

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



The Influence of Ovid's Echo and Narcissus Myth on English Petrarchan Poetry

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In Sonnet 45 of his *Canzoniere*, addressed to Laura at her looking glass, Petrarch addresses Laura's mirror, treating it as a love rival who has better access to her than he, and is causing her to become sour and proud.¹ In the final quatrain he reminds Laura of the fate of Narcissus, whose ultimately fatal self-love had arisen from seeing his reflection in a pool, in order to persuade Laura to transfer her attention from the mirror to him:

Certo, se vi rimembra di Narcisso,
questo et quel corso ad un termino vanno.²

The poem conveys Petrarch's typical positioning of male lover and female beloved: she is honoured in heaven, disdainful; he is inferior, banished from her and suffering. The reminder about the fate of Narcissus might be a warning against personal vanity, but the tone is still one of adoration, Petrarch echoing Laura's name with his rhymes, and ending with a compliment to her: if she were turned into a flower like Narcissus, the grass would not be worthy of it. Interpreting the myth of Narcissus as signifying vanity was already conventional by Petrarch's day, thanks to two early fourteenth-century

¹ See Gianfranco Contini (ed.), *Canzoniere di Francesco Petrarca* (Turin: Einaudi, 1964), http://www.letteraturaitaliana.net/pdf/Volume_2/t319.pdf (accessed 06 July 2017) or in English translation, Petrarch, *The Complete Canzoniere*, trans. by A.S. Kline (2001), http://people.virginia.edu/~jdk3t/petrarchkline.htm#_Toc12014221 (accessed 02 Dec 2016). I have provided hyperlinks to reliable online versions of texts where possible. Few of the English sonnet sequences I cite have recent editions, and some older editions have involved damaging editorial interventions, so I have used open access EEBO texts if available and, if not, then the best available online versions.

² Contini, p. 58.

French works, the *Ovide moralisé* and Pierre Bersuire's *Ovidus Moralizatus*, which drew Christianised messages from the tale, emphasising the dangers of *superbia*, the original sin (of Lucifer and/or Adam) that led to the Fall.³ For medieval French and German courtly verse, other themes such as reality and self-knowledge were drawn from the tale, and Narcissus could represent a paragon of beauty, or even an heroic figure.⁴ Despite the range of different interpretations, Narcissus was typically an emblematic, allegorical figure, as also was Echo, who might stand for flattery or, obscurely, reputation.⁵ During the sixteenth century there were many imitators of Petrarch, and allusions to the Narcissus myth in their sonnets were many and varied. This essay examines closely the way the myth was used by English sonnet writers of the 1590s, both the familiar and less well known, challenging the conclusion of J.W. Lever about English sonnet writing that 'little is to be gained from a close scrutiny of the minor sequences published after 1591'.⁶ He claimed that 'imagery consists for the most part of a proliferation of conceits, not as a means of apprehending complex issues, but solely as an end in themselves', and remarked that the fables of Cupid and Venus 'supply decoration for sonnet after sonnet'.⁷ Whilst Lever's general point was valid enough, this essay will demonstrate that allusions to Echo and Narcissus were often more than decorative and could indeed help the reader apprehend complex issues.⁸

Louise Vigne's encyclopedic account of appearances of the Narcissus myth in European literature through the centuries mentioned only two English sonnets, and only one from the 1590s, yet in that decade the Echo and Narcissus tale seems to have become a key motif in English Petrarchan poetry, appearing in sonnet sequences from ten different poets. This essay will argue that their reflections on the myth of Echo and Narcissus helped these poets to develop, deepen and interrogate the genre, contributing to what has been called English anti-Petrarchism.⁹ Conversely, it will also suggest that the use

³ See Louise Vigne, *The Narcissus Theme in Western European Literature up to the Early 19th Century* (Lund: Gleerups, 1967), pp. 91-100.

⁴ See Frederick Goldin, *The Mirror of Narcissus in the Courtly Love Lyric* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967); Gerald Seaman, 'The French Myth of *Narcissus*: Some Medieval Refashionings', *Disputatio* 3 (1998), 19-33; Jane Gilbert "'I Am Not He": Narcissus and Ironic Performativity in Medieval French Literature', *The Modern Language Review* 100. 4 (2005), 940-53.

⁵ See, on Arnulf's medieval interpretation of Echo as Reputation in his *Allegoriae*, Kenneth J. Knoespel, *Narcissus and the Invention of Personal History* (New York: Routledge, 1985 / 2016), p. 36.

⁶ J.W. Lever, *The Elizabethan Love Sonnet* (London: Methuen, 1966), p. 144.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Lever was particularly dismissive of Barnes, Fletcher and Constable, and found Drayton much inferior to Daniel, praising only his 'considerable store of knowledge' (ibid, p. 155).

⁹ Whilst the term 'anti-Petrarchism' is perhaps misleading, it is helpful in signalling that sixteenth-century poets were self-consciously challenging the conventions of what was becoming a cliché-ridden genre; on

of Ovid's tale by Petrarchan poets affected the way the tale of Echo and Narcissus was understood, shifting the interpretive focus both from the moral content to the psychological, and from consideration of the two protagonists as individually emblematic figures to consideration of their relationship or the nature of desire. The first section below considers how Ovid's *Metamorphoses* were received and interpreted in the sixteenth century, from classrooms to the Inns of Court. The following section focusses on the way the tale of Echo and Narcissus in particular was understood, and how the notion of narcissism as a psychological condition emerged during the sixteenth century. The next two sections show how a focus on either Echo or Narcissus had similar effects of emphasising the pathologically obsessive nature of the unsatisfied desire expressed in sonnet sequences. The final section suggests that some poets explored the potential for sexual violence inherent in the dynamic of sonnet sequences, particularly when driven by male narcissism.

Reading Ovid in Sixteenth-Century England

The early models for English Petrarchan poetry were published in *Tottel's Miscellany* (1557) where could be found the songs and sonnets of Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, as well as a number of unnamed authors. The sonnets of Wyatt and Surrey were typically in earnest imitation or even direct translation of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, which allude to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* extensively, but these English sonnets have few Ovidian references.¹⁰ Surrey does make a passing reference to Echo but not in a Petrarchan sonnet: in his poem about being imprisoned in Windsor she is used as a signifier of sorrow.¹¹ In these love poems, Surrey's main references are Cupid and Venus; Wyatt has almost no use for classical allusions, preferring historical comparisons, but addresses one sonnet to Cupid.¹² Cupid and Venus are also the standard classical references in the other love poems from the *Miscellany* by the unattributed authors.¹³ Subsequent generations of English sonneteers, however, would

the complexities of English Petrarchan discourse in particular, see Heather Dubrow, *Echoes of Desire: English Petrarchism and its Counterdiscourses* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995).

¹⁰ See Anthony Mortimer (ed.) *Petrarch's Canzoniere in the English Renaissance* (Minerva Italica, 1975) which identifies 27 of Wyatt's 96 poems as translations.

¹¹ Richard Tottel, *Songes and Sonettes* (London 1557), sig. 3Bv, <http://versemiscellaniesonline.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/texts/tottels-miscellany/tottel-sig-biiiv/> (accessed 10 July 2017).

¹² For Howard's use of Cupid, see for example Tottel, sigs. A3r, A3v, B1r,

¹³ See, for example, Tottel, sigs. Ee2r to Ee3v: <http://versemiscellaniesonline.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/texts/tottels-miscellany/tottel-eeiiiv-2/> (accessed 03 July 2017).

turn repeatedly to stories from the *Metamorphoses*. When Sidney wrote *Astrophel and Stella* (1591), whose posthumous publication sparked the 1590s craze for sonnet sequences, he made frequent allusions to Cupid but expected the reader to know also the stories of Ganymede and Jove, Morpheus, Amphion, Orpheus, Phoebus, Tereus and Philomena, and Narcissus. In the subsequent sequences, Venus and Cupid were the most common Ovidian allusions, and sometimes the only ones as in Giles Fletcher's *Licia* (1593). But other sonneteers were more adventurous, and were particularly fond of references to ill-fated couples from the *Metamorphoses* such as Myrrha and Cinyras, Hero and Leander, Venus and Adonis, or Diana and Acteon.

A significant context for the increase in Ovidian allusions was the educational background of the late sixteenth-century sonneteers. They came mainly from the growing middle class and were educated at grammar schools, sometimes progressing to university education, as did at least eight of the twelve poets discussed.¹⁴ The English education system was developing rapidly in the middle of the sixteenth century, the number of newly established grammar schools peaking at over thirty in the 1550s, and universities subsequently expanding during Elizabeth I's reign.¹⁵ As elsewhere in Northern Europe, humanism was gradually encroaching upon the scholastic curriculum at universities in Cambridge and Oxford. Even for those not reaching university level, access to classical literature was no longer the privilege of an aristocratic elite: the boys at grammar schools in Henry VIII's reign would have been taught with a range of texts from Aesop's fables to the plays of Terence and the *Eclogues* of Mantuanus. Whilst those texts had been noted for their edifying morals, in Elizabethan England Ovid's *Metamorphoses* became a new staple of grammar school education for boys, and with their tales of supernatural transformations, gruesome violence and uncontrolled passions they would undoubtedly have had a strong effect on adolescent schoolboys.¹⁶ R.W. Maslen explains that despite the reading of Ovid being a 'highly dangerous matter' the tales were used not only for practice in translation but also for exercises in exegesis, discovering their hidden meanings.¹⁷ Boys would move from deducing the morals of

¹⁴ Watson, Sidney, Lodge, Percy, Barnfield, Daniel and Barnes went to Oxford, though the last two did not graduate; Constable and Spenser were Cambridge graduates.

