



## Baroque Flair: Seventeenth-century European Sapphic Poetry

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**Abstract:** Early modern women poets across Europe and at least one colony enlisted Petrarchist terms, often with a self-aware, parodic twist. Some examples, considered here, include (first) self-portrait poems that serve to critique not only the lyric speaker/portrait subject's imperfect face or physique, but the very phenomenon of Petrarchist lyric objectifications of female love objects, and (second) love poems addressed by women to other women. By applying a theoretical grounding that combines feminist, lesbian, and queering approaches, we can bring to these poems a reading that is alert to moments when they reproduce, rework, or contest the kinds of gendered discourse and heteronormative paradigms that we find in better-known male-authored poems. The essay concludes with a survey of the kinds of cultural work performed by these texts in their ideological, religious, political, and poetic contexts. As cultural premises changed, the poems moved from widespread presence into illegibility or erasure from literary historiography.

For over three centuries, literary history erased, forgot, or became unable to account for the once-prestigious poetic phenomenon of women's engaged reshapings of Petrarchism. Women poets took up the terms, concerns, and conventions of the dominant lyric language for profane love but with a difference that marks their awareness of and engagement with gender hierarchies. This essay briefly introduces two types of texts by women who demonstrated their poetic mastery while often, it would appear, having fun with convention: satirical self-portraiture and love poetry *by* women to women. In the early modern period, across Europe and in at least one colony, women's love poems to women appeared in print and manuscript circulation in Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, English, French, Flemish, and Dutch.

The 1611 *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* by Sebastián de Covarrubias gives as one sense of *humano* (alternately, for modern English, *human* or *humane*): "Humanarse: humillarse y reconocerse, ser cortés con todos y afable, aunque sea gran señor" ("To become human: to humble oneself and know oneself well") (704).<sup>1</sup> *Reconocerse* suggests knowing one's own limits and acknowledging what is due to others. *Humanarse* appears in modern dictionaries as both to "become more human" and, especially as preserved in Latin American Spanish, with a sense of "condescend" (see for instance *Simon & Schuster's International Dictionary*). What does "human" mean for "humanism" and the "humanities," when we consider one two-century slice of the past and its lyric expressions of gender and sexuality? In the early modern period, as now, we can perceive the force of cultural efforts to put "woman" back into "human," observing how easily this works for some thinkers and

how uneasy or condescending it makes others. A “reconocimiento”—an epistemological acknowledgment—of same-sex desire and fulfillment informs the classics but was avoided or misrepresented by some European humanists, while others recalled and drew on it. Early modern women poets enlisted the classical past, along with other cultural spheres of prestige—including politically powerful queens and the parallel courts of noblewomen, the divinized Virgin Mary herself as “Queen of Heaven,” visually prevalent images of *femmes fortes* and viraginous women—to assert a rounded, vital, and even humorous humanity for themselves.

Early modern women poets frequently critique a self-serving male self-regard inherent in the Petrarchist paradigm. As Frederick Goldin remarks, “a poet’s idealized lady can function psychologically as a narcissistic idol, a reflection of himself” (103). As scholars today (re-) locate and (re-) publish early modern women’s lyric, a woman-authored anti-Petrarchism that satirized such male self-regard comes into view. Women poets enlist, but also call into question, Petrarchist paradigms and vocabularies. To date, scholars largely ignore or dismiss the great number of poems in which they do this—whether because they are unfamiliar with these female-authored texts or because they lack critical paradigms adequate to the task of assessing them. Women poets tend to deploy Petrarchist discourse in ways that openly or tacitly critique both the conventional narcissistic self-regard noted by Goldin and the corresponding fragmentation and objectification of the beloved famously commented on by Nancy Vickers (“Diana Described”).<sup>2</sup> They frequently take up familiar and culturally prized elements of Petrarchism, such as the blazon, to make loving address to other women. Often well-regarded and circulated in their own period, these texts for the most part remain unknown, overlooked, or squeamishly “explained away” to the present day.<sup>3</sup> In *Currency of Eros*, Ann Rosalind Jones notes women’s efforts to insert and (decorously) assert themselves in a dominantly masculinist lyric discourse of love. Two salient, linked aspects lie beyond Jones’s study of poetic strategies: one, the satirical spin that energizes women’s citing, use, and evocation of Petrarchism; another, the range of friendly, loving, devoted, passionate, and/or erotic address that female poets make *to women*.

