, kinfolk." For me, her suggestion brought to mind the forests of antiquity and the Renaissance's imitations of them, forests full of naiads, nymphs, and demigods. Surely this could not be what she meant. These visions of forests full of "kinfolk" are, to borrow Nietzsche's words, "human, all too human."

An alternative developed as Le Guin herself turned to Lucretius. Lucretius, I thought, at least levels the field between humans and nonhumans in his conception of the interconnectivity of all matter.<sup>23</sup> In Renaissance poetry, his influence is generally felt in moments that resist an anthropocentric emphasis on human exceptionalism. Le Guin seemed to make a similar move as Renaissance poets influenced by Lucretius when she read from her own writings a series of texts—some poetry, some prose—that interrogate the boundary between human and nonhuman artistry. She spoke with

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<sup>23</sup> In the Proem for *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius explains that we all come from one common stock of matter, and that only the forms of things change. Ronsard will refer to this idea in the last line of "Contre des bûcherons," where he writes, "La matiere demeure, et la forme se perd" ["Matter endures, and form is lost" (68, my translation). Thomas Greene claims this line illustrates that Ronsard "thematizes ... fluidity [between beings] repeatedly in naturalistic Lucretian terms" (207).

the same deep admiration for the classics and for her home, for high literature and for the ecosystems and environments in which she had lived and traveled. Bridging whatever divide remained between these two parts of her life, or as she said, “bring[ing] Lucretius’s Venus over to my ocean,” she shared a poem that mirrored Lucretius’s invocation of Venus at the beginning of *De Rerum Natura*:

“A Hymn to Aphrodite”

Venus solis occasus orientisque, Dea pacifica,

foam-borne, implacable, tender:

war and storm serve you, and you wear

the fiery tiara of the volcanoes.

Young salmon swimming downriver

and the old upstream to breed and die

are yours, and the fog-drinking forests.

Yours are the scattered emerald half-circles

of islands, the lost islands. Yours

are the sunken warships of the Emperor

and the the slow swirl of pelagic polymers.

The moon is your hand-mirror.

Mother of Time and daughter of Destruction,

your feet are light upon the waters.

Death your dog follows you down the beaches

whining to see the breakers break

into blossom, into immortal  
foam-flowers, where you have left  
the bright track of your passing.  
Pity your fearful, foolish children,  
O Aphrodite of Fukushima. (Le Guin).<sup>24</sup>

Then she said, “Thank you” and sat down.

The last word of her talk before giving thanks was “Fukushima.” No one could hear those final syllables without being reminded of the devastating effects the meltdown of a nuclear reactor in Fukushima only three years earlier has had and will continue to have on the ecosystems touched by radioactive contamination. The final image she left us with was one of destruction, a metonym for the violence that has earned humanity its own geologic epoch.

Given the shape of the rest of her talk, I had half expected her to end with an affirmation of the power of art to change the shape of the next epoch for the better, to restore balance. This did not seem to be that at all. What role could her hymn play in addressing humanity’s negative impact on the globe, I wondered. One of the hymn’s immediate effects may be to shock us out of our complacency and then to encourage us to reevaluate our complicity. The final image is jarring because the rest of the poem uses language to bring out the beauty of the ocean, reaching toward the ocean and toward us with beauty. Does the poem use the force of beauty to awaken in us

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<sup>24</sup> In the speech, Le Guin read the final line of the poem in the way I have written it above. In the published version I have cited, the line reads, “O Aphrodite of Fukushima” (21).

the desire to lighten our footprint, as John Felstiner claims poetry might do in the second epigraph above? In these small ways, as Felstiner asks in a book by this title, can poetry save the earth?

When the ecological situation facing us is so dire, why does poetry matter? And, I ask myself with regard to this project, what bearing could a bunch of centuries-old poems by the guiding thinkers of humanism have on our current situation, for which perhaps their very concept of humanity, according to some, might be to blame? Renaissance poets' engagement with the Narcissus and Echo myth, in particular, is instructive in this regard. As I have argued, the myth serves as a source of inspiration and anxiety for Renaissance poets, and their ambivalence about it bears a proleptic relationship to our own ambivalence about humanism. At what cost do its great masterpieces reach us? Do we, in idealizing humanism, also idealize anthropocentrism and sanction the destruction of the nonhuman, natural world? In this chapter, through a close reading of Ronsard's transformations of Ovid's myth, I suggest we do not, and we maybe never have.

### I. Ronsard Responds

Ronsard inherits a conflicted tradition from Petrarca. In the previous chapter, I argue that it is entirely possible to read the Petrarchan speaker not as an egoist who transforms everything and everyone into versions of himself, but as a fluid being who is prone to transforming into other beings and things. While both readings are tenable within the context of the *Canzoniere*, I lean toward the latter interpretation and

suggest that it is not until the end of Petrarca's career that the boundaries between beings begin to harden.

In *Epistolae Metricae* 3.1, Petrarca writes that he is "at war with the Nymphs," and explains that the Nymphs are angry with him for bringing "the fleeing Muses" into their forest dwelling (Wilkins 51). He gives the Nymphs a place of immanence in nature, characterizes the Muses as invaders who are tied to culture, and then describes the relationship between the two groups as a kind of turf war. In his representations of these two forces, he reveals that the boundaries between nature and culture are becoming reified, and that this reification strains humans' relationship to nature. This is the field of battle Ronsard enters into.

Ronsard begins writing his poems some 200 years after and 450 miles away from Petrarca's "small stony field" (Wilkins 51), the site of the epic battle between Petrarca's Nymphs and Muses. But the frontier of the battle has moved over time, and Ronsard finds himself in the midst of it in his own stony field in Vendôme. From his family home in Couture-sur-Loir, Ronsard writes sonnets, odes, hymns, and elegies in which he, like Petrarca, explores the boundaries between beings, and between nature and culture.

In his poetic portrayals of being, Ronsard is not consistent enough to produce anything like a coherent philosophy. His beings are too inconsistent, sometimes supple, sometimes fixed, sometimes in possession of essences, and sometimes unformed and given to liquefaction. Instead, he approaches the question of being

from different angles, and the Narcissus and Echo myth provides him with a fruitful starting point from which to work through his ideas.

Narcissus for Ronsard, as for Petrarca, provides an important aesthetic model, as well as a figure for thinking through ontological possibilities. In “La mort de Narcisse,” Ronsard participates in the tradition that develops an aesthetics of the mirror out of the Ovidian myth. In the middle of a poem that uses mirroring rhetorical devices to delight our minds and our ears, he constructs a metapoetic moment in which he transforms the poem’s speaker into Narcissus and the poem into Narcissus’s reflecting pool. These transformations are compounded with the final metamorphosis at the end of the poem when all the poem’s different figures collapse into the singular symbol of the flower.

This metamorphosis entails a certain degree of anxiety on the poet’s part. However, those anxieties are less about the relationship between the human and nonhuman than we might expect in a poem that focalizes its meditations on being through the transformation of anthropomorphized voice into a flower. Because Narcissus is a figure who shapes the poem’s aesthetics, he instead allows the poet to think through his relationship to his art and the implications of the transformation of voice into text. These are the ontological considerations Narcissus encourages Ronsard to think through. Echo inspires an entirely different line of thinking.

Most of Ronsard’s references to Echo appear in his eclogues, as well as in his odes and hymns to various features of the land he called home in his youth. In most cases, she enters Ronsard’s poetry as a mediator between the anthropomorphized

poetic speaker and the nonhuman poetic voices of the natural world. She makes it possible for a conversation and sense of community to develop between nonhumans and humans, nature and culture.

The fact that these categories require mediation suggests that the boundaries between beings are thought here in a way that diverges from those represented in Petrarca's *Rime*. In the idealized world of the eclogues, Echo is able to successfully hold together the opposing forces of nature and culture. But when these two forces become increasingly antithetical, Ronsard transposes Echo into a new context—an elegy—and imagines a world in which the communication Echo enables breaks down and the community she represents breaks apart. In “Contre les bûcherons de la forest de Gastine,” Ronsard transforms poetry into a hybrid space that accommodates the nonhuman and the anthropomorphic. He develops an echo-critical voice in an attempt to bridge the gap between the two, a gap he fears is widening.

## II. Ronsard's Poetic Narcissism: Repetition and Amplification

In the previous chapter I pointed to a particular aesthetic quality that emerges in Petrarca's first Narcissus poem. In *Rime* 45, Petrarca creates a formal reflection of Laura-as-Narcissus staring into a mirror with the doubling of “fora” at the ends of the lines. This may seem like a minor detail, but it is one that Ronsard duplicates in Sonnet 158 from the 1552 *Amours*, which is also a poem about Narcissus's relationship to his image. In this poem, “The poet-lover is trapped by the fascination

of his eyes with a ‘figure vaine,’ and most of the sonnet is a complaint addressed by Narcissus to his eyes” (Langer 6). Ronsard writes:

En m’abusant je me trompe les yeux,  
Aimant l’objet d’une figure vaine.  
O nouveauté d’une cruelle peine!  
O fier destin! Ô malice des Cieux!  
Faut-il que moy de moy-mesme envieux,  
Pour aimer trop les eaux d’une fontaine,  
Que ma raison par les sens incertaine  
Cuide en faillant son mal estre son mieux?  
Donques faut-il que le vain de ma face  
De membre à membre aneantir me face,  
Comme une cire aux raiz de la chaleur?  
Ainsi pleuroit l’amoureux Cephiside,  
Quand il sentit dessus le bord humide  
De son beau sang naistre une belle fleur.

[My eyes are wrong in abusing me, loving a vain, empty image. Oh, the novelty of a cruel pain! Oh proud destiny! Oh, the malice of the heavens! Is it necessary that I should envy myself, loving the water in the fountain so much that my reason, falsely believing my uncertain senses, should mistake my harm for my wellbeing? Is it thus necessary that my empty image should make me disappear limb by

limb, like a wax candle in the hot sun? Thus did Cephisus's loving son  
when, over the damp bank, he felt born from his beautiful blood a  
lovely flower.]<sup>25</sup>

In this poem, a formal mirror of the same sort Petrarca creates in *Rime* 45 appears in Ronsard's rhyming of "face" with "face" (9-10), and Ronsard goes further with the mirroring figures when he adds a second one in the repetition of "membre" (10).

Thus, Ronsard is not only imitating the narcissistic aesthetic Petrarca develops out of Ovid's subtle repetitions, thus sedimenting the aesthetic's formal features, but also is expanding it. This is nowhere more clear than in "La mort de Narcisse," an epistolary poem to Ronsard's humanist tutor, Jean Dorat. The poem was published in 1554 as part of a collection called *Le Bocage*, or *The Grove*. It begins with a description of all that awakens after a long winter, from the grasses, flowers, and trees of the countryside, to the young girls who inhabit it.

The speaker then reminisces about past springs, and this allows him to turn toward myth, to Jason, Narcissus, and Venus and Adonis. After mourning the loss of Adonis, the speaker returns to and lingers over Narcissus. At this point in the poem, the speaker's voice begins to blend with the Ovidian speaker of the *Metamorphoses*. Many of the poem's lines provide faithful translations of Ovid, though Ronsard occasionally transforms his predecessor's work, particularly at the level of form.

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<sup>25</sup> My translation. Ronsard's complete works have been incompletely translated into English, so in instances where English translations are not available, I offer my own.

Ronsard's formal manipulations of the Ovidian text are mediated through Petrarca, the intercessor who developed a specific set of aesthetic features through his engagement with the Narcissus myth.

Ronsard imitates Petrarca's poetic narcissism while translating Ovid in "La mort," but his repetition entails amplification. The speaker of Ronsard's poem despairs alongside Narcissus when he finally realizes, "Je suis mesme celuy qui me mets en fureur, / Je suis mesmes celuy, celuy mesmes que j'aime: / Rien je ne voy dans l'eau que l'ombre de moy-mesme" (lines 136-8)<sup>26</sup> ["I am the very one who makes me mad with love, I am the very one, the very one I love; what I see in the water is nothing but the reflection of myself."].<sup>27</sup> These lines produce repetition and inversion, and they formally illustrate Narcissus's predicament—first in the chiasmus that inverts line 137 at the caesura, and again in the rhyme that yokes together "j'aime" and "moy-mesme" (137-8).

We come across two more instances of repetition in the poem as well. The first occurs as the speaker describes Narcissus's efforts to kiss and embrace his image. The structure of these lines mirrors Ovid's Latin but again expands their repetitive quality; as each writer meditates on how often Narcissus reached out

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<sup>26</sup> Thomas Greene notes, "Ronsard's theory of poetry was in fact . . . [derived in part from] a Neoplatonic theory of *fureurs* stemming from Ficino" (199). As Danièle Duport explains, as a result of "le néo-platonisme prévalent au XVIe siècle sous l'influence des lectures de Ficin," French poets believed "la fureur poétique participe du souffle qui parcourt l'univers" (299). This moment in the poem, in which Ronsard uses the word "fureur" might connect to Ficino's theory of poetic production, thus underscoring the metapoetic quality of the line. See Appendix A for full poem.

<sup>27</sup> All translations of "La mort de Narcisse" are Malcolm Quainton and Elizabeth Vinestock's.

longingly, Ovid's "quotiens" (3.426, 427) becomes "Quantes-fois pour néant" in Ronsard's lines:

Quantes-fois pour néant, de sa lèvre approchée,  
Voulut toucher son ombre, et ne l'a point touchée?  
Quantes-fois pour néant de soy-mesmes épris,  
En l'eau s'est voulu prendre et ne s'est j'amaï pris? (73-6)  
[How many times, to no avail, lowering his lips, did he wish to touch  
his reflection, and fail to touch it? How many times, to no avail,  
enamoured of himself, did he wish to be embraced in the water and fail  
ever to be embraced?]<sup>28</sup>

The same repetitive speech pattern appears once more in the poem, this time in the voice of Narcissus, and this time the pattern is unique to Ronsard. It does not appear in the Ovidian text he translates. Where Ovid writes, "quo refugis? remane nec me, crudelis amantem desere!" ["Where are you going? Stay: do not desert me, I love you so."] <sup>29</sup> (3.477-8), Ronsard writes, "Où fuis-tu? . . . celui qui te supplie, / Ny sa jeune beauté, n'est digne qu'on le fuye. / Las! demeure: où fuis tu?" ["Where are you fleeing to? . . . Neither the person who implores you nor his youthful beauty deserves to be fled from. Alas! stay; where are you fleeing to?"] <sup>30</sup> (117-9). This instance in the repetition has an interesting effect in Ronsard's poem. Whereas the

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<sup>28</sup> Ronsard's use of the word "ombre" here is interesting since "ombre" can be used to refer to a shadow, shade, or ghost. His word choice foreshadows the end of the myth, when Ovid tells us that Narcissus will now gaze at his image in the Stygian pool for all eternity.

<sup>29</sup> All translations of Ovid are from Rolfe Humphries.

<sup>30</sup> Quainton and Vinestock's translation.

repetitive constructions are limited to the voice of the speaker in the *Metamorphoses*, in Ronsard's poem they are part of a speech pattern that the speaker and Narcissus share. The effect of this repetition of repetition is to close the gap between the speaker and Narcissus. The poem gives the impression that Narcissus's epiphany is also the speaker's, and many of its readers have observed that the poem seems metapoetic or self-reflexive.<sup>31</sup> The fact that the poem's speaker and the Narcissus character within the poem sound the same because of a shared speech pattern contributes to this sense.

Ronsard's speaker reflects on his own poetic processes and the potential for texts to become mirror surfaces when he describes Narcissus's development of self-knowledge:

“Je cognois maintenant l'effet de mon erreur,  
Je suis mesme celuy qui me met en fureur,  
Je suis mesmes celuy, celuy que j'aime,  
Rien je ne voy dans l'eau que l'ombre de moy-mesme.” (135-8)  
[“Now I know the consequences of my error: I am the very one who  
makes me mad with love, I am the very one, the very one I love; what  
I see in the water is nothing but the reflection of myself”]

The boundaries surrounding the field of aesthetics break down in these lines. The aesthetic features I have pointed to and described as a narcissistic aesthetic become

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<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Quainton and Vinestock (xxxiii), and Ullrich Langer, “Ronsard's ‘La Mort de Narcisse’: Imitation and the Melancholy Subject.”

more than that, taking on ontological significance. The formal mirrors in the poem—repetition, rhyme, and chiasmus—are figures for the mirror in which the poetic self is constructed, becoming metonyms for the mirror of the poem as a whole. The Ronsardian speaker, unlike his Petrarchan forebear, draws attention to this function of the text and is thereby able to reflect on the stakes of both constructions: the construction of beauty and the construction of the self. Both take place through the same process: through the production of mirror-images and through a doubling that is either aesthetic, self-constituting, or both.

At the moment in Ronsard's poem when Narcissus recognizes himself and his participation in this process, Tiresias's prophecy comes to full fruition. Narcissus now knows himself—"Je cognois maintenant"—and the self-knowledge he acquires here is self-destructive. Notably, it is also a self-constituting knowledge. That is to say, particularly in Ronsard's rendering of the myth, Narcissus's development of self-knowledge corresponds to or ushers in the first proposition of selfhood. This moment introduces with a jarring repetitiveness the first instances in the poem in which Narcissus is able to say what he is. "Je suis," he says twice (137, 138).

The association of self-knowledge with selfhood in general is not as pronounced in Ovid's Latin. "Iste ego sum," he says once, and then, "sensi, nec me mea fallit imago" ["He is myself! I feel it, I know my image now."] (3.464-5)—"He is myself," Ovid writes: a declaration of being, and *then* the knowledge he has acquired—"I know my own image now." Ronsard syntactically modifies the order of

things. Unlike the Ovidian Narcissus, who can *be* while blissfully ignorant, Ronsard's Narcissus acquires self-knowledge *then* develops a sense of himself, which suggests that knowledge produces being. Significantly, the being this knowledge produces is precarious, fragile, and ephemeral. In this moment we are left to ask what kind of being the poet envisions for himself in the reflective surface of the poem.

Because the poet has effectively reduced the gap or difference between the speaker and Narcissus, the moment the gaze turns into self-recognition, the poem turns into a *mis en abyme*. Narcissus gazes at his image in the reflective surface of the fountain. Narcissus in turn is himself the image the poetic speaker sees when he gazes into his textual mirror. Narcissus, in fact, comments on his status as mere image in one of the most puzzling lines in the poem. He asks, “seray-je tousjours couché dessus le bord / Comme un froid simulachre, en attendant la mort?” [“Shall I remain forever lying on the bank like a cold effigy, waiting for death?”] (142-3). His use of the word “simulachre” has significant implications with regard to the question of what kind of being the poet thinks the reflective surface of the poem might confer.

We might assume from the Latin *simulachre* that this moment offers a fairly faithful translation of Ovid, but these lines do not appear in Ovid's version of the myth. In Book III of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid uses the word *simulacra* once, but it is much earlier in the story, and it comes to us in the voice of the speaker as he describes Narcissus's dangerous infatuation (3.432). Narcissus at no point refers to himself as a simulacrum as he does in Ronsard's poem, and the use of the word

underscores the fact that Narcissus is to the speaker what the image in the fountain is to Narcissus, and that the fountain is to Narcissus what the text is to the speaker. That is to say, Narcissus is a reflection, and if we ask “of what or whom,” the most viable answer is “the poetic speaker.” And if Narcissus is the speaker’s reflection, what does this suggest about the nature of poetic being? Does each transformation result in a further diminishment of the creative spirit, from poet to Narcissus to pool/text to a delicate flower, born in the morning and ravished by evening?