¹⁵ University numbers rose significantly towards the end of the sixteenth century, e.g. matriculations at Oxford rose from an average of 191 in the 1570s to 340 per year in the 1580s: see Mark H. Curtis, 'The Alienated Intellectuals of Early Stuart England', *Past & Present* 23 (1962), 25-43 (p. 32).

¹⁶ See R. W. Maslen, 'Myths Exploited: the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid in Early Elizabethan England', in A.B. Taylor (ed.), *Shakespeare's Ovid*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 15-30. Even boys with little Latin could have access to English versions: the 1567 English translation by Arthur Golding is often referred to as Shakespeare's Ovid, but the earliest, from 1480, was by William Caxton.

¹⁷ Maslen, p. 16.

fables such as Aesop's to the rather more challenging task of 'moralising' Ovid's tales, which were open to more varied interpretation, and indeed often quite enigmatic.¹⁸

Classroom analysis would likely have steered clear of the sexual content of Ovid's tales, but some keen students later sought to fill that interpretive lacuna with poetry of their own. William Keach has described how from the 1560s the Inns of Court had fostered 'the growth of an unorthodox openness to Ovid's poetry' in the form of erotic mini-epics (epyllia) based on tales from the *Metamorphoses*.¹⁹ William Weaver has made a convincing case for them being seen as rites of passage texts in their symbolic representation of adolescence.²⁰ The 1590s saw the final flourish of what Heather Dubrow called a 'Petrarchan counterdiscourse' that shows 'an ironic detachment from the follies of love'.²¹ Keach cited the sexually ambiguous description of Adonis by Shakespeare and the homoerotic description of Leander by Marlowe as examples of the epyllion's subversiveness.²² Jim Ellis, in contrast, suggested that in the 1590s the poems were actually concerned with re-establishing the gender distinctions and roles which Petrarchism had undermined, projecting an assertive masculinity in contrast to Petrarchan submissiveness.²³

At the end of the sixteenth century, then, Ovid seemed to be both antithetical to Petrarchism and yet embedded in its discourse. Thomas Lodge (?1557-1627) is an interesting case of someone who wrote both a Petrarchan sonnet sequence and an epyllion. *Scylla's Metamorphosis* (1589), written during his decade of living in the all-male society of Lincoln's Inn, could be offered as evidence of masculinism in the epyllion genre, being presented as a light-hearted warning to women who reject men:

¹⁸ Lynn Enterline propounds an interesting thesis about the wider psycho-social impact of the rhetorical training received by boys via Ovid and other classical authors in *Shakespeare's Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

¹⁹ William Keach, *Elizabethan Erotic Narratives* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1977), p. 32. The broader influence of Ovid on poets such as Spenser, Marlowe and Drayton was explored by Heather James in 'Ovid in Renaissance English Literature' in *Blackwell Companion to Ovid*, ed. by Peter E. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 423-41. The use of Ovid by Shakespeare is well documented, most notably by Jonathan Bate in *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

²⁰ See Introduction to William Weaver, *Untutored Lines: The Making of the English Epyllion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

²¹ Dubrow, p. 273. On the association of Ovid with seventeenth-century English libertine poetry, see Maggie Kilgour, *Milton and the Metamorphosis of Ovid* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 97-156.

²² See Keach, pp. 66ff. and 94ff.

²³ Jim Ellis, 'Imagining Heterosexuality in the Epyllia', in *Ovid and the Renaissance Body* ed. G.V. Staniukovic (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2001), pp. 38-58.

‘Verie fit for young Courtiers to peruse, and coy Dames to remember’.²⁴ The poem is prefaced by a dedication to ‘the Gentlemen of the Innes of Court and Chauncerie’, and ends with Glaucus the unattractively scaly sea god gleeful at Scylla’s monstrous transformation, which teaches the lesson that ‘Nymphs must yield’, whether or not they find their suitor attractive. The narrative of Ovid’s tale had been drastically revised, now ending with the roles of infatuated lover and disdainful beloved reversed thanks to the intervention of Cupid at the behest of Thetis, the mother of Glaucus.²⁵ Given its explicitly comical and perhaps satirical aspect, it would be simplistic to call this rewrite misogynistic, but the reader was clearly supposed to be entertained by the idea of the woman getting a taste of her own medicine of disdain.²⁶ Perhaps his version of the tale, where both suitor and love object are monstrous, was written as an antidote to Petrarchan idealism; it certainly highlights how unlikely a pairing were Ovid’s tales and Petrarch’s sonnets – the one based on tales of arbitrary and uncontrolled passions, the other based on a carefully controlled and crafted suppression of passion. Yet four years after its publication, Lodge published his own Petrarchan sequence *Sonnets to Phillis* (1593), having just returned from Sir Thomas Cavendish’s ill-fated expedition to South America. Typically for the genre, the sonnets are predominantly in the first person but the speaker is also identified occasionally as the shepherd Damon, who also speaks in an eclogue embedded within the forty sonnets. Amongst a small number of classical references in the sequence, there are allusions to Echo in Sonnets 12 and 14, and one to Narcissus in Sonnet 34. To understand why this myth in particular should have attracted Lodge and so many other poets of the 1590s, it will be helpful to review the ways in which it was interpreted in the sixteenth century.

From Narcissus to Narcissism

Petrarch had evoked a Christian, moralised idea of Narcissus in Sonnet 45, but by the late sixteenth century a range of other interpretations of the tale were available for English sonneteers. One of the best known would presumably have been from the

²⁴ Thomas Lodge, *Scillaes metamorphosis* (London, 1589), Title page. Text Creation Partnership (EEBO), <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A06181.0001.001/1:1?rgn=div1;view=fulltext> (accessed 02 Dec 2016).

²⁵ See for a detailed analysis of the departures from Ovid in Lodge’s version, R.W. Maslen, ‘Lodge’s *Glaucus and Scilla* and the Conditions of Catholic Authorship in Elizabethan England’, in *Thomas Lodge*, ed. by Charles C. Whitney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 59-100.

²⁶ Georgia Brown warned against over-simplified readings of the epyllion genre, claiming that they are about ‘poetry, youth and shame’ as well as sex: Georgia Brown, *Redefining Elizabethan Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 106. Weaver (op. cit.) however, shows that adolescent violence, including rape, is a favourite theme.

Epistle preceding Arthur Golding's translation of *Metamorphoses*, published 1565, which briefly summarises the tales, remarking that Narcissus represents vanity and pride, whilst Echo represents 'the lewd behaviour of a bawd'.²⁷ That somewhat tendentious interpretation of Echo, happily not one which was generally taken up by Petrarchan sonneteers, was probably derived from the double meaning of her echo to Narcissus's *coeamus* ('let us meet') which can also mean 'let us copulate'.²⁸ Golding's source was certainly not the lengthy verse commentary by T.H., 'The fable of Ovid tretting of Narcissus' (1560).²⁹ That work comprises an English rendering of the Ovid followed by a range of alternative (and often incompatible) readings of the tale, from the moral/religious to more modern readings which might even be called psychological.³⁰ The first reading is a familiar one about the dangers of pride, exemplified by a series of Biblical, classical and historical references, from Lucifer to Cleopatra. Then the author turns to Echo, and suggests that her repetitions might signify the way flatterers agree with every word said by the rich and powerful:

The same, they saye, they aunswer after warde
As though it twise were worthe to be herde.³¹

The reading of Echo as a flatterer was more common than Golding's, but again not one which was generally followed by Petrarchan poets. T.H. next mentions Boccaccio's idiosyncratic commentary on the tale, which linked it in an abstruse manner to the themes of glory and fame.³² Marsilio Ficino's neoplatonic interpretation of the tale from

²⁷ See *The Fifteen Books of Ovid's Metamorphoses*, trans. by Arthur Golding (London, 1567), <http://www.elizabethanauthors.org/ovid00.htm> (accessed 08 July 2107). In the first encounter between Echo and Narcissus in Book III of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Echo can only repeat the last of Narcissus' words. This was her punishment from Juno who had been kept talking by Echo to prevent her from discovering Jupiter's infidelities.

²⁸ See Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3, 386, <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/ovid/ovid.met3.shtml> (Accessed 13 July 2017).

²⁹ Some commentators have followed Pollard and Redgrave's *Short Title Catalogue* in identifying the author as Thomas Howell, but this is only speculative: see Edward Wilson-Lee, 'Thomas Howell' in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of English Renaissance Literature*, ed. by Alan Stewart and Garrett Sullivan (2012), pp. 518-19.

³⁰ T.H., *The fable of Ovid tretting of Narcissus* (London, 1560), Text Creation Partnership (EEBO) <http://name.umd.umich.edu/A08664.0001.001> (accessed 02 Dec 2016).

³¹ Ibid., 'The moralization of the fable', <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A08664.0001.001/1:5?rgn=div1;view=fulltext> (accessed 11 July 2017).

³² See Book 7, Chapter 59 of Boccaccio's *de Genealogia Deorum* (*Genealogy of the Gods*) <http://www.uni-mannheim.de/mateo/itali/boccaccio1/jpg/s194.html> (Accessed 14 July 2017).