Why are the poetic texts in this category so little known? For one thing, they have not been collected, or recollected, in anthologies. Masculinist and hetero-normative—or perhaps, more directly, homophobic—definitions of humanism have been produced from the early modern period to the present. As a brief introduction to a few poets and lyric texts that were once better known and now await further exploration, I present here a few cameo appearances and snapshots, as it were, from the European and Colonial late-1500s and 1600s. In the present context, we might ask not just why or how these poems come into being, but *why Petrarchism?* How can a tradition of suffering in “icy fires,” let alone of representing women’s fragmented physical parts to the exclusion of their subjectivity, serve women’s poetic aims? Where do women access the discursive strategies that they employ? My conclusion below suggests ways to theorize and explore this prolific work that awaits our attention.

## Satirical Self-Portraiture

A zesty anti-Petrarchist satire appears in a poetic self-portrait by Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán (b. 1611- d. after 1663).<sup>4</sup> Ramírez de Guzmán, from a family of prominent Catholic ecclesiastics and civic figures in provincial Llerena, Extremadura, Spain, participated energetically in contests sponsored by poetry academies. Her elegiac, topical, and satirical verse circulated in manuscript and in *cancionero* compilations. Her poetry employs Petrarchist commonplaces of lavish flattery and protestations of devotion, for example, in encomiastic missives addressed to her mother and sisters. A humorous self-portrait poem holds special appeal for investigators of female anti-Petrarchism. Appearing with the epigraph “Retrato de la autora, habiéndosele pedido un galán suyo” (Portrait of the author, because one of her suitors requested it), the text follows convention to represent female body parts—the speaker’s—fragment by fragment, using the *coplas de pie quebrado* (or “broken-foot” stanzas) alternating paired eight- and four-syllable lines, *abcabc*. She employs an *arte menor*, popular-verse form (which is in fact complex, compositionally demanding, and enlisted for learned poetry as much as for informal satires). Her use of this structure in itself signals a casual relationship to high-Italianate tradition, demonstrating a relaxed, colloquial posture towards the enshrined conventions of Petrarchism.

The speaker apparently puzzles out, in the act of utterance and enumerating piece by Petrarchist piece, the problem of how suitably to portray herself without misrepresenting her own attributes or failing in culturally imposed modesty. The “galán suyo,” an interested suitor, seems from the epigraph to have asked for a description prior to a first meeting or perhaps a memento of already successful encounters. The exchange of courtship portraits in minute as well as larger and more formal scale was common early modern practice. In other words, the poetic exchange suggests a premodern social-media format, a *cancionero* Facebook or Match.com posting.

Ramírez de Guzmán’s humor not only inverts but jestingly outdoes the characteristic “power play” identified by Ann Rosalind Jones as “involved in exposing a female beloved to the view of male connoisseurs in the descriptive enumeration of the blazon” (7). As the poem diminishes self as subject through word play, it wittily dismisses the genre of Petrarchan portrait as the measure of the value of a woman:

Un retrato me has pedido,  
y aunque es alhaja costosa  
a mi recato,  
por lograte agradecido,  
si he dicho que soy hermosa,  
me retrato. (lines 1-6)

You’ve asked me for my portrait,  
a jewel a bit too dear  
for my *pudeur*;  
if I say that I’m no eyesore  
to satisfy you, then myself I here-

with draw.

The topos of the admirer-voyeur who gazes on (that is, reads) a Petrarchist portrait-poem draws on already heavily overdetermined convention. This first stanza undoes the cliché in a few strokes. In effect, “that I am beautiful is all you want to know, and about all one ever does know of the ‘lady’ anyway. My beauty must be stated, being in parts and sum the chief constituent element of the conventional portrait you request; therefore, the statement **is** the portrait. But the obligation to declare attractiveness undermines another requisite: my ‘feminine’ modesty, wherein lies my virtue.” Punning underscores this send-up: Ramírez’s verb “*retratarme*” signifies both “to portray myself” and also “to retract what I have said” (because in the period, no significant orthographic difference existed between “*retratarme*” and “*retractarme*”).<sup>5</sup> The text undoes the idea of beauty precisely while producing the usual catalogue of traits. Indeed it overrides admiration for physical beauty entirely, replacing looks with savvy.

