

A VOICE TO EASE HER "TROUBLED SENCE":  
INNOVATION AND EXPLORATION THROUGH  
THE FEMALE SONNETEER IN MARY WROTH'S  
SONNET SEQUENCE, PAMPHILIA  
TO AMPHILANTHUS

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## PREFACE

The depth and range of emotions in Lady Mary Wroth's sonnet sequence, Pamphilia to Amphilanthus, intrigued me from the first moment I encountered her poetry in a graduate seminar at Oklahoma State University. As I began to consider her work as part of the poetic tradition of Renaissance sonnet sequences, such as her uncle Philip Sidney's Astrophil and Stella, I was disheartened to realize that many critics have focused on Wroth's poetry merely to search for interesting autobiographical details. Other critics have become enthralled with the seventeenth-century scandal which surrounded the publication of her work, diverting attention away from the capabilities of a female poet attempting to respond creatively and critically under unquestionable societal constraints.

Understanding that Wroth wrote in a social and literary climate that insisted upon silence, obedience, and chastity as the definitive qualities of a virtuous woman, I began to question what difference the female voice of Pamphilia makes to Pamphilia to Amphilanthus--a sequence which is part of a male-dominated tradition. Reading the poems as the

self-exploration of the sonnet speaker, I encountered ambivalence in the voice due to the conflict between the powerful role of the sonneteer and the limitations of a seventeenth-century woman. This study does not try to prove that Lady Mary Wroth wrote very early feminist poetry; it does, however, aim to present Wroth's innovations through a discussion of Pamphilia's various responses to her role as female sonneteer.

I wish to express generous thanks to my major adviser, Dr. Edward Jones, for his thoughtful guidance, patience, and invaluable suggestions. I am grateful to the other members of my committee, Dr. Edward Walkiewicz and Dr. Elizabeth Grubgeld, for their time and helpful insights. I also extend my sincere appreciation to Dr. Paul Klemp for introducing me to the poetry of Lady Mary Wroth and for his early suggestions concerning this study.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In 1621, Lady Mary Wroth became the first Englishwoman to publish a complete sonnet sequence, Pamphilia to Amphilanthus, as well as an original, full-length work of prose fiction, The Countess of Montgomery's Urania. When we consider that only one new translation and two original compositions by women were printed under the entire reign of King James I (Warnicke 187-88),<sup>1</sup> it seems incredible that Lady Mary Wroth's literary achievement could have been ignored for more than three hundred years. Until the last two decades, Lady Mary primarily received attention in historical chronicles as merely an interesting member of the Sidney family. Sir Sidney Lee, in 1917, secures a place in history for her by noting that, after all, "the great Sir Philip Sidney was her father's brother" (1076). More recently, however, modern critics and students interested in Renaissance literature are attempting to see the world not only through the eyes of the major male figures in the foreground but also through the eyes of female figures. Lady Mary Wroth's sonnet sequence, Pamphilia to Amphilanthus, provides

modern readers an excellent opportunity to adjust our own vision of Renaissance literature, for Wroth radically changes the nature of the traditional sonnet sequence by making her sonneteer a woman.

Lady Wroth undoubtedly knew that her contemporary critical reception would include suspicion and condemnation, for she wrote in a social and literary climate that insisted upon women limiting their writings to pious forms such as religious translations, meditational devotions, or tracts on marriage and childcare. Had she chosen to write a domestic treatise, such as Dorothy Leigh's The Mother's Blessing, which went through sixteen editions between 1616 and 1640 (Warnicke 193), Lady Wroth's efforts would have been far less controversial. As Margaret L. King observes, "The learned women of the Renaissance, in the eyes of their male contemporaries and friends, ceased, in becoming learned, to be women" (76). The Renaissance in England seems to have begun well for women, producing many impressively learned women such as Margaret More Roper, Lady Jane Grey, and Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke, for women in the court of Queen Elizabeth were encouraged to learn and study. Pearl Hogrefe notes, however, that this sympathetic climate changed dramatically when James took the throne (142). Even those who defended women's education strictly forbade them from "reading romances, songs, and pagan



authors of dubious morality like Ovid. In limiting women's readings so severely, . . . [they] endorsed the assumption that women are morally frail" (Lamb 113). An examination of such restrictions led critic Joan Kelly-Gadol to inquire if women experienced a Renaissance during this time and to answer her own question with a resounding "no" (137).

Lady Mary Wroth became aware of the different standards and treatment of men and women at an early age. As the niece of Sir Philip Sidney and Mary Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, she was fortunate to know and to learn from one of the few publicly accomplished women writers of the time, a fact which would surely not discourage her from writing. On the other hand, the rules for women were not the same as those for men, so she also observed her uncle receiving great acclamation for his writings, while the Countess received very little. Arguing that the "history of women's writings is often one of repeated loss and rediscovery," Margaret Patterson Hannay offers the example of Sir John Harington, who credited the Countess of Pembroke's Psalmes to her chaplain against overwhelming evidence of her own authorship--simply because the verse revealed skill beyond Harington's perception of a woman's capabilities (2).

Wroth also experienced the unequal treatment of women in her own home. While her father, Robert

Sidney, was satisfied with Mary's reading and dancing before Queen Anne, he necessarily exhibited a great deal more concern for his sons' formal education, for he recognized that their potential and possibilities in society far outweighed those of his daughter. He wrote to his wife:

For the girls I can not mislike the care you take of them: but for the boies you must resolve to let me have my wil. For I know better what belongs to a man than you do. Indeed I will have him ly from his maide, for it is time, and now no more to bee in the nurcery among women. . . . But then will I have the boy delivered to his charge onely, and not to have him when he is to teach him, to be troubled with the women. (qtd. in Swift 332)

Through the odd syntax of "I can not mislike," the father begrudgingly acknowledges the girls' education yet hints that the mother may have exceeded the limitations of the properly narrow feminine learning. Given the cultural climate in which he lived, Robert Sidney's reservations concerning his daughter's education were entirely founded. As Kenneth Charlton explains,

. . . even by the end of the century there were still some . . . who, echoing Ben

Jonson's 'Lady Would-be' in Volpone, continued to argue that the education of girls in anything other than housewifery and the duties of motherhood was not only an unnecessary expenditure of money, but was also unseemly and in the end likely to endanger the chances of marriage itself.

(110)

Therefore, Robert Sidney expressed considerably more interest in his daughter's marriage than he did in her education. Realizing the societal importance of the institution and having orchestrated a marriage between Mary and Robert Wroth, the father was distressed when he heard news of the newly married couple's disagreements and unhappiness, so he wrote to his wife about the problems:

It were very soon for any unkindness to begin; and therefore whatsoever the matters bee, I pray you let all things be carried in the best maner til we doe meet. For mine enemies would be very glad for such an occasion to make themselves merry at mee.

(qtd. in Roberts, Poems 12)

Not only did the father's concern rest in sparing himself any embarrassing ridicule from his "enemies [who] would be very glad for such an occasion to make themselves merry" at him, but he implies in the letter

that such "unkindness" presumably would occur sooner or later anyway. He does not seem surprised that unkindness is present in the marriage, only that it had begun so early. Although Sidney mentioned no cause for the disagreement between the couple, Robert Wroth had earned a reputation as a difficult and jealous man. Ben Jonson, who dedicated The Alchemist, a sonnet, and two epigrams to Lady Mary, commented that she "was unworthily married on a jealous husband" (Works 55n). That Jonson would make such a declaration displays his high regard for Lady Mary, as does his sonnet to her which claims that he became "a better lover and much better poet" from copying her sonnets ("A Sonnet" 4). The treatment Lady Mary received from Wroth must have been conspicuously reprehensible to merit this comment from a man who normally spoke with contempt for women who followed fashion and "Melt[ed] downe their husbands land, to poure away / On the close groome, and page, on new-yeeres day" ("A Sonnet" 118).

While the marriage left much to be desired, Robert Wroth's death on March 14, 1614 virtually crippled Lady Mary financially. Her first child was born a month before her husband's death, but Wroth left her no resources to care for him. As John Chamberlain observed, she was left "a younge widow with 1,200 joynter, and a younge sonne not a moneth old: and his estate charged with 23,000 [pounds] debt" (512). Lady

Mary trusted in her ability to make decisions and insisted upon handling the finances herself, illustrating her independent nature; however, when her son died in 1616, most of Wroth's estate fell to the father's uncle, John Wroth, and Mary was left with mounting debts and painful loss (Roberts, Poems 23). Despite these tragedies, Lady Mary continued to lead an active court life until her infamous affair with her first cousin, William Herbert, third Earl of Pembroke. According to Edward Hyde, first Earl of Clarendon, Pembroke was fascinated by "those advantages of the mind, as manifested an extraordinary wit, and spirit, and knowledge, and administered great pleasure in the conversation" (73). The fascination, whatever its nature, led to Lady Mary bearing two illegitimate children by Pembroke, yet he would not marry her. Once again, Robert Sidney grieved over the embarrassment his daughter had brought him; in a letter alluding to Mary's son, he told his wife, "You have don very well in putting Wil away, for it had bin to greate a shame he would have stayde in the hous" (qtd. in Roberts, Poems 25).

Not surprisingly, as a result of the scandal Lady Mary suffered a serious decline in social status and was no longer a member of Queen Anne's intimate circle of ladies. With major debts and two illegitimate children, and without high social standing and the support of her

father or her lover, Lady Mary turned to her prose romance and sonnet sequence. Since the sale of books during this time did not usually earn profits for a writer, Wroth's aspirations for her work went beyond the hope for financial gain. Once again, as throughout her life, Wroth was willing to attempt what few women of her time would dare. The cultural and literary richness of her family, her own education, and her independent and creative spirit gave her the opportunity to continue the Sidney family heritage. She consciously chose to be a writer, yet even with all of her advantages, as a woman writer Wroth faced a complex and awkward situation. To write she must exhibit her knowledge and learning, yet this put her at considerable risk. John Dury insisted that learning in women only teaches them "how they may become objects of lusts and snares unto young gentlemen . . . [when instead] they should become modest, discreet, and industrious housewives" (qtd in Charlton 111). Sir Miles Sandys again espoused this common viewpoint in 1634 when he said, "learning in a woman is like a Sunnediall in a grave" (qtd. in Charlton 112).