De Amore was perhaps more influential, in particular on Spenser as we will see below.³³ According to this reading, the physical deterioration of Narcissus is the outcome of his obsession with the physical: 'the minde, that oughte of righte, to be / The teacher of the bodye to do well', is 'drowned with desire'.³⁴ Despite its metaphysical flavour, ultimately it belongs to that long tradition of assimilating Ovid's tales into a Christian ethic.

Between the versions of Boccaccio and Ficino are perhaps the most interesting parts of the commentary, which appear to be the author's own interpretations. He offers an alternative, and less than convincing, account of Echo where her repetitions are intended to make Narcissus reflect on his own words. That leads into an interesting passage about the grandiose self-delusion of Narcissus:

And what he hathe he thinkes all the beste
Besyds him selfe dispicinge all the reste

All though in dede, he nether be so fayer
So well proporsmid, nor so suerlye wise
Ne yet in strengthe, be abyll to compayre
With halfe the nomber that he dyd dyspise
A boue them al he thinkes him selfe to prise,
Whiche ouer weninge, wins him all his wooe.³⁵

This idea that Narcissus is not as beautiful as he thinks he is departs dramatically from Ovid's own account that 'no chylde was seene so fayre, nor yong man better shapyd' and instead hints at modern notions of narcissism.³⁶ Instead of any previous commentary on the myth, T.H. might here have been following Erasmus' *In Praise of Folly* where Philautia (self-love) is one of the foolish characters. Thomas Chaloner's

³³ Ficino in turn was following the interpretation provided by the Neoplatonist philosopher Plotinus in his *Enneads*. See for a discussion of this Sergius Kodera, 'Narcissus, Divine Gazes and Bloody Mirrors: the Concept of Matter in Ficino', in *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, ed. Michael J.B. Allen, Martin Davies and Valery Rees, pp. 288-294. Eric Langley has argued that in the early modern period the idea of narcissism was emerging, but still closely associated with such moral-religious / metaphysical attitudes in relation to the soul and self-knowledge. See Eric Langley, *Narcissism and Suicide in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

³⁴ T. H., 'Moralization'

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid, 'The Poem', <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A08664.0001.001/1:4?rgn=div1;view=fulltext> (accessed 11 July 2017).

English translation had appeared in 1549, and part of the section on Philautia (translated as ‘Selflyking’) is strikingly similar to T.H.’s description of Narcissus:

as though this *Selflykyng* made not most men, manifoldly, by wonderous meanes, most happie in theyr owne opinion: as whan one fowler than any marmoset, think hym selfe to be goodlier than *Absalon*.³⁷

There is clearly a satirical aspect to the passage, where fun is made of self-regarding poets, singers, and rhetoricians, as well as the particular manifestations of self-love evinced by different countries or even cities. Yet in describing Philautia as a psychological type, rather than as a moral failing, Erasmus had also provided a model for T.H. in his interpretation of Narcissus.

If T.H. hinted at a conflation of Narcissus with *philautia*, this was made explicit in Francis Bacon’s 1609 Latin work *de sapientia veterum* (*On the wisdom of the ancients*), which contains a short commentary on ‘Narcissus, sive philautia’. Whilst Bacon calls the story a fable and he does end with a judgment about the uselessness of the narcissist to society, his account is concerned less with moralising than with describing a certain psychological type:

For with this state of mind there is commonly joined an indisposition to appear much in public or engage in business; because business would expose them to many neglects and scorns, by which their minds would be dejected and troubled. Therefore they commonly live a solitary, private, and shadowed life; with a small circle of chosen companions, all devoted admirers, who assent like an echo to everything they say, and entertain them with mouth homage; till being by such habits gradually depraved and puffed up, and besotted at last with self-admiration, they fall into such a sloth and listlessness that they grow utterly stupid, and lose all vigour and alacrity.³⁸

The type described might seem more like the modern idea of an introvert than a narcissist, but the description identifies two characteristics of what modern psychology calls pathological narcissism.³⁹ One is the idea that they avoid company when they

³⁷ Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*, trans. by Edward Challoner (London, 1549), <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A00384.0001.001/1:3?rgn=div1;view=toc> (accessed 07 July 2017).

³⁸ Francis Bacon, *Of the Wisdom of the Ancients*, in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding and Robert L. Ellis (London, 1857–1870), <http://www.bartleby.com/82/4.html> (accessed 02 Dec 2016).

³⁹ See R.N. Raskin and C.S. Hall, ‘A narcissistic personality inventory’, *Psychological Reports* 45 (1979), p. 590, <http://prx.sagepub.com/content/45/2/590> (accessed 02 Dec 2016). This short list of NP

cannot cope with ‘neglects and scorns’ which relates to narcissists’ strategy of social withdrawal when their ego is threatened; the second is the link between narcissism and depression. Robert Burton in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) also drew that link in Part 1 Section 2 on the causes of melancholy. Self-love is one of the causes, and certain melancholics are described as ‘Narcissus-like’.⁴⁰ The resistance of such narcissists to treatment, something modern psychological research has confirmed, is noted in the remark that ‘those that are misaffected with it, never so much as once perceive it, or think of any cure’.⁴¹

Whilst the idea of a pathological narcissism was beginning to emerge in the early modern period, so too was an idea that self-love, rather than being an aberration or illness, is normal and even desirable. Though it might sound somewhat post-Freudian, the theory that *philautia* is the basis of all other types of love had been propounded by Mario Equicola in *Di Natura D’Amore* (1525).⁴² That encyclopedic text about love went through fourteen editions in the sixteenth century, and a French translation by Gabriel Chappuys was published in 1584. The opening of Book 2 makes it clear that the idea of us all loving ourselves is a fundamental and absolute principle. Moreover, it is ‘le plus louable amour de nous mesmes’, which is ‘le principe & l’origine de toutes les affections’.⁴³ This theory of a positive self-love as both universal and originary provides something of a counterpoint to the typically negative associations of either *superbia* or *philautia*, and perhaps more importantly for this study of love poetry it provided a space for more generalised ideas about narcissism in relationships than those treating it as a sin or an illness.

There were possible poetic influences too on late sixteenth-century English poets, the most obvious being French poets with Petrarchan leanings, for whom the association of Narcissus with melancholy was common. Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani described how

characteristics became the basis of subsequent criteria for diagnosing pathological narcissism. See for latest definitions of the disorder, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fifth edition (Washington DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), p. 669.

⁴⁰ Robert Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1632 edition), ed. by Holbrook Jackson (New York: New York Review of Books, 2001), p. 293.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 292

⁴² Freud’s paper ‘On Narcissism’ (1914) distinguished between primary or ‘normal’ narcissism (emerging as a stage of infant development) and secondary, pathological forms of narcissism. See J. Strachey (ed.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 Vols, (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), XIV p. 67.

⁴³ ‘The most praiseworthy love of ourselves’. See Mario Equicola, *Les Six Livres de Mario Equicola*, trans. Gabriel Chappuys (Paris, 1584), p. 97, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1110394/f193.item> (accessed 04 July 2017).

self-styled melancholic poets from Maurice Scève (1501-1564) to Siméon-Guillaume de La Roque (1551-1611) used the figure of Narcissus ‘comme emblème de leur ‘misère’ affective et sexuelle’.⁴⁴ Most prominent of these poets was Pierre de Ronsard (1524-1585) whose allusions to Narcissus are numerous and even include an elegy on the death of Narcissus, ‘La mort de Narcisse’ (1554).⁴⁵ Referring to Petrarchan poetry, Lynne Enterline asked in the introduction of her book on early-modern melancholy and masculinity, ‘why did a poetic form dedicated to praise of a beloved object so consistently generate melancholic self-reflection?’⁴⁶ Since Narcissus was a signifier of melancholic self-reflection, the same question is pertinent to the many appearances of Narcissus in 1590s sonnet sequences. Carine Luccioni has traced a focus on Echo in early seventeenth-century French poetry back to Flaminio de Birague (1550-?), Agrippa d’Aubigné (1552-1630) and de La Roque, who might have influenced the English Petrarchans of the 1590s.⁴⁷

According to Luccioni, Echo could represent melancholic love-sickness, and this was pathologised rather as Narcissism was: early seventeenth-century poetic representations of Echo in French poetry would have been seen in contemporary medical terms as symptoms of ‘mélancolie érotique’.⁴⁸ That Echo too could signify melancholy deepened and complicated the significance of the myth to Petrarchan poets, as the next section will show.

‘Payne agayne repeated’: Echo and the failure of love

The emergence of Echo and Narcissus as a motif within English Petrarchan discourse can be dated quite specifically to the five years after the publication of *Astrophel and*

⁴⁴ Gisele Mathieu-Castellani, ‘Narcisse au giron de mélancolie’, *Versants: revue suisse des littératures romanes* 26 (1994), 95-110 (p. 100). See also Gisele Mathieu-Castellani, ‘Narcisse ou la mélancolie: lecture d’un sonnet de du Perron’, *Littérature* 37.1 (1980), 25-36.

⁴⁵ See Ullrich Langer, ‘Ronsard’s “La Mort de Narcisse”: Imitation and the Melancholy Subject’, *French Forum* 9.1 (1984), 5-18. At least one of the English poets I refer to in this paper, Thomas Lodge, borrowed directly from Ronsard in his reference to the myth, though not his theme of melancholy.

⁴⁶ Lynn Enterline, *The Tears of Narcissus: Melancholia and Masculinity in Early Modern Writing* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 2.