One hundred and thirty-eight lines catalogue ravishing attributes, such as her nose “right between the eyes” (line 54) and “passable” throat (line 73). Directly alluding to Garcilaso de la Vega’s sonnet XXIII (“En tanto que de rosa y azucena / se muestra la color en vuestro gesto ...”) and thus foregrounding a playful critique of Petrarchist antecedents, the lyric voice observes:

Si es de azucena o de rosa  
mi frente, no comprendo  
ni el color;  
y será dificultosa  
de imitar, pues no le entiendo  
yo la flor. (lines 25-30)

If my forehead’s more  
of a lily or a rose  
is hard to say;  
and I don’t know that I can render  
flowers I don’t really under-  
stand, anyway.

This poem resonates with the *blasón* tradition as it emulates yet humorously overturns the overdetermined portrait-poem on female beauty. Implicitly critiquing Petrarchist commonplaces and conventional views, her text showcases lively wit and accomplished mastery of poetic discourse. Ramírez de Guzmán’s playful self-mockery, as it parodies a tiresomely oppressive discourse, invites comparison to a similar spoof in the *ovillejo* by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (a discussion of this spirited anti-Petrarchist satire concludes Bergmann and Middlebrook’s “Hollines y peces”).

## Sapphic Satire

Among the ways that early modern women poets work variations on Petrarchist conventions, their widespread address of love poems to other women is especially arresting, given the ongoing preoccupations with gender and sexuality of our present cultural period. Passionate poems foregrounding the female gender of both speaker and addressee circulated in print and manuscript, with Spanish, colonial New Spanish, English, Portuguese, Italian, French, Flemish, and Dutch examples. This lyric discourse pointedly satirizes longstanding convention, posing a humorous, loving mutual regard quite different from Petrarchist objectification of the beloved (Dugaw and Powell, “Sapphic Self-Fashioning”). Such poems also invoke longstanding female prestige inhering politically in courtly spheres and philosophically in Neoplatonic textual and visual references (Dugaw and Powell, “Feminist Road Not Taken”).

Poems by women who address other women in passionately erotic terms constituted a fashion in the court-oriented lyric of Europe in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.<sup>6</sup> Petrarchan tradition offered poets familiar topoi—from the warm, enraptured gaze to the cold thud of disappointment—to be reworked and reimagined. This framework allowed women poets to articulate a woman-to-woman eroticism that functioned in what our era can view as a paradoxical combination of conservative and liberatory ways. The Petrarchist stance-with-a-difference allowed a voicing of female homosociality and homoeroticism in the context of aristocratic court circles and of the intellectually privileged bourgeoisie that invoked courtly cultural forms. Across Baroque cultures, women’s love poetry to women satirizes the silencing of women while it opens a space for female homoerotic passion and sexuality.<sup>7</sup>

When scholars heed these texts at all, most declare them professions of friendship on a Renaissance model of *amicitia*, an observation neatly combining accuracy with squeamishness. Many of the poems do express affection, tenderness, and other bonds that characterize close friendship, and in some cases biographical evidence attests to a friendly association between writer and “real-life” addressee; some combine a loving address with flattery and solicitations of patronage. However, many poems of this type pointedly engage Petrarchist terms for the fleeting contentment and durable privations of erotic love, ardently moving beyond “standard” (if masculine poetic practice constitutes a standard) early modern forms of friendship-address.

To insist dualistically that such poems “really” express either the affectionate bonds between “good friends” or “that era’s form of lesbianism”—or, for that matter, the care and feeding of a patron by a favored subject—is to miss their most interesting features. In any of these cases, why and especially how do poets take up the use of erotic language that was in their day, as it is now, long familiar from more “mainstream” traditions of male-authored love poems to women? What made these women-authored poems—frequently celebrated, circulated, and esteemed in their own day—become all but unreadable to moderns?