The publishing history of The Countess of Montgomery's Urania and Pamphilia to Amphilanthus proves the difficulty she confronted as a female writing during the early seventeenth century, yet it supplies mixed evidence and few answers concerning Lady Mary

Wroth's involvement in bringing the book to press. Although the book was entered in the Stationer's Register on July 13, 1621, it contains no dedicatory epistles, poems, or prefatory material, and as Josephine Roberts notes, this is a significant omission in a book dedicated to a prominent courtier ("Lady Mary Wroth's Urania" 1). While this evidence may hint that Lady Mary was not involved in the book's publication, other information further clouds the modern reader's ability to know to what extent the author assented to the publication of the prose romance and sonnet sequence. For example, the various surviving manuscripts of the work reveal Wroth's conscientious attempts to revise and reorder the poems. Although she lived in a time when many authors, especially women, were "Anonymous," Wroth's name appears boldly on an engraved title page. Roberts's research into the publication history offers proof that the illustration for the title page, chosen by someone who was very familiar with the nature of the work, was created by Simon van de Passe, a Dutch artist who often executed portraits of members of the Sidney-Pembroke circle ("Lady Mary Wroth's Urania" 5). While the publication history is inconclusive, especially in light of Lady Wroth's tenuous social standing, nevertheless the book was published in 1621, and suppression and scandal followed closely once again.

Two months after the publication, Sir Edward Denny, Baron of Waltham, was outraged because he believed that the Urania was a roman a clef in which he had been maliciously slandered, depicted as the father-in-law of Seralius, an unsavory character in the romance. Denny wrote a scornful poem entitled "To Pamphilia from thee father-in-law of Seralius" (Roberts, "Bio" 48) and insisted that Lady Mary Wroth should

redeem the time with writing as large a volume of heavenly lays and holy love as you have of lascivious tales and amorous toys; that at the last you may follow the example of your virtuous and learned aunt, who translated so many godly books and especially the wholly psalmes of David. (qtd. in Roberts, Poems 34)

Wroth boldly defended her book by writing a poem, which rhymes word for word with Denny's poem, in answer to his criticism:

Your spitefull words against a harmless booke  
Shows that an ass much like the sire doth looke  
Men truly noble fear no touch of blood  
Nor question make of others much more good  
(qtd. in Roberts, Poems 34)

Despite her spirited retort, Wroth eventually realized the seriousness of the situation and stopped the sale of her book. She wrote a letter to the Duke of



Buckingham to assure him that she never meant her book to offend and that copies of the Urania were published and sold against her will (Roberts, "Lady Mary Wroth's Urania" 1).

This harsh critical reception to Lady Mary Wroth's romance and sonnet sequence helps to explain why so few women attempted to enter the "male domain" of literature during the early seventeenth century. Denny's response also illustrates the suffocating constraints and boundaries society placed on women. Hannay explains that

a woman's desire for godliness was habitually used to silence her. Paradoxically, women were permitted to break the rule of silence only to demonstrate their religious devotion by using their wealth to encourage religious education and publication by men, by translating the religious works of other (usually male) writers, and, more rarely, by writing their own devotional meditations. (4)

Recognizing the policy which permitted seventeenth-century women only religious writings or silence, recent Renaissance scholars have suggested that a discourse of silence and subversion exists in the texts written by Renaissance women authors. The question these critics raise involves how one speaks eloquently of such silences. The answer resides in the realization that

to enter history an oppressed or underprivileged class can speak only through or against the dominant discourse and disrupt by its negation or subdued silences. . . . [Such silence finally does speak . . . , and it is the critic's responsibility to make those silences speak. (Waller, "Struggling" 246-47)

Margaret Hannay, Elaine Beilin, and Elaine Showalter also realize the reader's need to look beyond the dominant and traditional literary forms when approaching the writings of Renaissance women, for "religious motivation, which permitted women to translate, could be used to force them out of original discourse" (Hannay 9). Elaine Beilin asserts that these social and literary attitudes toward women in the Renaissance influenced female writers "to subvert cultural expectations of women's writings" (Redeeming xviii), and in doing so, writers such as Mary Wroth began to construct a voice for their muted culture. Defining this feminine muted culture, Showalter explains that historians must "distinguish between the roles, activities, tastes, and behaviors considered appropriate for women and those activities, behaviors, and functions actually generated out of women's lives" (198).

Such a distinction provides a potential wealth of insight into the poetry of Lady Mary Wroth, for she

faced a culture's sense of reality which often manifested itself in the creation of female characters as extremes, be they Petrarch's Laura, the model of chaste beauty, or Shakespeare's promiscuous Dark Lady. She searched for a strong voice when the predominant message was "frailty, thy name is woman!" (Shakespeare, Hamlet I.ii.146). She chose to assume an artist's legitimacy for her work when "to men and to perhaps to some women, a woman's desire for knowledge was a frightening prospect, recalling images of Eve's hand reaching for the apple" (Beilin, Redeeming xxi).

Eager to hear a feminine perspective from the Renaissance and understandably seduced by the fascinating details of Lady Mary Wroth's life, some critics have chosen to search for autobiographical clues in Wroth's poetry.<sup>2</sup> Questioning the autobiographical elements within sonnet sequences has long been a source of scholarly discussion, yet as one Petrarchan scholar explains,

the actual experience of love on which the sonnets to Laura are based has its special scope and obvious limitation. . . . Intimate details and close contact are not the material of which the Petrarchan pattern is made: they are subsidiary to it, or, sometimes, serve as decorations upon it. (Thompson 177)

Just as scholars who search for personal references to Petrarch and Laura in Canzoniere or Philip Sidney and Lady Rich in Astrophil and Stella provide interesting and insightful, if limited readings, autobiographical readings of Pamphilia to Amphilanthus divert attention away from questions concerning the poet's innovation and creative process. Reading Wroth's poetry as primarily autobiographical love letters diminishes the capabilities of a poet who has elected to write despite the constraints dissuading women from doing so. In Wroth's case, such readings are a double disservice because she accepts the limitations placed on women yet responds creatively to them.

Confronting her role as a woman artist of the Renaissance, despite society's disapproval, and employing the poetic model of the sonnet sequence, in Pamphilia to Amphilanthus Wroth struggles to say, "I am a poet. I am a woman." Her choice of the sonnet sequence, a heretofore male-dominated tradition, is a judicious one, and one Wroth exploits to her advantage. The title page of The Countess of Montgomery's Urania reminds her readers that its author was the "Neece to the ever famous, and renowned Sir Philip Sidney knight. And to most excellent Lady Mary Countess of Pembroke late deceased." One way to offset the public disapproval of a woman writing sonnets is to call attention to her family legacy, to suggest an image of

herself as next in a line of poets. Another advantage which Elaine Bellin calls attention to is that the "worn-out" forms within the sonnet sequence allowed Wroth "greater freedom to adapt them to her special perspective than if she had followed a current fashion" (Redeeming 213). Certainly not the least of these adaptations was Pamphilia, the female sonneteer. Gary Waller supports this idea when he introduces his critical edition of Lady Mary Wroth's sonnet sequence as "the familiar Petrarchan therapy given a new twist simply because it is written by and in the person of a woman" (Intro 16).<sup>3</sup>

This "new twist," presenting the woman as the speaker instead of the beloved, albeit very bold, is not enough in itself to warrant much literary discussion beyond that single statement if we do not consider how that innovation broadens or changes the traditional focus and complexity of the sonnet sequence. We can, as Waller notes, "once again explain away her poetry empirically as a minor, belated variant of Petrarchan love-poetry," or instead we might ask, "what difference does the author's gender make to her sequence?" ("Struggling" 248). Even beyond that question, we can ask what difference the female voice of Pamphilia as the sonneteer makes to the sequence. While Pamphilia to Amphilanthus often employs conventions and familiar images of the Elizabethan sonnet sequence such as

"night's blacke mantle" and "my woe-kild heart," Pamphilia does more than simply reverse roles from male to female. Wroth's Pamphilia is not the speaking voice of the traditional Petrarchan mistress, alluring, mysterious, and silent, sending her lover into inner turmoil. She is both a poet and a lover who responds differently to the Petrarchan love poem's "theater of desire" in which "men have the active roles and the women are assigned silent, iconic functions, and are notable primarily for their absence in the script" ("Struggling" 242).

While poets such as Petrarch and Sidney explored the complex psyches of their active male speakers throughout their sonnet sequences, Lady Mary Wroth must necessarily do something different when it comes to Pamphilia, a female speaker whose attitudes and ideas are traditionally based. Pamphilia is not a revolutionary feminist, an iconoclast railing against the injustice, limitations, or inequality of her time. Her voice does, however, in its development throughout the sequence, involve the reader in an honest exploration of the reactions and emotions of a seventeenth-century feminine psyche. Ambivalence and confusion emerge from this exploration as the powerful, definitive, and usually active role of the sonnet speaker comes into conflict with the restrictions and limitations which bind the female voice.

