PETRARCHISM

DEFINITION: “The poetic style introduced by Petrarch and characteristic of his work”; popularized in England by Tottel’s Miscellany (1559)

CONVENTIONS OF PETRARCHAN LOVE POETRY:

• Idealized conception of love as a spiritual experience (no physical consummation) involving worship of/devotion to Beloved [Neoplatonic, as in The Courtier]

• Idealized conception of the Beloved:
  --Conventional physical features, with physical beauty a sign and reflection of her inner virtue;
  --Attitude toward her Lover: cold; disdainful; remote; chaste

• Posture of Speaker, attitude toward Beloved: Humble, not worthy of her attention, affection

• Poems frequently function as complaints, with focus on speaker’s various emotional states, or as praise of lady, persuasions to love, expressions of flattery

• Recurrent themes:
  --Love as ennobling of both Lover and Beloved
  --Poetry as a means of immortalizing the Beloved
  --Love sparks conflict between Reason and Passion

• Figurative language (way of talking about love)—
  --Use of elaborate comparisons or conceits; paradox
    --Love as war
    --Love as religious experience
  --Desire to be something (a glove, a pet lap dog) associated with or belonging to the Beloved