These poems often flaunt their enlistment of the conventional language of erotic love, by drawing the reader's attention to a woman speaking to a woman as male lyric-speakers have done. It is interesting, but (alas) fruitless, to speculate on whether the woman author of a given love poem to a female addressee felt erotic longings for, or sought to consummate an extra-textual close encounter with, the woman poetically invoked. Just as fruitless as, say, attempting to detail how the historical Petrarch might respond were an eager, flesh-and-blood Laura to appear in his boudoir; or whether anything—and if so what—transpired between the sheets of Garcilaso de la Vega and Isabel Freire, if actual sheets they ever crept between, beyond those of manuscript and printed folios. While critics seem to demand (impossible) extra-textual substantiating evidence before conceding the possibility of woman-for-woman's lyric infatuation, they do not require this "higher evidentiary standard" (in historian Martha Vicinus's term, 59) from lyrics of presumptively heterosexual address.

From the context of colonial New Spain, or Mexico, the extensive epistolary-verse offerings of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648-1695) to her beloved friend and patron, the Countess of Paredes, Vicereine María Luisa Manrique pose examples par excellence. In some poems, Sor Juana's speaker invokes a long continuation of the medieval courtly love vein in which the lady was saluted with the masculine form "mi dons" (that is, "my lord"; Sautman and Sheingorn 30-31). The beloved "Lysi" (the vicereine) is variously called "Adorado Dueño mío" (my adored Lord; Juana Inés de la Cruz 93, line 29) or again "divino" and "hermoso Dueño" (divine / lovely Lord; 212, lines 25, 30). This corpus of poems springs from a context of known friendship. However, the texts playfully, passionately, or strenuously incite the reader to consider both the potency *and* the possible impropriety of a woman's erotic lyric address to another woman, as in the poetically virtuosic *romance decasílabo* (ballad in irregular meter) that in working through terms of the blazon, praises the vicereine's throat as a passageway to her breasts:

Tránsito a los jardines de Venus,  
 órgano es de marfil, en canora  
 música, tu garganta, que en dulces  
 éxtasis aun al viento aprisiona. (Juana Inés de la Cruz 204-5, lines 37-40)

Transiting to the sumptuous gardens of Venus,  
 musical organ of marble, your sculpted throat  
 captivates even the air, in bewitching  
 ecstasies of a melody long and low.

This poem and others clearly flaunt their reach beyond friendship to the erotic (Powell, "Sor Juana's Love Poems Addressed to Women").

Anne de Rohan-Soubise (1584-1646), from a powerful ducal family in Brittany and Anjou, allied herself with dissenting Calvinists. Her extensive learning in Latin and Hebrew received admiring comment, while her manifest piety within a severe Protestant framework coexisted with an active poetic practice as *précieuse* and hostess to a bon-vivant salon in Paris. Her poetry, circulated and preserved in manuscript in keeping with *salonnière*

practices (*Poésies*, published in 1862; see also Stanton, “Anne de Rohan”), dashingly combines elegies to family and political figures (such as her “Stances sur la mort de Henry IV”) with passionate address to beautiful women.

A quatrain to the Viscountess “d’Oulchy [d’Auchy]”—a distinguished *bel esprit* of the time (*Poésies* 75, n. 17)—enthuses in conventional Petrarchist style on eyes that are better termed “skies” in their celestial blue, yet “suns” in their capacity to set fire and wound:

Ce ne sont pas des yeux, ce sont plutost des cieux,  
Aussy bien que les cieux ils ont la couleur bleue;  
Non, ce sont des soleils, car ils blessent le veue,  
De ceux qui de les voir sont trop curieux. (69)

These cannot be eyes, these are rather heavens,  
for like skies above, their shade is deepest blue;  
no, they must be suns that blaze to burn the gaze  
of those who seek such loveliness to view.

Another poem counsels a certain Isabelle of “*beauté féconde*” (“fertile beauty”) that speaker and beloved must be content with friendship (43). Despite mutual desires for further “*amorous embraces*” (“*amoureuse braise*”), heterosexual marriage is likely to make a supplanting claim on their hearts:

... Il faut donc, chère Isabelle,  
D’une amitié mutuelle  
Contenter icy nos vœux;  
Que l’amoureuse braise,  
Qui vit dedans nous s’appaise ...  
Offrant chacun le cœur sien  
Dessus l’autel de l’hymenée,  
Nos amitiés recompensées  
Par un conjugal lien. (lines 4-8, 10-13; 43)

Well then, my dearest Isabelle,  
with a friendship warm and mutual  
we must appease our wishes;  
let the loving ember  
living in us both now slumber ...  
Each one offering up her heart  
at hymen’s holy altar,  
loves exchanged, perhaps rewarded  
for a marriage bond.