In any case, these lines ensure the further collapse of the difference between Narcissus and the poem’s speaker. As a result, the *stanza* becomes a room full of mirrors, and the effect of entering this room is confounding. Just who, exactly, is gazing at whom or what? We all know what happens when two or more mirrors face each other. Fun houses create disorienting mazes using this effect, challenging all who enter to figure out what is real and what is fictional.

Ronsard’s entrapment in this room full of mirrors he has created does not provide any easy means of escape. Instead, escape is possible only through transformation. Ronsard writes of how Narcissus’s human body melts like wax in the sun,

Si bien que Narcis qui fut jadis si beau,  
Qui plus que laict caillé avoit blanche la peau:  
Qui de front, d’yeux, de bouche, et de toute visage  
Resembloit le portrait d’une Adonine image,  
Ne resta seulement qu’une petite fleur,

Qui d'un jaune safran emprunta la couleur. (154-9)

[...with the result that of Narcissus, who was once so beautiful, whose skin was whiter than milk curds, whose forehead, eyes, mouth, and whole face resembled the portrayal of an image of Adonis, there remained only a little flower, which assumed the colour of saffron yellow.]<sup>32</sup>

The significance of the transformation Ronsard envisions here is manifold. The flower we are left with is at once a placeholder for Narcissus and for the poem itself. This means that the flower represents the poem, Narcissus, and the poet-as-Narcissus. The flower replaces the metaphor of the text as a mirror, and whereas the mirror metaphor keeps the poet-as-Narcissus and the poem-as-mirror separate, the flower joins them. Poet and poem become one. We have, in this transformation, the full realization of the narcissistic aesthetic: the complete collapse of difference into similitude; multiplicity distilled into a singular, beautiful form; the synthesis of many disparate elements—mythic boy/poet/text/mirror—into the flower symbol.

But again, what is at stake in this complicated transformation? We may sense that the poem harbors some uneasiness about it, particularly since it reaches us in the form of an elegy. The poem, moreover, seems to suggest that the transformation is reductive. In the final stanza, the speaker moves from a description of the many colors in Narcissus's living face to a description of the monochromatic flower he becomes.

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<sup>32</sup> Quainton and Vinestock's translation.

The transformation turns the boy into *only* a flower, and from variegated colors to *only* yellow. In light of the terms with which the poem describes the transformation, we are left to wonder what has happened to the poet inside of this poetic universe he has created for himself. If the flower, which conflates poet and poem, is all that remains, what kind of access do we have to the poet? Is his life contained in this flower of verse? Is the reduction that occurred in the process of the transformation so great as to result in erasure?

These are the questions and observations reading for Narcissus encourages us to think about. These are questions and observations about the nature of art and the role art might play in the preservation of human lives or culture. Through his rendering of Narcissus, Ronsard is able to explore the nature and construction of beauty and to provoke questions about the self's relation to and of itself in art. A different set of preoccupations and questions arise with regard to his rendering of Echo. Whereas Narcissus is invoked to dissolve the boundary between the inside and outside of the self, Echo is invoked as an intermediary between inside and outside, specifically between the human and the natural, nonhuman world. In Ronsard's poetic universe, she moves us from the contemplation of a metaphorical flower to the contemplation of real flowers.

In "La mort de Narcisse," Ronsard is already developing a reading of Echo that will unsettle the self-centered narcissism that underwrites the poem's aesthetic cachet. In a poem that performs for us the collapse of difference into similitude, Echo is conspicuously relegated to a very small role. Ovid's myth gives her 25-30 lines,

and more importantly, gives her a story, feelings, and a voice. Ronsard's poem, on the other hand, condenses her part into a brief exchange between Narcissus and his image. As Narcissus implores his image to reciprocate his love he says,

“... les Nymphes de ces bois  
Ne m'ont point desdaigné, ny celle qui la vois  
Fait retentir és monts d'une complainte lente,  
Et si n'ont point jouy du fruit de leur attente”

[“The Nymphs in these woods have never spurned me, nor she who sends her voice echoing round the mountains with a lingering lament, yet they did not enjoy the fruits of their expectations”] (119-22).<sup>33</sup>

Echo never speaks in the poem as she does in the *Metamorphoses*. Without a proper name and without a voice, she has become a brief tale that Narcissus uses for bragging rights. His comments on Echo almost seem to say, “I refused to return anyone's love, even the love of Echo who is most deserving of pity.” The poem seems to gesture toward Echo's importance in the same moment in which it dismisses her, refusing her the return Ovid gives her as she repeats and thereby magnifies the cries of Narcissus's mourners. Why does the poem dismiss her in this way?

Her exclusion seems to be the result of her connection to the unassimilable outside world. In a poem that claustrophobically reduces in scope, from the fields and forests of ancient myth to one boy looking into a fountain to one small flower, Echo's entrance would only distract from the beautiful distillation that is taking place.

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<sup>33</sup> Quainton and Vinestock's translation.

We know this because she is mentioned in relation to the surrounding mountains where she delivers her “*complainte lente*.” At her mention the speaker almost seems to look up and around, away from the small enclosure that is his focus. Her presence seems to remind the narcissistic speaker of the world outside, a world of irreducible, unassimilable difference. Immediately after this, the shared epiphany occurs—“*Rien je ne voy dans l’eau que l’ombre de moy-mesme*”—, and then the Narcissus character in the poem refers to himself as a simulacrum. Such an understanding of the character is only possible with reference to the outside world, which Echo makes possible by momentarily tearing the focus away from the small enclosure.

### III. Echo in the Eclogues

Though Ronsard at no point writes an extended meditation on Echo as he does on Narcissus, her role as a mediator between the self-centered culturally-minded world of a Narcissus figure and an unassimilable outside world remains fairly consistent throughout his works. He makes the most frequent reference to her in the eclogues, and these mentions of Echo provide valuable insights into Ronsard’s reading of her story. The eclogues contain conversations between two characters, Perrot and Bellot. In Eclogue 4, Perrot tries to persuade Bellot to put off leaving for Syracuse, where he clearly thinks he might be inspired to write better poetry. “*Ne laisse pour cela, mon Bellot, de chanter,*” he says [“My Bellot, do not leave for Syracuse to sing”]<sup>34</sup>. “*Les bois ne sont pas sourds, ils pourront t’escouter. / Echo*

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<sup>34</sup> My translations of the eclogues.

nous respondra, et nous ferons égales / Nos rustiques chansons à la voix des cigales,” he explains [“The woods are not deaf, they can listen to you. Echo will respond to us, and we will make our rustic songs equal to the voices of the cicadas”]. Here, Echo appears to be the mediator between the cultural locus that is the city and the uncultivated nature beyond or outside the city. She seems to communicate between the voices of the forest and the humans in the poem. She is the voice that responds to the shepherds’ voices, and their voices, we learn, imitate the cicadas or at least aspire to be as mellifluous as they are. Perrot therefore reminds us of the ancient Aristotelian idea that poetry imitates the sounds of nature and suggests that nature, in turn, can reflect the sounds of poetry back to humans through Echo.

This is quite a different version of poetics from the one we encountered in Ronsard’s self-reflexive rendering of Narcissus’s story. Whereas Ronsard’s development of a narcissistic poetics in “La mort” strove to reduce difference, this scene of writing refuses that reduction. Humans and nonhumans remain separate and in conversation with each other, and Echo seems to be poised somewhere between them. The same can be said of her appearance in Eclogue 1 when Perrot explains that “les bois ... chanteront” in celebration of a marriage ceremony. The “creuses vallées” and “eaux des rochers” also participate in the celebration, and then “echo, qui l’oïrra / Si souvent rechanter, souvent le redira” [echo, who will hear the song sung again so often will echo it back just as often]. In Eclogue 4, again at a marriage ceremony, Perrot plays a song on his pipe. Then “Echo luy respondoit” and “les bois qui rechanterent / Le beau chant nuptial jusqu’au ciel le porterent” [And then,

because “Echo responded to him,” “the woods echoed the nuptial song, carrying it up to the sky”].

In all three contexts, Echo seems to be a liminal figure who participates in and mediates between the human and the nonhuman worlds. Whereas the Narcissus myth seems to collapse the human into nature, appropriating the beauty of the flower in the interest of culture, Echo seems to underscore the difference between humans and nonhuman nature as she mediates across some divide. As we have seen, Ronsard only occasionally capitalizes her name, conferring upon it proper-name status, and this choice points to her liminality. She is somewhere between the human realm where the proper and property are operative constructs, and the nonhuman realm. She is somewhere between culture and nature.

Through a comparison of her several brief entrances into Ronsard’s poetry, we can develop a sense of Ronsard’s interpretation of the transformation she undergoes in Ovid. He does not focus on the loss of her physical form. Instead, in her alliance with the woods, rocks, fountains, mountains, and caves, she seems to have transcended her human form rather than lost it. Unlike Daphne, who becomes one lone, silent tree, Echo seems to have undergone a transformation that connects her to all of nature. And while Daphne becomes the laurel Apollo uses to crown his brow and the laurel Petrarca aspires to earn for himself in his love poems for Laura, Echo almost seems to resist such impositions, and to have strength as a result of her diffusion. Without a human body, in Ronsard’s poetry she seems to resist

appropriation, and she points to the problem of appropriating nature since she is associated with a natural world that is vital in both senses of the word.

In “Contre les bûcherons de la forest de Gastine,” nature is alive and important. In an apostrophe to the lumberjack who is clearing the forest’s trees, the poem’s speaker argues that the Gâtine is indispensable. It is important, he suggests, because of the contributions it has inspired him to make to French culture, but it is also important to the creatures who live there. At the center of the poem, and structurally at the threshold between the classicizing language that anthropomorphizes and the nonhuman world of the forest, between culture and nature, we find Echo. She represents the connectedness and possibility of conversation between humans and a vital, natural world, and in the context of this poem, she is in danger.

The Echo-critical message Ronsard delivers in “Contre les bûcherons,” is made possible by the role Echo plays as a mediator between humans and nonhuman nature earlier in Ronsard’s career. She carries song across the boundary between humans and nonhumans, and Ronsard’s respect for nature’s creatures is related to his sense of those creatures as fellow artists who share in and inspire song. Le Guin began her talk by considering what art is, what art’s relationship to language and communication might be, and whether plants, for example, might have their own form of art that we simply do not understand. Thinking of the artistic possibilities within nature seems to be part of subjectifying nature. In Ronsard’s eclogues, where he builds upon classical concepts of mimesis, poetry and song move back and forth

between human speakers and the nonhuman artists of the natural world. The natural world is not understood as a surface that receives a poet's projections. Instead it is the home of fellow artists who share in the production and amplification of beauty.

#### IV. The Real and Mythic Gâtine

“Contre les bûcherons” is one of the last of Ronsard's poems about the Gâtine forest and the Loire River, two features of the French countryside that he wrote about often over the course of his long career. His Gâtine and Loire poems have experienced their own critical renaissance since the 1990s, garnering attention from scholars interested in ecocriticism, ecopoetics, and environmental and nature poetry. “Contre les bûcherons” is demanding of critical attention because it is by far the most Echo-critical poem in Ronsard's oeuvre.

Echo appears in “Contre les bûcherons” to offer an explicit critique of anthropocentrism; the overall message in the poem is that people should stop cutting down trees for self-serving purposes. As many readers of the poem have noticed, however, as the speaker invokes Echo and delivers this message, he evokes sympathy for the trees that are being felled by relying heavily on his anthropomorphizations of the landscape. The effect of his anthropomorphizing is that the difference between the natural world to which the poem refers and the world of nature as it has been appropriated for the sake of cultural production seems to collapse by the end of the poem. Echo appears between the poem's more referential language, which reminds us of the physical world outside the poem, and its most classicizing,

anthropomorphizing language, which describes the woods only in relation to their importance for and as cultural production.

The referential quality of the poem's language comes from the fact that the poet is writing about an actual place, his childhood home in the Gâtine forest, and from the fact that he is writing in response to an actual event, Henri de Bourbon, King of Navarre and future King Henri IV of France's clearing of that forest.<sup>35</sup> Ronsard's family had a deep connection to the land surrounding their home, and the Ronsards were even able to trace the origins of their name back to this connection.

One twentieth century biographer, Pierre Champion, notes that the Ronsards were "une vieille famille de gens . . . qui, de père en fils, en qualité de sergents fieffés, gardaient la forêt de Gastine" (1). He continues, "Ses aïeux, ce sont ces gens de bois, gardes forestier, issus des ronciers dont ils prirent leur nom et qui léguèrent l'amour de la forêt" (2) [... the Ronsards were "an old family made up of people who ... from father to son and in the manner of accomplished sergeants, guarded the Gâtine forest ... His ancestors were forest people, forest guards children of the "ronciers" or brambles from which they took their name, and they passed on a love of the forest"].<sup>36</sup> Ronsard's desire to protect the woods from the lumberjack's axe in "Contre les bûcherons" may have developed from a sense of inherited responsibility.

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<sup>35</sup> See Todd Borlik's "Mute Timber?: Fiscal Forestry and Environmental Stichomythia in the *Old Arcadia*," in which he delineates the historical conditions contributing the Henri de Bourbon's decision to sell the Gâtine for lumber to pay off war debts incurred during the French Wars of Religion.

<sup>36</sup> Translations of Champion's biography are mine.

Many of Ronsard's biographers convey the importance of the land to the poet in his youth. He spent his childhood in the manor of Possonnière, a "moderate-sized house . . . not far from the south or left bank of the Loire, a clear, deep, slow-running river . . . [and] backed by a range of low hills crowned by remnants of the forest of Gastine" (Tilley 43). In describing Ronsard's early education, Champion devotes one half of one sentence to his formal schooling and then explains, "Mais un autre livre est grand ouvert sous ses yeux, celui de la nature, de la forêt que ses aïeux surveillèrent. L'enfant regarde la rivière limpide qui coule entre les saules, la vallée du Loir, la terre qui l'a reçu la première entre ses bras" (5-6) [But another book opens wide before his eyes, the book of nature, of the forest that his ancestors watched over. The young Ronsard looks at the clear river flowing between the willows, the Loire Valley, the land that first received him in its arms]. Then, nearly as enamored with the landscape as he suggests Ronsard was, he goes on to describe the scenery in some detail for the next page and a half.

Similarly, in his biographical essay on Ronsard, Isidore Silver includes sections on Ronsard's family, his education, "The Loire," "The Fountains of Vendôme," and "Gâtine." These are the categories Silver focuses on in his "account of the influences that first guided Ronsard into the path of poetry" (631). The section of his essay that Silver devotes to describing Ronsard's education is very brief. Like Champion, he instead focuses on Ronsard's education from the book of nature, and his "education of field, forest, hill, and river in the peaceful corner of the province of Vendôme into which he had been born" (638).

As Champion explains, all of this “est sorti Ronsard” when he moved to Paris for his advanced education (6), but he would make frequent journeys back to his family home, nestled in the Gâtine on the banks of the Loire, over the next several decades. When his health began to decline, he returned to his home and lived out the remainder of his years writing and revising his poetry (Champion 33).

It was in these final years of Ronsard’s life, when his health began to fail, that Henri de Bourbon authorized deforestation in the Gâtine to pay off the war debts he inherited from his father. Ronsard’s inheritance of an appreciation and sense of responsibility for the forest left him deeply at odds with Henri de Bourbon, who was dealing with his own inherited responsibilities. The loss of the forest while he was himself in declining health must have strengthened Ronsard’s connection to the land. Champion notes, “Jamais Ronsard n’avait été plus vigoureux, plus grand, que pendant les années qu’il passa sur ses terres” (411) [Ronsard had never been stronger or greater than he was during the years he spent on these grounds], and it was toward the end of his life that Ronsard wrote “Contre les bûcherons” in defense of his ancestral home.

When Ronsard writes of his home, his descriptions are imbued with realistic detail as well as with the fantastic qualities of a mythical forest. Sara Sturm-Maddox claims that it is the addition of the former that distinguishes him from Petrarca. She explains, “Ronsard’s use of nature, some readers have suggested, distances his collection from the *Rime sparse* through its frequent recourse to concrete detail in which we readily recognize the landscape, however, stylized, of Vendôme” (53).

Tilley suggests that Ronsard's fixation on his physical environment is also one of the qualities that distinguishes his work from that of his immediate predecessors and contemporaries. In a comparison of Ronsard to Clément Marot, Tilley observes that the two poets differ greatly "in their treatment of nature. Marot sees nature through the eyes of other poets, Ronsard through his own . . . Ronsard . . . though he interweaves with them reminiscences of Horace and Virgil, relies chiefly on his own impressions in his descriptions of the country that he loved so well" (46).

In Ronsard's poems, Vendôme is at once a physical locale and a place of fantasy. The Loire and Gâtine make up a poetic landscape that remains consistent throughout Ronsard's oeuvre. However, the Loire and Gâtine do not provide merely a setting, insofar as a setting refers to "the literary framework of a narrative or other composition."<sup>37</sup> Nor should they be understood as mere context for the various poetic moments they coexist with in Ronsard's poetry, because they are not only textual constructs. Instead, they are also actual geographical places. They make up part of what Felstiner calls the "physical world surrounding us" (xiii), or rather, the physical world surrounding the poet, which informs and is formative of his poetic world.

Ronsard begins intertwining his physical environment with the deeply mythical poetic world early in his career. He writes his odes to the Vendôme region in 1545, and in the odes, he borrows from the ancients' theories of mimesis, the model for poetic production that I have suggested he returns to later in his career in the eclogues. In one of his most famous odes, "À la Fontaine Bellerie," the poet's

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<sup>37</sup> *OED*, "setting, *n.*, 6b."

natural environment is more than a divine source of poetic inspiration in the classical sense.<sup>38</sup> The fountain, one of Ronsard's favorite springs in the area surrounding his house, is home to the naiads who inspire him to write poetry, but it also seems to be a poet like himself. In the poem's third stanza, the speaker describes resting on the grass by the spring:

L'Esté je dors ou repose  
Sus ton herbe, où je compose,  
Caché sous tes saules vers,  
Je ne sçay quoy, qui ta gloire  
Envoira par l'univers,  
Commandant à la Memoire  
Que tu vives par mes vers. (15-21)

[In Summer I sleep or rest on your grassy bank, where, concealed beneath your green willows, I write something that will spread your glory through the universe, bidding Memory to let you live on in my poetry.]<sup>39</sup>

In these lines, a pun on "vers" presents us with an image of the greenness of the willow while also calling to mind the willow's connection to verse. The willow appears to be a "fellow being," or fellow poet. The poem then goes on to make

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<sup>38</sup> In classical texts such as the travelogue of Pausanias (2<sup>nd</sup> Cent. CE), the Pirene fountain is described as a sacred enclosure that Apollo and the Muses would often visit. Poets would sometimes travel there hoping that they would become divinely inspired.

