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Nazarian, Cynthia N. Love's Wounds: Violence and the Politics of Poetry in Early Modern Europe

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[See table of contents](#)

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Nazarian, Cynthia N.

Love's Wounds: Violence and the Politics of Poetry in Early Modern Europe.

Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016. Pp. xiii, 299 + 3 b/w ill. ISBN 978-1-5017-0522-9 (hardcover) US\$49.95.

To love is to suffer, but “the wound of love is a speaking wound” (1). So begins Cynthia Nazarian’s *Love’s Wounds: Violence and the Politics of Poetry in Early Modern Europe* which originated as an examination of the imagery of violence in sixteenth-century poetry. Following what she labels a northward and chronological progression, Nazarian traces the legacy of Petrarchan poetry in the Renaissance. She logically dedicates her first chapter to the Tuscan master himself and to Maurice Scève, author of the first sixteenth-century Petrarchan sequence who, like his model, interweaves political and amorous poems. Each of the next three chapters introduces a new poet—Du Bellay, d’Aubigné, Spenser—each of whose work across genres has been seen by critics as inconsistent. Instead, Nazarian astutely proposes that what links them is their emphasis on the poet’s voice which not only survives but also protests despite extreme duress. We should not make the mistake, she argues, of reading the political material (*La Deffence, Les Tragiques, The Faerie Queene*) as unrelated to the love poetry (*L’Olive, L’Hécatombe, Amoretti*); rather, we should allow each to inform the other.

Love’s Wounds does just that, ingeniously aligning the beloved’s cruelty with the sovereign’s indifference and equating the poet’s rebellion with political insurgency. Among Petrarch’s imitators, the beloved becomes increasingly more sovereign, the lover more abject and vulnerable, and love itself significantly more destructive. Nazarian maintains that this shift in Renaissance lyric poetry reflects the poets’ historico-political circumstances and provides a unique venue for their resistance and what she terms “countersovereignty,” which effectively converts vulnerability into agency. Her incisive close readings unveil the unexpected potential of conventional tropes and present early modern Petrarchan sonnets as a site for collaboration, contestation, and ultimately critique.

In the first chapter, “Strategies of Abjection: *Parrhēsia* and the Cruel Beloved from Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* to Scève’s *Délie*,” Nazarian argues that Petrarch’s love poetry set the precedent for grounding the abjection and inexorable lament of the unrequited lover in the political concept of *parrhēsia*

(frank or bold speech). In so doing, the Tuscan poet exploits both the political and rhetorical possibilities of *parrhēsia* in order to produce a voice that cannot be silenced. Scève, in turn, imagines the violent consequences of bold speech when faced with a cruel and omnipotent beloved. It is thus, Nazarian contends, that the *Délie* prepares the way for the politicization of Petrarchan poetry and “establishes the foundations of lyric countersovereignty and political critique” (58).

Like Scève, Du Bellay juxtaposes a sovereign lady with the vulnerable poet, yet he does not afford the amorous poems primacy over the political. Nazarian’s second chapter, “Violence and the Politics of Imitation in DuBellay’s *La Deffence et Illustration de la langue françoise* and *L’Olive*,” declares that Du Bellay reconfigures the Petrarchan sonnet as a political genre in which abjection becomes a means for countering subjection. Nazarian argues that by equating the beloved’s cruelty and the oppression of a callous sovereign and “by turning dependency into appropriation, belatedness into conquest” (82) DuBellay provides the catalyst for the sonnets’ countersovereignty. This reversal of power is further underlined by the poet’s attention to corporeality: in the sonnets, the poet is presented as fragmented by the beloved’s power, whereas the *Deffence* depicts him as an agent of dismemberment.

D’Aubigné, too, presents a poet who is fractured albeit by his own hand. This self-dissecting poet of *L’Hécatombe* perfectly represents the double persona of the soldier-poet who exemplifies both vulnerability and agency. The poet of the *Tragiques*, on the other hand, offers “voluntary and *unresisting* service through which the tragic-epic’s religious politics seek to resolve the conflict of the love sonnets into teleology and transcendence” (145). The monograph’s third chapter, “Martyrdom, Anatomy, and the Ethics of Metaphor in d’Aubigné’s *L’Hécatombe à Diane* and *Les Tragiques*,” juxtaposes real violence with metaphorical violence to underscore the “paradox of real violence used for art’s sake” (116). Rather than allegorize love like other Petrarchan poets, d’Aubigné allegorizes war, using exceedingly violent themes and brutal imagery to accentuate physical suffering as a precondition of the poet’s writing.

The fourth and final chapter, “Petrarchan Tyranny and Lyric Resistance in Spenser’s *Amoretti* and *The Faerie Queene*,” outlines the ways in which Spenser modifies the Petrarchan paradigm as a means of delegitimizing authoritarian rule and of providing the vulnerable with lyric strategies to fight back against tyranny. Nazarian posits that the overlapping publication of Spenser’s texts

signals their political collaboration. The inextricability of the two, in fact, is so undeniable that Nazarian appears to conflate their characteristics, speaking of “the Petrarchan politics of the sonnet sequence and the political Petrarchism of the long poem” (234) but also claiming that “the sonnets’ Petrarchism is political, and the long poem’s politics are Petrarchan” (181). Despite this minor inconsistency, Nazarian meets her goal of both problematizing and contributing to feminist and political criticism of Spenser’s work, ultimately pointing up what she calls the “double tyranny at the heart of Petrarchan politics” (213), that of the authoritarian beloved but also of the poet’s own desire. By means of a conclusion, Nazarian discusses the limits of Petrarchism due to the genre’s inherent contradictions, which Nazarian terms “paradoxes of pain” (237): the problem of authenticity versus loquacity and the ethical dilemma of violence used for art’s sake. The subtitle of this section highlights “Shakespeare beyond Petrarchism,” and offers the bard’s comedy *Venus and Adonis* as a demonstration of the disempowerment that occurs when desire is dissociated from vulnerability. Hopefully, Nazarian will continue her perspicacious probe into the interrelationships between poetry and politics, particularly as experienced by women writers. In the introduction, the author admits to having excluded them because she has *not yet* been able to identify all of the necessary countersovereign requirements. With any luck, Nazarian will be able to do so, for this reviewer would welcome the opportunity to read her analysis of Du Guillet’s rhetorical countersovereignty alongside Scève’s, particularly in their respective rewritings of the Acteon myth, and to be able to see the tyrant/martyr dichotomy come full circle.

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Pangallo, Matteo.

Playwriting Playgoers in Shakespeare’s Theater.

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017. Pp. 248. ISBN 978-0-8122-4941-5 (hardcover) US\$59.95.

Hampered somewhat by a misleading title that might more aptly have gestured toward the early modern English professional stage, rather than “Shakespeare’s