Jonathan Culler explains that "critics are beginning to consider the fact that voice is a figure and to explore the role of this figure of voicing" (50). This approach is especially applicable to the poetry of Lady Mary Wroth, for if we read each poem as presenting a speaker who is not the poet, we risk losing a vital aspect of the poetry: the poet's self-discovery as a linguistic being searching for a discourse of her own--that ability or inability of voicing into silence or manipulating the silence itself. Yet we walk on a tightrope of literary criticism here, for to refer to the speaker in the poems as "the poet" (Mary Wroth) would be naive and misleading, "stopping our ears to both lyric cries and historical imperatives . . . " (Tucker 243). While on the one hand we find ourselves at an increasingly narrow impasse if we continue to discuss the poetry in the limited context of a fictionally situated persona, on the other, we can hardly ignore such a context. As readers, perhaps we can best profit by keeping in mind that

while texts do not absolutely lack speakers, they do not simply have them either; they invent them instead as they go. Texts do not come from speakers, speakers come from texts. . . . To assume in advance that a poetic text proceeds from a dramatically situated speaker is to risk missing the play of verbal

implication whereby character is engendered in the first place. (Tucker 243)

The self-exploring Pamphilia who emerges from Wroth's sonnet sequence reveals the conflict between the traditionally powerful role of the sonneteer and the limitations a seventeenth-century woman faced. The first section of the sequence establishes this conflict and ambivalence. Pamphilia analyzes, defines, and clearly sees her obsession for Amphilanthus as painful and destructive, yet she cannot follow her realization with any liberating action or response: such actions or responses would be unacceptable for a woman expected to exhibit feminine virtues of chastity and silence. The frustration which results from her acceptance of such a restricted position leads Pamphilia into the cynical bitterness of suspicion and jealousy which characterizes the second section of poems within the sequence. The melancholy of this section of poems reflects a deep disillusionment with her passive position in contrast to Amphilanthus's adventure and autonomy. In desperation and a final grasp for hope, Pamphilia attempts to idealize love with an attack against the concept of an immature, selfish Cupid and instead turns to the image of Cupid as a wise ruler who controls her life. Once again, however, Pamphilia finds it impossible to sustain her glorification of Cupid and her self-deception when



she confronts Amphilanthus's betrayal despite her own constancy to him throughout the sequence.

From Pamphilia's various reactions and realizations as the speaker in the sequence, Lady Mary Wroth forms a polyphonic discourse, a perceptive exploration of human thought and emotion. The quiet, yet disarming figure of voicing--which results from the struggle for a legitimate role as female sonneteer--becomes Wroth's proof of an intellectual mind and an argument against the Renaissance stereotypes of women as Madonna or Eve, virgin, mother, or whore. The sequence, as it concludes, does not seem to require an answer or resolution beyond the reader's acceptance of Pamphilia's diversity and humanity as Pamphilia accepts the complex human emotion of love. Just as the sonnet sequence simultaneously offers boundaries and freedom to work within those boundaries, Wroth encounters her original discourse within the very structured, rhetorical form of the sonnet sequence. Ultimately, Pamphilia to Amphilanthus provides a literary metaphor for the lives of many artists who must exist as creatively and freely as possible within the constraints of the dominant societal messages, restrictions, and traditions.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Lady Elizabeth Russell's translation of John Poynt's work on the Lord's Supper was printed in 1605; Elizabeth, Lady Falkland's French-Saxon play, the Tragedy of Mariam, was published in 1613; and Lady Mary Wroth's pastoral romance, The Countess of Montgomery's Urania, appeared with its companion sonnet sequence, Pamphilia to Amphilanthus, in 1621.

<sup>2</sup> May Nelson Paulissen first addressed the possibility of a pun "intended to name the recipient" (44) in Wroth's sonnet twenty-six: "Butt if you will bee kind, and just indeed, / Send mee your hart" (9-10). Paulissen believes "the poetess is sending a coy letter of a proposal of love to her friend, Will" (44). In "The Biographical Problem of Pamphilia to Amphilanthus," Josephine Roberts investigates the autobiographical references linking the character of Amphilanthus to William Herbert, third Earl of Pembroke. Roberts sensitively concludes that Wroth "sharply limited the degree of personal reference and concentrated instead on expressing a more universal response to disappointment in love" (49); however, a large part of the argument focuses on the possible specific connections to William Herbert throughout the sequence.

<sup>3</sup> Other critics, such as Josephine Roberts, have noted the poet's "ability to observe and analyze the

psychology of women in love" ("Labyrinth" 327). Elaine Bellin, discussing Wroth's use of a female sonneteer, argues that the "sonnets are a tribute to the supreme constancy possessed by the female sex" ("Onely" 242).

## CHAPTER II

### THE VOICE OF AMBIVALENCE: THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND THE ROLE OF SONNETEER

The reader who approaches the first four poems of Pamphilia to Amphilanthus in search of great originality and innovation will likely be struck by the similarity of Wroth's sequence to those of her predecessors. The first poem of the sequence begins with many conventional sonnet conceits and images, as if Lady Mary hoped quickly to establish in her readers' minds her own knowledge and appreciation of the tradition she was prepared to enter. Cloaked with "nights black mantle" (1) and drawn in a chariot by "wing'd desire" (5), the dream-vision of Venus and Cupid, echoing the opening of Petrarch's Trionfe d'Amore, depicts the murder of Pamphilia's heart. Since then, Pamphilia confesses, she has become a lover, obsessed and parted "from knowledge of [her] self" (3). Not surprisingly in light of her uncle's sonnet sequence, Wroth proceeds with a poem which compares Amphilanthus's "Deare eyes" (1) to "Two starrs of heaven" (9). The speaker in sonnet 3 pleads with Love to "shine in those eyes which conquer'd have [her] hart"

(3), just as Astrophil praises Cupid, who "shin'st in Stella's eyes" (12.1). Pamphilia ends sonnet 4 with the resolution that "now backe the life comes where as once it grew" (14) since she has found love.

Despite the conventional opening of the sequence, a series of poems which follows, beginning with sonnet 5, introduces the ambivalence and struggle between Pamphilia's self-deceptive obsession and selfknowledge. In her position as speaker in the sequence, Pamphilia is able to recognize her obsession as destructive and begins to realize the power and control of her own mind, yet the ambivalence and vacillation of her responses emerge as Pamphilia confronts her limitations as a female speaker bound by expected feminine qualities of chastity, silence, and mental weakness. There is a great deal of historical validity to Pamphilia's confusion when we consider the apprehension with which most women writers of England approached their tasks. In her Revelations of Divine Love, Julian of Norwich expressed uneasiness toward her position as a woman and a writer: "But God forbid that you should say or take me for a teacher . . . for I am a woman, ignorant, weak, and frail" (qtd. in Hannay 7). While Wroth, as a member of the aristocracy, did have a better education and more contact with scholars and writers than women in the lower classes, she was not oblivious to the fact that "court ladies, learned though they may have been, were

commonly admonished to hold their tongues in all the tongues they knew" (Hannay 8).

Wroth's sonnet 5 illustrates the conflict that arises when this understanding of her position as a woman must co-exist with the potent role of sonnet speaker in the "theater of desire" (Waller, "Struggling" 242). The poem opens with four questions in quick succession:

Can pleasing sight, misfortune ever bring?  
 Can firme desire a painefull torment try?  
 Can winning eyes prove to the hart a sting?  
 Or can sweet lips on treason hidden ly?

(1-4)

The speaker has just ended the preceding poem, sonnet 4, with an image of life growing "where as once it grew" (14) after "the great Snow / Melted" (12-13)--a very positive and hopeful image of rebirth and natural continuity of her love and the "joyes [which] now budd againe" (1). Then the four questions in sonnet 5 strike in rapidity, as if the speaker is not seeking or waiting for an answer, but instead forcing herself to confront the fragile hope and self-deception she succumbed to in the earlier sonnet. The parallel sentence structure of each question also focuses the reader's attention on the vacillation the speaker is experiencing. The engaging and sensuous descriptions which begin the questions--"pleasing sight," "firme desire," "winning eyes," and "sweet lips"--are not followed by a natural fulfillment

of the speaker's desire; indeed, for Wroth to allow her female speaker to describe the sexual consummation which might follow in the poem would be unthinkable for a woman in the seventeenth century. Shock and outrage would only begin to describe her contemporary readers' reactions as Waller has suggested: "we sense the silent inexpressibility of women's sexuality, never put into words since there are, as yet, no words for it" ("Struggling" 251-52). Rather, the speaker, in frustration and mockery of her calm veneer in the preceding poem and the growing sensuality in sonnet 5, dashes each pleasant image with the destructive conclusions of "misfortune," "painefull torment," a sting "to the hart," and hidden "treason" (1-4).

The jarring see-saw effect of each of the four questions, correlating with the speaker's own swinging and repressed emotions, forces her to a confession that "The Sun most pleasing blinds the strongest eye / If too much look'd on, breaking the sights string" (5-6). Here it will become evident that Wroth will not develop the sonnet sequence around physical descriptions of Amphilanthus in particular, but instead she will concentrate her poetic efforts on the reactions and realizations of Pamphilia. This focus on the psychology of the lover rather than the beloved is not original to Lady Mary Wroth's sonnet sequence. While "Petrarch brought woman down from Heaven to earth" (Durling 7) with such descriptions as Laura bathing

naked in the *Sorgue*, few would argue that Laura herself is the central focus of the poetry. What is different in *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* is the absence of physical descriptions of Amphilanthus and the reason behind the absence; Pamphilia does not woo him or create blasons to express desire for him, for this--although expected of a male sonneteer--would be impossible for a female sonneteer bound by the feminine virtue of chastity. Therefore, due to her linguistic limitations as a female, the speaker does not elaborate on "the Sun most pleasing" (5) but explains that it causes blindness "if too much look'd on" (6). The statement offers a clear answer and warning in response to the four questions which begin the poem: a woman's obsessive devotion to a man, capable of much freer action and words than a woman without fear of harsh judgment, is both blinding and destructive beyond repair. As Josephine Roberts explains, Renaissance scientists believed the eyes emitted invisible shafts of light which resulted in vision (*Poems* 88). The speaker of the poem warns that the sight strings will be broken--not blurred or diverted--and the connotation is one of irreversibility. However, through Pamphilia's painful acceptance of the destruction of this devotion, Wroth makes it clear that a seventeenth-century woman was usually dependent on men for survival and existence, no matter what she must endure along the way. Wroth



also uses the image of the sun's power of destruction in sonnet 22:

Like to the Indians, scorched with the sunne,  
 The sunn which they doe as theyr God adore  
 Soe ame I us'd by love, for ever more  
 I worship him, less favors have I wunn,  
 (1-4)

The image, in both sonnet 5 and 22, is a painful one of being harmed by that which one worships and adores, yet it forces the speaker to acknowledge that her lover's response to her devotion is similar to "killing the bud befor the tree doth spring" (10). Although the speaker, in the preceding sonnet 4, ended with the positive image of new life after the snow melts, Pamphilia has now come to a more realistic and fitting description of her relationship: without nourishment and care, the "bud" which represents her love will wither and shrivel up in the ground.