<sup>39</sup> Quainton and Vinestock's translation.

contradictory statements with regard to the natural world's poetic possibilities. It is difficult to say whether the poet learns his art from the natural world, or whether his poetry transcends and is more potent than nature's. On the one hand, its "vers" precedes the poet's own, which doesn't appear until four lines later. On the other hand, the poet is already composing (16) before nature's first "vers."

But the poet has already told us that the fountain is ancient, "la Nymphes  
eternelle / De ma terre paternelle" (8-9), and in the final stanza he emphasizes the  
spring's poetic qualities. There he explains that he will go on "celebrant le conduit /  
Du rocher percé, qui darde / Avec un enroué bruit / L'eau de ta source jazarde / Qui  
trepillante se suit" ["celebrating the stream issuing from the pierced rock, which with  
a gurgling sound spouts out the water of your babbling spring, which dances along  
unceasingly"] (31-5).<sup>40</sup>

These lines evoke two ancient myths: the first is the story of the four sacred  
springs of the Muses, which Pegasus is said to have formed by striking the ground  
with his hooves (Ovid 5.250-82); and the second is the story of Orpheus, whose death  
caused the Hebrus River to become a poet as its "banks echoed" with "strains of  
mourning" (Ovid 3.51-60). In any case, Ronsard's emphasis on the stream's  
musicality and its ancientness represents the stream as an originary poet of which his  
art is mimetic. And yet, despite the fact that it is a poet and is "eternelle," he seems  
to be anxious about its survival.

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<sup>40</sup> Quainton and Vinestock's translation.

Why does an “eternelle” source for poetic inspiration such as the Fontaine Bellerie need to be memorialized and immortalized in the poet’s own verse? Why does he feel the need to make a demand “à la Memoire / Que tu vives par mes vers”? Such promises of immortality in poetry are generally reserved for a beloved addressee who inhabits a beautiful but frail, dirt-bound body. Why must he ensure the fountain’s preservation—“tu seras sans cesse / Des fontaines la princesse, / Moy celebrant le conduit / Du rocher percé” [you will forever be the princess of fountains, because I celebrate the stream issuing from the pierced rock] (29-32)—when its greatness precedes him and is eternal? Two different pictures of the fountain emerge here, one powerful and divine, the other more naturalized and given to movement and change. As Morton explains in his parsing of “nature,” for which the fountain might be read as a metonym, “*Nature* wavers between the divine and the material” (14). What Ronsard’s poem suggests in response to Morton’s observation is that nature also, therefore, wavers between the eternal and the vulnerable.

Ronsard allows nature to waver in this way in “Contre les bûcherons” as well. That is, he shifts between images of nature as physical beings and things and images of nature as the home of anthropomorphized, divine beings by the end of the poem. Part of the potency of the message in “Contre les bûcherons” comes from this wavering. Ronsard characterizes the Gâtine as at once eternal and vulnerable. He suggests that the destruction of the material forest will result in the deaths of nymphs and demigods, beings who would, without human intervention, be eternal when he writes:

Escoute, Bucheron (arreste un peu le bras)  
Ce ne sont pas des bois que tu jettes à bas,  
Ne vois-tu pas le sang lequel degoute à force  
Des Nymphes qui vivoyent dessous la dure escorce?  
[Listen, Lumberjack (stay your arm for a moment). These are not the  
trees of the woods that you cast to the ground. Don't you see the  
blood that forcefully gushes from the Nymphs who live under the hard  
bark?]<sup>41</sup>

Ronsard's anthropomorphizing of the trees in order to get what he wants, to save the forest, suggests that he feels his audience will be persuaded more effectively if he can make them develop an empathic connection to the woods. By presenting images of trees that bleed, Ronsard strengthens the force of his message.

The force of his message also derives from the poem's insistence of a connection between the forest and Ronsard's own career. The poem's readers undoubtedly would have been familiar with the mythology Ronsard developed for himself out of this forest. Reading "Contre les bûcherons," where the woods are partially made of earthly material and are partially divine, contemporary readers may have been reminded of his earlier works in which he had constructed the forest's mythology alongside his development of his own mythic status.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> My translation.

<sup>42</sup> Ronsard aligned himself with various figures and writers of ancient myth over the course of his career. Greene writes of Ronsard's alignment of himself with Homer in the *Abbrégé de l'Art poétique françois* in 1565, and of his self-fashioning after Virgil and Homer in the *Franciade* (198-9). Sara Sturm-Maddox compares his fashioning of himself after Apollo in

In a sonnet to “Sainte Gastine” from the *Amours de Cassandre*, Ronsard writes,

Sainte Gastine, heureuse secrétaire  
De mes ennuis, qui respons en ton bois,  
Ores en haulte, ores en basse voix,  
Aux longz sospirs que mon cuœur ne peult taire—:  
Loyr, qui refrains la course volontaire  
Du plus courant de tes flotz vandomoys,  
Quand acuser ceste beaulté tu m'ois,  
De qui tousjours je m'affame & m'altère :  
Si dextrement l'augure j'ay receu,  
Et si mon œil ne fut hyer deceu  
II Des doulx regardz de ma douce Thalie,  
Dorénavant poëte me ferez.  
Et par la France appellez vous serez,  
L'un mon laurier, l'aultre ma Castalie.

[Sainte Gastine, fortunate secretary of my agony, Who respond in your woods, Now in high, now in low voice, To the long sighs that my heart cannot keep quiet: Loire, you who restrain the impetuous movement Of the swiftest currents through my land, When you hear me accuse

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imitation of Petrarca when he writes the *Amours de Cassandre*, and of Ronsard's reference to himself as “Gaulois Apollon” (17-8, 6).

this beauty, Who always leaves me hungry and thirsty: If I receive the favorable sign, And if my eye was not yesterday deceived, By the sweet looks of my sweet Thalia, From now on you will make me a poet, And you will be called throughout France, The one my laurel, the other my Castalie ...my fountain of Parnassus]<sup>43</sup>

As Silver explains, Ronsard “veut que la forest de Gâtine lui serve du laurier pour la coronner, et qui le fleuve du Loire lui soit en lieu de Castalie” (137)[Ronsard “wants the Gâtine forest to serve as his laurel crown, and the Loire River to take the place of Castalia”]. Marc Bizer compares Ronsard’s formation of his poetic self to Petrarca’s and notes that, in this poem, “Ronsard is intent on establishing his own poetic genealogy, appropriating Petrarca’s legacy of the amorous wood and the laurel myth, yet giving them the cachet of France and the stamp of Ronsard” (162). Ronsard gave France its Homer, its Petrarca. When he writes his goodbyes to the forest in the latter half of “Contre les bûcherons”—“Adieu vieille forest” (41, 49) and “Adieu Chesnes” (55)—he reminds readers that this is the forest “Où premier j’accorday les langues de ma lyre” [This is the forest “where first I taught my seven-tongued lyre to sing]<sup>44</sup> (42). He reminds his readers that this forest is the site of an important moment not only in his history, but in France’s cultural history.

When he imagines the transformation of Gâtine into barren countryside (36), he bemoans the fact that “ny Satyres ny Pans ne viendront plus chez toy” [“neither

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<sup>43</sup> Marc Bizer’s translation.

<sup>44</sup> Translated by Curtis Hidden Page.

Satyres nor Pans will come to you”]<sup>45</sup> (40), and this line harkens back to another of his earlier poems in which he develops the mythology and divinity of the woods. In an ode called “À la forêt de Gastine,”<sup>46</sup> Ronsard writes,

Tes bocages soient toujours pleins

D'amoureuses brigades

De Satyres et de Sylvains,

La crainte des Naïades!

En toi habite désormais

Des Muses le collège,

Et ton bois ne sente jamais

La flamme sacrilège!

[Forever may thy thickets hold / The amorous brigade / Of Satyrs and  
of Sylvans bold. / That make the Nymphs afraid; / In thee the Muses  
evermore / Their habitation claim, / And never may thy woods deplore  
/ The sacrilegious flame.]

The juxtaposition of this poem with “Contre les bûcherons” exposes the irrevocable loss the speaker seems to feel with regard to the felling of the trees of the Gâtine. Because he created a mythology out of the woods and declared them the eternal home of Satyrs and other mythological beings, the actions of the lumberjack

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<sup>45</sup> My translation.

<sup>46</sup> See Appendix C for the full poem, and Appendix D for Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s translation of it.

are equated with reversing the order of the universe; human actions threaten to kill something divine and eternal.<sup>47</sup> The forest, while remaining safe from the “*flamme sacrilège*,” risks falling at the hand of a “*sacrilege meurdrier*” instead (“*Contre*” 23). A version of what the earlier poems had established as the most catastrophic possibility for the forest and for France’s culture has happened.

#### V. And What if Echo no Longer Responds?

“*Contre les bûcherons*” holds the forest suspended between the physical world of nature and the anthropomorphized world of classical mythology. I have described a few of the ways in which the mythology Ronsard has built up around the forest has contributed to the sense of loss he wishes to convey in the poem. Louisa Mackenzie, one of the most influential writers on Ronsard’s Gâtine poems, famously claims, “*Contre les bûcherons*,” “brims with classical references to the point of not seeing the wood for the Ovids and Horaces” (136). While this is, for the most part, true, in the speaker’s first apostrophe to the forest, he reflects on its actual ecology:

Forest, haute maison des oiseaux bocagers,  
Plus le cerf solitaire et les chevreuls legers  
Ne paistront sous ton ombre, et ta verte criniere

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<sup>47</sup> Louisa Mackenzie claims Ronsard’s reacts to the destruction of the Gâtine in “*Contre les bûcherons*” by creating the woods as a sacred home for the Muses. I am arguing here, however, that rather than creating the Gâtine as a sacred space in “*Contre les bûcherons*,” he is instead using his elegy to *remind* us that the woods have been a sacred space since 1552, when he began developing his reputation as a divinely inspired poet in relation to the sacred woods.

Plus du Soleil d'Esté ne rompra la lumiere. (27-30)

[O lofty wood, grove-dwelling birds' retreat, / No more shall stag and  
doe, with light-footed tread, / Feed in thy shadow, for thy leafy head /  
No more shall break the sun's midsummer heat].<sup>48</sup>

The speaker's attention seems to be focused on a physical world rather than the world of poetry at this point. His gaze is directed at the horizon beyond the poem and not on the mythic figures that inhabit its enclosure. Instead of making use of a classicizing aesthetic that anthropomorphizes, this stanza encourages us to picture trees, birds, and deer. A forest. This forest:



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<sup>48</sup> Page's translation.

(Credit for the photo goes to someone by the google username, “Cyann,” who posted it to [panoramio.com](http://panoramio.com), and who includes the following caption: “Chevreuil en lisière de la forêt de Gâtine” [Deer at the edge of the Gâtine]<sup>49</sup>)

For Ronsard’s modern audience, those who do not have the same knowledge or appreciation of the classics that he and many of his contemporaries would have had, this stanza may reach out more poignantly than the rest. For those who find the classical references alienating, this stanza may present the most powerful image. This may be the most powerful image, even for modern readers who are familiar with the Ovids and the Horaces.

Soon after this, approximately midway through the poem, Ronsard again moves away from what will happen to the trees and animals that make up the forest if deforestation continues and returns to what this means to him and his world, the world of poetry. This is where he bids his first “Adieu,” and reminds us that what is important to him is also of cultural importance:

Adieu vieille forest, le jouët de Zephyre,

Où premier j’accorday les langues de ma lyre,

Où premier j’entendi les fleches résonner

D’Apollon qui me vint tout coeur estonner. (41-4)

[“Farewell thou ancient forest, Zephyr’s toy! / Where first I taught my seven-tongued lyre to sing, / Where first I heard Apollo’s arrows ring / Against my heart, and strike it through with joy”].

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<sup>49</sup> My translation.

At this point, the turn towards myth corresponds to the introduction of the lyric “I.” Ronsard sublimates the physical world into the world of myth, nature into culture, in this moment, and this act of sublimation seems to make the expression of the lyric “I” possible. It is instructive that the poem’s first move toward self-expression, toward the self-reflexive and narcissistic, corresponds to a turn away from the ecological.

As a result, the concern for the forest the speaker expresses in the poem at this point becomes what Morton characterizes as environmentalism rather than ecocriticism. Whereas ecological writing and ecocriticism “inevitably involve ideas and decisions about *group* identity and behavior,” environmental writing registers “the feeling of being surrounded by others, or more abstractly, by an otherness, something that is not the self” (17). In Ronsard’s poem, as in Morton’s description of the environmental as opposed to the ecological or ecocritical, the self remains intact and separate from the rest of the natural world. While Ronsard’s continued evocation of myth collapses the difference between humans and nonhumans, the rest of Morton’s definition of environmentalism seems to provide an apt description of what happens in Ronsard’s poem. Difference, for Ronsard, ontological rather than qualitative difference, is introduced, but the environment it constitutes is “my” environment, which is necessarily self-centered and local.

Echo appears in the space between Ronsard’s more ecological and environmental concerns. Between these two stanzas, the speaker imagines that if the deforestation continues, “Tout deviendra muet: Echo sera sans voix” (35, “All will

become mute: Echo will be without a voice”).<sup>50</sup> The disappearance of the forest is understood as the complete loss of Echo’s voice. In fact, because of the parallel structure of the two syntactical units surrounding the colon, Echo is made the equivalent of “tout” or everything. The loss of Echo means that all will be lost, not just trees and nymphs, nature and culture, but *everything*.

This image of Echo silenced intervenes in a contemporary debate in ecocriticism about language’s relationship to the natural world. Some ecocriticism claims that language plays a role in what Timothy Morton describes as our transformation of “place” into “space” (10). Morton synthesizes this strand of thought in the following terms: “In social structure as in thought, goes the argument, place has been ruthlessly corroded by space: all that is solid melts into air” (10). Leonard Scigaj argues that language has been used to bring about this transformation of place into space. He claims abstract language takes our attention away from the physical world when he writes:

We have despoiled nature, the necessary context for any aesthetic act, to the point where we must pause before composing poems that depict nature as a benign and reliable backdrop for human quests for an authentic voice. We can no longer conceive of nature as a bucolic idyll . . . or an echoing hollow filled by poststructural language theory. What we need is a sustainable poetry, a poetry that does not allow the

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<sup>50</sup> My translation.

degradation of ecosystems through inattention to the referential base of all language. We need a poetry that treats nature as a separate and equal other and includes respect for nature conceived as a series of ecosystems . . . These ecosystems sustain every moment of our lives, and, because they have been so bruised by humans, we cannot naturalize them into benign backdrops for human preoccupations or reduce them to nonexistence by an obsessive focus on language in our literary creations. (5)

While I am sympathetic with Scigaj's motivations, I think Ronsard's poetry puts pressure on his assertion that we cannot contribute to the preservation of the environment and its ecosystems when we obsess over language in our literary creations.

Language and abstraction are not necessarily antithetical to nature, or what Scigaj calls, "the referential base of all language" (5). Ronsard's poem insists that there must be communication across the divide between the physical world of nature and the abstracting, anthropomorphizing language of the classical world. This is Echo's function in the poem and also in the eclogues: to mediate between these two seemingly discreet realms or forces. This is the purpose of Echo-critical poetry. Ronsard's Echo-criticism would respond to Scigaj by suggesting that his insistence on separating the abstract and referential will stretch Echo to a breaking point and may silence her, effectively ending the communication she enables. This communication, Ronsard's poem suggests, does not serve only the purpose of keeping the arts intact

and inspiring more poetry. It also, as she turns poetry into a hybrid space, connects human and nonhuman beings and works to save the lives of the trees and ecosystems in the Gâtine.

Felstiner, like Ronsard, believes in a poetry that can save the earth. “[W]ords tie us in one with nature, tying human and nonhuman,” Felstiner writes (15). In Ronsard’s poetry, Echo is that “tie,” and when the tie becomes strained, poetry becomes Echo-critical in an effort to keep the line of communication open. Ronsard’s Echo-critical poetry makes an effort like the one Le Guin suggests we make when she says we need to “start subjectifying nature, because look where objectification has gotten us.” His poem insists on the subjectivity of the trees in an effort to counteract their objectification. In this way, he counteracts the process whereby “habitats” become “natural resources” or commodities (Nardizzi 4).

While the boundaries between beings have become reified in Ronsard’s poetry, Echo and Echo-critical poetry open up the possibility of movement and communication across those boundaries, and this communication has the power to affect positive change in the physical world or to slow the process of negative changes. Our imaginative spaces sometimes change physical places, and we can be attentive to the ways in which that is happening without insisting, perhaps naively, that the avenues of change should or could be blocked. While a causal line cannot be drawn between the two, Ronsard’s Echo-critical poetry may have helped to change the public perception of forests in France. In 1669, King Louis XIV wrote a famous ordinance that significantly restricted deforestation in France. The ordinance outlines

the general guidelines for forest management and explains, “we will that they be preserved” (Ch. XVII, Art. 5).

In 1872, M. Cézanne writes in his *Étude sur les Torrents des Alps* that, despite the King’s efforts to regulate deforestation, “nothing could now arrest the *déboisement*—the destruction of the woods, and the men, then indeed few in number, who looked to the public weal, began that united cry of lamentation of which we hear still, even to-day, the prolonged echo” (Brown 11). Though he characterizes the Echo-critical as ineffectual here, we might wonder what would happen if the “few in number” became many. If poetry could, in Felstiner’s words, “reach toward” us with its beauty and force, could we lighten our footprint?

The message in Ronsard’s Echo-critical poem, “Contre les bûcherons,” is finding a new and expanding audience today. A google search turns up more than 23,000 references to the poem, many providing excerpts of the poem, some engaging critically, and some expressing admiration in prose or in song. The message is resonating because again, or still, the forces of nature and culture are being pulled apart, endangering Echo and the community she represents.

Le Guin’s poem, “A Hymn to Aphrodite,” is also written in the spirit of Echo-criticism. Echo is not mentioned in the poem, but myth and nature, anthropomorphizing classicism and the physical world, are imagined in strained communion with one another. Le Guin does not imagine the silenced figure of Echo. Instead, the force of her Echo-critical message comes across in the transposition of Venus from the mythological world to the physical ruin in Fukushima. Le Guin

combines the beauty of poetry with the ugliness of ecological destruction, allowing the physical world to read back on and transform our imaginative constructions, even going so far as to challenge the indestructibility of an immortal. The poem leaves us behind, looking after Venus “in [her] passing,” following her like Death, her dog, as we wait, foolish, and fearful that she is already gone.

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### Chapter 3: Excess and Echoing Hollows in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*

"... the caesura between the human and the animal passes first of all within man ..."

– Giorgio Agamben, *The Open*

"[Echo's] punishment fails (in order) to mark *différance*. Ovid covers it over with telling; we open it."