⁴⁷ See Carine Luccioni, ‘Les accents d’une nymphe plaintive: Écho, miroir du dire mélancolique dans la poésie de l’âge baroque (1580-1630)’, *XVIIe siècle* 239 (2008), 285-310. <https://www.cairn.info/revue-dix-septieme-siecle-2008-2-page-285.htm> (accessed 22 Dec 2016). De La Roque’s *Les Amours de Narsize* (1609) opens with an appeal to Echo, see *Oeuvres* (Paris, 1609), p. 128: <https://books.google.com/books?id=mOhfAAAACAAJ> (accessed 04 July 2017).

⁴⁸ Luccioni, p. 294.

Stella: by 1596, nine poets – Thomas Watson (posthumously), Edmund Spenser, Thomas Lodge, Samuel Daniel, Bartholemew Griffin, Henry Constable, Richard Barnfield, William Percy and Barnaby Barnes – had published sequences that drew on the myth, some of them, as we will see below, repeatedly. Two other responses to the Narcissus myth in the same period are worth mentioning, a Latin poem by John Clapham (1566-1619) published 1591 and an English poem by Thomas Edwards published 1595. Clapham's poem, dedicated to the Earl of Southampton, was a warning against Narcissism which might have been prompted by Lord Burleigh who wanted the earl to marry his granddaughter.⁴⁹ Edwards' poem is a curiosity, narrated by Narcissus himself, that William Weaver places in the category of epyllion. Amongst its curious features is that Edwards explicitly feminises Narcissus by having him decked in the gifts he has received from admiring ladies ('So I a woman turned from a boy').⁵⁰ The theme of sexual confusion, and perhaps even homosexuality, seems to be hidden in the dense and, as Weaver puts it, 'tedious' monologue. 'Fie wanton, fie, knowst not thou art a boy?' he exclaims, apparently to himself, in the final stages.⁵¹ The coincidence of these publications in such a short time-span suggests that Narcissus gained almost a cult status amongst English poets in these years.⁵²

When sonneteers went beyond medieval readings of Ovid's myth, it could be seen as part of the increasingly humanistic approaches to human behaviour, motivation and desire in the sixteenth century. The standard references to Venus and Cupid in English Petrarchan sonnets had provided a somewhat limiting template for the story of love. The random interventions of Cupid created a fanciful, deterministic world where the male lover was a helpless victim and relationships were the result of random interventions of fate. Including the story of Echo and Narcissus in the palette of references facilitated engagement with the complexities of human affections and desires, beyond the simplistic erotic scenarios of Venus and Cupid. The complexity was partly about

⁴⁹ John Clapham, 'Narcissus' (London, 1591), <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=eebo;idno=A18930.0001.001> (accessed 07 July 2017). It is possible that Shakespeare knew Clapham, or at least his poem, before he wrote *Venus and Adonis* (1593) which itself drew heavily on the myth and was also dedicated to the Earl of Southampton. See Colin Burrow and Charles Martindale, 'A Probable Source for Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*: Text and Translation of John Clapham's *Narcissus*', *ELR* 22 (1992), 147-176.

⁵⁰ *Poems by Thomas Edwards*, ed. by W.E. Buckley (London, 1882), p. 48, <https://archive.org/details/cephalusprocrisn00edwarich>. (accessed 07 July 2017).

⁵¹ Ibid, p.59. One could argue that sexual confusion is hinted at in Ovid's version where, in T.H.'s version, 'A nomber bothe of men and maydes, did hym desire'. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A08664.0001.001/1:4?rgn=div1;view=fulltext> (accessed 07 July 2017).

⁵² Evidence of the vogue is also provided by Ben Jonson's play *Cynthia's Revels*, first acted in 1600, and entered into the stationer's Register the next year as *Narcissus the Fountain of Self-Love*.

perspectives, since some sonneteers related to Echo as much as to Narcissus, challenging the male perspectives both of Petrarchan verse and of traditional Ovidian exegesis. The milieu from which many of the sonnets of the 1590s emerged – groups of poets meeting at the country houses of aristocratic patrons, some of whom were female – was rather different from the bachelor residences of the Inns of Court in the City of London which had produced the Ovidian epyllia. Mary, the Countess of Pembroke, sister of Philip Sidney, was the most renowned of these patrons and also a respected poet in her own right. She presided over the Wilton Circle of poets that flourished in the 1590s and included sonneteers Samuel Daniel, Edmund Spenser and Michael Drayton.⁵³ It is likely that the contrasting environments of Wilton House and the Inns of Court would have inflected responses to Ovid in different ways, and a focus on Echo rather than Narcissus in allusions to the myth might have been one of those ways.

Thomas Watson (1555/6-1592), an Oxford graduate and friend of both John Lyly and Christopher Marlowe, was influenced by Ronsard, whom he imitated in several sonnets from his first sonnet sequence, *Hekatompathia, or Passionate Century of Love* (1582).⁵⁴ Echo appears as a character in one of the hundred ‘passions’, as he calls the sonnets in *Hekatompathia*, in dialogue with the poet.⁵⁵ The echo verse, where the final word or words of a line are repeated, was well known as a poetic form in sixteenth-century France and Italy, but Watson’s version of this in Passion 25 is unusual and his conceit original, the poet and Echo competing with each other over whose love is the greater.⁵⁶ The poem can be read as undermining its own Petrarchan rhetoric, particularly in line 3, ‘In this thou tellst a lie. / *Echo*. Thou tellst a lie’, which by effectively being a version of the Liar Paradox creates uncertainty about everything that follows.⁵⁷ In contrast to the

⁵³ See Margaret Hannay, *Philip’s Phoenix: Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 110-19. Daniel and Drayton were also later under the patronage, as were Ben Jonson and John Donne, of another aristocratic female, Lucy, Countess of Bedford, cousin of Mary Sidney.

⁵⁴ Watson, *The Ekatompathia, or Passionate Centurie of Love* (London, 1581-2).

⁵⁵ This sequence is one where the poet is, ostensibly at least, identical with the speaker in the sonnets, as indicated by the title page which claims that the collection ‘expresseth the authors sufferance in love’. See <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A14822.0001.001/1:12.25?rgn=div2;view=toc> (accessed 07 July 2017).

⁵⁶ This is one of the two English sonnets discussed by Louise Vigne (p. 173). An extraordinary feature of the collection is that Watson prefaces every poem with an explanation and includes specific references to where he has imitated French (usually Ronsard) or Italian (mainly Petrarch and his follower Serafino) poets.

⁵⁷ Watson, *Ekatompathia* 25, Text Creation Partnership (EEBO)

<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A14822.0001.001/1:12.25?rgn=div2;view=fulltext> (accessed 02 Dec

standard interpretation of the verbal echoes being flattering, these are contradictions or rebuttals, comically challenging the author's Petrarchan posturing. In the prefatory text, Watson provides what appears to be an ironic gloss, simultaneously confirming and denying that Echo contradicts him:

It is to be considered in reading this Passion, how in some answers, the accent or pointing of the words is altered, and therewithal how the Author walking in the woods, and bewailing his inward passion of Love, is contraried by the replies of Echo: whose meaning yet is not so much to gainsay him, as to express her own miserable estate in daily consuming away for the love of her beloved Narcissus.⁵⁸

Both the self-mocking disingenuousness of the gloss, and the fact that he was comparing himself to Echo in the first place, marks this out as a very different treatment of the myth to that seen in Petrarch's Sonnet 45. If not necessarily anti-Petrarchan, it is certainly reflexive and self-aware, setting the scene for the sometimes subversive use of the myth in the 1590s.

Samuel Daniel (1562-1619) was an early contributor to the 1590s sonnet-publishing explosion – indeed, so early that some of his sonnets were published along with Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* without his consent. Like Watson, Oxford-educated (but apparently without graduating), in the 1590s he joined the Wilton circle and in 1592 published the full sequence to Delia, which he dedicated to the Countess of Pembroke. Given that a number of the poems are imitations of Petrarch and others, the 'I' of the sonnets cannot convincingly be identified with Daniel, but he uses the first person throughout. In Sonnet 29 he imitates Petrarch's sonnet 45, or more precisely he translates Philippe Desportes' 1573 imitation of the same, suggesting that Delia ought to gaze less at her mirror and more at him instead: 'To viewe your forme too much, may daunger bee, / Narcissus chaung'd t'a flowre in such a case'.⁵⁹ In contrast to Petrarch, Daniel's / Desportes' version does not soften the ending but maintains a bitter and

2016). Heather Dubrow opened her book on English Petrarchism (pp. 1-4) with this sonnet, citing it as an early example of English Petrarchism's subversiveness.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Samuel Daniel, *Delia* (London, 1592) <http://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/iemls/resour/mirrors/rbear/delia.html> (accessed 02 Dec 2016). Daniel's source was Sonnet 18 in Phillippe Desportes, *Les Amours d'Hippolyte* (1573). A similar sentiment is expressed in an unattributed poem from a 1578 verse miscellany addressed to a disdainful lady: 'beware, least loue renew in thee, / The dreadfull flame *Narcissus* whylom felt'. See Thomas Proctor, *A gorgeous gallery of gallant inventions* (London, 1578) sig. G4r, <http://versemiscellaniesonline.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/texts/gorgeous-gallery/gorgeousgallery-sig-giiiiir/> (accessed July 07 2017).

accusatory tone in the final line, 'I feare your eye hath turn'd your hart to flint'.⁶⁰ Despite this dubious ploy of using the mythical embodiment of male self-love to reinforce a stereotype of female vanity, the overall emphasis of the sequence is less on her blameworthiness and more on his self-obsessed suffering, and it ends with a wryly self-deprecating couplet: 'This is my state, and Delias hart is such; / say no more, I feare I saide too much'.⁶¹

Suggestions of anti-feminist sentiments from Petrarch or his followers regarding the vanity of women are offset by the implicit association with Echo involved in identifying their love object as Narcissus. De La Roque, in his 1590 sequence to Phyllis, had partly imitated the same sonnet ('Vous semblez un Narcis de grace et de rigueur... je crains qu'un miroir cause vostre malheur') but made explicit the poet's correlative identification with Echo: 'je suis Echo dolente forestiere'.⁶² An increasingly explicit association with her was one of the most interesting ways sonneteers appropriated the myth in the 1590s.⁶³ If Echo's inability to communicate makes her relationship with Narcissus problematic, it is of course further jeopardised by Narcissus falling in love with himself. She then becomes, as his rejected lover, a victim of his destructive self-love, and a symbol of hopeless love.