The lyric distinguishes between the proposed, redefined friendship (“*amitié mutuelle*”) with which speaker and addressee must be contented and the erotic embraces they formerly enjoyed.

A poem to Madeleine, who is called a “Belle de qui dépend ma vie” (“Beautiful lady on whom my life depends”), protests the beloved’s rejection and emphasizes the speaker’s ennoblement through suffering, both in highly conventional terms-with-a-gender twist:

Non, je ne me plains, madame,  
 De voir vostre fière rigueur,  
 Car le beau sujet qui m’enflamme  
 Ne me fait mourir qu’en douceur;  
*Je tiens à honneur ceste peine*  
*Puisque c’est pour vous, Madeleine.* (Poesies 48-49, lines 1-6)

My lady, I shall not complain  
 of your cruel severity,  
 for the lovely one who sets me aflame  
 does not slay me, save in sweetness;  
*I am honored by this pain of mine*  
*because it is for you, Madeleine.* (italics in original)

These lyrics give no opportunity for inquiry (sadly undocumentable, although interesting) into what may have taken place between the speaker and Isabelle, or Madeleine, or other real or fictive beloveds, involving bodies or gifts or affections. Rather, we can make forthright examination of how women poets enlist the same poetic strategies deployed by male Petrarchists, to image-out the hope for, bliss during, or loss of amorous “conquest,” “possession,” or enjoyment.

Anne de Rohan’s poems on the surface adopt numerous elements of Petrarchism and courtly love. But for the reader cognizant of the female gender of author and addressee, they incisively reinscribe those conventions. The poet’s elegant handling of prized cultural forms, first, demonstrates a female author’s capacity for poetic mastery: “Car le beau sujet qui m’enflamme / Ne me fait mourir qu’en douceur” (“for the lovely one who sets me aflame / does not slay me, save in sweetness”). Subjectivity exquisitely refined by love—suffering is not an exclusively masculine domain. Second, as Jones points out, a woman poet’s “adulatory imitation” of a privileged discourse destabilizes “the gender system that prohibits her claim to public language—although with limited disturbance to that system” (4). These poems held further strong resonance for their period, as I suggest in my general conclusion below.

Given limited space and time, I make abbreviated mention of a few more examples. The Portuguese Violante do Ceu (or in Castilian, del Cielo) adopts Petrarchism, like the Mexican Juana Inés de la Cruz, to make witty reformulations that not only emulate but send up those conventions. From a convent in Lisbon, in the same period—indeed, in a life extending for almost the entire seventeenth century (1601-1693[?])—she collected and published her combined secular and devotional poetry. The *Rimas*, composed in Portuguese and Castilian and issued in Nantes, France (1646), features poems addressed to women in various discourses of passionate love, wryly amused friendship, and the intense jealousy well-



known from male and presumptively heterosexual (if homosocial) poets. Many of these texts evoke eroticism and seduction and then seem to enjoin—indeed enjoy—the reader’s likely discomfiture. For a sampling and analysis of this aspect of her verse, see my “‘*Oh qué diversas estamos*’” (73-80); a varying critical treatment appears in Adrienne Martín, “Rhetoric.”

In Italy, Tarquinia Molza (1542-1617) received wide admiration (and in 1600, honorary Roman citizenship) as “L’Unica” for her intellectual, literary, and musical achievement. She served as choral director and poet at the famously magnificent house of the Duke Alfonso II d’Este (Jaffe 311).<sup>8</sup> There, one scholar observes, Molza maintained openly “passionate relations with women friends, to whom her most emotional poetry is addressed,” whereas among her lyrics of love none can be identified as addressed to a masculine beloved (Riley 99 n. 10).<sup>9</sup> Irma Jaffe renders a section of one love poem thus: “I sobbed / with passion you aroused... / for the lover is tossed between / fire and waves” (320). Francesco Patrizi’s *L’Amorosa Filosofia* (1577), in the edition and translation by John Charles Nelson, remarks of Molza, “No other woman has ever enflamed so many hearts ...—in sum, [she is loved by] every manner of man, and no few women” (Riley 100, n 15).