– Gayatri Spivak, "Echo"

#### I. Opening

If Prince Hal has taught us anything it is that Shakespeare and his contemporaries loved a good redemption story. In Shakespeare's *Henry V*, we first meet the future King Henry V as a rebellious young man who spends his time drinking sack and playing pranks on his friends and acquaintances. After a firm reprimand from his father, Hal apologizes for his behavior in his youth, which was "faulty wandered and irregular," and he asks his father, the king, to "find pardon" on his "true submission" (3.2.27-8). He then promises, "I shall hereafter, my thrice-gracious lord, be more myself" (3.2.92-3), by which he means that he will "redeem" his faults and grow in honor.

Hal's claim that he is not himself is instructive with regard to the plays' underlying philosophy of being. As Hal triangulates himself between King Henry, the valiant Hotspur, and the fun-loving but admittedly cowardly Falstaff, he

recognizes himself as a divided being, a being who, in his maturity, can disavow his youthful indiscretions and at long last become himself. But what is he when he is not himself, and is he successful in his transformation, leaving all remnants of his former self behind? In the two plays preceding *Henry V*, we witness Hal's kingly self-fashioning taking place through dialectical processes of relationality and negation. He makes himself a mirror of Hotspur, but renounces Falstaff and attempts to negate all the parts of him that are reminiscent of his old friend.

In order for his self-fashioning to be successful, he must master those parts of himself he wishes to dispense with, but even in his most kingly moments, the plays insist on the fractured nature of the self. As the chorus at the beginning of *Henry V* describes the entrance of "warlike Harry, like himself" (1.1.6), we are reminded of the gap in being that are instituted in the earlier plays, and we see that when he should most be himself, he is instead only ever *like himself* and can only pursue selfhood asymptotically. The closure of these gaps in being are continually deferred. In the *Henriad*, as elsewhere in the Shakespearean oeuvre, they remain open, such that they become constitutive of being itself.

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In chapter one I argue that the charges of narcissism and egoism that have been leveled against Petrarca rely on a potentially anachronistic reading of the self at the center of the *Canzoniere*. Narcissus, I suggest, acts as an aesthetic model for Petrarca rather than an ontological one, and Echo gets us much closer to understanding the type of being we encounter in the Petrarchan speaker. While

Petrarca's speaker seems to obscure the otherness of everything he gazes upon by turning them into versions of himself, this may be more a reflection of his fluidity than his egoism. The boundaries between the self and non-self are porous and admit enough transformative change in Petrarca's sonnet sequence that it becomes difficult to differentiate the humans from the nonhumans. Rather than representing two terms whose oppositionality defines them, "human" and "nonhuman" instead appear to be mutually constitutive.

In chapter two I argue that the versions of being we read in Ronsard's poetry are more bounded. As the boundaries between beings harden, the forces of nature and culture become increasingly antithetical. Ronsard's intervention into the battle between nature and culture is to transform poetry into a hybrid space that accommodates both sides of the divide and to create a poetic voice that mediates between the opposing forces that threaten to tear it apart. As with Petrarca, Narcissus serves as an aesthetic model Ronsard, and he identifies Echo as a model for the poetic voice, a voice he fears will be silenced if nature and culture become continue to be polarized. He develops an echo-critical poetic voice in an effort to bridge a gap that he fears is widening.

Eight years after Ronsard's death, England was struck with a severe outbreak of the bubonic plague that closed its theaters, one of the public spaces they feared were contamination zones that would spread the disease and strengthen its potency. While taking a necessary break from playwriting, Shakespeare made his first foray into poetry and print with the publication of *Venus and Adonis* in 1593.

The 1590s were important years in England's cultural development. Queen Elizabeth and the Tudor court were willing to financially support poetry and the other arts. This decade, arguably the core of England's Renaissance, saw the publication of major poetic works by Edmund Spenser, Philip and Mary Sidney, and Christopher Marlowe, as well as philosophical treatises by Richard Hooker and Francis Bacon; it saw the construction of architectural wonders such as Hardwick Hall; and it rang with the measured notes of some of the most famous madrigals in the English tradition. Not coincidentally, as English culture flourished, the country's relationship to nature transformed.

Vin Nardizzi explores the shift in the England's attitudes toward nature through its slow transformation of "habitat[s]" into "natural resources" (4). During the 1590s, he explains, "fiscal forestry" led to extensive "woodland scarcity in England" (4, 119). This ecological depletion, Nardizzi notes, led to poetic interventions, some along the same lines as that produced by Ronsard at the end of his life.

This decade also featured bear-baiting as a form of popular entertainment, an entertainment that allowed participants to live out what Dan Brayton refers to as "a European fantasy of mastery over nature" (186). The violence of the spectacle led one observer to write in 1596, "the Antipathie and crueltie, which one beast sheweth to another, is the fruite of our rebellion against God" (Perkins 141), a statement that gives pause. Whether the beasts referred to here are the bears and dogs who fight them or the humans who unleash the dogs is unclear. Shakespeare may have had this

fashionable but increasingly reviled pastime in mind when he wrote his most famous stage direction, “Exit, pursued by a bear” (*Winter’s Tale* 3.3, stage direction).

To the list of things that reoriented sixteenth-century England’s relationship to nature, we can add oceanic exploration in the name of colonial expansion. Steve Mentz writes of the range of possibilities for interpreting Shakespeare’s oceans as he claims, on the one hand, that “oceanic liberty generated a powerful cultural fantasy that Shakespeare’s plays engage as a vision of poetic power” (xii), and on the other, that “the sea throws cold water on the happy dreams of environmentalism ... [and] destabilizes our fantasies of sustainable growth and a harmonious relationship between human culture and the natural world” (xii). One of Shakespeare’s responses to the increasingly fraught relationship of humans to the natural world was to produce new beings through which to consider the divide.

Brayton takes up the question of how Elizabethans’ changing interactions with and understandings of the ocean led to the development of new ontologies. Citing Shakespeare’s Caliban as his example, Brayton claims the transformation of humans’ relation to the ocean led to “an ontological hybridity whose condition of possibility is the sea” (186). With regard to Caliban, Shakespeare follows in Ronsard’s footsteps and turns to hybridity in his exploration of new ways to traverse the gap between nature and culture, nonhuman and human.

Though I do not have the space to pursue the idea here, I conjecture that Caliban and Ariel may embody the range of affective responses Elizabethans may have had to oceanic exploration and the colonialist project. In such a reading, Ariel

would correspond to the new world's opening up of the "new visions of poetic power" Mentz refers to, and Caliban would correspond to what Simon Estok refers to as "ecophobia," "a generalized fear or contempt for the natural world and its inhabitants" (4), a phenomenon he connects to England's colonialist expansion (77).

In the 1590s, Shakespeare approached the questions of being opened up by his contemporaries' turbulent relationship with nature more slowly. Rather than using the jarring hybridity of Caliban to think through these questions, he considered them through the unfolding of metamorphosis in *Venus and Adonis*. It is no wonder that the Ovidian epyllion became one of the poetic genres of choice at this point in England's history. Ovid provided Shakespeare and his contemporaries with stories in which "careless things took shape, change followed change, / And with it unknown species of mankind" (*Metamorphoses* 1.87-8).<sup>51</sup>

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One of the most charming qualities of the story of Venus and Adonis, both in Ovid's telling of it and in Shakespeare's, is its transformation of the goddess into one of these "unknown species of mankind." Shakespeare's Venus occupies a liminal space with regard to being. While she may not be merely mortal, she does not quite live up to her divine potential in overwhelming majority of the poem. In the action that unfolds, the goddess of love is stripped of her divine power as she experiences the feelings of love she is used to inspiring in others. A.D. Cousins argues she is

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<sup>51</sup> This translation belongs to Horace Gregory. All other English translations of Ovid in this chapter are from Rolfe Humphries's edition, which I prefer for its clarity and elegance. But here I prefer Gregory's for its closeness to the Latin.

humanized by love. “One of the most important aspects of her characteristics,” Cousins writes, “is her discovering the familiar, human experience of loving another in vain” (16). Noam Flinker similarly claims Venus’s experience of “sexual desire and tragic grief” simultaneously secularizes and humanizes her (92). Only within this unique context can Venus, the goddess of love, refer to another being as “love’s master” (585), lending him the kind of divine power that she normally wields but newly lacks.

Surprisingly, therefore, some of Shakespeare’s most compelling ideas regarding humans’ relationship to the natural world in *Venus and Adonis* do not develop in relation to the character who transforms from an anthropomorphic being to an anthomorphic one. These ideas come instead through the triangulated relationship between Venus, her environment, and the poem’s narrator. Through this triangulation, we can map the key points in Shakespeare’s reflections on being in the poem.

These reflections are responses to Ovid and Petrarca as much as they are responses to the turbulent relationship between nature and culture in sixteenth-century England. The most profoundly intertextual moment in the poem, a moment in which Shakespeare reads Ovid through the lens of Petrarca, allows us to explore the status of being in the poem at multiple levels. First, we can see how he reads Petrarca’s construction of being in the *Canzoniere*, which differs significantly from the reading I propose in chapter one. Second, we can see how he integrates Petrarca’s voice into his own poetic voice in order to distance himself from Petrarca. He thereby produces

his poetic self as a negation of Petrarca's, and through this negation of something that clearly has become a part of himself, he inscribes within his poetic being what Giorgio Agamben calls "an intimate caesura" (15).

This caesura, according to Agamben, is the space of the non-self within the self, against which the self is constituted. Agamben argues that this caesura or open develops "between the human and the animal," but that it "passes first of all *within* the human" (16, my emphasis). By this he means that humans define themselves against animality that they contain within themselves, but always in the form of a negation. This understanding of the being of the human unfolds in Shakespeare's poem not only in the context of the anthropomorphized Venus's relationship to animals, but also in her relationship to plant life and other beings and things in her environment, as well as in the narrator's relationship to Ovid and Petrarca.

All of these relationships are self-constituting relationships—that is, they constitute selves or various versions of being in the poem—and all of them reveal the non-identity of being. All point to the presence of openings within being that allow one to be, like Prince Hal, something or someone other than oneself. In *Venus and Adonis*, the openings between and within beings are also the echo chambers in which the poem's echo-critical voice resonates.

## II. Methods

In addition to engaging with ecocriticism and philosophy, my argument that being in Shakespeare's poem is constituted through a process of internal negation that

opens up a space of non-identity within the self grows out of existing scholarship that analyzes *Venus and Adonis*'s contributions to theories of identity formation. Such scholarship, mostly literary criticism within the fields of queer theory and gender and sexuality studies, has influenced my sense of the beings shaped in and by the poem, as well as the methodology I follow as I read these beings.

In *Unhistorical Shakespeare*, Madhavi Menon claims *Venus and Adonis* presents numerous points of resistance to teleological thinking and that these resistances have ontological effects. Teleology, she explains, is “the nominal term” for an “investment in conclusive progress” (*Unhistorical* 28). It is “defined as the doctrine of ends or final causes,” and it “depends on a sequence leading to an end that can retrospectively be seen as having had a beginning” (*Unhistorical* 28). An anti-teleological perspective, on the other hand, is “embracing [of] inconsequence and instability” (32). She locates *Venus and Adonis*'s “anti-teleological success” in its “investment in failure as a theoretical paradigm” (34). The poem replays scenes failure and irresolution, and it breaks apart the system of cause and effect, she argues.

The examples Menon cites as evidence of *Venus and Adonis*'s anti-teleological success include its recurrent juxtaposition of logical inconsistencies, its two main characters' failure to consummate, and the fact that the poem's other sexualized encounters—the puncture of Adonis's soft inner thigh by the boar's tusk, for example—are not reproductive and thus thwart the teleological expectations the poem sets up. Shakespeare's poem continually “prompts in the reader a desire that it fails to gratify,” she explains (48).

For Menon, this reading has high stakes because the anti-teleological quality of Shakespearean desire puts pressure on the teleological underpinnings of historicist approaches to reading both the past and ourselves. She suggests that this pressure, in fact, has ontological as well as methodological implications. She writes:

Even as “Shakespeare” has been hailed as the precursor of our current identity regimes—indeed, of our current academic and sexual identities—his histories also challenge the way in which we arrive at such formulations about identity and ontology. Always the ontological prop for “our” modes of being, Shakespeare is also the teleological point to which “we” aspire ...[but] “Shakespeare” exists only as a set of incoherencies: if he criticizes empire, then he also institutes it; if he supports racism, then he also undermines it; if he ends his plays heterosexually, then he also embraces homosexual desire. (25)

Menon argues that “internal difference” and “incoherencies” make the Shakespearean text, and indeed his name, an unreliable signifier—unstable foundations to build ourselves and our histories upon.

While Menon’s work focuses on how *Venus and Adonis*’s “internal difference[s]” and “incoherencies” affect identity formation outside the context of the poem, in *Shakespeare’s Schoolroom*, Lynn Enterline analyzes how they affect identity formation within it. Her specific interest in ontology and identity in *Venus and Adonis* is focused on gendered sexuality and the formation of the masculine ego. In her analysis of *Venus and Adonis* in *Shakespeare’s Schoolroom*, Enterline reads

the failed consummation at the poem's core in a different way than Menon. She explains, "Critics generally note that the poem's joke on Venus stems from the fact that she is trapped by Petrarchan rhetoric ill suited to the occasion" (62). The poem comically places Venus in the position of the male wooer in the Petrarchan sequence, which leaves her "busily turning Adonis into Laura," Enterline claims (62).

What Menon reads as a methodology of failure that is unique to *Venus and Adonis* Enterline instead suggests is the defining characteristic of an entire poetic tradition, inherent in the Petrarchan poetics Shakespeare parodies. "[A] literary mode founded on unrequitedness," she explains, "presumes the speaker's disappointment" (66). Like Menon, however, Enterline recognizes certain incoherencies in the poem, which she attributes to Shakespeare's intertextuality. She argues that the poem's integrations of Ovid and Petrarca lead to these incoherencies as she writes,

When Petrarchism's binary conventions of address meet Ovid's polymorphous eroticism, the two produce a poem whose plot, tension, and humor depend on the differences between "male" and "female" bodies, identities, and desires while undermining those distinctions at every turn. (67)

I agree that Shakespeare's poem establishes binaries only to muddy such distinctions or to explore the fungibility of the placeholders on either side of the binary, but Enterline reads less fluidity in Petrarca's work than I do in chapter one. There I argue that Petrarca's own intertextuality with the *Metamorphoses* allows his speaker to transform into male, female, and nonhuman beings over and over again in the

*Canzoniere*, making him just as prone to polymorphous eroticism as Ovid's mythic characters.

Shakespeare's poem explores polymorphous eroticism, Enterline suggests, by placing Venus in different roles, sometimes that of the Petrarchan speaker, and sometimes that of a nurturing mother. Venus's gender-bending role reversals become "problems ... for interpretations that define Venus univocally," Enterline claims (68). To add to the confusion, the figures for Venus and her desire are also sometimes, Enterline suggests, species-bending as well. Venus, who is jealous of the boar who kills Adonis, imaginatively transforms herself into him, penetrating and killing Adonis all over again. At another time Venus is a "voracious eagle penetrating Adonis's body with her loving beak" (Enterline 68). "Such startling transformations," Enterline explains, "give the lie to simple taxonomies that separate pre- from post-oedipal narratives or hetero- from homo-erotic desires" (68), but the poem's challenges to these taxonomies are filtered through another important set of taxonomic classifications, those that Venus imaginatively crosses in her desire to harness the penetrative powers of the eagle or the boar.

Her imaginative species-crossing calls to mind the two worldviews I discuss in chapter one in relation to Pico della Mirandola. In his famous *Oration*, Pico articulates the popular belief in the Great Chain of Being and the idea that humans are microcosms that contains the full potential of the macrocosm of creation. Neither worldview offers a positive definition of the human. Instead, what distinguishes humans is their transformative nature, their ability to move up the chain toward the

divine or down the chain toward animals or even unfeeling, inanimate beings. Pico denies the human any unique essence of its own and instead emphasizes humans' connectedness to other beings.

One of the clearest articulations of the Great Chain of Being and the microcosm/macrocosm theories in Shakespeare's lifetime came from Edward Topsell's *Historie of Four-Footed Beasts*, which was first published in 1607, and which "borrowed heavily from Konrad Gesner's Latin *Historia Animalium* published in Zurich (1551-8)" (Egan 92). Gesner, Gabriel Egan explains, argues,

humans and animals are not so far apart in physical nature, being made of the same stuff and also linked together in the Great Chain of Being that runs through "the heavenly spirits and degrees of Angels and celestiall bodies ... the minds of men ... and from men to other creatures that have life or sence, as to plants and inanimate bodyes, so as the inferiors do alwaies so compose themselues to the imitation of their superiours, even as their shaddowes and resemblaunces." (92-3)

One thing that is notable in this passage is its suggestion that lesser beings imitate superior beings in the chain, which makes it particularly striking that Venus is willing to imagine herself in a position of resemblance to an eagle or a boar. In context, her willingness to trade places with beings that occupy a lower place on the chain reveals the strength of her love for Adonis.

This belief that lesser beings imitate superior ones sets a precedent for the era's attitudes toward imitation more generally, such that Renaissance English writers

versed in humanist imitative practices had to grapple with a sense of inferiority as they imitated the texts of earlier writers. Shakespeare's way of dealing with this is to, over the course of his career, offer an extended if inconsistent critique of humanist curricula that insisted on the value of imitation. Indeed, this is the core of Enterline's analysis. In *Venus and Adonis*, she explains, Shakespeare makes use of the texts he would have been taught to imitate in school, but he has "a way of deploying the texts and formal techniques he learned at school against the institution in which he first learned them" (Enterline 74). The most recognizable example of his use of his intimate knowledge of grammar school practices against that very institution occurs in *Love's Labour's Lost* through the buffoonish schoolmaster Holofernes. In *Venus and Adonis*, he makes a similar move, this time with regard to specific texts; he uses his intimate knowledge of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Petrarca's *Canzoniere* against their authors.

Shakespeare's engagement with Ovid does not match the irreverence he brings to the character of Holofernes, but it does entail a resistance to Ovid's mastery, a resistance made manifest in *Venus and Adonis*'s piling up of aesthetic one-upmanship and excess. A passing remark by Shakespeare's narrator on art's ability to bring the dead to life reflects something of the anxiety the poem works through as a result of its indebtedness to Ovid. The narrator describes how "art with nature's workmanship at strife," seeks to outdo nature by making its objects lovelier than they in fact are, "as if the dead the living should exceed" (291-2). While these lines open up a gap within poets' mimetic acts of representing nature, they also speak to the

poem's anxiety that the dead Ovid will exceed the living Shakespeare. The poem copes with this anxiety by at once paying homage to Ovid through imitation and seeking to outdo him at every turn. Shakespeare, for instance, recapitulates Ovid's 200-line myth, but Shakespeare's version is bigger, coming in around 1,200 lines. Also, instead of one pair of Ovidian figures, we get two, since the poem overlays the story of Venus and Adonis from Book X with the language, themes, and image patterns from Narcissus and Echo's story in Book III.

In an effort to outdo another literary master, Shakespeare also expands the narcissistic aesthetic he borrows from Petrarca. This aesthetic produces patterns along lines of sameness, patterns that create beauty out of repeated images and music out of repeated sounds. But, to borrow a line from *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare, in engaging with this aesthetic pattern, gives us excess of it, that surfeiting he may test our appetites for such things (1.1.2).

