

Petrarch and de la  
vega's all-  
encompassing  
passion



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

“ Love found me altogether disarmed,” declares Francis Petrarch in one of his highly acclaimed sonnets, referring of course to his dearly beloved yet unattainable Laura (Petrarch 2068). This is perhaps a bit of an understatement. Both Francis Petrarch and Garcilaso de la Vega found themselves so utterly consumed by their respective infatuations that they wrote of little else, thus revealing much to their readers about their ideas concerning the trials and tribulations of love.

The two poets share a similarly pessimistic view of love. Petrarch, in his third sonnet, uses war-like metaphors to recount his experience, stating that he was not “ on guard” and “ did not defend [him]self against it” and that he was consequently struck “ with an arrow” (Petrarch 2068). By clearly asserting that one must protect himself from love, Petrarch alludes to its less than desirable effects. He also directly states that the day he initially encountered Laura was the day his “ misfortunes began” (Petrarch 2068). In his 189th sonnet, Petrarch describes the “ changeless wind of sighs,” “ rain of weeping,” and “ mist of disdain” that he encounters while sailing through the figurative “ harsh sea” of love (Petrarch 2071). Through his comparison of the hardships of seafaring to the plights of passion, he further emphasises the numerous difficulties that love brings about. Even the title of his sonnet collection, *Rime Sparse*, which translates to “ scattered rhymes,” alludes to his troubles: love has left him broken and scattered.

Likewise, many of de la Vega's poems appear to focus on the darker side of love. In his first sonnet, he laments that he “ gave [his] heart to one who could destroy and ruin [him] if she should wish” (de la Vega 2072). Here, rather than appreciating the immense joy and happiness that love can bring

<https://assignbuster.com/petrarch-and-de-la-vegas-all-encompassing-passion/>

to those who fall under its spell, de la Vega chooses instead to fret over the devastation he would face should his relationship end. Somewhat hyperbolically, he attests that his lover's ill will "will kill [him] if it can" (de la Vega 2072). By attributing such a final and undesirable ramification to love, de la Vega succeeds in highlighting the negative aspects of this intense emotion. This sense of repercussion is also evidenced in his 10th sonnet, when he notes that "the joys doled out a little at a time" by his lover were taken from him in only "one hour," with nothing but "sorrow left behind" (de la Vega 2073). Additionally, the gloomy diction de la Vega utilizes throughout these two sonnets, such as "bitter," "lost," "ruin," "death," "sorrow," "alone," "grief," and "bleak," adds to the overall sense that love is more depressing than it is joyous (de la Vega 2072-2073.)

Another parallel between Petrarch and de la Vega's conceptions of love is their highly romanticized and seemingly shallow views toward their objects of their affection. When portraying his lover, each poet primarily focuses on her immensely beautiful outward appearance, making no mention of her intelligence or personal beliefs. In Petrarch's 126th sonnet, Laura is said to possess a "lovely body," "angelic breasts," "lovely eyes," and "blond locks," among several other becoming physical qualities, but little other information about her is provided (Petrarch 2070). Similarly, de la Vega's love has a "fair face," hair that "shimmers" and is made "of the purest gold," and is "so beautiful, so slender, and so white" (de la Vega 2073). An obvious reason for this exclusion is the time period: in the 1300s and 1500s, women were still viewed as intellectually and morally inferior to men, so non-

physical traits may have been deemed unimportant by Petrarch and de la Vega.

A final resemblance that can be found when analyzing Petrarch and de la Vega's perceptions of love is the fact that each poet is so devout in his worship of this emotion that it seems to take precedence over everything else in his life. Petrarch, in his 333rd sonnet, mourns the death of his precious Laura, proclaiming that without her he is "sick of living" and that "praise of her is all my purpose here/ And all my business; that of her alone" (Petrarch 2071). This notion that he is both worthless and duty-less without Laura's presence shows how deep and consuming his love for her truly is. De la Vega, too, shares this sentiment, disclosing that the lover who once brought him such "joy" eventually causes him to "die of memories filled with grief" (de la Vega 2073). His representation of love as a life or death situation exposes the extreme significance he associates with it. The reader begins to assume that each of the poets would sooner die than experience the loss or rejection of a lover.

Overall, these two poets provide an image of love as an arduous yet unavoidable facet of life. Petrarch and de la Vega's sonnets would come to influence countless poets of the Renaissance and beyond, both in style and form. The Petrarchan sonnet became widely popular among other poets who wished to express their feelings of love and devotion; notably, William Shakespeare parodied the style in his well-known Sonnet 130. Even in more contemporary times, love songs tend to express similarly intense thoughts and actions, as in Bill Withers's "Ain't No Sunshine" and U2's "One."

Certainly Petrarch and de la Vega would agree that “ love is a temple, love’s the higher law.”