Poets typically took one of two alternative positions with respect to Echo: the competitive or the empathetic. Watson had competed with Echo, and had allowed himself to be outdone by her, but Thomas Lodge's Damon rather egotistically suggests that 'Eccho wailes to see my woe' in Sonnet 12 of his *Sonnets to Phillis* (1593).⁶⁴ Bartholemew Griffin (fl. 1596) likewise declares, in Sonnet 16 of his sequence to

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Daniel, Sonnet 50.

⁶² Simeón-Guillaume de La Roque, *Amours de Phyllis et Diverses Amours*, ed. Gisele Mathieu-Castellani (Paris, 1590), p. 25. See also *Oeuvres* (1619), p. 6:

<https://books.google.com/books?id=mOhfAAAACAAJ> (accessed 07 July 2017).

⁶³ Daniel's sequence ends with an allusion to Echo in the short ode appended to it. These poets were not directly following Petrarch in their use of Echo, though the allusion is often suggested in the *Canzoniere*. A.S. Kline's English translation does use the verb *echo* nine times, but only as translations of a range of verbs from the original including *rimbombare*, *risonare* and *rispondere*. See Gianfranco Contini (ed.) *'Il Canzoniere' di Francesco Petrarca* (1964),

[https://it.wikisource.org/wiki/Canzoniere_\(Rerum_vulgarium_fragmenta\)](https://it.wikisource.org/wiki/Canzoniere_(Rerum_vulgarium_fragmenta)) (accessed 21 Dec 2016).

⁶⁴ Thomas Lodge, *Phyllis: Honoured with Pastorall Sonnets, Elegies and amorous delights* (London, 1593), 12: Text Creation Partnership (EEBO) <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A06170.0001.001> (accessed 02 Dec 2016).

Fidessa (1596), 'Me thinkes dame Eccho weepeth at my morning'.⁶⁵ The implication is that the pain of their love, which itself is treated as a measure of its depth, is greater than hers. Alternatively, and more interestingly, the poet (or the speaker, where these are not identical) might empathise, or even identify with, Echo, as did Thomas Watson in his second, posthumously published sequence, *Teares of Fancie* (1593).⁶⁶ Here he went beyond the one-off echo verse from *Hekatompathia*, making Echo an explicit focus of two consecutive sonnets, and a cohesive device for the whole sequence. In Sonnet 28 the internal rhymes and repetitions produce an echoing effect, so that he identifies with her both emotionally and poetically:

My sorrowes ground was on her sorrow grounded
The Lad was faire but proud that her perplexed:
Her harts deepe wound was in my hart deepe wounded.⁶⁷

The following sonnet then echoes these sentiments with further verbal echoing both of the previous sonnet as well as internally:

When wofull eccho payne agayne repeated,
Redoubling sorrow with a sorrowing sound:
For both of us were now in sorrow seated,
Pride and disdaine disdainefull pride the ground.⁶⁸

These verbal echoes (which in fact continue through subsequent sonnets and even to the final word of the final sonnet, 'disdained') suggest an obsessive redoubling of sorrow, an almost masochistic repetition of pain.

The poet-as-Echo scenario is at once Petrarchan and yet also its opposite, inverting the Petrarchan gender stereotypes, feminising the speaker, and perhaps even implicitly equating male and female desire. Enterline claimed that for some early modern male

⁶⁵ B. Griffin, *Fidessa, more chaste then kinde* (London, 1596), sig. C3v, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A02230.0001.001/1:5.16?rgn=div2;view=fulltext> (accessed 07 July 2017).

⁶⁶ As in his first sequence, Watson uses the first person throughout *Teares of Fancie*. The circumstances of its publication were extraordinary. Watson had ended up in prison for killing a man apparently in defense of Marlowe in 1589, so after Watson's death in September 1592, Marlowe repaid his debt by arranging for the publication of the sonnets sequence, shortly before his own death in May 1593.

⁶⁷ Thomas Watson, *Teares of Fancie* (London, 1593), Sonnet 28, Edward Arber and Thomas Seecombe, eds, *Elizabethan Sonnets, from An English Garner* (1904); Bartleby.com, 2012. <http://www.bartleby.com/358/210.html> (accessed 02 Dec 2016).

⁶⁸ Ibid., Sonnet 29. <http://www.bartleby.com/358/211.html> (accessed 12 July 2017).

writers, ‘melancholia disturbs the presumed sexual identity of self-representing masculine subjects’, and engagement with Echo is surely evidence of this.⁶⁹ Although the poet does not quite become Echo since he retains control of his own voice, relating to her might express the rejected suitor’s feeling of emasculation. Alternatively, it is a deliberate undercutting of traditionally gendered poetic discourse, which one can easily believe of Watson after his self-deflating use of Echo in *Hekatompathia*: there is more than a hint of irony in his exclaiming, ‘O women’s pride!’ when he is supposed to be sympathising with Echo.⁷⁰ Whether consciously or unconsciously, Echo could represent either the hopeless Petrarchan sonneteer’s predicament or, meta-poetically, the sonnet sequence itself, signifying both frustrated desire and the impossibility of communication between the sexes.⁷¹

Other sonneteers picked up not only on Watson’s Echo theme from *Tears of Fancie* but also on his use of verbal echoing. Cambridge-educated Henry Constable (1562-1613) is unusual in this group of poets in being from an aristocratic family, but only intermittently part of the court scene in England because as a convert to Catholicism he spent most of the 1590s exiled in Paris. His conversion came shortly before the publication of his sonnet sequence to Diana in 1592, and the second, augmented edition (1594 – a year after Watson’s sequence had appeared) makes a number of allusions to Echo and Narcissus in the fifth decade of sonnets. The poet compares himself to Echo in two consecutive sonnets, making the echoing conceit obvious by repeating the final line of sonnet 8 as the opening of Sonnet 9: ‘Whilst Eccho cries, what shal become of me?’⁷² As with Watson, the dominant message is that his endeavor is hopeless: failure is echoed from one sonnet to the next.

Perhaps the most surprising and certainly the most subversive instance of the echoing sonnet was from Richard Barnfield (1574-1620) in a sequel to his homoerotic poem from 1594, *The Affectionate Shepheard*. In one of the last few stanzas of that pastoral poem there is a line which could easily be from a Petrarchan sonnet, ‘My sad Complaints the babling Ecchoes tell’.⁷³ The plaintive Daphnis of that poem became the

⁶⁹ Enterline, *Tears of Narcissus*, p. 9.

⁷⁰ Watson, *Ekatompathia*, 29.

⁷¹ See, on Echo and the problem of miscommunication, Cécile Mauré, ‘Écho ou les dangers de la voix dans la littérature élisabéthaine’ in *Les Espaces du Malentendu*, *Savoir en Prismes* 5 (2016), <https://savoirsenprisme.com/numeros/05-2016-les-espaces-du-malentendu/> (accessed 07 July 2017).

⁷² Henry Constable, *Diana* (London, 1595), sigs D8v-E1r.

⁷³ Richard Barnfield, *The affectionate shepheard Containing the complaint of Daphnis for the loue of Ganymede* (London 1594), <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A04673.0001.001/1:4?rgn=div1;view=fulltext> (accessed 03 Nov 2017).

speaker in a series of twenty sonnets published in 1595 addressed to the beautiful boy Ganymede, and the thirteenth opens with the speaker asking Echo for advice.⁷⁴ The contrived word-play (for example, echoing ‘christaline’ with ‘*Eyne*’) is clumsy but Barnfield’s imitation of his contemporary Petrarchan sonneteers suggests that he perceived the same Narcissus-Echo dynamic in homosexual attraction. By the same token, then, it is equally subject to frustration and failure, and calling upon Echo to bear witness is as good as admitting defeat. Yet another minor poet, William Smith (fl. 1596), used Constable’s repeated line technique in his more conventional pastoral sonnet sequence *Chloris* (1596). Corin, the speaker, compares himself to Echo in the final couplet of Sonnet 20, ‘That nymph unto my clamors doth reply, / Being likewise scorned in love as well as I’, then the final line begins Sonnet 21 in the manner of Constable’s two sonnets to Diana. And he is perhaps copying Lodge in his suggestion that Echo pities him: ‘She pitying me, part of my woes doth bear’.⁷⁵

Smith and Barnfield echoed Constable who in turn had been echoing Watson, and by 1596 it seemed that sonnets featuring Echo had become a synecdoche for sonnet sequences in general, highlighting what Heather Dubrow suggested is their true etiology: a morbid repetition compulsion. I am not here suggesting that all these poets were all unconsciously exhibiting the same psychopathology: sometimes it was no doubt simply a case of poets copying other poets. But however normalised Petrarchism might have become by generations of admiring imitators, it was still an inescapably negative model for male-female relations, and it appears that the most sophisticated practitioners of sonnet writing were aware of its internal contradictions. Poets using the mythical character of Echo were, intentionally or otherwise, pushing the abnormal psychology of Petrarchism to the surface: not only was Echo a useful symbol of futile love, but the echoing used as a poetic signifier of that futility was also a symptom of the obsessive compulsion to repeat which drives sonnet sequences.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Richard Barnfield, *Cynthia with certaine sonnets, and the legend of Cassandra* (London 1595), <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A68287.0001.001/1:19?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>

⁷⁵ William Smith, *Chloris* (London, 1596) in Martha Foote Crow (ed.) *Elizabethan Sonnet Cycles* (London: Kegan Paul, 1897), http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15448/15448-h/15448-h.htm#WILLIAM_SMITH (accessed 02 Dec 2016). Sonnet 22 is an echoing sonnet, with the last word or words of each line repeated; if not in Constable, Smith might have found his model in Barnaby Barnes’ *Parthenophil and Parthenophe* (1593), discussed below.