Despite Pamphilia's apparent recognition of her own destruction if she continues to be ruled by her obsession, the last stanza takes a more ambiguous stance toward the possibilities of love, illustrating the continuous struggle born out of Pamphilia's position as a female sonneteer:

Desire, sight, Eyes, lips, seeke, see, prove, and find  
 You love may winn, butt curses if unkind;  
 Then show you harmes dislike, and joye in Love. (12-  
 14)

Beginning with a catalogue of the more positive and desirable images and words which are woven throughout the poem (and excluding words found in the poem such as "torment," "treason," "rejecting," "killing," and "poyson"), the speaker seems to be fighting away the doubts which have filled her mind. Although she recognizes the potential for "curses" and "harmes dislike," Pamphilia insists in the end upon the possibility of finding "Joye in Love." The syntactical break in the line following "dislike" further enforces the doubt which surrounds the unlikely resolution. In light of Pamphilia's earlier description of destruction due to her love for Amphilanthus, this turn seems unwarranted, yet an understanding of the severe societal limitations which Wroth well knew will clarify the speaker's hope at the end of the poem. Renaissance women legally belonged to their fathers, then their husbands, and if they did not marry, they belonged to society. A 1563 statute stipulated that unmarried women between the ages of 12 and 40 could be forced, in degradation, to work at any job for any wage determined by municipal officials (Swift 341). Faced with such unappealing, practically nonexistent options, the female speaker can only hope to find joy in love. The forced conclusion of the poem does, however, introduce the reader to the ambiguity and subtleties which characterize Pamphilia's battle between surrender and control over her emotions, between self-deceptive

obsession and self-knowledge. The speaker on the one hand is in a position of power. She is free to define and to analyze through the poetry and to see her love for Amphilanthus for what it is--destructive and painful. However, as a speaker created by a woman fully cognizant of what it took to be considered a virtuous woman--silence, chastity, obedience to man and society, and female validation through male admiration--Pamphilia struggles to find hope for her existence.

The poem also illustrates Wroth's own attempt to use the structure and language of the poem to reinforce the concept of this struggle: the parallel, see-saw effect of the questions; the clear assertion of destruction following the questions; the images of blindness and death; and the battle that results from the juxtaposition of violent words such as "killing" and "rejecting" with positive, affirming words like "seeke" and "prove." All represent Wroth's experimentation and endeavor to prove herself as a poet. Moreover, she employs an intricate verse form which has been described as "correlative or reporting verse (carmen correlativum, vers rapportes) which became popular with neo-Latin and French vernacular poets in the second half of the sixteenth century" (Ringler 406). The rhyme pattern of a-b-a-b in the first stanza is reversed to b-a-b-a in the second stanza. Not only does the difficulty of this rhyme scheme illustrate Wroth's knowledge and ability with various forms (as well as her

pride in craftsmanship), but the rigid structure of the sonnet acts as another force to help hold the fluctuating responses together at the same time that the rhyme-scheme reversal reflects Pamphilia's oscillating emotions.

After Pamphilia's confusion, the voice of tentative hope for "Joye in Love" (14), which the speaker finally clings to in the last stanza of sonnet 5, does not uplift the tone of the following sonnets. In a Petrarchan sequence, hope typically counterbalances the lover's despair, yet here hope and constancy are presented as deceptive, tedious, and dangerous. In sonnet 6, Pamphilia admits, "Long have I suffer'd" (9) as she waited "for joyes delights to flow" (7). The song which follows, equally mournful, is written from the perspective of a shepherdess lamenting her own death "since all true love is dead" (40). The shepherdess leaves her own epitaph in hopes that someone will come along after her death "and place them on [her] tombe" (44):

She who still constant lov'd  
 Now dead with cruell care  
 Kill'd with unkind dispaire,  
 And change, her end heere prov'd. (45-48)

After the extreme pathos and self-indulgent sorrow of these lines in the song and sonnet 6, sonnet 7 strikes the reader with a welcome change of voice. Frederick Rowton, one of Lady Mary Wroth's earliest

modern critics, did not appreciate this diversity and attacked what he believed were Wroth's inconsistencies, warning that "the reader will not fail to notice the remarkably contradictory sentiments" within the sequence (29). Rowton reads the poems as a simple progression of thought or a single doctrine, yet Wroth's plan does not appear to match Rowton's evaluative criteria. The tone from poem to poem varies as Pamphilia's reactions and moods change, this multifaceted response--beyond stereotypical labels of "chaste," "obedient," or "indecent"--becoming Wroth's exploration of the human mind. It is as well her poetic attempt, however uneasy she is with her own position and boundaries, to move beyond societal limitations.

A poem of complex tonal variety, Sonnet 7 begins with an impatient command to Love, and while Pamphilia speaks with disgust of her own surrender to her emotions, the mocking tone and careful word placement throughout the poem imply that her struggle for self-control is not over:

Love leave to urge, thou know'st thou hast the hand;  
 'Tis cowardise, to strive wher none resist:  
 Pray thee leave off, I yeeld unto thy band;  
 Doe nott thus, still, in thine owne powre persist,  
 (1-4)

Accusing Cupid of cowardice since she has already surrendered, Pamphilia's voice is more spirited than in the two preceding poems. Although she speaks of being

"conquer'd" (6) and "yeeld[ing] unto" Cupid (3), three of the poem's first four lines are direct orders--not a common rhetorical stance for a prisoner to assume. Cupid is also presented as stupidly fighting against himself, persisting in his "owne powre" (4). The third and fourth stanzas as well analyze and question who is in control, who is making the choices in Pamphilia's life:

Butt now, itt seemes, thou would'st I should thee love;  
 I doe confess, t'was thy will made mee chuse;  
 And thy faire showes made mee a lover prove  
 When I my freedome did, for paine refuse.

Yett this Sir God, your boyship I dispise;  
 Your charmes I obay, butt love nott want of eyes.

(9-14)

The first line of the stanza, broken as a direct assertion by the medially placed "itt seemes" (9), leaves room for doubt concerning Pamphilia's total sincerity. Followed by "I doe confess, t'was thy will made mee chuse" (10), the two words "itt seemes" lend ambiguity to Pamphilia's acknowledgement of Cupid's control. As the poem comes to an end, the sardonic tone and questioning of control become more evident. The speaker reminds Cupid that she became a lover "when I my freedome did, for paine refuse" (12). Paradoxically, by admitting that she made the decision herself to refuse freedom, Pamphilia finds some control

in her own surrender. The final mocking address to Cupid does not sound like the words of someone openly admitting defeat.

On the surface, the speaker may agree to obey Cupid's charms, yet the fight is not concluded as she tells his "boyship" that she despises him. Pamphilia's final statement that she "love[s] nott want of eyes" (14) indicates her repulsion for Cupid's--and her own--blindness. Furthermore, the assertive and forceful words which strategically end each line give the reader reason to believe Pamphilia is seeking control of her life and sight. Words such as "resist" (2), "persist" (4), "withstand" (8), "chuse" (10), and "refuse" (12), all leading up to the final word "eyes" (14), destroy any singular tone of surrender, blindness, or despair which the reader may notice initially. On the surface, the poem seems to characterize a woman as stereotypically weak--an expected trait and an acceptable portrayal of a female character in the seventeenth-century. However, Wroth's ability to write a poem which conveys various tones of disgust, sarcasm, and possible manipulation through subtle sentence structures, diction, and word placement speaks of her skill as a poet. The sonnet quietly examines the struggle between surrender and control from the interesting perspective of a woman, expected to yield easily and without question, in contrast to a male

sonneteer who would not have to establish his mental strength and superiority.

In the ensuing poem, Pamphilia seems once again to relinquish the control she gains through her tenacity in sonnet 7 and instead insists she was "led by the powre of grieffe, to waylings brought / by faulce consiete of change fall'ne on my part" (1-2). In her grief and disappointment, Pamphilia resolves to "seeke for some smale ease by lines, which bought / Increase the paine" (3-4). The modesty expressed by the mere hope for "smale ease by lines" might be understood as a sense of inadequacy and unease in approaching a traditionally male preserve. According to Jennifer Waller,

Intellectually and emotionally, educated seventeenth-century women suffered from a massive inferiority complex, often unable to see themselves as anything more than a virgin, wife, or mother. (439)

While Wroth might have accepted this reading of humility into her poems if it meant she would be less harshly castigated by her critics, she paradoxically identifies Pamphilia with the tradition of great sonneteers who regarded their writing with self contempt. In sonnet 50 of Astrophil and Stella, Astrophil, trying to express "the fulnesse of [his] thoughts" for Stella (1), bemoans the "weake proportion" of his words (7). And although Pamphilia's lines do not provide her comfort, they are powerful enough to evoke a



visceral response to "increase the paine" (4). Pamphilia unpretentiously concludes in the final statement of the stanza that "griefe is nott cur'd by art" (4), a quiet observation through which Wroth boldly affirms that "art" is precisely what she accomplishes with her lines of poetry. They may not "cure grief," but they empathetically and truthfully express human emotions and thoughts.