When Petrarca offers his allusion to Narcissus in *Canzoniere* 45, he playfully recreates Narcissus's mirror by ending two lines with words that act as images of each other. Ronsard does the same thing in "La mort de Narcisse," and in addition, he makes use of chiasmus, another type of formal mirror common in poetry. When Shakespeare engages with this tradition as well, he uses the same tools, but he adds to the toolbox other mirror-like rhetorical figures, such as antimetabole, plocce, diacope, mesodiplosis, anadiplosis, and epizeuxis—rhetorical figures for repetition that he

would have learned in school when rehearsing exercises modeled on Erasmian copia.<sup>52</sup>

But something is amiss in the proliferation of these rhetorical mirrors. They surround the poem's one explicit reference to Narcissus and are part of the tradition that develops out of his story. And yet, Narcissus is invoked as a figure for stagnation and sterility and the reference has distinctly homophobic undertones. Venus cites his story as a lesson, or rather as a warning of the stakes of refusing the pleasures of heterosexual sex. The fundamental irony in Narcissus's appearance in the text develops out of the tension between what Narcissus represents in the context of Venus's speech and what he represents in the context of the Petrarchan poetics Shakespeare imitates and transforms. On the one hand Narcissus represents stagnation, sterility, and homophobia; on the other, he represents fecundity, creativity, and a love of sameness. These two somewhat antithetical readings of the Narcissus figure do not cancel each other out. Instead, they coexist in tension with one another, making the poem's position on narcissism unclear and the figure of Narcissus (rather fittingly) un-unified and double.

Though operating differently in this context, the non-identity of being in Shakespeare's poem thus seems to extend even to its mythic figures. It also affects the poem's portrayals of Petrarca since the narrator defines his voice against that of the Italian poet. But Petrarca remains a voice that is nonetheless constitutive of that narrative voice since the poem makes frequent use of Petrarca's language, themes,

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<sup>52</sup> See Appendix E for a glossary of rhetorical figures.

and rhetorical figures. The Petrarchan voice resonates loudly in *Venus and Adonis*, and the moment in which it is clearest is also the one that most clearly serves the purpose of differentiating Shakespeare's narrative voice from his.

### III. "Beauty breedeth beauty"

Thomas Edwards, a contemporary of Shakespeare's and the author of two lesser-known epyllia called *Cephalus and Procris* and *Narcissus*, is one of the earliest commentators on *Venus and Adonis*. He mentions Shakespeare's poem in the envoy to his second narrative poem, *Narcissus*.<sup>53</sup> In the reference, he focuses on Adonis's beauty and explains how deserving Adonis was of Venus's affections. If she had not loved him, Edwards writes, "other nymphs [would] have sent him baies" (48). Two stanzas later, Edwards's speaker echoes this line by saying Adonis's "golden art might woo us / to have honored him with baies" (60). The repetition highlights how the popular understanding of the relationship between poet and poem has shifted from Ronsard's context to Shakespeare's. That is to say, we can see that "Adon" is being used as a figure for Shakespeare himself, just as other heroes and heroines from the world of poetry are being conflated with their authors in the poem.<sup>54</sup>

The overall effect of the poem is to express the writer's perhaps disingenuous belief that he has no right to be in the company of these great writers/characters, and the terms the poem deploys in its descriptions of Edwards's inadequacy are telling.

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<sup>53</sup> See Appendix F.

<sup>54</sup> Edwards refers to Spenser as "Collyn" (25), Samuel Daniel as "Rosamond" (37), Thomas Watson as "Amintas" (39) and Christopher Marlowe as "Leander" (39).

The envoy addresses the preceding work, *Narcissus*, as a “pretie wanton boy” (7), and then the speaker remarks, “What a sire did hatch thee forth” (8). The speaker then contrasts Edwards with the great poets who “divinely dreamt” (13), and comments on Edwards’s “frostie lims of age,” “uncouth shape,” “blearing eies,” and his euphemism-laden broken pen (19, 20, 23). These descriptions of Edwards’s physical form are presented as the explanation for why he “cannot cunningly / Make an image to awake” (17-8), wherein the image is clearly meant to represent an idealized version of the poem he has written.

Edwards’s choice to refer to successful poetry as an image of the poet suggests that the slow epiphanic awakening Ronsard depicts in “La mort de Narcisse,”—the realization that the poet is like Narcissus and the poem his reflective pool—has become more commonplace. What Ronsard develops over a few hundred lines has been condensed here into two.

A finer point about the relationship between poets and their poetry that surfaces in the envoy’s references to Shakespeare/Adonis is that the beauty of the poem is related specifically to the physical form of the poet. Edwards’s speaker suggests its writer’s age and decrepitude prevent him from producing a worthy poem/image. Its beauty is contingent upon his beauty, for as the Shakespearean Venus says, “beauty breedeth beauty” (167).

Edwards, convinced his own beauty is not enough to enliven the poem, borrows some from Shakespeare. While his other narrative poem, *Cephalus and Procris*, proceeds in couplets like Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander*, the envoy to

*Narcissus* mirrors the form of Shakespeare's poem, skipping along in six-line stanzas like *Venus and Adonis*. More importantly, it turns Venus's statement—"beauty breedeth beauty"—into a poetic conceit that playfully allows the poem to comment on its own inadequacy while explaining its reasons for imitating Shakespeare.

In Shakespeare's poem, "beauty breedeth beauty" is the governing aesthetic, and Venus speaks this line while making the poem's only explicit reference to Narcissus. This section of the poem is also imitative, borrowing beauty from Shakespeare's precursors, Ovid and Petrarca. In this moment, Shakespeare adds his epyllion to a long tradition that playfully responds to Narcissus's story through the incorporation of rhetorical figures that act like mirrors. Whereas Petrarca included a rhetorical mirror in his repetition of line endings in *Canzoniere* 45 and Ronsard included repetitions like Petrarca's along with chiasmus, Shakespeare's poem creates a rhetorical hall of mirrors.

The poem abounds with rhetorical figures for repetition, creating a pattern of reflection-making or doubling that becomes part of the poem's excess. That the poem's rhetorical patterns contribute to the sense of its excess has been touched upon by a number of readers. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, for instance, writes, "In the 'Venus and Adonis,' the first and most obvious excellence, is the perfect sweetness of the versification ... The delight in richness and sweetness of sound, even to a faulty excess" (Porter 152). Heather Dubrow, attributes this excess to Venus and comments on Venus's use of rhetoric and artifice in her efforts to woo Adonis. She associates the poem's excessiveness with its use of mirror-like rhetorical figures and notes that

Venus is “governed by paradox,” “extravagance,” and “excess,” and that she has a “habit of naming and re-naming” (37).

Pauline Kiernan describes two different directions Shakespearean scholarship has gone in its responses to the poem’s excessiveness; scholars, she explains, have either tended to argue that in the poem Shakespeare is “showing off with a self-indulgent manipulation of literary conceits” or have defended him against charges of “self-indulgent excess” (87). Regardless of whether readers have viewed the poem’s excessiveness favorably or unfavorably, in many of their assessments, the poem’s excess is connected explicitly to the poem’s repetitive use of rhetorical figures, and also is often connected specifically to the mirror-like ones.

This pattern of repetitive rhetorical excess emanates from Venus’s description of Narcissus’s initial encounter with his image. In an effort to understand Adonis’s rejection of her, she says to him,

“Is thine own heart to thine own face affected?  
Can thy right hand seize love upon thy left?  
Then woo thyself, be of thyself rejected,  
Steal thine own freedom, and complain on theft.  
Narcissus so himself himself forsook,  
And died to kiss his shadow in the brook.” (157-62)

Venus accuses Adonis of selfishly loving himself and compares him to Narcissus. Her speech abounds with doubles, and Venus, ever the opportunist in this poem, is given to doubling what she loves. In each of the sestet’s references to Adonis, she

duplicates the pronoun that refers to him. In the first line of the sestet—“Is thine own heart to thine own face affected?”—the possessive pronoun “thine” is repeated, “thine own heart” coupled with “thine own face.” In the second line—“Can thy right hand seize love upon thy left”—again we encounter the repetition of the possessive pronoun “thine.” In the third line, “thyself” is doubled: “Then woo thyself, be of thyself rejected’.”

This rhetorical pattern adds to the musicality to the verse, a musicality that strikes a discordant note with the meaning of the lines, which act as a condemnation of Adonis for refusing to engage in the reproductive hetero-sex that would allow him to recreate his beauty for future generations. Through her use of this pattern of doubling, Venus demonstrates her power to do in language the thing Adonis refuses to do through sex: reproduce Adonis. These instances of doubling point to the potency of language, a potency that the poem’s most extended reference to Echo will give us cause to be wary of.

That this pattern of doubling in this moment is associated with the Narcissus myth and the poetic tradition he inspires is made clear in the penultimate line of the stanza, which includes the purest example of a poetic reproduction of Narcissus’s mirror: “Narcissus so himself himself forsook’,” Venus says. Through the use of the rhetorical figure *ploce*, Venus recreates the scene of Narcissus gazing into the pond, and through this repetition makes Narcissus “himself” gaze at “himself.”

As Eric Langley explains in his reading of this line, “[T]his tiny display of Shakespearean rhetorical ingenuity encapsulates much of what follows” (11).

Langley then describes “the reflection of ‘himself’ against ‘himself’” as “an interaction admitting no difference or threatening alterity” (11). Though, as I have argued, the “Shakespearean rhetorical ingenuity” Langley attributes to this line predates Shakespeare, he is right to suggest that it captures, on a small scale, something significant about the rest of the poem.

This reflection of “himself” against “himself” acts as the poem’s aesthetic model, and in the lines that follow, Venus discloses its aesthetic motto as well. She continues to try to persuade Adonis to reciprocate her love in the stanza following her reference to Narcissus:

“Torches are made to light, jewels to wear,  
Dainties to taste, fresh beauty for the use,  
Herbs for their smell, and sappy plants to bear;  
Things growing to themselves are growth’s abuse:  
Seeds spring from seeds, and beauty breedeth beauty;  
Thou wast begot; to get it is thy duty.” (163-8)

The first clause in this stanza creates a grammatical structure that each of the following lines duplicates until the climax in the penultimate line, where Venus articulates the poem’s aesthetic motto: “beauty breedeth beauty.” This idea, along with the rest of the line’s argument about seeds, works to naturalize the reproduction Venus touts as a duty. Caroline Walker Bynum describes where the structuring logic of this line comes from. The idea develops from what she describes as a “classical trope ‘like from like,’ [which is] understood to mean that like is generated from like,

like returns to like, like knows like via likeness” (24). Shakespeare follows the classical trope in these lines at the level of syntax as well as meaning.

The grammatical duplication in the first five lines of the stanza is compounded by lexical duplication—“Seeds spring from seeds, and beauty breedeth beauty” (162). This is the clearest expression of the poem’s aesthetic principle, and it represents a distillation of Shakespeare’s contribution to a long tradition of poetic narcissisms. The unique marker of this contribution is its excessive magnification of others’ poetics so that it reaches the level of parody. In keeping with a pattern of excess, Shakespeare doesn’t limit his use of the rhetorical mirrors that are characteristic of the poetic tradition for which Narcissus is a figure.

The poem has a chiasmic structure, with Venus’s first reference to Adonis mirroring the end of the poem. She refers to him at the beginning as “the field’s chief flower,” which of course prefigures his transformation, after which she will refer to him as a “poor flower” (8, 1177). Additionally, the early comical moment in which she “pluck[s] him” from his horse prefigures the ending when she “crops the stalk” of the Adonis flower, thus strengthening the chiasmic quality of the poem (30, 1175).

In addition, other rhetorical mirrors lend the poem a sonorous quality that delights the ears and create networks of images that delight the intellect. The narrator, for instance, describes Venus’s pursuit of her prey in the following terms:

Still she entreats, and prettily entreats,  
For to a pretty ear she turns her tale.

Still is he sullen, still he lowers and frets

‘Twixt crimson shame and anger ashy pale.

Being red, she loves him best, and being white,

Her best is bettered with more delight. (73-8)

This passage is full of linguistic couples formed along lines of sameness. In the first line, “entreats,” encounters its own reflection in the final two syllables, and notice that its reflection or double is “pretty”; “prettily” and “pretty” form another verbal pair. Throughout the stanza, words encounter their visible or conceptual reflections: “still” and “still” (75), “crimson” and “red” (76-7), “ashy pale” and “white” (76-7), and “best” and “best” (77-8). These self-reflecting words add a musicality to this section of the poem that suggests the poetic speaker is reveling in their coupling. Significantly, the kind of narcissistic reflection-making that creates poetry here takes on a distinct tone from Ronsard’s poem, “La mort de Narcisse.” Whereas Ronsard’s speaker mourns poetic narcissism in the form of an elegy, Shakespeare’s revels in it in the form of a lyrical epyllion.

Since the poem’s pattern of reflection-making often extends beyond the linguistic level, the poem’s narrator also makes Venus into a poet figure like himself. At the beginning of the poem, Venus seems more invested in reason than poetry. She tries to persuade Adonis to return her favors by appealing to logic as she says,

“Were I hard-favoured, foul, or wrinkled-old,

Ill-nurtured, crooked, churlish, harsh in voice,

O’erworn, despised, rheumatic and cold,

Thick-sighted, barren, lean and lacking juice,

Then mightst thou pause, for then I were not for thee.” (133-8)

“But having no defects,” she continues, Adonis has no reason to reject her. Her irritable reaching after reason failing, however, she turns to poetry. “Bid me discourse, I will enchant thine ear’,” she says, thus declaring her new vocation as a poet, and at this point, she suddenly turns to troping. Adonis does not respond well to this new mode of wooing either, though it is Adonis’s spurning of her love that sets the occasion for her production of poetry, as is often the case in Renaissance love poetry. After one of his many rejections of her, the narrator wonders, “Now which way will she turn” (253), which of course draws attention to his commonality with her as a fellow writer of tropes.

This mirroring that momentarily turns Venus into an image of the poem’s narrator is a large-scale version of the rhetorical figure *conduplicatio*, just as the structural figure *chiasmus* is a large-scale version of *antimetabole*. The poem makes use of all of these figures on all sorts of scales. In one instance that makes use of *antimetabole*, for instance, the narrator, describes Venus’s tearful response to Adonis’s death with a turn of phrase that asks the reader to picture, “Her eye seen in the tears, tears in her eye” (962). And sometimes, whole stanzas include a syntactical structure that causes them to turn on themselves and end where they began, as, for example, in the stanza that begins with Venus yearning for “pure lips, sweet seals in my soft lips imprinted’,” and ends with the request that Adonis “set thy seal manual

on my wax-red lips” (511-6). Here the mentions of lips and seals mirror each other in the repetition with inversion that structures the sestet.

These syntactical mirrors are part of the larger pattern of repetitions wherein “‘beauty breedeth beauty’,” repetitions that rely on other rhetorical figures such as diacope (e.g., 167, 1081-6), conduplicatio (e.g., 169-70, 610), and anadiplosis (e.g., 479-80, 1150-5). The rhetorical figure *ploce*, which Venus uses in her mention of Narcissus’s fate, appears in no fewer than four additional places in the poem (e.g., 214-5, 373-8, 762, 1019-20).

In his parsing of the use of the figure in the Narcissus passage, Langley asserts that the rhetorical figure Venus uses in the sentence admits no difference or threatening alterity. Many of the instances in which this particular figure appears, however, do not exclude difference and alterity, but rather highlight it. The poem’s various deployments of repetition demonstrate that meaning- and image-making produce difference in the midst of apparent sameness, putting pressure on any reading that looks to these figures and expects to see self-consistency or unity of meaning.

For instance, in one of the poem’s extended uses of *ploce*, the repetitive play across Venus and Adonis’s speech unsettles the sense that the repeated word means the same thing in each new context:

“Give me my hand,” saith he. “Why dost thou feel it?”

“Give me my heart,” saith she, “and thou shalt have it.

O give it me, lest thy hard heart do steel it,

And being steeled, soft sighs can never grave it.

Then love's deep groans I never shall regard,  
Because Adonis' heart hath made mine hard." (373-8)

This stanza is punctuated by the repetition of the pronoun "it," which by its second appearance has an unclear referent. The first "it" clearly refers to Adonis's hand, but the second may refer to his hand or Venus's heart, and each successive "it" remains unclear, thumping along with the rhythm of a pulse from a heart that "it" may or may not refer to. The repetition in this stanza undoes the coherence of the signifier "it" in an almost Derridean way, opening the door to difference, not in spite of repetition, but because of it.

In his reading of the repetition in the line Venus uses to describe Narcissus's story, Langley suggests that the proximity of the repeated terms forecloses the possibility that difference can enter the scene. While this particular instantiation of the figure excludes other signifiers as it reduces Narcissus's story to a relation of "himself" to "himself," the context in which the figure appears denies it the difference-defying singularity Langley attributes to it. Venus is using Narcissus's story to present Adonis with a warning against spurning heterosexual love. She uses Narcissus as a figure who represents the stakes of failing to reproduce, a figure for sterility, and yet, he is the figure around which the poem's most self-duplicating language proliferates. At an aesthetic and linguistic level, he is the figure for reproduction. He is the inspiration for endless duplication and wordplay, and this function of the figure complicates the narrative Venus weaves around his name.

There is a second level of complication as well. Venus implies that narcissism is an obstacle to the imperative to procreate. She tells Adonis that his self-love is preventing him from helping his likeness to endure, to live on in the faces of his children. As Menon points out in her reading of this moment in the text, “This resistance to reproducing his image despite a narcissistic investment in that image points to the impossibility of reading narcissism univocally” (“Spurning” 503). Venus’s warnings to Adonis for his narcissism, Menon explains, “partakes of the logic of illogic” (503). This is because Venus’s argument in favor of procreation relies upon the very self-love she condemns for its persuasive power.

There is a fundamental incoherence in the poem’s use of the Narcissus myth, such that even as the poem seems to, as Langley suggests, circumscribe Narcissus and what he signifies, Narcissus exceeds the bounds of the interpretation. One interpretation of the figure contradicts another. The excess that surrounds the Narcissus figure relates to more than its aesthetic features; it also affects the myth’s sense, which, as we reach for it slips beyond the horizon.

The non-identity of Narcissus with himself is an effect of the structure of being in the poem, which is opened to internal difference, un-unified at its core. This structure crystallizes in the poem’s references to Petrarca and Echo, the former representing the non-self against whom the narrator produces his own voice, and Echo introducing the nonhuman selves against which human selfhood is defined. In both cases, the non-self inheres within the self, opening the space of non-identity within being.

IV. “Twenty echoes twenty times cry so.”

Echo’s presence in *Venus and Adonis*, like Narcissus’s, reveals the presence of difference within what appears to be seamless repetition. When the Shakespearean narrator introduces Echo in the poem, he, like Jacques Derrida and Gayatri Spivak, reads Echo as a figure for a rupture in the circuit of communication that occurs between a speaker and respondent.