Isabella Canali Andreini (1562-1604), an internationally renowned actor, wrote acclaimed letters, plays, and poetry including the *Mirtilla* (1588), her *Rime* (1601), and the *Lettere* (1607 and various editions). Giovanna Rabitti observes that Andreini’s written texts, like her stage performances, speak both as and to women and men in flexible ways that “challenge the rigid boundaries of gender representation” (47-48), as in her “Madrigale III”:

Se non temprate un poco  
 Madonna il mio gran foco con quel gielo,  
 Che’n voi nascose il Cielo,  
 O se picciola dramma  
 Non riceuete in voi  
 De la mia immensa fiamma  
 Temo, che Morte haurà di noi la palma,  
 Di voi per troppo ghiaccio, e di mi poi  
 Perche foco souerchio hò dentro à l’alma. (*Rime* 9)

If, my lady, you do not somewhat check  
 my raging fire with that icy chill  
 that Heaven concealed within you,  
 or if you will not take in  
 the tiniest dram  
 of my towering flame,  
 I fear that Death will triumph over both—  
 over you for too much freezing, and then me  
 because of the excessive fire within my soul.<sup>10</sup>

In Andreini's trademark dramatic voicing, our old friends fire and ice evoke the lover's passion and frustration.

The English poets Katherine Phillips and Aphra Behn in England have received attention for their love poems to women, although most criticism does not treat their texts in the international context of European Baroque women's poetry that substantially informs this aspect of their work as representative rather than exceptional. Phillips, renowned as "the matchless Orinda," and Behn, who saw her theater works much produced in London and who published extensive lyric poems, were both celebrated in the period for deft, and sometimes buoyantly parodic, love poems to women (Dugaw and Powell, "Sapphic Self-Fashioning" 135-41).

Finally, Flemish and Dutch poets deserving recognition on their own and also as representative of this international, early modern vein of love poetry to women include Katharina Questiers (1631-69), Cornelia Van Der Veer (1639-1702?), Katharina Lescailje (1649-1711), and Titia Brongersma (late seventeenth century). Maaike Maijer and Lia van Gemert collect and discuss examples of their poetry that reveal characteristics of this international Petrarchist-Sapphic mode.

### Theorizing These Voices and These Loves

Once the texts that identify sixteenth- and seventeenth-century women's international flair for satirical and Sapphic reworkings of Petrarchism stand before us, we can enlist feminist, queer, historicizing, and discursive theories to open to view the poems and the cultural work they perform. First, numerous textual passages either suggest or highlight an awareness of participating in hierarchically gendered discourse traditions. Far from being anachronistic, feminist approaches are necessary to analyze the poems' shaping of lyric discourse and the poets' commanding of opportunities to make their work known.

While it seems counter-intuitive to most modern viewpoints, many aspects of the Baroque period vitally empowered women's intellectual and cultural activity, including the production of these poems. Queer theory provides useful perspectives for investigating how this was so, by offering ways to search against and through our own pervasive cultural assumptions about sexualities and their representations. Richly resonant emblemata of that period, grounded ideologically in Christian Neoplatonist philosophy and politically in the then-ongoing presence of women rulers and nobles, provided sources for creative and intellectual women through artifacts, spaces, and energies—but tend to be markedly misread, or simply erased, in modernity. These include visual images, literary *exempla*, religious processions and ceremonies, and real-world examples of unabashed, agency-wielding women ranging from the divine Mother of God, to political power-brokering queens, various *femmes fortes* of legendary and commonplace description, female patrons of the arts and letters, and cross-dressing, far-roving women fighters (in the streets and on the stage).