The third song of the sequence continues the ironic understatement which Wroth achieves in sonnet 8. The poem not only examines Pamphilia's hopeful responses to love but also quietly--yet unequivocally--protects and defends the power of her thoughts, the freedom within her mind which is beyond the control of anyone but the individual. The song begins with the imperative, "Stay, my thoughts" (1)--a direct command. However, the various connotations of the word "stay" and the instructions which follow the order provide the possibility for an alternative meaning in what would otherwise be a simple statement:

Stay, my thoughts, do nott aspire  
 To vaine hopes of high desire:  
 See you nott all meanes bereft  
 To injoye? noe joye is left;  
 Yett still mee thinks my thoughts doe say  
 Some hopes do live amid dismay; (1-6)

If we infer that the speaker uses "stay" in the first stanza to mean "to cease or end," then the speaker

judiciously and prudently guards against "vaine hopes of high desire" (2), whether the desire is for artistic success or her lover (although reminders of him appear less and less frequently in the sequence; in fact, his name is not mentioned again after the title). Reminding the speaker of her position and warning herself against "vaine hopes," this reading presents a voice acceptable to those who judge Pamphilia based on the seventeenth-century criteria of chastity and restraint.

The reader has reason, however, to note ambiguity within the first lines when the last line of the stanza calmly and confidently assures the reader--and the speaker--that "some hopes do live amid dismay" (6). With "stay, my thoughts" (1), Pamphilia seems to have been encouraging her mental processes to endure rather than to cease. Throughout the poem, in fact, "thoughts" do persist; some form of the word appears eleven times in the course of the poem's twenty-four lines:

Hope, then once more hope for joy;  
 Bury feare which Joyes destroy;  
Thought hath yett some comfort giv'ne  
 Which dispaire hath from us drivn;  
 Therfor deerly my thought cherish  
 Never lett such thinking perish;

'Tis an idle thing to plaine  
 Odder farr to dy for paine,

Thinke, and see how thoughts do rise  
 Winning wher ther noe hope lies:  
 Which alone is lovers treasure  
 For by thoughts wee love doe measure:

Then kinde thought my phant'sle guide  
 Lett mee never haples slide;  
 Still maintaine thy force in mee,  
 Lett mee thinking still bee free:  
 Nor leave thy might untill my death  
 Butt lett mee thinking yeeld up breath.

(6-24)

Amid the despair of rejection, the speaker is able to keep her hope alive as long as she protects the power of her thoughts and is able to give birth to those thoughts with her poetry. Gerald Bruns explains that language "belongs less to the human community than to the human interior, where it abides, together with thought and feeling, as a power of the human spirit" (51). Through Pamphilia, Wroth expresses the control she has over language as long as thoughts "maintaine thy force" (21). Exploring the human interior and the power of the mind does not always end on a promising note, however, as the sequence builds on the ambivalence established in these early poems. Pamphilia may discover autonomy within her own mind, but without the freedom to act upon this autonomy, a frustrated and bitter tone develops in later poems.

### CHAPTER III

#### VOICES OF RESIGNATION AND BITTERNESS:

#### PAMPHILIA'S "SOULES UNREST"

Lady Mary Wroth signals the end of the first section of poems by concluding with Pamphilia's "signature" after the forty-eighth sonnet (P55).<sup>1</sup> Pamphilia's name serves two purposes here: it reminds the reader that Pamphilia is the speaker in the series, the female sonneteer we are coming to know through her self-exploration; the name also brings to closure the struggle within Pamphilia between surrender to her obsession for Amphilanthus and the awareness that this obsession will destroy her. The image of fire in the last sonnet of this section further conveys Pamphilia's position in relation to the conflict:

How like a fire doth love increase in mee,  
The longer that itt lasts, the stronger still,  
The greater purer, brighter, and doth fill  
Noe eye wth wunder more, then hopes still bee

Bred in my brest, when fires of love are free  
To use that part to theyr best pleasing will,

And now impossible itt is to kill  
 The heat soe great wher Love his strength dothe see.

Mine eyes can scarce sustaine the flames my hart  
 Doth trust in them my passions to impart,  
 And languishingly strive to show my love;

My breath nott able is to breathe least part  
 Of that increasing fuell of my smart;  
 Yett love I will till I butt ashes prove.

Pamphilia.

(P55.1-14)

In her role as sonneteer, Pamphilia clearly and eloquently describes the ever-growing power of love "like a fire" within her (1), yet despite her recognition that this fire will grow "stronger . . . greater, purer, [and] brighter" (2-3) until it will consume and destroy her, Pamphilia unequivocally concludes, "Yett love I will till I butt ashes prove" (14). Pamphilia's individual choice to continue to love until she "butt ashes prove[s]" may strike the modern reader as melodramatic and foolishly sacrificial, yet Wroth has developed her virtuous sonnet speaker in keeping with the Renaissance concept of a good woman. As Beilin has noted, doctrine on women "was being delivered from the pulpit, in prayer books, in educational treatises, and household manuals"

(Redeeming xviii). The message delivered was definitive:

Their image of the virtuous woman is a domesticated version of the Virgin: remaining at home to keep the household goods, a good woman was pious, humble, constant, and patient, as well as obedient, chaste, and silent. (Redeeming xix)

With Pamphilia's choice to accept her role as a constant, patient, and faithful lover to Amphilanthus, Lady Mary Wroth decidedly stays within the boundaries set by the speakers and writers of her time. Deborah Lockwood suggests that writers of the period generally portrayed women as "the essentially controllable counterpart to man; they reflect in other words, a world in which man's mastery of the social and intellectual scene, is unquestioned" (38). Despite Pamphilia's earlier questioning of this concept and her attempt to protect the freedom of her own mind, she now appears resigned to her passive, but constant, role of lover to Amphilanthus. The poems which follow this decision are interesting in their development of Pamphilia's as a female sonneteer who has accepted passivity as part of her virtue, a development which required several adjustments by Wroth to the traditional sonnet sequence written from a male perspective. In order to win true love, Pamphilia cannot aggressively

attempt to impress Amphilanthus with brave deeds or physical seduction. Instead, Pamphilia resigns herself to the role of passive and constant lover and in doing so exposes her loss of faith in love and faith in herself. It is this resignation which Wroth explores in the poems in this part of the sequence, poems reflecting Pamphilia's disillusionment with love, her own helplessness, and her frustration with her limitations.

The connection between Pamphilia's emotional darkness and Amphilanthus's actions is not immediately obvious from the sonnets themselves since Pamphilia cannot vigorously pursue Amphilanthus in order to describe his adventures and activities. We can, however, gain a better understanding of Amphilanthus's character and his treatment of Pamphilia by reviewing the Urania, the companion work which was printed with the poems and provides a context for the sequence. By the time we reach the sonnet sequence, we know Pamphilia as an educated woman, "being excellent in writing" (51). Her constant love for the unfaithful Amphilanthus is the central story of the romance. Pamphilia is presented throughout as faithful to not only Amphilanthus but her friends as well. She rejects courtship with the adventuresome knight Leandrus despite his persistent efforts (170). Urania and Pamphilia loyally remain friends through two generations, and

Pamphillia and her friend Antisia deeply mourn their impending separation, "lying together, and with sad but loving discourse passing those dark hours" (123). Pamphillia lives up to her name, which means "all-loving," as the paragon of constancy, faith, and courage within the romance. Amphilanthus does not fare as well by the end of the romance, however. Although he is described as a valiant knight, he continually strays from the noble Pamphillia. Noting Amphilanthus's infidelity, Musalena, the Queen of Bulgaria, insists that men are unfaithful since "'tis their naturall infirmitie, and cannot be helped" (375). She goes on to say that although tradition calls women unfaithful, men "who excell us in all perfections, would not for their honours sake, let us surpass them in any one thing"--not even infidelity (375). Throughout the romance, Amphilanthus betrays Pamphillia again and again, yet she vows she will love him even if he despises her (400). His name is defined by one of his former lovers whom he has thrown aside: "and truly doth he make good his name, that signifieth the lover of two" (249-50).

The first sonnet and song (P56 and P57) of the second section of poems (P56-P76) continue to convey Amphilanthus's infidelity and wanderings and present Pamphillia's voice of resignation and her susceptibility to self-depreciation, suspicion, and jealousy in her loneliness. In the first sonnet, Pamphillia addresses



Amphilanthus, not with the vengeful or bitter words which might be expected of someone who has been betrayed, but with comforting and loving words:

Lett grieffe as farr bee from your deerest brest  
 As I doe wish, or in my hands to ease;  
 Then showld itt bannist bee, and sweetest rest  
 Bee plac'ed to give content by love to please,  
 (1-4)

Pamphilia wishes Amphilanthus "sweetest rest" and contentment, indicating that, from her vantage point at least, he feels some remorse and "grieffe" for his unfaithfulness. While she does not begrudge Amphilanthus his autonomy, Pamphilia's feelings toward his female partner are much more wrathful:

Lett those disdaines which on your hart doe seaze  
 Doubly returne to bring her soules unrest,  
 Since true love will nott, that beelov'd displease  
 Or lett least smart to theyr minds bee adrest,

Butt often times mistakings bee in love,  
 Bee they as farr from faulce accusing right,  
 And still truthe governe with a constant might,  
 Soe shall you only wished pleasures prove,  
 (5-12)

Pamphilia, again sparing Amphilanthus any suffering, instead hopes that any "disdaines" which seize his heart will "doubly returne to bring her soules unrest"

(5-6). The words which end the lines of the first two stanzas are indicative of Pamphilia's feelings toward Amphilanthus and the other woman. In the first stanza when Pamphilia addresses Amphilanthus, the lines end with soothing words such as "dearest brest," "ease," "sweetest rest," and "please." When Pamphilia refers to the other woman in stanza two, the tone changes dramatically as the lines end with words such as "seaze," "soules unrest," and "displease." As a woman in a subordinate position to Amphilanthus, it would be slanderous and dangerous to question or condemn his actions; therefore, Pamphilia displaces her anger on the other woman and on herself. Pamphilia describes Amphilanthus's affairs as "mistakings" in love (9), yet she persists in her hope that he will eventually reward her by coming back since "still truthe governe with a constant might" (11). Until then, Pamphilia recognizes that her cost, "she that showes you least scorne" (13), will be her own torn heart (14).