The Ovidian scene that captures the attention of Shakespeare, Derrida, and Spivak is the one that tells of the moment when Echo sees Narcissus in the woods. Though she longs to talk to him, she can only repeat back fragments of what he says. Ovid writes:

... o quotiens voluit blandis accedere dictis  
et mollis adhibere preces! natura repugnat  
nec sinit, incipiat, sed, quod sinit, illa parata est  
exspectare sonos, ad quos sua verba remittat.  
forte puer comitum seductus ab agmine fido  
dixerat: “ecquis adest?” et “adest” responderat Echo.  
hic stupet, utque aciem partes dimittit in omnis,  
voce “veni!” magna clamat: vocat illa vocantem.  
respicit et rursus nullo veniente “quid” inquit  
“me fugis?” et totidem, quot dixit, verba recepit.  
perstat et alternae deceptus imagine vocis  
'huc coeamus' ait, nullique libentius umquam

responsura sono “coeamus” rettulit Echo  
et verbis favet ipsa suis egressaque silva  
ibat, ut iniceret sperato brachia collo;  
ille fugit fugiensque “manus complexibus aufer!  
ante” ait “emoriar, quam sit tibi copia nostri”;  
rettulit illa nihil nisi “sit tibi copia nostri”  
spreta latet silvis pudibundaque frondibus ora  
protegit et solis ex illo vivit in antris. (3.375-94)<sup>55</sup>

[Oh how long she wanted to come near with coaxing speeches, make soft entreaties to him! But her nature sternly forbids; the one thing not forbidden is to make answers. She is more than ready for words she can give back. By chance Narcissus lost track of his companions, started calling “Is anybody here?” and “Here!” said Echo. He looked around in wonderment, called louder “come to me!” “Come to me!” came back the answer. He looked behind him, and saw no one coming; “Why do you run from me?” and heard his question repeated

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<sup>55</sup> “Oh how long she wanted to come near with coaxing speeches, make soft entreaties to him! But her nature sternly forbids; the one thing not forbidden is to make answers. She is more than ready for words she can give back. By chance Narcissus lost track of his companions, started calling “Is anybody here?” and “Here!” said Echo. He looked around in wonderment, called louder “come to me!” “Come to me!” came back the answer. He looked behind him, and saw no one coming; “Why do you run from me?” and heard his question repeated in the woods. “Let us be together!” There was nothing Echo would ever say more gladly, “Let us be together!” And, to help her words, out of the woods she came, with arms all ready to fling around his neck. But he retreated: “Keep your hands off,” he cried, “and do not touch me! I would die before I give you a chance at me.” “I give you a chance at me,” and that was all she ever said thereafter, spurned and hiding, ashamed, in the leafy forests, in lonely caves” (Humphries 69).

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Echo longs to speak to Narcissus, but her punishment keeps her from calling out to him. She waits until he speaks and then cleverly repeats back part of each utterance so that she is able to say what she wants to say. Narcissus says, “Is anybody here?” and Echo says, “Here!” As she and Narcissus each seek the source of the other’s voice, Narcissus asks, “Why do you run from me,” and Ovid reports that he “heard his question repeated in the woods.” Narcissus says, “Let us be together,” and she repeats the words: “Let us be together!” Echo’s words seem to faithfully return Narcissus’s speech, and yet Derrida and Spivak, and I argue Shakespeare as well, read her as a figure for failed repetition and difference.

In his preface to *Rogues*, Derrida emphasizes that Echo’s repetitions of Narcissus’s speech do not actually repeat what he says. “Echo feigned to repeat the last syllable of Narcissus in order to say something else,” Derrida writes (xi). He sees Echo’s feigned repetitions as instances in which Echo, “take[s] back the initiative of answering or responding in a responsible way,” thereby “outsmarting the tyranny of a

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<sup>56</sup> Humphries’s translation.

jealous goddess” (xi-xii), the goddess Juno who punished Echo for using her speech as a distraction to help Jove in his efforts to commit acts of adultery (Ovid 3.342-71). “Echo,” Derrida claims, “lets be heard by whoever wants to hear it, by whoever might love hearing it, something other than what she seems to be saying” (xii). Her responses, he argues, “are something more than mere reiteration” (xii). She “overflows the calls of Narcissus” (xii). She appears “at the intersection of repetition and the unforeseeable” (Derrida xii), by which Derrida means that she introduces the possibility that difference can sneak into the cycle of repetition.

Derrida’s point that Echo’s speech is “something more than mere reiteration” is underscored by his use of language associated with excess. She “*outsmarts*” Juno, and she “*overflows*” with love for Narcissus (xii, my emphasis). These prefixes indicate that Derrida interprets Echo as an uncontainable, uncontrollable figure. For Derrida, her excessiveness results in a breakdown in the repetition in Ovid’s myth, but this breakdown allows actual communication to occur.

Spivak characterizes the breakdown in repetition differently, instead registering it as a consequence of Latin grammar. She writes:

Echo in Ovid is staged as an instrument of the possibility of a truth not dependent upon intention, a reward uncoupled from, indeed set free from, the recipient. Throughout the reported exchange between Narcissus and Echo, she behaves according to her punishment and gives back the end of each statement. Ovid ‘quotes’ her, except when Narcissus asks, *Quid me fugis* (Why do you fly from me)? Caught in

the discrepancy between second-person interrogative (*fugis*) and the imperative (*fugi*), Ovid cannot allow her to be, even Echo ... He reports her speech in the name of Narcissus: *quot dixit, verba recepit*— he receives back the words he says. (24-5)

Spivak, like Derrida, reads this moment in Echo's story as evidence that she is able to break free of her punishment, but they locate the break differently. Derrida sees Echo breaking free of her punishment because she is able to still say what she means by strategically beginning her repetitions where she sees fit. Spivak, on the other hand, focuses specifically on the lines that reveal that the constraints of grammar will not allow Echo to repeat what Narcissus says and still make sense. She notes that instead of quoting Echo in this moment, the Ovidian narrator simply steps in and tells us that the repetition occurred.

Spivak claims this moment in the text turns Echo's punishment into a reward. "Here is the figuration of Echo's reward," she writes. "Her punishment fails (in order) to mark *différance*. Ovid covers over it with telling; we open it" (26). Since the narrator tells us Echo repeats Narcissus rather than quoting what Echo actually says, Spivak tells us it is our responsibility to note the breakdown in the cycle of repetition that creates a gap in the narrative here, and she suggests that we ask ourselves what that means. In her characterization of the breakdown in repetition as an opening that has been covered over that we must then re-open, Spivak plays with the language of the Ovidian text that associates Echo with hollows and caves, just as Shakespeare does in *Venus and Adonis*.

In his most extended reference to Echo, Shakespeare, like Spivak and Derrida, interprets her as a figure for the possibility of a breakdown in the cycle of repetition, and this interpretation shapes the poem's commentary on humanist imitative practices as well as its insights into the nature of being. Like Spivak, Shakespeare represents Echo as a figure who introduces difference into that cycle. Like Derrida, he reads her as a figure for repetition that can break free of its origin. He writes that Venus, having failed to woo Adonis or convince him of the dangers of hunting the boar, allows him to take his leave of her, at which point she sits in solitude and,

... beats her heart, whereat it groans,

That all the neighbor caves, as seeming troubled,

Make verbal repetitions of her moans;

Passion on passion is deeply redoubled:

“Ay me!” she cries, and twenty times, “Woe, woe!”

And twenty echoes twenty times cry so. (829-34)

Shakespeare makes a space for Echo in these lines, introducing the “neighbor caves” that Ovid tells us she dwells in. The narrator then describes the “verbal repetitions” of Venus's speech that return to her from the cavernous hollows. These repetitions strengthen the passage's allusiveness, as does the use of the word “redoubled,” which again calls to mind the repetition for which Echo is known. Even Venus's cries of “Woe, woe!” turn her mouth, in its pronunciation of the “o” vowels in “woe,” into another hollow in which Echo might dwell.

And Echo does indeed dwell in these hollows. In response to Venus's cries of woe, "twenty echoes twenty times cry so" (834). But already Shakespeare has subtly suggested that there is something more than mere repetition going on here. The "neighbor caves" that echo Venus's cries are described as "*seeming* troubled" (830, my emphasis). Shakespeare does not write that the caves *are* troubled, but rather that they seem to be, and that "seeming" opens up a space for difference.

The next stanza holds open additional spaces for Echo. Venus hears her cries echoed from the caves, and,

She marking them begins a wailing note,  
And sings extemporally a woeful ditty,  
How love makes young men thrall, and old men dote,  
How love is wise in folly, foolish witty.

Her heavy anthem still concludes in woe,

And still the choir of echoes answer so. (835-40)

Again, the repetition of the "o" sound—this time in "note" (835), "woeful" (836), "dote" (837), "woe" (839), and "so" (840)—holds open the hollow spaces Echo calls home.

That these hollows can produce meaning that differs from that which they seem to echo becomes clearer in the next two stanzas. Here, the narrator suddenly becomes critical of Venus, transforming her from victim to victimizer:

Her song was tedious and outwore the night,  
For lovers' hours are long, though seeming short,

If pleased themselves, others they think delight  
In such like circumstance, with such like sport.  
Their copious stories, oftentimes begun,  
End without audience, and are never done.

For who hath she to spend the night withal  
But idle sounds resembling parasites,  
Like shrill-tongued tapsters answering every call,  
Soothing humours of fantastic wits?

She says "Tis so," and they answer all, "Tis so,"

And would answer after her if she said "No." (841-52)

There is no love in these lines. Shakespeare reimagines the scene between Narcissus and Echo here in a way that places Venus in the position of Narcissus, but the "neighbor caves" that represent Echo are not cleverly sending back only parts of what Venus says in order to declare their love. Instead, this version portrays the echoes as indifferent, and the narrator does not seem to describe them particularly favorably either, suggesting they are idle and perhaps parasitic.

The first shift in the narrator's tone occurs in relation to Venus, and the sudden turn in the narrator, his sudden loss of sympathy for Venus, may seem surprising if it were not for the reading the previous stanzas offer of Echo. Since the caves only seem to echo Venus's cries and woe, Venus becomes *one of those lovers*,

the sort who think everything and everyone can feel their pain. She becomes a type, and that type is someone the narrator is clearly wary of.

If that type seems familiar, it is because the model for it comes from Petrarca's *Canzoniere*. Petrarca begins to enter this scene with Venus in her repetition of the "o" sounds. Such repetition is reminiscent of *Rime* 197, which ends nearly every line with an "o" that in chapter one I argue turns the poem into an echo chamber that amplifies the speaker's feelings. The references to Petrarca become stronger in the stanzas where the narrator becomes critical of Venus.

These stanzas, in addition to providing an intertextual moment with Echo's story from the *Metamorphoses*, represent an intertextual moment with Petrarca's *Rime* 23, his famous transformation poem from the *Canzoniere*. In that poem he writes, "[i]l mio duro scempio / sia scripta altrove, sì che mille penne / ne son già stanche, et quasi in ogni valle / rimbombi il suon de' miei gravi sospiri, / ch'aquistan fede a la penosa vita" (23.10-4) ["My harsh undoing is written elsewhere so that a thousand pens are already tired by it, and almost every valley echoes to the sound of my heavy sighs which prove how painful my life is."]<sup>57</sup>

Shakespeare's poem includes the same ideas, but reverses their order. Venus's sense that the world around her echoes her woe is followed by the narrator's comment on how tedious her song is to those she thinks she delights. The Petrarchan speaker notes that his sorrow is so well known that people have grown tired of it, and then he notes that the whole world seems to echo with his sighs. Shakespeare's

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<sup>57</sup> Robert Durling's translation.

narrator, in echoing these lines becomes part of the world that repeats Petrarca's story and the tone of the passage suggests that he has indeed grown tired by it.

The Shakespearean narrator's repetition of the ideas and images from Petrarca's poem also transforms Venus into a figure for the Petrarchan speaker, or rather reaffirms her indebtedness to this tradition since her efforts to woo Adonis are inflected with Petrarchan conceits throughout the epyllion. While Venus's parodies of Petrarca have a humorous quality to them elsewhere in Shakespeare's poem, in this passage her Petrarchism takes a serious turn. The narrator's criticism of Venus in one of her most Petrarchan moments becomes a critique of the tradition that forms the Shakespearean voice in this poem, a tradition the narrator seeks to distance himself from while nonetheless revealing his participation in it.

Shakespeare echoes Petrarca, but as Derrida says in his reading of Echo, he does so in order to "let be heard by whoever wants to hear it something other than what [he] seems to be saying" (xii). The echoing moment allows Shakespeare to repeat what came before, but with a difference. In repeating Petrarca, the poem creates in Venus a surrogate for the Petrarchan speaker that it can then criticize for assuming that a repetition of words equates with a repetition of meaning or feeling. Echo serves in this moment as a figure for humanist imitative practices and also as the voice that speaks up from the opening of difference between Shakespeare's narrator and Petrarca. She introduces the possibility of a critique in the irreverence she sets into motion for Petrarchan *auctoritas*.

Critics have long recognized Echo's significance as a figure for Renaissance imitative practices, but these accounts have tended to characterize Echo as a passive imitator rather than as an agent of change or a figure for difference and resistance. Judith Deitch, for instance, provides an insightful reading of Echo's significance as a figure for *imitatio* in Edmund Spenser's "Epithalamion." Deitch's essay, in addition to outlining some of the most important moments in the discourse surrounding Echo and *imitatio*, also makes an argument that connects Echo's passivity to her femininity. She claims Echo represents "failed poetic descendance," the failure of poets to find their own voices because they too closely imitate classical models. Echo, she explains, "only passively re-sounds other voices," so when Spenser invokes her as a figure for his imitation of Ovid, he does so in order to represent an image of his own poetic failure. He depicts his own poetry as an "ineffectual image," embodied in Echo, "the available woman," his "passive reflector" (224).

The passivity of Spenser's Echo figure and its contrast with Shakespeare's may be due in part to Spenser's greater reverence for literary tradition, and for the classical past in particular. Sean Keilen, who writes of another Ovidian figure for literary transmission, the nightingale from Philomela's tale, explains, "the nightingale is a figure" for a particular tension, "a way of acknowledging that whenever writers submit themselves to a tradition that is larger than themselves, they are both augmented and diminished by the experience" (91). A similar quality is perhaps true of poets' uses of the Echo figure, but Deitch's example suggests Spenser's Echo mostly reflected his sense of diminishment.

Conversely, Shakespeare's *Echo* captures some of the ambivalence that Keilen attributes to the nightingale. His narrator speaks disparagingly of origins and gestures toward the possibility of breaking the cycle of repetition. This, of course, is tinged with irony because in expressing these ideas, his repetition of Petrarca suggests he has not managed to break free entirely. The disparaging tone the Shakespearean narrator takes toward Venus, however, bespeaks a kind of irreverence for what she represents that suggests Shakespeare does not feel diminished by the experience of repeating Petrarca. Instead, the poem's reference to *Rime 23* becomes a space of negativity where the narrator develops his own poetic voice in opposition to Petrarca's.

As such, the narrative voice in Shakespeare's poem takes shape along the same lines as those traced by Agamben in his description of the human. Agamben explains that "the opposition man/animal, human/inhuman," opens up a space *within* the being of the first term rather than simply dividing the first term from the second (37). Likewise, *Venus and Adonis* establishes a division between the Shakespearean narrator and Petrarchan speaker that passes first within and is constitutive of the Shakespearean voice. Over the course of his career, Shakespeare also seeks to differentiate himself from the classical voices that shape him. Even Ovid, who most critics agree must have been one of Shakespeare's favorite authors, gets thrown into the sea eventually.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> In Act 5, scene 1 of *The Tempest*, most critics agree that when Prospero says, "I'll drown my book," he is discarding his Ovid, since Prospero's speech begins as a fairly faithful translation of a speech by Medea in the *Metamorphoses*.

But Petrarca is the literary master whose authority is most clearly flouted in *Venus and Adonis*. As Venus listens to her cries and songs echoed in the “neighbor caves,” the correspondence drawn between Venus and Petrarca leads to the creation of a correspondence between the narrator and Echo. The narrator echoes Petrarca’s transformation poem and then criticizes those lovers who mistake echoes for shared feeling; “If pleased themselves, others they think delight,” he says (843).

In echoing Petrarca in order to say something more, something different, Echo becomes a figure who offers the Shakespearean narrator self-affirmation, though that affirmation comes at a price in that it produces a divided self. Nonetheless, the imitative practice is not a passive act of repetition here, but an act of repetition in which the echoer can to some extent be “set free” from the intention of the original speaker. Shakespeare is able to say something new even in a profoundly imitative moment, quoting Petrarca in order to abjure him, just as Prospero quotes Ovid as he abjures the magic he borrows from him.

In the second stanza in the passage that reflects on how Venus reads the echoes, the object of the narrator’s criticism seems to slide from Venus to the echoes themselves. The narrator describes the echoes as “idle sounds,” “parasites,” and “shrill-tongued tapsters” (848-9). The language of critique now appears to be associated with the echoes, but that language boomerangs back to Venus who misunderstands them. Moreover, these descriptors, while appearing to bear negative connotations, in fact may be aimed at evoking sympathy from the reader. In the sixteenth century, “parasites” were people who had to resort to flattery and

entertainment to eat at the tables of wealthy patrons (“parasite, *n.*”). They had to pander to people in positions of power for their food. “Tapsters” were also pitiable figures in the Shakespearean oeuvre.

Nancy Lindheim provides an important insight into the image pattern Shakespeare’s narrator uses in describing Venus’s echoes. Lindheim notes that the “tapsters” are “undoubtedly the originals of Prince Hal’s Francis” (200). She reminds us of Act 2, scene 4 of *Henry IV, Part 1*, in which England’s future king plays a joke on Francis, a tapster in the tavern he frequents with Falstaff and his other friends. The joke develops out of Prince Hal’s efforts to maintain Francis’s attention while Hal’s friend Ned Poins calls more and more loudly for him from another room in the tavern.

At the beginning of the scene, Hal makes fun of Francis for giving him the gift of a lump of sugar and discloses the plan for his joke to Poins:

... Ned, to drive away the time till Falstaff come, I prithee do thou stand in some by-room while I question my puny drawer to what end he gave me the sugar; and do thou never leave calling “Francis!” that his tale to me may be nothing but “Anon!” (2.4.27-32)

Poins complies and immediately starts calling, “Francis!” as the Prince moves on to question him.

Hal asks Francis a series of questions, and each of Francis’s responses is interrupted by a call from Poins from the other room. With each interruption Francis

replies to Poins by shouting “Anon!” and then continues his conversation with his prince, just as Hal predicted.

Eventually Hal makes a presumably empty promise and says that in thanks for his pennyworth of sugar, he will “give [Francis] ... a thousand pound” (2.4.59). Then when Poins calls and Francis replies “Anon!” looking to extend his contact with Prince Hal, Hal begins to make fun of him: “Anon, Francis? No, Francis; but tomorrow, Francis; or, Francis, a Thursday; or indeed, Francis, when thou wilt” (2.4.60-6). When Hal finally decides to relinquish his control over Francis he says, “Away, you rogue! Dost thou not hear them call?” (2.4.76). He then jokes to Poins who has now rejoined him, “That ever this fellow should have fewer words than a parrot” (2.4.94-5), a bird whose mimicry brings Echo to mind.