⁷⁶ Dubrow, p. 37.

‘The thing thou seekest is not there’: Petrarchan rhetoric and narcissistic desire

If poets’ identification with Echo was surprising, the association of the Petrarchan voice with Narcissus is an obvious one to the reader of Ovid’s tale. In the Latin original, Narcissus addresses his own reflection in such a way that he could be a spurned Petrarchan lover: his vanishing image becomes a beloved teasing him then avoiding his advances:

quisquis es, huc exi! quid me, puer unice, fallis
quove petitus abis? certe nec forma nec aetas
est mea, quam fugias.⁷⁷

In Golding’s rendering, the word ‘fickle’ reinforces this idea of his image as an inconstant lover:

Thou fondling thou, why doest thou raught the fickle image so?
The thing thou seekest is not there. And if a side thou go,
The thing tho lovest straight is gone.⁷⁸

This way of reading the story was familiar enough for a balladeer to make much fun of it in a ballad published 1584, ‘The History of Diana and Acteon’. In this comical version of the tale, a cross-dressing Narcissus (possibly therefore the inspiration for Edwards’ version of the tale) mistakes his reflection for a beautiful woman and ends up leaping into the river ‘his Ladie to imbrace’.⁷⁹ This is interesting both because it shows how Ovid’s tale had penetrated into popular culture, and in that it is presented as being about the trials of love rather than about the moral condition of the protagonist:

Loe, hereby you may perceive,
How *Venus* can, and if she please,
Her disobedient Subiects grieve,

⁷⁷ See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 3, 454: <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/ovid/ovid.met3.shtml> Accessed 06 July 2017. ‘Whoever you are, come out here! You incomparable youth, why do you trick me? Where do you disappear when you are reached for? Surely it is neither my looks nor my age that you flee from’.

⁷⁸ W. H. D. Rouse (ed.), *Shakespeare’s Ovid, being Arthur Golding’s translation of the Metamorphoses*, 73: <https://archive.org/details/shakespearesovid00oviduoft> (accessed 02 Dec 2016).

⁷⁹ See *A Handful of Pleasant Delights* (London, 1584), <http://versemiscellaniesonline.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/texts/handful-of-pleasant-delights/handful-sig-bviir/> (accessed 05 July 2017). This was perhaps also the inspiration for Edwards’ feminised Narcissus.

And make them drinke their owne disease.⁸⁰

Despite its flippancy, the ballad shows how the myth was increasingly being understood as about the nature of love and desire, and how self-love was characterised as an illness.

Thomas Vaux (1509-1556) had used Narcissus to express the impossibility of satisfying desire in a poem published in *Paradise of Dainty Devises* (1576):

Narsissus brought, unto the water drinke,
So aye thirst I, the more that I doe drinke.⁸¹

In the case of Narcissus, satisfaction of desire is impossible because the love object is illusory, which relates to Petrarchism in a number of ways, not least in the way the disdainful love object in sonnet sequences was so often an invention of the poet. It was not simply that the idea of Narcissism influenced Petrarchan poetry: Petrarchism seemed to have provided a new way of reading the myth, as about the illusoriness of romantic love, and about the impossibility of satisfied desire. It has been argued that the figure of Narcissus was strongly influential on Petrarch himself, both in the *rime sparse* and the *Secretum*, where an imagined dialogue between the poet and St Augustine includes an explicit reference to the myth.⁸² Gur Zak has suggested that in the Third Dialogue of the *Secretum* 'Petrarch stages his personal history in a manner that closely resembles Ovid's myth'.⁸³ Once the Petrarchan sonneteer has become Narcissus, then we have effectively the same message which resulted from his identification with Echo: he is compelled to repeat his inevitable failure.

Not only must Narcissus fail, but he must die, and in his refusal to procreate, he comes to signify a rejection of life. In Freud's view, the compulsion to repeat is an expression of the death drive, making the reiterative form of the sonnet sequence a negative, almost

⁸⁰ <http://versemiscellaniesonline.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/texts/handful-of-pleasant-delights/handful-sig-bviiv/> (accessed 05 July 2017).

⁸¹ See M. Edwards, *Paradise of Dainty Devises* (London, 1576)
<http://versemiscellaniesonline.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/texts/paradise-of-dainty-devises/paradise-sig-ciir/> (accessed 06 July 2017).

⁸² Benjamin Boysen, 'Crucified in the Mirror of Love: On Petrarch's Ambivalent Conception of Love in *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*', *Orbis Litterarum* 58 (2003), 163-188 (p. 185).

⁸³ Gur Zak, 'A Humanist in Exile: Ovid's Myth of Narcissus and the Experience of Self in Petrarch's *Secretum*', in *Metamorphosis: The Changing Face of Ovid in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. by A. Keith and S. Rupp (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2007), pp. 179-98 (p. 185).

nihilistic one.⁸⁴ Moreover, Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* linked the death drive with primary (normal) narcissism, both being opposed to the creative life force of Eros.⁸⁵ The nexus of narcissism and death had been a common theme of Ronsard's verse, and was also evoked in Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*. In Sonnet 82, Narcissus is alluded to, along with Venus, as an example of the beauties which Astrophel surpasses:

Nymph of the garden where all beauties be;
Beauties which do in excellency pass
His who till death looked in a watery glass,
Or hers, whom naked the Trojan boy did see.⁸⁶

The ostensibly flattering references to the beauty of Narcissus and Venus, in what appears to be a playfully flirtatious poem, have darkly ironic connotations. The beauty of Narcissus is effectively the cause of his death; Paris, the Trojan boy, adjudged Venus to be the most beautiful only in order to obtain the greater beauty of Helen, a desire which led directly to the Trojan War. Both Venus and Narcissus here are as much signifiers of death and desire as they are symbols of beauty.

Edmund Spenser (1552/3-1599) overtly identifies with Narcissus in his *Amoretti* (1595), which were unusual amongst Petrarchan sonnet sequences in that they were written to the woman he was about to marry, not to some unattainable fantasy. Even so, they do enact the usual Petrarchan scenario of the suffering lover, using the Narcissus myth to this end in Sonnet 35, where Spenser's 'hungry eyes' cannot help but look at the cause of their pain, 'lyke Narcissus vaine / whose eyes him starv'd: so plenty makes me poore'.⁸⁷ Although this is almost a direct quotation from Golding's translation of Ovid ('The thing I seeke is in myselfe, my plentie makes me poore'.⁸⁸), Calvin Edwards has argued that the reference to eyes points to the influence of Marsilio Ficino's neo-Platonic interpretation of the Narcissus myth.⁸⁹ For Ficino, sight was the highest of the senses, and the eyes were portals via which the souls of lovers were exchanged. Ficino thought that the fatal flaw of Narcissus was being too attached to the reflection of his

⁸⁴ Cynthia Marshall picked up the theme of repetition compulsion where Heather Dubrow had left off, dedicating a chapter to the nihilistic tendencies of Petrarchism in her Lacanian analysis of early modern literature, *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

⁸⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. by J. Strachey (London, 1961).

⁸⁶ Philip Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* (London 1591), Text Creation Partnership (EEBO) <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A12226.0001.001> (accessed 02 Dec 2016), p. 34.

⁸⁷ Edmund Spenser, *Amoretti and Epithalamion* (London, 1595), C3r.

⁸⁸ Taylor, *Shakespeare's Ovid*, p. 74.

⁸⁹ Calvin R. Edwards, 'The Narcissus Myth in Spenser's Poetry', *Studies in Philology* 74 (1977), 63-88.

bodily form instead of seeking the true self-knowledge of his soul. It is not entirely clear that this is the message of Spenser's poem, whose final couplet, 'All this world's glory seemeth vain to me, / And all their shows but shadows, saving she', expresses a conventional *omnia vanitas* theme. What is clear, I think, is that the Narcissus myth is seen here as being about the nature of desire, and the lesson of Narcissus is that his desire, like the poet's hunger for the sight of his beloved, can never be satisfied.