This resignation and lack of self-esteem continues in the following song in which Pamphilia relates her feelings upon Amphilanthus departing from her again. The poem is especially interesting when we consider Pamphilia's perspective as a female sonneteer, for her attempts to win Amphilanthus's love are based in sacrifice, passivity, and her faith in love. When the poem begins, "the time is come to part" (1) for

Pamphilia and Amphilanthus, yet Pamphilia never pleads with him to stay, nor asks to go with him. She knows and accepts that once again she will be left alone with only her words and thoughts, while he leaves to seek more adventure, and possibly other women:

Fond hope leave mee my deer must goe  
To meet more joy, and I more woe;

Wher still of mirth injoye thy fill  
One is enough to suffer ill  
My hart soe well to sorrow us'd  
Can better bee by new griefs brusd;

Thou whom the heav'ns them selves like made  
Should never sitt in mourning shade  
Noe I alone must mourne, and end  
Who have a lyfe in grief to spend,  
(P57.3-12)

If one of them must suffer, Pamphilia reasons it should be she since she has become accustomed to sorrow and dejection. In a telling analogy, she compares Amphilanthus to heavenly bodies (9) which are in constant motion by nature's design; with her comparison, Pamphilia implies that it would be unnatural for Amphilanthus to "sitt in mourning shade" (9) as she must do, for as a man, he must be active and adventurous (Renaissance concepts and stereotypes of

gender were not limited to one sex). Pamphilia's attempt to win Amphilanthus's love through her sacrifice, understanding, and passivity is quite different from the attempts of previous sonneteers to woo their beloveds. To impress Stella as she "lookt on, and from her heavenly face / Sent forth the beames" (41.13-14), Astrophil entered a horseman's competition:

Having this day my horse, my hand, my lance  
 Guided so well, that I obtain'd the prize,  
 Both by the judgement of the English eyes,  
 And of some sent from that sweetemie Fraunce:  
 Horsemen my skill in horsmanship advance;  
 (41.1-5)

Astrophil knew that to be a man worthy of Stella's love, he must be a prepared and skilled warrior, aggressive on the battlefield and in his approach to winning her. He again exhibits this aggressiveness in the second song of the sequence when he steals a kiss from Stella while she is sleeping and berates himself as a "fool, for no more taking" (28).

To win Amphilanthus's love, obviously Pamphilia could not enter masculine competitions or show her desire for Amphilanthus by approaching him physically. Certainly this would not gain his favor, and at the very least could stain her with the reputation as a witch or whore. This behavior would fit neatly within the Renaissance stereotype which narrowly limited women's

actions. For example, ministers continually pointed out that

Eve listened to Satan and thus initiated all of humankind's future woe. Since then, women had followed their guilty foremother by being disobedient, talkative, lascivious shrews. Implied in this attack is that women should be the opposite--obedient, silent, and chaste. (Redeeming xix)

In light of such attitudes, it is plausible to suppose that Wroth would adjust the voice of her sonnet speaker from the bold and aggressive lover, such as Astrophil, to the fitting voice of a virtuous woman, passive and resigned to spend "a lyfe in grief" (12). Pamphilia recognizes, however, that in order for her to exist in this role--to wait quietly for Amphilanthus's return--she must maintain her own "faith in love" or "in horrid darkness will [she] range" (19-20). These last two lines of the song, warning against the loss of faith in the ideal of love, predict the melancholy and darkness of the following group of sonnets, which reflect a painful and tormented disillusionment with her passive position as female sonneteer and lover.

The first sonnet which follows the interlude of songs illustrates Pamphilia's inability to maintain her "faith in love" (P57.19) and her perception of herself as an ineffectual and helpless pawn at Fortune's mercy:

In night yett may wee see some kind of light  
 When as the Moone doth please to show her face,  
 And in the sunns roome yeelds her light, and grace  
 Which otherwise must suffer dullest night,

Soe ar my fortunes, bard from true delight  
 Colde, and unsertaine, like to this strang place,  
 Decreasing, changing in an instant space,  
 And even att full of Joy turn'd to despite;

Justly on Fortune was beestow'd the wheele  
 Whose favors ficle, and unconstant reele;  
 Drunk with delight of chang, and sodaine paine;

Wher pleasure hath noe settled place of stay  
 Butt turning still for our best hopes decay,  
 And this (alas) wee lovers often gaine.

(P63.1-14)

Pamphillia believes her own fortunes are darker than night, for at least at night "wee see some kind of light / When as the Moone doth please to show her face" (1-2). "Dullest night" also has the sun's light to hope for as it waits in darkness for morning, yet Pamphillia's fortunes are "bard from true delight" (5). To describe her emotions and loss of faith, Pamphillia uses words such as "colde," "unsertaine," "strang," "decreasing," and "changing" (6-7). Her fortunes are

not, however, "changing" for the better since as she has waited for Amphilanthus, her "joy turn'd to despite" (8). While Pamphilia in the first sonnet and song introduced this section of poems with a voice accepting and resigned to Amphilanthus's freedom and her own constraints, ambivalence emerges in her role of sonnet speaker, for she is able to recognize and express the destructive power of being trapped by one's own values yet unable to act upon that recognition. The image of Fortune's wheel in stanza three illustrates the feelings of helplessness and lack of control which Pamphilia would undoubtedly share with many women of this period. She perceives her life as ruled by "fickle" and "unconstant" Fortune, reeling and "drunk with delight of change, and sodaine paine" (9-11). When we consider that our guide through this sequence is a dejected feminine persona, one who imagines herself as a helpless pawn controlled by sadistic Fortune, we can understand the total elimination of the playfulness and humor which was interspersed throughout earlier sonnet sequences. Pamphilia imagines Fortune's wheel "turning still for our best hopes decay" (13). The wheel has not stopped but turns continuously in the grasp of vindictive Fortune, delighting in change and pain, so although hope struggled to exist in the first section of poems, Pamphilia can hope no longer. There is no room amid this darkness for humorous poems addressed to lap

dogs (59) or Philip Sparrow (83) as in Astrophil and Stella. Words like "decreasing," "changing," and "turning" woven throughout the poem evoke the feelings of continual suffering and unpredictability which bring about insecurity and characterize the voice of Pamphilia in her passivity.

Pamphilia continues to express her loss of faith in love and loss of self-control in the following sonnet by denigrating and belittling Cupid as an immature and selfish child. The tone of the sonnet is particularly cynical and bitter since Pamphilia recognizes that she, childishly and pathetically, allows herself to be controlled by this mischievous Anacreonic Cupid:

Love like a jugler, comes to play his prise,  
 And all minds draw his wonders to admire,  
 To see how cunningly hee, wanting eyes,  
 Cann yett deseave the best sight of desire:

The wanton child, how hee can faine his fire  
 So pretely, as none sees his disguise!  
 How finely doe his tricks, while wee fooles hire  
 The badge, and office of his tirannies,

For in the end, such jugling hee doth make  
 As hee our harts, in stead of eyes doth take  
 For men can only by theyr sliegths abuse



The sight with nimble, and delightful skill;  
 Butt if hee play, his gaine is our lost will:  
 Yett childlike, wee can nott his sports refuse.

(P64.1-14)

Cupid is compared to a dexterous juggler who charms his audience with his skill. Pamphilia does not portray him as a harmless, innocent, and entertaining clown, however; she describes the "wanton child" (5) as someone cunning (3) and deceptive (4), who "finely doe[s] his tricks, while wee fooles hire / The badge, and office of his tyrannies" (7-8). Including herself as one of the "fooles," Pamphilia seems well aware of her pathetic state as she observes Cupid juggling "our harts" (10). The image is a horrifying one of a wanton child holding control of someone's life in his hands like a mere plaything. Pamphilia depicts Cupid trifling with human emotions as if they were a juggler's toys--he may save them from destruction only to toss them back up in abandonment and confusion, or he may let them fall to the ground. Despite Pamphilia's realization of the danger inherent in playing Cupid's game of love, she admits that "childlike, we can nott his sports refuse" (14). The cynicism of the poem results from the speaker's clear recognition of her own dire position, yet at the same time she is unable and unwilling to move beyond her role of constant and patient lover.

Just as Pamphilia predicted that a loss of faith in love will cause her to range in "horrid darkness" (P57), this sonnet mocking Cupid's and her own childishness results in two dark sonnets which explore the jealousy and suspicion that follow Pamphilia's inability to control her own emotions. In a sonnet addressed to night, Pamphilia confronts her own jealousy, an emotion which results from her degradation of the god of love. Searching for comfort from the torture and destruction of jealousy, Pamphilia can only passively turn to the darkness of night to hide her eyes in self-delusion. The rest does not last long, however, for suspicion grows within Pamphilia without faith in love until it threatens to destroy her. The sonnet written to "cruell suspicion" reflects, with violent and nightmarish imagery, Pamphilia's confusion and inability to bear the agony of her desperate thoughts.