To place women's complex use of poetic convention in accurate context, we should account for how Petrarchist lyric discourse reaches them within a kind of "popular culture of the elite" within which they shape their opportunities. They are not necessarily reading specific poems in the canon by Francesco Petrarca himself—although that does occur for some women. These are more often readings-of-readings; so that (for example) in Spain and Portugal, the alluded examples include Garcilaso, Herrera, and company, as read and re-written by Góngora, Lope, Quevedo, et al. Thus, by the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a mere note or two serves to summon recognizable melodies, harmonics, and overtones. Female and male poets give evidence of a rich mix of frustration as well as delight with an aging trove of imagery and poetic strategy. They enlist and renovate metaphors—jeweled, flowery, stony, architectural, and cosmic—along with clichéd antitheses and paradoxes that resonate with Neoplatonic and erotic significance. Women writers show equal familiarity, when compared to both much-studied as well as lesser-known male poets, with how the too-familiar ingredients can be served up afresh to "fashion a self" or articulate subjectivity (at the risk of enlisting our present-day cliché-trove).

Taken as a group, Petrarchist satire and Sapphic love poems provide women poets with an equalizing discourse. Most basically, the authors display poetic prowess in the culturally prestigious lyric form. Discursively, this reworked Petrarchism confers dignity—with a wit all the more supple when it is humorously enacted—between intellectually and affectively equal subjects, the speaker and her female addressee. Such poems offer a valuable—and judging by their prevalence in the period, clearly valued—model of interaction that provides a variant for the gender hierarchy of Petrarchism. Time and again, the gender-bending address of women's love poems to women does honor to the perfections of the beloved Lady. As seen above, Anne de Rohan addresses her Madeleine as a "madame" who rules over the speaker's heart with "fière rigueur" ("cruel severity"). By speaking in female voice to address women, women poets expose gender convention as a regulated system that conceals possible alternatives.

Male-authored Petrarchist love-suffering usually roots in relational opposition to, rather than pleasurable collaboration or interdependence with, the addressee. When women poets evoke this paradigm, the fact of female authorship and female-to-female address generates an ironic distance from tradition. Humorous or over-the-top deployment of Petrarchist imagery sets up a basis for recognition of the self in and with the "other," similarly female beloved, rather than over/against her (see Powell, "Sor Juana's Love Poems" 209, 213).

In the early modern context, this deployment of Petrarchist homage works to reinforce women's real-world lines of interchange of power and support. A now-deepening investigation of epistolary correspondences demonstrates vital practices among women ranging from queens to noblewomen to bourgeoisies for creating, nurturing, and maintaining political and financial as well as affective alliances.<sup>11</sup> The widespread Sapphic love poetry in the period in part reflects the cultural importance of social network relations between women, to reveal another source of energy infusing these poems of love.

Finally, in many texts the lavish erotic imagery makes clear that, as love poems, they are just that and work familiar chords along with changes on Petrarchist harmonies to express friendly, fond, and amorous devotions of various sorts. For example, Sor Juana's humor overturns poetic and social conventions to undo not only the paradigms that objectify, silence, and separate women but what our age terms the heteronormative groundings of these paradigms as well. Infused with all this charge (to shift metaphors), it is no wonder the poetry produced a kick.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the translations here are mine. I must *reconocer* with grateful acknowledgement Dianne Dugaw's contributions to this essay, through our ongoing collaborative research on and thinking about these poems.

<sup>2</sup> Bergmann and Middlebrook read the dismembered "Petrarchan woman" in early modern Spanish literature; they treat Sor Juana's resistance to the "problematic representation of woman's desire and woman's body," especially in her satiric portrait-poem, *romance* no. 43, "*Sobre sí es atrevimiento*" addressed to Elvira, Countess of Galve (153-54).

<sup>3</sup> See Powell, "*¡Oh qué diversas estamos,/ dulce prenda, vos y yo!*" (especially 55-57) for an analysis of how seventeenth-century Spanish women's love poems to women construct four explicit, grammatically marked modes of address: (1) explicitly female speaker to male addressee; (2) male speaker to female addressee; (3) female, or unspecified, to unidentified addressee; and (4) female speaker to explicitly female addressee. Each of these stances in individual poems, and the effects created collectively across a poet's single interventions and manuscript or published collections, can work theatrically to deliver charged perspectives on presumably normative roles. These modes create space to elicit love's ever-present undercurrent, the consolidation or exchange of power.