Constable had also openly identified with Narcissus before his self-comparisons with Echo cited above. He took the Petrarchan cliché of the poet's verse mirroring the beauty of his beloved, and linked it directly to Narcissus at the pool in the opening of Sonnet 5 of the fifth decade. Beginning with 'His shadow to Narcissus well presented / How faire he was, by such attracting love', the poem continues with the argument that his pen has similarly 'made thy sweetes admired'.⁹⁰ The message of such an allusion is at the least ambivalent: if the poet's verses in praise of Diana are as good as the reflection of Narcissus at provoking love, then by implication this love is also hopeless and self-destructive. As in his use of Echo, Constable seems here to be commentating on the futility both of his quest and of the sonnet sequence. The sonneteer is trapped like Narcissus by the mirroring of his own text, by its recursive, self-reflecting cycle of failure.⁹¹ Narcissus represented to the Petrarchan poet the pointlessness of his endeavour and also exposed its essentially self-obsessed and self-destructive character.

'Love's outrage': Echo, Narcissism and sexual violence

Identification with either Echo or Narcissus can highlight the way the sonnet sequence is always doomed to failure, but some poets went beyond showing awareness of this to exploring the psychological consequences of that repeated failure. We saw that Thomas Lodge had alluded to Echo in his sequence to Phyllis in Sonnet 12, but he seems to have had in mind his old Inns of Court readership in Sonnet 34 where he imagines himself twice as Zeus, first transformed into a golden shower to impregnate Phyllis/Danae and then as white bull to abduct Phyllis/Europa. The first octet is in fact a direct translation of one Ronsard's sonnets to Cassandra (1552), but Lodge made subtle changes to the treatment of the Narcissus myth which went beyond his source. Ronsard had imagined

⁹⁰ Constable, 11r.

⁹¹ The association of the poet with Narcissus extended to the visual arts too in the renaissance: see Paul Barolsky, 'A Very Brief History of Art from Narcissus to Picasso', *The Classical Journal* 90 (1995). It is noteworthy that Caravaggio's painting *Narcissus* (1597-99) depicts Narcissus as locked in a circle created by his reflection, conveying a feeling of self-entrapment similar to the experience of the sonnet sequence. See <https://www.caravaggio-foundation.org/Narcissus-C.1597-99.html> (accessed 15 July 2017).

being Narcissus whilst Cassandra was the spring into which he would ‘plunge’, in a thinly disguised rape fantasy.⁹² In contrast, Lodge presents himself in the sestet as retreating from the implied sexual coercion of the first two fantasies:

I were content to wearie out my paine,
To bee Narcissus so she were a spring,
To drowne in hir those woes my heart do wring,
And more I wish transformed to remaine:
That whilst I thus in pleasures lappe did lye,
I might refresh desire, which else would die.⁹³

Although an erotic fantasy of being immersed in her is still suggested, it is via a submissive drowning, and the explicit physicality of Ronsard is deliberately deflected onto his woes. The final line also hints at the frustration of the sonneteer: desire cannot be sustained by the mere re-iteration of woe. The idea of entering the pool seems also to be a fantasy of breaking through the Petrarchan mirror of his verse, destroying the poetic illusion by satisfying the reality of his desire.

Michael Drayton (1563-1631) has a special place in the evolution of the English Petrarchan sonnet because he allowed readers to see his own evolution as a poet during the 1590s.⁹⁴ After the rather bland verses of *Ideas Mirour* (1594), he self-consciously re-invented his poetic persona.⁹⁵ In Sonnet 2 of the 1599 edition of *Idea* (the change of title was significant, abandoning the tired Petrarchan commonplace) he announced that he was turning his back on the conventional ‘ah mees’ and ‘far fetched sighs’ of the ‘whyning Sonets’ in his earlier sequence, and presenting more libertine, cynical

⁹² ‘Pour m’y plonger une nuit à sejour’: see Pierre de Ronsard, *Les Amours de Cassandre* <https://oeuvresderonsard.wordpress.com/2012/08/11/sonnet-20/> (accessed 08 July 2107).

⁹³ Lodge, *Phyllis*, Sonnet 34
<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A06170.0001.001/1:8?rgn=div1;view=fulltext> (accessed 08 July 2107).

⁹⁴ A contemporary of Shakespeare, Drayton followed a similar career path, at least in its early years. He came to London from Warwickshire around 1590, apparently having been educated by a local family, the Gooderes, though probably not to university level. He was a prolific writer who was popular enough as a poet in his own day to make a good living by it to the end of his life, though it was clearly not easy. Whilst he was able to rely on patrons and publishing for many years, he was also writing plays for the Lord Admiral’s Men from 1597 to 1604, at the rate of about three a year.

⁹⁵ Only twenty of the original sonnets would survive into the 1619 edition of *Idea*, as Drayton ruthlessly edited out evidence of the clichéd Petrarchism of his first sequence. On Drayton’s anti-Petrarchism, see Christine Hutchins, ‘English Anti-Petrarchism: Imbalance and Excess in “the Englishe straine” of the Sonnet’, *Studies in Philology* 109 (2012), 552-580 (p. 553).

attitudes to love.⁹⁶ Whilst the use of Ovid to introduce such sentiments is not at all surprising, the choice of Echo and Narcissus to do so certainly is. A cryptic sonnet which appears first in the 1599 edition, with slightly (but significantly) different punctuation in the 1619 edition, contains an oblique reference to the myth which also seems to be deliberately anti-Petrarchan:

Nothing but no and I, and I and no,
How falls it out so strangely you reply?
I tell ye (Faire) ile not be aunswere so,
With this affirming no, denying I,
I say I loue, you slightly aunswere I,
I say you loue, you pule me out a no;
I say I die, you eccho me with I,
Save me I cry, you sigh me out a no:
Must woe and I, have naught but no and I,
No I, am I, if I no more can have,
Aunswer no more, with silence make reply,
And let me take my selfe what I do crave;
Let no and I, with I and you be so,
Then aunswer no, and I, and I, and no.⁹⁷

If one changes some instances of 'I' to 'aye' the poem can be read as simply the complaint of a rejected lover, but at times it is impossible to be sure of meaning in the poem, which 'I' should be 'aye' or whether sometimes they are both at once.⁹⁸ The poem's unresolvability seems to be exactly its point. The poem is about the failure to communicate, about the complete disunity of subject and object, and at the center of the poem, in line 7, the Narcissus myth is evoked when she echoes his 'I die' with 'I /

⁹⁶ Michael Drayton, *Idea* (London, 1599), 2: in subsequent editions, this sonnet prefaced the numbered sonnets. The declaration that 'My verse is the true image of my mind' (ibid), also makes it clear that there is no blurred line between poet and speaker in these sonnets.

⁹⁷ Ibid., Sonnet 8: I have followed the punctuation of the tenth line in the 1619 version (Sonnet 5) which makes more sense than earlier versions which have the line beginning, 'No, I am I, if ...'. Another noteworthy change in the 1619 edition was the capitalisation of 'Eccho', as though to emphasise the allusion.

⁹⁸ Amongst other editorial abuses the poem has received, one early twentieth-century editor of *Idea* actually substituted *aye* for *I* in the sonnet, surely missing the point that it was intended to be ambiguous. See *Daniel's Delia and Drayton's Idea*, ed. by Arundell Esdaile:

<http://www.luminarium.org/editions/idea.htm> (accessed 02 Dec 2016), p. 72.

aye'.⁹⁹ Here the echo seems to be mocking the speaker's Petrarchan earnestness, or indeed his Narcissism. As Ronsard knew and Sidney had hinted, the Narcissus myth is always also in part a myth of death, which adds an extra layer of irony to the line.

The ending of Drayton's sonnet leads to a still darker aspect of the narcissism hidden in Petrarchan discourse. There is at least one point in the poem where meaning is unambiguous, when he dispenses with word-play and declares his intention to 'take my selfe what I do crave'. A simmering resentment, hinted at by his use of 'pule' to describe her negative response, boils over into the threat of sexual force. The only means of re-asserting his masculine self is by discarding language, rejecting her repeated 'No'. Echo is not merely constrained by his words, but now completely silenced. The final two lines revert to ambiguity, drawing back from the threat of action, back into the retreat of circular verbal play. Perhaps it is imagining, with her 'no ... yes ... yes ... no', that she will be undecided whether to resist him or not, suggesting that she really wants him to take what he craves, but even if this is so, her final word is still 'no'. The emergence in English literature of the idea that for women 'no' can mean 'yes' has been dated to the 1590s by Cynthia Garrett, who traced it to the first English translation, by Thomas Heywood, of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* in which the advice is given that 'force is pleasing to girls'.¹⁰⁰ It is quite possible, then, that this idea is the key to understanding Drayton's wordplay, making the sonnet's central theme the vexed and volatile relationship between language and desire.

If Lodge and Drayton had hinted at a sexually coercive Narcissus, Barnaby Barnes (?1569-1609) engaged fully with that idea in *Parthenophil and Parthenophe* (1593), which combines 102 sonnets with a range of other verse forms to create an extended narrative about the two young and virginal protagonists.¹⁰¹ The poet repeatedly uses dialogue with Echo, in an apparently systematic way, moving from the conventional to the shockingly subversive. The echo verse of Sonnet 89 is clever, but the sentiments unremarkable for the genre, evoking blazon-style verse:

⁹⁹ Lynn Enterline's discussion of 'failed voices' in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, including that of Echo, is relevant, I think, to this poem's theme: see *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 42 ff.

¹⁰⁰ Cynthia E. Garrett, 'Sexual Consent and the Art of Love in the Early Modern English Lyric', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 44, 1, The English Renaissance (2004), 37-58 (p. 38).

