

# Sir Thomas Wyatt and Italian Petrarchism: Hypothesis of a Musical Mediation

Francesca Strada (La Trobe University)

Sir Thomas Wyatt was the first poet who wrote sonnets in English and who consequently introduced Petrarchism into England. Many of his lyrics, in fact, are translations and imitations of poems composed by Francis Petrarch and by the 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup>-century Italian Petrarchists.

Scholars have often tried to explain under what circumstances Wyatt might have come into contact with his Italian literary models. However, only mere hypotheses have been put forward as no records of Wyatt's encounter with Italian Petrarchism have been left. The aim of this paper will be therefore to reconsider how and when Italian sources might have reached Wyatt's poetry.

In the first place, I will point out the important role that 15<sup>th</sup>-century and early 16<sup>th</sup>-century Italian Petrarchism played on Wyatt's poetry and then consider the main hypotheses which have been suggested by scholars in order to explain Wyatt's encounter with Italian lyric poetry. The core of this paper, however, will focus on the hypothesis of a musical mediation between Italian Petrarchism and Wyatt's verse. From this perspective I will also take into account the possible mediating role that French poetry set to music might have played between Italian original sources and Wyatt's adaptations into English. Therefore, I will suggest that most of Wyatt's lyrics were probably intended to be sung and that Italian Petrarchism may have reached this poet through the musical settings which had been created for many lyrics by Petrarch and his followers.

This paper will finally stress the probability, often disregarded by scholars, that Wyatt's Petrarchism might have started even before his Italian embassy of 1527 as a result of some Petrarchist settings which may have been circulating at the court of Henry VIII in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.