The sonnet to "Most blessed Night" (P65) at first echoes familiar to Sidney's sonnet to his bed, "the field where joye's peace some do see" (98.1). Pamphilia also begins her poem with a very positive description of Night's attributes:

Most blessed Night, the happy time for love,  
 The shade for Lovers, and theyr loves delight,  
 The Raigne of Love for servants, free from spite,  
 The hopefull seasons, for joy's sports to move;  
 (P65.1-4)

From here, however, Pamphilia departs from earlier sonnet models which depict typical Petrarchan night turmoil when the lover is unable to find rest. For example, Astrophil tries "to steale some rest," but is only able "to turne and toss" (98.6,8) as he thinks of Stella. Pamphilia, on the other hand, welcomes night that, like Mercury, "whose pleasant reede did smite / All Argus eyes into a deathlike night" (6-7), now

hast clos'd those eyes from prying sight  
That nourish jealousie more than joyes right  
While vaine suspition fosters theyr mistrust,

Making sweet sleepe to master all suspect  
Which els theyr privatt feares would nott neglect  
Butt would imbrace both blinded, and unjust.

(9-14)

The comparison of Night to Mercury brings many levels of meaning to this sonnet. Not only does Pamphilia show rare pride and evidence of her classical learning, but she has carefully chosen an analogy that quietly conveys her own simultaneously restricted and knowing position as sonneteer. Night, like Mercury playing the soothing pipe of Syrinx which lulled the thousand-eyed Argus to sleep, "hast clos'd [Pamphilia's] eyes from prying sight / That nourish Jealousie more than joyes right" (9-10). The image is one of soothing rest, yet the reprieve for Pamphilia from "vaine suspition [that]

fosters their mistrust" (11) results from her own self-delusion and blindness. Her reaction is once again a passive one, for she does not quiet her jealousy by actively pursuing Amphilanthus and searching out the truth. Nor can she win him back with brave words and actions like the male sonneteers. Night, which closes her eyes to all that would cause her suspicion and jealousy, is her only comfort, yet it is comfort which soothes her "privatt feares" (13) with blindness. The comparison of Night to Mercury also warns Pamphilia against her own self-deception and blindness, for after Mercury lulled Argus to sleep, he destroyed him.

Pamphilia's fear, jealousy, and suspicion continue to grow. They multiply and become stronger as she waits for Amphilanthus, without recourse or action. These emotions, which she attributes to her own mind rather than the actions of Amphilanthus, can be contained only so long. Finally, she cries out in anguish and mental exhaustion:

Cruell suspition, O! bee now att rest,  
 Lett dayly torments bring to thee some stay;  
 Alas make nott my ill thy ease-full pray,  
 Nor give loose raines to rage when love's oprest.

I ame by care sufficiently distrest,  
 Noe rack can stretch my hart more, nor a way

Can I find out for least content to lay  
 One happy foote of Joye, one step that's blest;

Butt to my end thou fly'st with greedy eye,  
 Seeking to bring grieffe by bace jealousie,  
 O in how strang a cage ame I kept in?

Noe little signe of favor can I prove  
 Butt must bee way'de, and turnd to wronging love,  
 And with each humor must my state begin.

(P66.1-14)

Screaming to "Cruell suspition" (1), rather than Amphilanthus, as her prosecutor, Pamphilia pleads for "dayly torments" within her own mind to cease. In her role as sonnet speaker, she has been able to relate the power of her emotions with words and images, yet she cannot control or stop her tumultuous thoughts which breed on her own insecurity and passivity. She employs violent images of torture and entrapment, yet the battle is not between Pamphilia and Amphilanthus; in fact, his right to be free and active is never questioned but presented as natural and expected. "Noe rack can stretch my hart more" (6), Pamphilia insists, yet faced with the role she has assumed as a virtuous woman of constancy, she cannot imagine any possible way out of her mental dungeon: "nor a way / Can I find out for least content to lay / One happy foote of Joye, one step

that's blest" (6-8). Pamphilia's feet are firmly bound by the constraints she faces as a woman with such a limited acceptable sphere of action, the "cruell suspicion" (1), and the "bace Jealousie" of earthly love led by the childish god (10). The bitterness and agony which Wroth conveys in this section of sonnets culminate as Pamphilia cries out, "O in how strang a cage am I kept in" (11). The image of the cage portrays Pamphilia's precarious and painful position as sonneteer, for she can see and hear and communicate from within the cage. She witnesses, explores, and shares a multitude of situations and emotions in her poetry, yet like a caged animal, she becomes frustrated, weary, and dispirited by her chances for the autonomy and adventure she sees beyond the confines of her acceptable behavior as a woman.

Without faith and hope in love, the subsequent poems in this section of the sequence are grave and cynical in tone. Pamphilia describes herself as a "Tombe for sad misfortunes spite" since "cruell love" has chosen not to reward her constancy (P67.13, 17). She tells herself that "hope's perish'd [and] Love tempest-beaten" (P68.12), yet Cupid, an implacable child, still searches for more mischief "smiling and scorning" (P70.14). She continues to degrade Cupid, illustrating her own unhappiness and frustration with love:

Love a child is ever criing,  
 Please him, and hee strait is flying,  
 Give him hee the more is craving  
 Never satisfi'd with having; (P74.1-4)

Then abruptly, the sequence shifts directions, as if Pamphilia suddenly remembers her earlier vow to love until she "butt ashes prove[s]" (P55.14) and realizes that the darkness of her earthly love--jealousy, the suspicion, and the deprecation--are quickly destroying her. Since the sudden shift does reveal the traditional sonneteer's irresolution and search for a new course of action to pursue, Wroth may have been attempting to gain credibility by placing Pamphilia's change of attitude in the context of the earlier sequences. The change is vital to her own sequence as well, however. Reflecting the speaker's turbulent mind, Pamphilia realizes that if she continues in this vein, she can never find happiness. She therefore pledges a new mental attitude and repents for the bitterness she has succumbed to in the prior sonnets and songs:

O pardon, Cupid I confess my fault  
 Then mercy grant mee in soe just a kind  
 For treason never lodged in my mind  
 Against thy might soe much as in a thought,

And now my folly I have deerly bought  
 Nor could my soule least rest or quiett find  
 Since rashnes did my thoughts to error bind  
 Which now thy fury, and my harme hath wrought;

I curse that thought, and hand which that first fram'd  
 For which by thee I ame most justly blam'd,  
 Butt now that hand shall guided bee aright,

And give a crowne unto thy endless prayse  
 Which shall thy glory, and thy greatnes raise  
 More then thes poore things could thy honor spite.

(P76.1-14)

Her confession to Cupid pleads for mercy, "for treason never lodged in my mind" (3), yet she speaks with guilt and paranoia, treating Cupid as a monarch instead of a wanton child. Pamphilia feels she has been punished for her "folly," "rashnes," and "error" by Cupid's fury, which has brought her the pain expressed in the preceding sonnets. Cursing her own thoughts and hand for ever writing such blasphemy, Pamphilia now vows that her "hand shall guided bee aright / And give a crowne unto thy endless prayse / Which shall thy glory, and thy greatnes raise" (12-14). The confession serves as an explicit introduction to the next section of sonnets entitled "A Crowne of Sonetts dedicated to Love." Pamphilia has been constant to an infantile,



earthly love which has only brought her pain through jealousy and suspicion. As a woman, she cannot assume a more aggressive role in search of true love, yet she can change her own mental attitude and her conception of love from that of a cruel, destructive child to that of a wise ruler deserving of her worship.

### Note

<sup>1</sup>To avoid confusion concerning the numbering of the poems or the question of which poem is being discussed, from this point on I will use the bracketed numbers from Josephine Roberts's edition, The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth.

## CHAPTER IV

A VOICE IN SEARCH OF HIGHER LOVE:

"IN THIS STRANG LABOURINTH

HOW SHALL I TURNE?"

Pamphilla's vow to give endless praise and honor to a higher love after her exploration of the pain of sensual love signals a decidedly Neo-Platonic turn to Wroth's sequence. In Astrophil and Stella, Sidney also uses Neo-Platonic arguments in order to answer the conflict within a man who passionately desires a married woman by finding a link between Stella's beauty and virtue. Traditional Neo-Platonic thought serves Sidney's sequence well, developing the idea that

the true beauty of the body is only the outer manifestation of a moral and spiritual beauty of the soul, which in turn is rayed out from the absolute beauty of the one God himself. The Platonic lover, irresistibly attracted to the physical beauty of his beloved, reveres it as a sign of the spiritual beauty that she shares with all other beautiful women, and also regards her bodily beauty as the lowest rung on a ladder that leads up from sensual

desire to the pure contemplation of Heavenly  
Beauty in God. (Abrams 136)

The Neo-Platonic ladder, linking human love and divine love, focuses upon the physically and spiritually beautiful Stella. Like her uncle, Wroth also carefully considers the Neo-Platonic tenets passed down to her and with the "Crowne of Sonnets," perseveres to attain the Neo-Platonic ideal of Divine Love. The crown, or corona, "was an Italian poetic form in which the last line of either a sonnet or stanza served as the first line of the next" (Roberts, Poems 127). The crown was generally used in praise of a specific individual, such as Tasso's corona which "consisted of twelve madrigals linked together in praise of the lady, called Laura" (Roberts, Poems 127).<sup>4</sup> Wroth has given this section of poems a special integrity and symmetry by extending the crown to fourteen sonnets of fourteen lines each; in addition, the fourteenth line of the last sonnet connects back to the first line of the first sonnet. If the poems succeed and Pamphilia transcends to divine love through her human love for Amphilanthus, the fourteen poems are a perfect image of wholeness--a crown of praise for a deserving ruler.

