Aileen A. Feng. *Writing Beloveds: Humanist Petrarchism and the Politics of Gender.* Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2017. Pp. 266. ISBN. 978-1-4875-0077-1.

This book is an exciting addition to the bibliography on Petrarchism. It calls into question the prevalent assumption that Petrarchism emerges for the first time in sixteenth-century vernacular poetry, instead showing that a form of Petrarchism can already be found in fifteenth-century Latin humanist texts. The author's approach is multifaceted and wide-ranging, contributing to debates on early modern women's writing and the status of women humanists, as well as to our understanding of Renaissance theories of imitation. Aileen Feng newly emphasizes Petrarchism as a highly political and gendered phenomenon, from its earlier, Latin incarnation onwards.

The first chapter undertakes a careful re-reading of the myth of Medusa in Petrarch. As Feng usefully points out, Laura is identified with one particular aspect of the tale, the Gorgon's slain, disembodied head. Thus, for Feng, Petrarch's use of the myth presents less an example of petrifying female power, open to interpretations ranging from the moral to the psychoanalytical. Rather, it suggests a much more complex situation in which female agency is appropriated by a male figure, the poet/Perseus, through poetry as a means of immortalization.

Within the broader scope of the book, this re-reading of the Medusa myth enacts and contributes to what Feng calls "the politics of gender", which she subsequently reads in relation both to the workings of patronage in Petrarch and to epistolary exchanges between humanist writers. More precisely, Feng discerns in Petrarch an "intellectual masculinity" (p. 20 and *passim*) that undermines the power of the other—whether beloved or patron—by appropriating its agency. This narrative is a useful framework for what follows, although it represents a necessarily limited view of Petrarch and his work.

In the second chapter, Feng argues that, in the Quattrocento, male humanist writers emulated and repeated this gesture of appropriation by writing in Petrarchist terms to and about female humanists such as Isotta Nogarola, Cassandra Fedele, and Alessandra Scala. Feng shows how male writers celebrated the exceptionality of these learned women whilst also, in comparing them to Petrarch's Laura, reducing them to a silent, chaste, objectified model. In contrast, female humanists, as Feng's third chapter explores, adopted Petrarchan language, not in response to these male writers, but rather in the contexts of female friendship and

marital love. Here, the principal examples are the writings of Costanza Varano and Laura Cereta, as well as Fedele again.

The second part of the book returns to more familiar territory and to Pietro Bembo, the oft-reputed father of Petrarchism. Feng reminds her readers about debates surrounding imitation and Ciceronianism, focussing on the early sixteenth century and on letters between Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola and Bembo. The final chapter assesses Petrarchan rhetoric deployed by Bembo in his vernacular amorous correspondence with Maria Griffoni Savorgnan and then Lucrezia Borgia. The latter, in particular, represents the convergence of the figures of beloved and patron explored earlier in the book. Feng reiterates that Petrarch was, for Bembo, a source of inspiration and a cause for rivalry, and it would have been interesting perhaps to consider this potential for competition in relation to earlier examples.

The example of Bembo confirms the adoption of Petrarchism as a model for male-female dialogue, already observed by Feng in the fifteenth century. Yet more might be done to differentiate the two Petrarchist moments, especially in terms of both linguistic difference and gender relations. If male Latin humanist writers used Petrarchism to silence female intellectuals, Bembo's vernacular project is quite different. The myth of Medusa, introduced as foundational, seems here no longer especially operative. The proposed Petrarchism of Latin humanism evidently predates Bembo, yet Feng's examples show Bembo more commonly returning in the vernacular directly to Petrarch's poetry, rather than to fifteenth-century Latin intermediaries.

In sum, Feng's reading of Petrarch and Petrarchism innovatively highlights the imbrication of love and patronage, poetry and politics, drawn along gender lines. Her uncovering of a form of humanist Latin Petrarchism already in the fifteenth century opens up new avenues of research and necessitates a rethinking of our understanding of this literary tradition. How this study will change our perception of sixteenth-century lyric Petrarchism remains to be seen.

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