This is, of course, a highly comical and crowd-pleasing scene in most productions of the play. But there is something unsettling in Hal’s treatment of Francis. Hal is able to maintain his hold on Francis through the exercise of his power and the promise of favors when he takes the throne. This use of power feels abusive, though, as he preys on someone weaker than himself to please his friends and prove his strength. Through his abuse of power Hal is able to manipulate Francis in a way that causes Francis to reflect back to him an augmented image of himself. The play dramatizes a version of self-affirmation that relies on the abuse and manipulation of others for its stability.

*Venus and Adonis* offers a similar vision of self-affirmation as Venus allows the repetition of her cries to amplify her sense of herself. As the “neighbor caves”

return her cries, she becomes full of herself and wears on the night. Like the Petrarchan speaker, Venus thinks the caves, nature, all the world shares in her feelings, which, according to Marjorie Hope Nicolson would make her a typical Elizabethan.

Rebecca Bushnell reminds us of Nicolson's insights into Elizabethans' relationship to nonhuman nature. She notes, "Nicolson turns the image of the microcosm inside out ... to suggest that it is premised on the *lack of distinction* between human and nonhuman, where 'Man was so involved in Nature that no separation was possible—nor would an Elizabethan have understood such separation'" (329). Venus, in this moment, does not see where she ends and the caves and surrounding elements begin. As Bushnell explains, this belief in humans' connectedness to nature has roots in "Paracelsus's belief (in Nicolson's words) that 'Man *was* the elements; he was minerals and metals; he was fruit and trees, vegetables and flowers. He was also wind and storms and tempest'" (329). In this moment in *Venus and Adonis*, Echo highlights the connectedness of the anthropomorphic Venus and the minerals of the caves that return her voice to her as "idle sounds."

The poem presents us with an echo-critical reading here as well, however, as the narrator notes that the sources of the "idle sounds" that surround the goddess of love cannot help but echo her voice. Here, unlike the earlier echoes of an intertextual variety, the echoes become passive. Their lack of agency is clear as the narrator explains, "She says, 'Tis so,' / And would say after her if she said 'No'" (851-2).

Venus cries out to the night and her song makes her feel better. “Pleased [herself], others [she] think[s] delight” (843), but like Francis with the prince, these echoes cannot help but respond.

There is, however, a significant difference between the compulsory responses in *Venus and Adonis* and *Henry IV, Part 1*. *Venus and Adonis* includes a narrator who frames the scene and offers a perspective that stands apart from it and looks on critically. The affect of the tavern scene is left to be interpreted by directors, actors, and audiences of the play. The narrator of *Venus and Adonis* actively shapes the affect of the echoing scene by commenting on Venus’s misreading of the responses she hears. In the aftermath of the echo-critical voice of the narrator, we are left only to determine who we feel worse for: the sources of the echoes who have to endure Venus’s cries as they outwear the night, or Venus, who thinks she has received authentic responses and has companions who understand her when the narrator’s commentary instead suggests that she misunderstands and is not understood.

The narrator’s echo-critical voice points to a critical tension in the development of Renaissance ontology. Contemporary ecocriticism that focuses on the era often highlights the connectedness of human and nonhuman beings. As Bushnell explains, “The microcosm/macrocosm model ... both centers and dissolves the human, and is fundamentally dynamic and unstable” (329). Citing Michel Foucault, she claims the era

was indeed less an age of order and more one of ‘resemblance’: ‘The universe was folded in on itself: the earth echoing the sky, faces seeing

themselves reflected in the stars, and plants holding within their stems the secrets that were of use to man.’ While man was imagined at the center of creation, everything in creation touched and reflected other things. (329)

She suggests, vis-à-vis Foucault, that mirroring and echoing brought various orders of being together, dissolving the boundaries between species. This belief in the interconnectedness of all being is one of the props I use to support my reading of Petrarca in chapter one. There, I use this understanding of being to offer a rebuttal to arguments that read the Petrarchan speaker as a narcissistic egoist who is a symptom of humanism’s destructive anthropocentrism. Sometimes, analyses that assert that the Petrarchan speaker is imprinting others with his own thoughts and feelings rely on the assumption that there is a stable boundary separating the anthropomorphic speaker from nonhuman others, and such an assumption, I suggest, is questionable in the context of the *Canzoniere*. I argue that the Petrarchan speaker may be too fluid to be egotistical, too inhuman to be anthropocentric. Shakespeare, however, is not so sure.

The echo-critical voice of the narrator enters the poem to comment on the Petrarchan Venus’s egocentric interpretations of the echoes in the woods. In offering a critique of Venus for assuming that the “neighbor woods” are other beings who reflect her own voice back to her because they are all part of the great interconnectedness of being, the narrator also marks a critical moment in the development of Renaissance ontology. The Petrarchan Venus reads the caves as parts of herself; Shakespeare’s narrator reads them as potentially ontologically other.

But when the Shakespearean narrator comments on the inevitability of the night's reply, he also opens up the possibility that while other beings are present, Venus is in fact only talking to herself. While a self/other relation is possible between the anthropomorphized Venus and the nonhumans who make up her environment, Venus instead engages in intrasubjective communication. This is suggested in the line that ridicules Venus for being one of those people who, "If pleased themselves, others they think delight" (843, my emphasis), and it is underscored by the line that begins Venus's lamentations. She first cries, "Ay, me" (833), which sounds like "I, me," and sets the stage for a reading in which Venus's community in this passage is actually made up of a Petrarchan lyric "I" and a "me."

This kind of relationality calls to mind Carla Freccero's reading of the *Canzoniere*, where she argues that "what is articulated in the Petrarchan lyric 'exchange' between an 'I' and a 'you' or 'she' is ... a relation of identification ... such that Laura comes to resemble not so much an 'other' object of desire, but a kind of Petrarch in drag" (24). In *Venus and Adonis* Shakespeare offers a similar reading of the Petrarchan lyric "I," only this time, the Petrarchan speaker is Venus and the one in drag is not even human, but rather the nonhuman beings and things who make up Venus's echo chamber.

The narrator simultaneously reads Venus and her echoes as a relation that reveals the presence of a self and others and as a relation occurring between an "aye" or "I" and a "me" (856). Such a reading is possible because the otherness in this passage slides from one location to another, at once seeming external to Venus and

internal. When the narrator explains that “neighbor caves ... / make verbal repetition of her moans” (853), the otherness appears to exist outside of Venus, and the opening of the clearing into which she sings is the opening of a space between self and other that is literalized in her environment. But when the narrator explains that as an effect of these verbal repetitions, “Passion on passion deeply is redoubled” (854), the location of otherness seems to shift. Her passionate cry is met with other passionate cries, but these latter cries do not belong to the others who surround her.

The echo-critical narrator suggests those others are in fact dispassionate when he explains, “She says ‘Tis so:’ they answer all ‘Tis so;’ / And would say after her, if she said ‘No.’” (873-4). This suggests the echoes would respond no matter what, and that they may be indifferent to Venus’s suffering. Additionally, the redoubling of passion occurs “deeply,” which can suggest that they occur with intensity, but may also suggest that they occur at a deep level within Venus. This in turn would mean that the echoes that she perceives as emerging from a community of other beings who like her and are like her are instead her own voice echoing within the hollow in her own being.

That she is talking to herself again becomes clear in the narrator’s framing of the repetitions she misreads, specifically in the interpretation he offers of the repeated terms, “passion” and “passion” (854) and “woe, woe” (855). Like the redoubling “passion” that the narrator reveals belongs to her and her alone, the echoing of “woe” is articulated only by her and is happening between the “aye” / “I” and the “me.” The echo-critical narrative voice therefore conveys his skepticism of Venus’s

understanding of being, which is the same understanding I propose for Petrarca in chapter one.

The fluidity of the Petrarchan speaker that results from his interconnectedness with nonhuman beings is replayed in this scene with Venus and her echoes, but through the mode of parody. Instead of serving as a viable understanding of being, the Petrarchan Venus's sense of her interconnectedness with others is met with the ridicule of the echo-critical narrative voice. While the Petrarchan speaker of the *Canzoniere* uncritically looks upon the nonhumans of the natural world as extensions of himself, the narrative voice in *Venus and Adonis* introduces a jarring critique of this notion. He insists that the nonhumans surrounding Venus are ontologically other and indicates her alienation from these others. As a result of his sense of her separation, he can suggest that she is egotistical in her assumption that the other beings and things that make up her natural environment are part of or are extensions of herself.

The narrator's echo-critical reading of Venus therefore produces a different kind of being than the kind we encounter in the *Canzoniere*. Rather than representing the anthropomorphized poetic voice as a being whose boundaries are porous and admit constant change, like Ronsard, *Venus and Adonis*'s narrator represents the boundaries between beings as reified. One of the effects of this reification is to produce through the humanized figure of Venus a definition of the human as that which is not animal, plant, or mineral. As Agamben explains, "The division of life into vegetal and relational, organic and animal, animal and human, therefore passes

first of all as a mobile border within living man, and without this intimate caesura the very decision of what is human and what is not would probably not be possible” (15). This version of being opens up a space within the human that serves as the space of negation, a negation of the inhumanness against which the human is defined.

Agamben suggests that within this structure of being, nonhuman others are closed off from humans in more ways than one. Not only does this definition of being close humans off to their own animality. It also places nonhuman animals beyond the scope of human knowledge. “The animal ... is closed in a total opacity,” Agamben explains, and the opacity of the animals in *Venus and Adonis* is nowhere more evident than in the conflicting narratives Venus constructs in her interpretations of the boar.

Venus’s first descriptions of the boar characterize him as a monster, frightening to behold. When Adonis tells Venus his plan to hunt the boar, she begins to tremble and is overcome with “a sudden pale” (589-91). She then tells Adonis that he would not pursue such a creature if he had a better understanding of what it is. She seeks to educate him by describing the boar:

“With javelin’s point a churlish swine to gore,  
Whose tushes never sheathed he whetteth still,  
Like to a mortal butcher bent to kill.

“On his bow-back he hath a battle set  
Of bristly pikes that ever threat his foes;

His eyes like glow-worms shine when he doth fret;  
His snout digs sepulchers where'er he goes;  
Being moved, he strikes whate'er is in his way,  
And whom he strikes his cruel tushes slay.

“His brawny sides, with hairy bristles armed,  
Are better proof than thy spear's point can enter;  
His short thick neck cannot be easily harmed;  
Being ireful, on the lion he will venter:

The thorny brambles and embracing bushes,  
As fearful of him, part, through whom he rushes.” (616-30)

In Venus's description, the boar escalates from being a blood-thirsty butcher to a veritable war machine. His tusks are unsheathed weapons. When Venus describes his “bow-back” she is calling to mind the arched shape of the boar's spine, but also another weapon. With his “bow-back,” in place of arrows, he has “bristly pikes” to bring into battle. He has armor that makes him invulnerable to attack, and he is brazen enough to attack even lions.

This description of the boar contrasts with the narrative she tells after it succeeds in killing Adonis. The shift in her portrayal of the boar occurs as she imagines the boar's reasons for impaling her beloved. She says,

“But this foul, grim, and urchin-snouted boar,  
Whose downward eye still looketh for a grave,

Ne'er saw the beauteous livery that he wore:

Witness the entertainment that he gave.

If he did see his face, why then I know

He thought to kiss him, and hath killed him so.

“’Tis true, ’tis true, thus was Adonis slain:

He ran upon the boar with his sharp spear,

Who did not whet his teeth at him again,

But by a kiss thought to persuade him there;

And nuzzling in his flank, the loving swine

Sheathed unaware the tusk in his soft groin.

“Had I been toothed like him, I must confess,

With kissing him I should have killed him first.” (1105-18)

In this passage, Venus begins by describing the boar in the same disparaging terms she used before when trying to persuade Adonis to forego the hunt.<sup>59</sup> But midway through the stanza, something shifts in Venus’s tone, and she suddenly

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<sup>59</sup> Venus’s characterization of the boar in this passage is informed by ancient and Renaissance texts that suggested humans occupy a higher order of being because they are upright and closer to the heavens, while other animals’ eyes remain downward cast, representing their lower states. She refers to the boar’s “downward eye” to emphasize its inferiority. For an analysis of this theory, see Karen Raber’s discussion of Helkiah Crooke in *Microcosmographia*, and for a detailed discussion of its history, see Marjorie O’Rourke Boyle’s *Senses of Touch*, where she traces its evolution through Plutarch, Aristotle, Augustine, Lactantius, Boethius, Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas, Gianozzo Manetti, Marsilio Ficino, and Pedro Mexía, among others (see especially pages 35-41).

begins anthropomorphizing the boar. This anthropomorphization is another relic of a Petrarchan past that emphasized the interrelatedness of humans, animals, plants, and minerals. As the point at which her tone shifts, she begins to conjecture about what the boar must have been feeling when he saw Adonis and why he might have killed him. She describes his impaling of Adonis as a loving act committed by a “loving swine” who only meant to kiss that which he killed. She notes that if she were the boar, she would have done the same. In kissing him the night before, she would have impaled him with her tusks.

These two very different portraits reveal the opacity of the boar. They suggest that Venus does not understand the boar’s internal workings anymore than the flowers understand hers. As she says to Adonis in order to emphasize their privacy, “These blue-vein’d violets whereupon we lean / Never can blab, nor know not what we mean” (145-6). Her conflicting characterizations of the boar suggest that the opacity goes both ways in relation to humans and nonhumans.

In the context of Shakespeare’s poem, the division between beings that creates a division within the human causes nonhuman animals to be inscrutable, and their inscrutability was something in which Shakespeare’s contemporaries were beginning to take an interest. Michel de Montaigne, whose work Shakespeare would come to know after John Florio published his translation in 1603, famously asks in the “Apologie de Raimond Sebonde,” “Que scay-je?”—what do I know about the internal lives of animals? He continues, “Comment cognoit il [l’homme], par l’effort de son intelligence, les branles internes et secrets des animaux?” (119) [How can a person

know, through an effort of his intelligence, the internal and secret motions of animals?].<sup>60</sup> Shakespeare's poem also takes up this question, and the version of being the poem produces is one that suggests we cannot know the secret internal stirrings of other beings. Within this framework, other beings remain closed to us just as our own animality remains closed up within us through our negations of it within ourselves. This mode of being, however, is one that the poem filters through the lens of parody. The anthropomorphized Venus is not upheld as a model for the most ethical way of being in the world. Instead, she is held in check by an echo-critical voice that reads her as a relic of a past generation—Petrarca's generation—, a generation that the narrative voice wishes to outgrow.

## V. Closing

Part of what I hope to have conveyed here is that, as Foucault says, “the humanistic thematic is in itself too supple, too diverse, too inconsistent to serve as an axis for reflection” (44). In his famous essay, “What is Enlightenment?” Foucault historicizes what he refers to as the “theme or, rather ... set of themes” tied to humanism, and he explains that the version of being we have inherited—“a permanent creation of ourselves in our autonomy”—derives from Enlightenment thought rather than humanism (44). One thing that becomes clear in my analyses of Petrarca, Ronsard, and Shakespeare is that the structures of being that shape humanity shift in various Renaissance contexts.

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<sup>60</sup> My translation.

Being is “supple,” “diverse,” and “inconsistent,” across the three contexts I focus on here. However, all three poets are more interested in versions of being based on community with rather than autonomy from nonhuman nature. Though the boundaries between humans and nonhuman nature are figured differently by these three poets, all three write poems that speak to the importance of a humanity that is ontologically integrated with the nonhuman.

While I am not sure that the shifting boundaries of the human and the changing definitions of humanism prevent each from serving as axes of reflection, they may produce unstable ground on which to build our current structures of being. This is, in part, Cary Wolfe’s point when he cites the above lines from Foucault’s famous essay in *What is Posthumanism?* (xii); Wolfe cautions against defining posthumanism as a reaction to humanism, which, as he notes, should not be read univocally.

Some scholarship on posthumanism makes an effort to avoid generalizing humanism by acknowledging the era’s more ecocritical or anti-humanist writers. These writers, however, are often characterized as exceptions to the rule. Kate Rigby, for instance, notes that “the hyper-separation of human reason and language from other-than-human forms of cognition and communication, which became accentuated in Western culture with the ascendancy of Renaissance humanism and Cartesian mind-matter dualism, has never gone unchallenged” (50). She goes on to compare Montaigne and Derrida’s non-anthropocentric thinking about human-feline

interactions in order to highlight Montaigne's uniqueness in the context of the rest of humanist culture.

Such generalizations that assume there was a dominant narrative to which the non-anthropocentric writers represented exceptions are problematic. Therefore, in place of them, I propose an understanding of humanism that encompasses the vast variety of being and thought that I have illustrated is evident in some of its most canonical thinkers. This more complex and capacious understanding of Renaissance humanism is necessary given the fact that definitions of posthumanism, read out of context, might be misconstrued as definitions of humanism. Even in Wolfe's own writing, for instance, one of the distinguishing markers of posthumanism is said to be its insistence that "the-other-than-human resides at the very core of the human" (17). What I have argued in this chapter is that some versions of humanism produced similar ontologies.

In each of my three chapters, in fact, I have made an effort to illustrate the form the "other-than-human" takes within the poets' anthropomorphic speakers and characters. As the boundaries between the human and "other-than-human" shift in the poetry of Petrarca, Ronsard, and Shakespeare, significantly, so does the function of poetry.

For Shakespeare, poetry bears a double burden. On the one hand, poetry's figurative language serves as a reminder of the un-unified nature of the human who is defined according to its internalized separation from nonhuman beings that it can now only be *like*. On the other, it serves as a source of comfort in the face of some

incomprehensible wound. In *Twelfth Night*, when Malvolio declares, “I’ll be revenged on the whole pack of you!” and runs offstage after being “most notoriously abused,” Feste steps in to sing a song about the wind and the rain (5.1.371-401). Feste’s song consoles after Malvolio’s exit wounds the pleasing conclusion of the comedy. A similar juxtaposition closes *The Merchant of Venice*. Following the court scene in which Shylock is ushered offstage a trembling and broken man, the next act turns to lovers listening to music in the moonlight. While Jessica—Shylock’s daughter and one of the two lovers in the scene—expresses her ambivalence about the song, again poetry and song are presented as possible sources of consolation for the opening of an incomprehensible wound.

*Venus and Adonis* makes a similar move. In consolation for the wound in Adonis’s leg, it offers up the Adonis flower without ever pretending the two are commensurable. In consolation for the wounds it opens in our understandings of our world and ourselves, it offers flowers of poesy. Across the yawning chasm, it strews whole bouquets of them.

