



The Poetry of Petrarch

Petrarch

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*Ineffable sweetness, bold, uncanny sweetness
that came to my eyes from her lovely face;
from that day on I'd willingly have closed them,
never to gaze again at lesser beauties.*

--from Sonnet 116

Petrarch was born in Tuscany and grew up in the south of France. He lived his life in the service of the church, traveled widely, and during his lifetime was a revered, model man of letters.

Petrarch's greatest gift to posterity was his *Rime in vita e morta di Madonna Laura*, the cycle of poems popularly known as his songbook. By turns full of wit, languor, and fawning, endlessly inventive, in a tightly composed yet ornate form they record their speaker's unrequited obsession with the woman named Laura. In the centuries after it was designed, the "Petrarchan sonnet," as it would be known, inspired the greatest love poets of the English language--from the times of Spenser and Shakespeare to our own.

David Young's fresh, idiomatic version of Petrarch's poetry is the most readable and approachable that we have. In his skillful hands, Petrarch almost sounds like a poet out of our own tradition bringing the wheel of influence full circle.

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