



Outside the Book

Two Styles of Love

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Two generations of male poet, two very different kinds of lover: the Petrarchan and the Libertine.

Petrarchanism describes a sort of love poetry from the 16th and 17th centuries; though it's actually named after a 13th Century Italian poet called Petrarch.

Your Petrarchan poet is a teenager at heart, revelling in his own suffering and never making his move. He puts his love on a pedestal and praises her bit-by-bit like some starry-eyed stock taker.

The love he portrays is Platonic, unrequited and unconsummated. It's your *soul* he's interested in. Sure.

These wimpy lovers couldn't last forever and soon a *slightly* more experienced poet came along.

The Libertine poet has exactly one thing on his mind: to seduce and conquer his *current* love ASAP.

He sees death's approach and wants to seize each precious moment. So if he does praise your body, he'll do it whilst tearing your clothes off.

Here's one of Donne's nautical numbers:

'My rudder, with thy bold hand, like a tried
And skilful pilot, thou shalt steer, and guide
My bark into love's channel'

Classy.

The men of Petrarchan and Libertine poems aren't such worlds apart though. They both tell us a lot more about Renaissance masculinity than femininity.

Both boys would much rather conquer the girl in bed or half dismember her in verse, than give her the chance to say anything at all.