<sup>4</sup> See my further discussion subtitled "Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán: Humor, silence, violence" in "*¡Oh qué diversas estamos...*" (68-73). The poet's work is now available in a new critical edition: Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán. *Obra poética*. Ed. Aránzazu Borrachero Mendíbil and Karl McLaughlin. Mérida, Spain: Editora Regional de Extremadura, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Julián Olivares and Elizabeth Boyce note this pun (*Tras el espejo* 186, n. 6).

<sup>6</sup> Scholars who have observed this fashion in and (to some degree) across European literatures include Harriet Andreadis in *Sappho in Early Modern England: Female Same-Sex Literary Erotics, 1550-1714* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Emma Donoghue in *Passions between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668-1801* (NY: Harper Collins, 1993); Susan Lanser in "Befriending the Body: Female Intimacies as Class Acts," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 32 (1998-99): 179-98 and in "'Au sein de vos pareilles': Sapphic Separatism in Late Eighteenth-Century France," *Journal of Homosexuality*, 41 (2001): 105-16; Adrienne Martín in "The Rhetoric of Female Friendship in the Lyric of Sor Violante del Cielo," *Calíope*, 3 (1997): 57-71 and in "The Mediation of Lesbian Eros in Golden Age Verse" in Alain Saint-Saens and María José Delgado, *Lesbianism and Homosexuality in Early Modern Spain: Literature and Theater in Context* (New Orleans: University Press of

the South, 2000), 343-62; and Elizabeth Wahl in *Invisible Relations: Representations of Female Intimacy in the Age of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> What do we talk about when we talk about non-normative discursive love? Taking as a chief point of departure Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, literary and historical scholarship of the last thirty-plus years wrestles with how to conceptualize same-sex eroticism before the formation of modern sexual identities. Recent conceptualizations of erotic love between women in pre-modern texts include "same-sex love and desire between women" (Canadé Sautman and Pamela Sheingorn, "Introduction" in Sautman and Sheingorn, eds., *Same-Sex Love and Desire among Women in the Middle Ages* [NY: Palgrave, 2001]. 1-47); the "silent sin" (Alain Saint-Saens, "Homoerotic Suffering, Pleasure and Desire in Early Modern Europe, 1450-1750" in Alain Saint-Saens and María José Delgado, eds., *Lesbianism and Homosexuality in Early Modern Spain: Literature and Theater in Context* [New Orleans: University Press of the South, 2000].1-86); "female homoeroticism" (Bernadette Brooten, *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996]); "lesbian-like" (Judith Bennett, "'Lesbian-like' and the Social History of Lesbians," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 9 [2000]: 1-24); "queer desire" (Valerie Traub, "Desire and the Differences It Makes" in Valerie Wayne, ed., *The Matter of Difference: Materialist Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991]. 81-114); "female intimacy" (Elizabeth Wahl, *Invisible Relations*); and "sapphism" (Susan Lanser, "Befriending the Body"). Given my own literary interest, and that of the writers considered here, I follow Lanser's allusive term *Sapphic* for texts that express or suggest erotic love between women. This is not to assert for these poems or poets a textual, or sexual, identity anachronistic to the early modern, or genealogical connection to the Classical lyricist, but rather to supply collective terminology for the poems in question and, especially, to refuse the suffocating inconvenience of wordlessness. On this point see Marie-Jo Bonnet, "Sappho, or the Importance of Culture in the Language of Love: Tribade, Lesbienne, Homosexuelle," in *Queerly Phrased: Language, Gender and Sexuality*, ed. Anna Livia and Kira Hall (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).147-66.

<sup>8</sup> This patronage center in Ferrara shows the multi-media, courtly role for intellectual and creative women; Isabella Andreini starred there annually with her traveling theatre company, the *Gelosì*. Molza was leader of the Concerto delle Donne, a group of accomplished women musicians who performed private court concerts or *musica secreta* under the patronage of Duke Alfonso II (Jaffe 337, n. 20).

<sup>9</sup> By way of gender-contrast, Joanne Marie Riley notes that toward male addressees Molza's poetry evidences "warm, affectionate friendship"—but not the passionate or erotic investment found in poems to women (23, n. 16).

<sup>10</sup> My thanks go to Nathalie Hester for her insightful reading of this poem, supplied in conversation.

<sup>11</sup> On early modern Spanish women's use of epistolary networks to form, consolidate, and extend political power, see for example Romero-Díaz.

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