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## Appendix A

“La Mort de Narcisse, en forme d’*elegie*”

À *Jean Daurat, son precepteur*

Sus, dépan, mon Daurat, de son croc ta Musette,  
Qui durant tout l’hyver avoit esté muette,  
Et loin du populace allong ouyr la vois  
De dix mille oiselets qui se plaignent é bois.  
Ja des monts contre-val les tiedes neiges chéent, 5  
Ja les ouvertes fleurs par les campagnes béent,  
Ja l’espineux rosier desplie ses boutons  
Au lever du Soleil, qui semblent aux tetons  
Des filles de quinze ans, quand le sein leur pommelle,  
Et s’eleve bossé d’une enfleure jumelle. 10  
Ja la mer gist couchée en son grand lit espars,  
Ja Zephyre murmure, et ja de toutes pars  
Calfeutrunt son vaisseau, le Nocher hait le sable,  
Le pastoureau le feu, et le troupeau l’estable,  
Qui desire dés l’Aube aller brouter les prez 15  
Costoyez des ruisseaux aux Naiades sacrez.  
Ja l’arbre de Bacchus rampe en sa robbe neuve,  
Se pend à ses chévreaux, et ja la forest veuve  
Herisse sa perruque, et Cerés du Ciel voit  
Desja crester le blé qui couronner la doit: 20  
Ja pres du verd buisson, sur les herbes nouvelles,  
Tournassent leurs fuseaux les gayer pastourelles,  
Et d’un long lerelot aux forests d’alentour  
Et aux prochaines eaux racontent leur amour.  
Ceste belle saison me remet en memoire 25  
Le Printemps où Jason, espoinçonné de gloire,  
Esleut la fleur de Grece, et de son aviron  
Baloya, le premier de Tethys le giron:  
Et me remet encor la meurtriere fontaine  
Par qui le beau Narcis aima son ombre vaine, 30  
Coupable de sa mort: car pour trop se mirer  
Sur le bord estranger, luy convint expirer.  
Une fontaine estoit nette, claire et sans bourbe,  
Enceinte à l’environ d’un beau rivage courbe  
Tout bigarré d’esmail: là le rosier pourpré, 35  
Le glayeul, et le lis, à Junon consacré,  
À l’envi respiroyent une suave haleine,  
Et la fleur d’Adonis, jadis la douce peine

De la belle Venus, qui chetif ne sçavoit  
 Que le destin si tost aux rives le devoit, 40  
 Pour estre le butin des vierges curieuses  
 À remplir leurs cofins des moissons amoureuses.  
 Nulle Nymphe voisine ou bœuf ou pastoureau,  
 Ny du haut d'un buisson la cheute d'un rameau,  
 Ny sangler embourbé n'avoient son eau troublée. 45  
 Or' le Soleil avoit sa chaleur redoublée,  
 Quand Narcisse aux beaux yeux, pantoisement lassé  
 Du chaud, et d'avoir trop aux montaignes chassé,  
 Vint là pour estancher la soif qui le tourmente.  
 Mais là! en l'estanchant une autre luy augmente: 50  
 Car en beuvant à front, son semblant apperçoit  
 Sur l'eau representé, qui fraudé le deceut.  
 Helas que feroit-il, puis que la destinée  
 Luy avoit au berceau ceste mort ordonnée?  
 En vain son ombre il aime, et simple d'esprit croit 55  
 Que ce soit un vray corps, de son ombre qu'il voit,  
 Et sans avoir raison sottement il s'affolle,  
 Regardant pour-neant une menteuse idole:  
 Il admire soy-mesme, et sur le bord fiché,  
 Bée en vain dessus l'eau, par les yeux attaché. 60  
 Il contemple son poil, qui, renversé se couche  
 À rebours sur sa face, il voit sa belle bouche,  
 Il voit ses yeux ardents, plus clairs que le Soleil,  
 Et le lustre rosin de son beau teint vermeil:  
 Il regarde ses doigts et sa main merveillable, 65  
 Et tout ce dont il est luy-mesmes admirable.  
 Il se prise, il s'estime, et, de luy-mesme aimé,  
 Allume en l'eau le feu dont il est consumé:  
 Il ne sçait ce qu'il voit, et de ce qu'il ignore  
 Le desir trop goulou tout le cœur lui devore, 70  
 Las! et le mesme abus qui l'incite à se voir,  
 Luy nourrist l'esperance, et le fait decevoir.  
 Quantes-fois pour-neant, de sa lévre approchée,  
 Voulut toucher son ombre, et ne l'a point touchée?  
 Quantes-fois pour-neant de soy-mesmes épris, 75  
 En l'eau s'est voulu prendre, et ne s'est jamais pris?  
 Leve, credule enfant, tes yeux, et ne regarde  
 En vain comme tu fais, une idole fuyarde:  
 Ce que tu quiers, n'est point: si tu verses parmi  
 L'onde un pleur seulement, tu perdras ton ami: 80  
 Il n'a rien propre à soy, l'image présentée  
 Que tu voice dedans l'eau, tu l'as seul apportée,

Et la remporteras avecques toy aussi,  
 Si tu peux sans mourir te remporter d'ici.

Ny faim, ny froid, ny chaud, ny de dormir l'envie 85  
 Ne peurent retirer sa miserable vie  
 Hors de l'eau mensongere, ains, couché sur le bord,  
 Ne fait que souspirer sous les traits de la mort:  
 Ne sans tourner ailleurs sa simple fantasie,  
 De trop se regarder ses yeux ne ressasie, 90  
 Et par eux se consume: à la fin s'levant  
 Un petit hors de l'eau, tend ses bras en avant  
 Aux forests d'alentour, et plein de pitié grande,  
 D'une voix casse et lente, en plourant leur demande:

Qui, dites moy, forests fut onques amoureux 95  
 Si miserablement que moy, sot malheureux?  
 Hé vistes-vous jamais, bien que soyez agées  
 D'une infinité d'ans, amours si enragées?  
 Vous le sçavez forests: car mainte et mainte fois  
 Vous avez recelé les amans sous vos bois. 100  
 Ce que je voy, me plaist, et si je n'ay puissance,  
 Tant je suis desastré, d'en avoir jouyssance,  
 Ny tant soit peu baiser la bouche que je voy,  
 Qui ce semble, me baise et s'approche de moy.

Mais ce qui plus me deult, c'est qu'une dure porte, 105  
 Qu'un roc, qu'une forest, qu'une muraille forte  
 Ne nous separe point, seulement un peu d'eau  
 Me garde de jouyr d'un visage si beau.  
 Quiconque sois, enfant, sors de l'eau, je te prie:  
 Quel plaisir y prens-tu? ici l'herbe est fleurie, 110  
 Ici la torte vigne à l'orme s'assemblant  
 De tous costez espend un ombrage tremblant:  
 Ici le verd lierre, et la tendrette mousse  
 Font la rive sembler plus que le sommeil douce.

À peine il avoit dit, quand un pleur redoublé 115  
 (Qui coula dedans l'eau) son plaisir a troublé:  
 Où fuis-tu? disoit-il: celui qui te supplie,  
 Ny sa jeune beauté, n'est digne qu'on le fuye.  
 Las! demeure: où fuis tu? les Nymphes de ces bois  
 Ne m'ont point desdaigné, ny celle qui la vois 120  
 Fait retentir és monts d'une complainte lente,  
 Et si n'ont point jouy du fruit de leur attente.  
 Car alors de l'amour mon cœur n'estoit espoint,  
 Pour aimer maintenant, ce qui ne m'aime point.

Las! tu me nourrissois tantost d'une esperance: 125  
 En l'onde tu tenois: se mes bras je pliois,

Tu me pliois les tiens: moy riant, tu riois,  
 Et autant que mon œil de pleurs faisoit espandre,  
 Le tien d'autre costé autant m'en venoit rendre.  
 Si je faisais du chef un clin tant seulement, 130  
 Un autre clin ton chef faisoit également:  
 Et si parlant j'ouvrais ma bouchette vermeille,  
 Tu parlois, mais ta voix ne frappoit mon oreille.  
 Je cognois maintenant l'effet de mon erreur,  
 Je suis mesme celui qui me mets en fureur, 135  
 Je suis mesmes celuy, celuy mesmes que j'aime,  
 Rien je ne voy dans l'eau que l'ombre de moy-mesme.  
 Que feray-je chetif? pri'ray-je, ou si je doy  
 Moy-mesme estre prié? je porte avecques moy  
 Et l'amant et l'aimé, et ne sçaurois tant faire, 140  
 Las! que de l'un des deux je me puisse desfaire.  
 Mais seray-je tousjours couché dessus le bord  
 Comme un froid simulachre, en attendant la mort?  
 Ô bien-heureuse more, haste toy je te prie,  
 Et me tranche d'un coup et l'amour et la vie, 145  
 À fin qu'avecques moy je voye aussi perir  
 (Si c'est quelque plaisir) ce qui me fair mourir.  
 Il avoit achevé, quand du front goute à goute  
 Une lente sueur aux talons lui degoute,  
 Et se consume ainsi que fait la cire au feu, 150  
 Ou la neige de mars, qui lente peu à peu  
 S'escoule sur les monts de Thrace ou d'Arcadie,  
 Des rayons incertains du Soleil attiedie.  
 Si bien que de Narcis qui fut jadis si beau,  
 Qui plus que laict caillé avoit blanche la peau: 155  
 Que de front, d'yeux, de bouche, et de tout le visage  
 Resembloit le portrait d'une Adonine image,  
 Ne resta seulement qu'une petite fleur,  
 Qui d'un jaune safran emprunta la couleur,  
 Laquelle n'oubliant sa naissance premiere, 160  
 Suit encore aujourd'huy la rive fontainiere,  
 Et tousjours pres des eaux apparroist au Printemps,  
 Que le vent qui tout souffle, abat en peu de temps.  
 Aux arbres la Nature a permis longue vie:  
 Ceste fleur du matin ou du soir est ravie. 165  
 Ainsi l'ordre le veut et la necessité,  
 Qui dès le premier jour de la nativité  
 Allonge ou raccourcist nos fuseaux, et nous donne  
 Non ce que nous voulons, mais cela qu'elle ordonne.

## Appendix B

“Contre les bucherons de la forest de Gastine”

Elégie XXIV

Quiconque aura premier la main embesognée  
A te couper, forest, d'une dure congnee,  
Qu'il puisse s'enferrer de son propre baston,  
Et sente en l'estomac la faim d'Erisichton,  
Qui coupa de Cerés le Chesne venerable 5  
Et qui gourmand de tout, de tout insatiable,  
Les bœufs et les moutons de sa mère esgorgea,  
Puis pressé de la faim, soy-mesme se mangea :  
Ainsi puisse engloutir ses rentes et sa terre,  
Et se devore après par les dents de la guerre. 10

Qu'il puisse pour vanger le sang de nos forests,  
Tousjours nouveaux emprunts sur nouveaux interests  
Devoir à l'usurier, et qu'en fin il consomme  
Tout son bien à payer la principale somme.

Que tousjours sans repos ne face en son cerveau 15  
Que tramer pour-neant quelque dessein nouveau,  
Porté d'impatience et de fureur diverse,  
Et de mauvais conseil qui les hommes renverse.

Escoute, Bucheron (arreste un peu le bras)  
Ce ne sont pas des bois que tu jettes à bas, 20  
Ne vois-tu pas le sang lequel degoute à force  
Des Nymphes qui vivoyent dessous la dure escorce ?  
Sacrilège meurdrer, si on prend un voleur  
Pour piller un butin de bien peu de valeur,  
Combien de feux, de fers, de morts, et de destresses 25  
Merites-tu, meschant, pour tuer des Déesses ?

Forest, haute maison des oiseaux bocagers,  
Plus le Cerf solitaire et les Chevreuls legers  
Ne paistront sous ton ombre, et ta verte criniere  
Plus du Soleil d'Esté ne rompra la lumiere. 30

Plus l'amoureux Pasteur sur un tronq adossé,  
Enflant son flageolet à quatre trous persé,  
Son mastin à ses pieds, à son flanc la houlette,

Ne dira plus l'ardeur de sa belle Janette :  
Tout deviendra muet : Echo sera sans voix : 35  
Tu deviendras campagne, et en lieu de tes bois,  
Dont l'ombrage incertain lentement se remue,  
Tu sentiras le soc, le coutre et la charrue :  
Tu perdras ton silence, et haletans d'effroy  
Ny Satyres ny Pans ne viendront plus chez toy. 40

Adieu vieille forest, le jouët de Zephyre,  
Où premier j'accorday les langues de ma lyre,  
Où premier j'entendi les fleches resonner  
D'Apollon, qui me vint tout le coeur estonner :  
Où premier admirant la belle Calliope, 45  
Je devins amoureux de sa neuvaine trope,  
Quand sa main sur le front cent roses me jetta,  
Et de son propre laict Euterpe m'allaita.

Adieu vieille forest, adieu testes sacrées,  
De tableaux et de fleurs autrefois honorées, 50  
Maintenant le desdain des passans alterez,  
Qui bruslez en Esté des rayons etherez,  
Sans plus trouver le frais de tes douces verdurees,  
Accusent vos meurtriers, et leur disent injures.

Adieu Chesnes, couronne aux vaillans citoyens, 55  
Arbres de Jupiter, germes Dodonéens,  
Qui premiers aux humains donnastes à repaistre,  
Peuples vrayment ingrats, qui n'ont sceu reconnoistre  
Les biens receus de vous, peuples vrayment grossiers,  
De massacrer ainsi nos peres nourriciers. 60

Que l'homme est malheureux qui au monde se fie !  
Ô Dieux, que véritable est la Philosophie,  
Qui dit que toute chose à la fin perira,  
Et qu'en changeant de forme une autre vestira :  
De Tempé la vallée un jour sera montagne, 65  
Et la cyme d'Athos une large campagne,  
Neptune quelquefois de blé sera couvert.  
La matiere demeure, et la forme se perd.

## Appendix C

“À la forêt de Gastine”

Couché sous tes ombrages verts,  
Gastine, je te chante  
Autant que les Grecs, par leurs vers  
La forêt d'Érymanthe :

Car, malin, celer je ne puis  
À la race future  
De combien obligé je suis  
À ta belle verdure,

Toi qui, sous l'abri de tes bois,  
Ravi d'esprit m'amuses ;  
Toi qui fais qu'à toutes les fois  
Me répondent les Muses ;

Toi par qui de l'importun soin  
Tout franc je me délivre,  
Lorsqu'en toi je me perds bien loin,  
Parlant avec un livre.

Tes bocages soient toujours pleins  
D'amoureuses brigades  
De Satyres et de Sylvains,  
La crainte des Naiades !

En toi habite désormais  
Des Muses le collège,  
Et ton bois ne sente jamais  
La flamme sacrilège !

## Appendix D

“To the Forest of Gastine”

(Trans. by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow)

Stretched in thy shadows I rehearse,  
Gastine, thy solitudes.  
Even as the Grecians in their verse  
The Erymanthian woods.

For I, alas! cannot conceal  
From any future race  
The pleasure, the delight, I feel  
In thy green dwelling-place.

Thou who beneath thy sheltering bowers  
Dost make me visions see;  
Thou who dost cause that at all hours  
The Muses answer me;

Thou who from each importunate care  
Dost free me with a look,  
When lost I roam I know not where  
Conversing with a book!

Forever may thy thickets hold  
The amorous brigade  
Of Satyrs and of Sylvans bold.  
That make the Nymphs afraid;

In thee the Muses evermore  
Their habitation claim,  
And never may thy woods deplore  
The sacrilegious flame.

## Appendix E

Glossary of Rhetorical Figures, with definitions from

Gideon Burton's *Silva Rhetorica*

Anadiplosis: "The repetition of the last word (or phrase) from the previous line, clause, or sentence at the beginning of the next."

Antimetabole: "Repetition of words, in successive clauses, in reverse grammatical order."

Chiasmus: "Repetition of grammatical structures in inverted order (not to be mistaken with antimetabole, in which identical words are repeated and inverted)."

Conduplicatio: "The repetition of a word or words. A general term for repetition sometimes carrying the more specific meaning of repetition of words in adjacent phrases or clauses."

Diacope: "Repetition of a word with one or more between, usually to express deep feeling."

Epizeuxis: "Repetition of words with no others between, for vehemence or emphasis."

Mimesis: "1. Greek name for the rhetorical pedagogy known as imitation. 2. The imitation of another's gestures, pronunciation, or utterance."

Mesodiplosis: "Repetition of the same word or words in the middle of successive sentences."

Ploce: "The repetition of a single word for rhetorical emphasis."

## Appendix F

“L’Envoy de Narcisse,” by Thomas Edwards

Scarring beautie all bewitching,  
Tell a tale to hurt it selfe,  
Tels a tale how men are fleeting,  
All of Love and his power,  
Tels how womens shewes are pelfe,  
And their constancies as flowers.

Aie me pretie wanton boy,  
What a sire did hatch thee forth,  
To shew thee of the worlds annoy,  
Ere thou kenn'st anie pleasure:  
Such a favour's nothing worth,  
To touch not to taste the treasure.

Poets that divinely dreampt,  
Telling wonders visedly,  
My slow Muse have quite benempt,  
And my rude skonce have aslackt,  
So I cannot cunningly,  
Make an image to awake.

Ne the frostie lims of age,  
Uncouth shape (mickle wonder)  
To tread with them in equipage,  
As quaint light blearing eies,  
Come my pen broken under,  
Magick-spels such devize.

Collyn was a mighty swaine,  
In his power all do flourish,  
We are shepheards but in vaine,  
There is but one tooke the charge,  
By his toile we do nourish,  
And by him are inlarg'd.

He unlockt Albions glorie,  
He twas tolde of Sidneys honor,  
Onely he of our stories,  
Must be sung in greatest pride,  
In an Eglogue he hath wonne her,

Fame and honor on his side.

Deale we not with Rosamond,  
For the world our sawe will coate,  
Amintas and Leander's gone,  
Oh deere sonnes of stately kings,  
Blessed be your nimble throats,  
That so amorously could sing.

Adon deafly masking thro,  
Stately troupes rich conceited,  
Shew'd he well deserved to,  
Loves delight on him to gaze,  
And had not love her selfe intreated,  
Other nymphs had sent him baies.

Eke in purple robes distaind,  
Amid'st the Center of this clime,  
I have heard saie doth remaine,  
One whose power floweth far,  
That should have bene of our rime,  
The onely object and the star.

Well could his bewitching pen,  
Done the Muses obiects to us,  
Although he differs much from men,  
Tilting under Frieries,  
Yet his golden art might woo us,  
To have honored him with baies.

He that gan up to tilt,  
Babels fresh remembrance,  
Of the worlds-wracke how twas spilt,  
And a world of stories made,  
In a catalogues semblance  
Hath alike the Muses staide.

What remaines peerelesse men,  
That in Albions confines are,  
But eterniz'd with the pen,  
In sacred Poems and sweet laies,  
Should be sent to Nations farre,  
The greatnes of faire Albions praise.

Let them be audacious proude,  
Whose devises are of currant,  
Everie stampe is not allow'd,  
Yet the coine may prove as good,  
Yourselves know your lines have warrant,  
I will talke of Robin Hood.

And when all is done and past,  
Narcissus in another sort,  
And gaier clothes shall be pla'st,  
Eke perhaps in good plight,  
In meane while I'le make report,  
Of your winnings that do write.

Hence a golden tale might grow,  
Of due honor and the praise,  
That longs to Poets, but the show  
Were not worth the while to spend,  
Sufficeth that they merit baies,  
Saie what I can it must have end,  
Then thus faire Albion flourish so,  
As Thames may nourish as did Po.

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