¹⁰¹ Barnes was a colourful character: the son of a bishop, he attended Brasenose, Oxford, without graduating, and briefly went to war in France in 1591 with the Earl of Essex, became embroiled in the Harvey / Nashe feud, and was apparently guilty of attempted murder in 1598 but escaped punishment. See John D. Cox, entry for Barnaby Barnes, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). See also old *DNB* entry by Arthur Henry Bullen, [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Barnes, Barnabe_\(DNB00\)](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Barnes,_Barnabe_(DNB00)) (accessed 01 July 2017).

What were her cheeks (when blushes rose) like?

ECHO, Rose-like!

What are those lips, which 'bove pearls' rew be?

ECHO, Ruby!¹⁰²

Although the tone seems unthreatening, the conventional complaint at Parthenophe's hard-hearted unreceptiveness that ends the sonnet includes an ominous mention of furies, the Greek goddesses of vengeance. The second appearance of Echo brings another omen in the Pastoral Odes section: at the end of Ode 1, Shepherds ask 'How doth Parthenophil?' and Echo answers, 'Ill'. Ode 2 develops the theme of Parthenophil's sadness/illness with much echoing word-play, but again quite innocuously: indeed, the tone at this stage is deceptively pious, Ode 3 involving an imagined meeting with the Virgin Mary.¹⁰³ There is a turning point, however, with the third and final appearance of Echo, in Sestine 4. Parthenophil asks a series of questions seeking advice about his pursuit of Parthenope, beginning, 'What shall I do to my Nymph, when I go to behold her?' Echo's replies, recommending that he 'hold her', force himself 'on her' (ironically echoing 'honour') and then 'attempt her', appear to have some agency in Parthenophil's subsequent move from suitor to rapist.¹⁰⁴ Echo here seems to serve the function of expressing his suppressed desires, representing not a female voice, but perhaps the unspoken misogyny of Petrarchan discourse. The echo says what he wants to hear: a tentative question 'is it harm, if I kiss such?' is met with the prompt to action, 'Ey, kiss such', and his concern that 'most Ladies have disdainful minds, to refuse such', is apparently dismissed by the reply 'few such'.¹⁰⁵ Parthenophil goes beyond identifying with Echo or silencing her, to appropriating her voice in a fantasy of male control and female submission.

Echo's final intervention heralds a melodramatic finale in Sestine 5, involving the abduction and rape of Parthenope by her young, frustrated lover, desperate to lose his virginity by taking hers. With a sudden shift of style and tone, Parthenophil is presented as possessed by vengeful furies and out of control. In retrospect one can see that beneath

¹⁰² Edward Arber and Thomas Seccombe (eds.) *Elizabethan Sonnets*, <http://www.bartleby.com/358/index5.html> (accessed 02 Dec 2016).

¹⁰³ Barnes also keeps the myth in the background of the action by linking Parthenophe with Narcissus flowers in Odes 5 and 9.

¹⁰⁴ Sestine 4, <http://www.bartleby.com/358/419.html> (accessed 08 July 2017). William Percy, a friend of Barnes, attempted something similar with echoes in Sonnet 15 of his short sequence to Coelia published in 1594, <http://www.bartleby.com/358/654.html> (accessed 08 July 2017).

¹⁰⁵ It is possible that Barnes was drawing upon Arthur Golding's interpretation of Echo as a bawd here.

the Petrarchan politeness there was always something of the obsessive stalker about Parthenophil, someone barely in control of his raging passions and at times crude sexual fantasies.¹⁰⁶ Between the two final odes is a Canzon involving extended blazon-style praise of Parthenope's bodily parts, becoming increasingly overt in its sexual references as it progresses to her 'lovely tender paps' and then 'love's soft hills'.¹⁰⁷ But the tone moves from erotic to manic after Echo's intervention in Sestine 4; in the final scene of consummation, the verse deteriorates into an incoherent tirade, Parthenophil's narcissistic rage expressed as an invocation of Hecate and the furies:

So be She brought! which pitied not my tears!
And as it burneth with the cypress wood,
So burn She with desire, by day and night!
You gods of vengeance! and avengeful Furies!
Revenge, to whom I bend on my knees bare.
Hence, goat! and bring her, with love's outrage kindled!¹⁰⁸

It appears to be blank verse except in that the same six words are used to end the lines of all nineteen stanzas, each time in a different order. The effect of such unrhyming repetitions is perhaps deliberately uncomfortable, a poetic subversion to match the ideological subversion, or perversion, which it represents. Barnes takes the use of verbal echo which had been suggestive of unhealthy obsession in Watson, Constable and Smith and turns it overtly against Petrarchism, transforming a lover into a rapist, and poetry into unlyrical, discordant ranting. And whereas Lodge had made the Narcissus scenario an alternative to rape, Barnes made it the catalyst for sexual violence: if any of the English poets understood pathological narcissism in the modern sense, it was Barnaby Barnes. In the jargon of recent psychology, Parthenophil was expressing his sense of narcissistic entitlement, and recent studies have shown not only links between narcissism and aggression, and specifically correlations between narcissism and sexual violence, but also evidence in narcissists of a high disposition towards vengeance.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ In the notorious Sonnet 63 he fantasizes about being the wine drunk by her and then passed 'by pleasure's part', <http://www.bartleby.com/358/321.html> (accessed 08 July 2107).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., Canzon 3, <http://www.bartleby.com/358/417.html> (accessed 09 July 2017).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., Sestine 5, <http://www.bartleby.com/358/425.html> (accessed 09 July 2017).

¹⁰⁹ See B. J. Bushman, and R. F. Baumeister, 'Threatened egotism, narcissism, self-esteem, and direct and displaced aggression: Does self-love or self-hate lead to violence?' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 75.1 (1998), 219-29; E. Mouilso and K. Calhoun, 'Personality and Perpetration: Narcissism Among College Sexual Assault Perpetrators', *Violence Against Women* 22 (2016), 1228-42; R.P. Brown, 'Vengeance is mine: Narcissism, vengeance, and the tendency to forgive', *Journal of Research in Personality* 38.6 (2004), 576-584.

In interpreting *Parthenophil and Parthenophe* as belonging to the Petrarchan sonnet sequence tradition, it is worth noting a number of differences from that tradition, apart from the range of verse forms it involves. Typically, the poet and the poetic voice of sonnets are difficult to distinguish – that is, they usually read as at least quasi-autobiographical – but there was a deliberate distance established in the first few sonnets between Barnes himself and Parthenophil who is first identified in the third person as ‘a lovely virgin boy’.¹¹⁰ The use of the first person thereafter does confuse the matter somewhat, but *Parthenophil and Parthenophe* is clearly a fictional narrative with a dramatically contrived conclusion, not a typically pseudo-autobiographical sonnet sequence expressing the sufferings of the poet. There is even a feeling that the final scene, staged as a Satanic rite involving Hecate and the Furies, is really just a fantasy sequence or even a psychotic hallucination.¹¹¹ Another pertinent context is that it ends with dedicatory sonnets to three female patrons, amongst whom was the Countess of Pembroke, so this should not be thought of as erotica directed at a male readership like the Inns of Court epyllia. Despite the rape being depicted as revenge, and to that extent similar to Lodge’s story of Glaucus and Scylla, there is no suggestion, except perhaps from a demonically transformed Parthenophil, that the lesson here is ‘nymphs must yield’. What this young poet contributed to the sonnet sequence was a shockingly honest acknowledgement that for some men perpetual rejection is as likely to lead to sexual violence as to Petrarchan stoicism or Platonic love, so it is not so much anti-Petrarchan as a consideration of one possible outcome of the Petrarchan scenario. If sonnet sequences had normalised obsessive devotion to an unresponsive love object, Barnes’ work has the effect of de-familiarisation. When one considers the extraordinary stylistic extravagance of the work, which is often verging on the comical, there is some justification for arguing that it not a serious contribution to the sonnet sequence genre at all but instead a dark parody of it.

Attempts by successive poets in the 1590s to engage with the Narcissus myth ranged from highlighting Petrarchism’s inherent pessimism or its implicit violence to questioning the grounds of the whole Petrarchan enterprise. That poets could identify with either Echo or Narcissus led to an ungendered consideration of desire and at times challenged conventional gender relations. But most significantly Echo and Narcissus seem to have found a special place within Petrarchan discourse because they could represent its bleak negativity. Sonnet sequences which according to convention

¹¹⁰ Barnes, Sonnet 4.

¹¹¹ Cox (op. cit.) refers to Sestine 5 as a dream sequence, but I can find no evidence of this in the text – indeed in the final sonnet preceding it, Parthenophil specifically states that he ‘never slept and always did awake’, ending with an explicit determination to force himself upon his hard-hearted mistress: Sonnet 105 <http://www.bartleby.com/358/424.html> (accessed 09 July 2017).

reflected the beloved's beauty also inevitably reflected a psychopathology which had much in common with that of Narcissus: obsessively pursuing unrequited love is as much about avoidance as is choosing to love only yourself. Petrarchan poets had invested in an ostensibly romantic scenario which was in fact unnatural, depressing, and even dangerous. It is pertinent to note that the 1590s represented not so much the zenith of English Petrarchism as its final phase. If Echo and Narcissus helped poets of this period to put Petrarchism into better perspective, it appears thereby also to have signalled the imminent demise of a genre that had persisted for two hundred years.