Problems interfere with the realization of the Neo-Platonic ideal, however. While Pamphilia recognizes that she must find a better, more reliable pathway to virtue and happiness than her sensual love for

Amphilanthus, she must measure the possibility of NeoPlatonic divine love against that which is real and actual. Amphilanthus's physical beauty does not reflect his spiritual and mental beauty, for we have come to know him as inconstant and self-centered. Pamphilia's attempt to idealize love becomes impossible because she has been faithful to someone who lacks spiritual constancy, and she recognizes as well that she lives in a human realm where unreasonable and unpredictable human emotions are a necessary part of life. As a woman limited by stereotypes and societal definitions, Pamphilia comes to understand that the concept of a perfect, divine love is as much a one-sided projection as is the wholly negative and destructive image of Cupid she presented in earlier sonnets. While Wroth's sequence varies from the traditional Neo-Platonic transcendence, Pamphilia's new understanding of a human love--composed of both the physical and the divine--prevents the crown of sonnets from being trapped by its own symmetry and resembling a carousel that merely goes around and around with no destination or rest.

The first sonnet in the "Crowne of Sonnets Dedicated to Love," begins with the image of the labyrinth, a popular sonnet image used by Petrarch in the Rime and by subsequent Elizabethan sonneteers such as Thomas Watson. After Pamphilia's exploration of her

emotions--including obsession, hope, and painful resignation--in the preceding sonnets, the image of a winding, complicated, and intricate maze is especially fitting to portray her confusion and sense of being lost without a way out of the despair she related in the second section of sonnets:

In this strang labourinth how shall I turne?  
 Wayes are on all sids while the way I miss:  
 If to the right hand, ther, in love I burne;  
 Lett mee goe forward, therin danger is;

If to the left, suspition hinders bliss,  
 Lett mee turne back, shame cries I ought returne  
 Nor fainte though crosses with my fortunes kiss;  
 Stand still is harder, although sure to mourne;

Thus lett mee take the right, or left hand way;  
 Goe forward, or stand still, or back retire;  
 I must thes doubts indure with out allay  
 Or help, butt traveile find for my best hire;

Yett that which most my troubled sence doth move  
 Is to leave all, and take the thread of love.

(P77.1-14)

Within the poem, Pamphilia carries her readers through the mental labyrinth, depicting the choices and the outcomes of those decisions which she believes are

available to her in this maze of love. To the right hand, accepting her consuming love to Amphilanthus as omnipotent and inevitable, she fears obsessive devotion which she realizes will result in her own destruction; Pamphilia once again states this without hesitation: "in love I burne" (3). If she steps resolutely forward, "therin danger is" (4) in the unknown, for to take the active and aggressive role as a woman in her relationship with Amphilanthus would be socially difficult and certainly dangerous. If she turns to the left, "suspition hinders bliss" (5), and she will range as before in the "horrid darkness" (P57.20) of Jealousy, bitterness, and decayed hope (P63.13). Pamphilia's own shame at her irresolution and lack of action will not allow her to "turne back" (6), nor can she simply stand still after discovering the emotional atrophy which results from total passivity. After cataloguing the limited options before her, Pamphilia continues the analogy of the mythological maze and vows "to leave all, and take the thread of love" (14) in order to ease her "troubled sence" (13). Just as Ariadne's thread rescued Theseus from the endless confusion of the mythological maze, so Pamphilia hopes that taking the thread of love will lift her above the torments of her earthly turmoil. She has sworn to guide her hand to "give a crowne unto [Cupid's] prayse" (P76.12) and to quiet the "rashnes" and "error" (P76.7) which allowed her to belittle Cupid

and to sink into suspicion and bitterness. First in the "Crowne of Sonnets Dedicated to Love," this sonnet, with its dominant imagery of the labyrinth and the tone of Pamphilia's tired frustration, establishes her need for comfort and a new, more transcendent and reliable way of understanding love.

The next sonnet, beginning with the last line of the preceding sonnet to build the link and continuity of the crown formation, points to a higher form of love as the deserving recipient of praise. No longer is Cupid portrayed as a "wanton child" (P64.5) or a vindictive boy who "will triumph in your wayling" (P74.13). Instead, this sonnet pronounces, with religious imagery and Pamphilia's strong sense of purpose, that Love is a wise and just ruler whose strength "bands true lovers might" (P78.14).

After vowing to "leave all, and take the thread of love," Pamphilia approaches her poetry with a sense of commitment to follow the "line [which] strait leads unto the soules content" (P78.1-2). She now views her obsession and jealousy concerning Amphilanthus as "idle phant'sie" (4), and he will play no part in her journey to reach her "soules content." While male sonneteers traditionally used an idealized and transcendent lady to help them reach a higher understanding of love,<sup>2</sup> Pamphilia excludes Amphilanthus from the crown which she is creating in honor of Love. Bellin supports this



observation and explains that "Amphilanthus belongs wholly to mutability and is in fact responsible for some of its manifestations" ("Onely" 240). Love and mutability are presented as antithetical in this instance because Amphilanthus's mutability and lack of steadfastness lead him away from Pamphilia and leave her as constant to someone who is not dedicated to the same concept of love to which she is faithful. Rather than allowing her emotions to be led by Amphilanthus's life and actions in her exploration of true love, Pamphilia now recognizes that

When chaste thoughts guide us then our minds are bent  
 To take that good which ill from us remove,  
 Light of true love, brings fruit which none repent  
 But constant lovers seek, and wish to prove;  
 (P78.5-8)

She will leave behind the jealousy caused by her own insecurity and Amphilanthus's inconstancy and, instead, focus on her own virtues and the rewards of true love. Although Amphilanthus will not lift Pamphilia up to divine love through his spiritual goodness, Wroth combines her knowledge of the Neo-Platonic philosophy with her own creative instincts to search for a less traditional sonnet sequence response. The Neo-Platonic concept of Reason, although "involved with the experiences, desires, and needs of the body as transmitted by the senses and the imagination," is free,

either to be "carried away by the Lower sensations and emotions, or to overcome them" (Panofsky 136-37). Wroth portrays Pamphilia as applying Reason to conquer the claims of "Lower" nature by turning to a higher nature for divine guidance and enlightenment. As a female sonneteer, Pamphilia's attention to a higher love away from sensual thoughts keeps her safely within her feminine role, yet once again, Wroth assigns an "unfeminine" quality to Pamphilia--in this case the faculty of Reason--with favorable and productive results. Her "chaste thoughts" (5) guide her to actively "take that good which ill from us remove" (6), a stronger tone than the passive and frustrated voice of the second section of poems. She is learning that "constant lovers seek" (8) the "light of true love, [which] brings fruit which none repent" (7). Since she has vowed her constancy from the very beginning of the sequence, Pamphilia seems now to have found her mission and feels no need for guilt or repentance as she did after her poems of earthly, sensual love and its products, suspicion and jealousy.

The vision of "true love" which Pamphilia relates in the crown of sonnets brings her to the zealous language of religious praise which characterizes the third stanza of this poem and the remaining sonnets in the crown. Pamphilia glorifies love as

the shining starr of blessings light;  
 The fervent fire of zeale, the roote of peace,  
 The lasting lampe fed with the oyle of right;  
 Image of fayth, and wombe for joyes increase.

Love is true vertu, and his ends delight;  
 His flames ar joyes, his bands true lovers might.

(P78.9-14)

Pamphilia finds devotional language appropriate in her praise of true love, for in her earthly relationship with Amphilanthus she has experienced nothing of the constancy and truth which she imagines of an ideal love. Therefore, searching desperately for answers and comfort, Pamphilia now portrays Cupid as the extreme opposite of her bitter and despondent description of her earthly love for Amphilanthus. In fact, the third sonnet in the crown resembles a devotional hymn of praise rather than a love poem between human lovers. Rhyming each line with only the words "might," "white," "light," and "requite," the poem echoes with the cadence of a worshipful chant:

Please him, and serve him, glory in his might,  
 And firme hee'll bee, as innosencye white,  
 Cleere as th'ayre, warme as sunn beames, as day light,  
 Just as truthe, constant as fate, Joy'd to requite,

Then love obey, strive to observe his might,  
 And bee in his brave court a glorious light.

(P79.9-14)

Pamphilia can use no higher language for the praiseworthy true love of constant lovers which, she can only imagine, is as pure and eternal as God's love.

Maintaining her vivid conception of supreme love in the following sonnets, Pamphilia offers an eloquent and piercing portrait of the true love that she believes can exist between "two harts" who allow themselves to be led by Cupid, "owr profitt, and our Tuter" (P82.1). True love has the power

To joine two harts as in one frame to move;  
 Two bodies, butt one soule to rule the minde;

Eyes which must care to one deere object bind  
 Eares to each others speech as if above  
 All els they sweet, and learned were; this kind  
 Content of lovers wittniseth true love,

(P82.3-8)

Pamphilia's description of a relationship which represents her understanding of true love does not focus on the physical or sensual side of love. Unlike Astrophil, Pamphilia does not praise Amphilanthus or love with descriptions of a "sweet swelling lip" (80.1) or breasts like "the milk'n way" (Song 5.10). She does not argue, as Astrophil does, that in true love

"passions leave to run their race" (64.2). Not only would these sensuous phrases be inappropriate discourse for the female sonneteer, but she does not seem to need them at all in her characterization of love. What we "gaine since living in blest love," and what we learn from "our profitt, and owr Tuter" (P81.13-14) are the gifts of emotional and intellectual communion beyond the danger and pain of physical love. When she explored the more immature, physical love led by the "wanton child" (P64.5) in the second section of poems (P56-76), Pamphilia's eyes were tools of "priing sight / That nourish Jealousie more than Joyes right" (P65.9-10). As she explores the possibility of ideal love, she imagines "Two bodies, butt one soule to rule the mind" (4). No longer would the lovers be at cross purposes, watching each other suspiciously, but their eyes "must care to one deere object bind" (5). In their sharing and understanding as one soule within two bodies, they would make a conscious effort to see and reach for the same goals, the same "deere objects." For lovers who "witniseth true love" (8), misunderstandings like "faulce accusing right" (P56.10) cease to be a problem because ears hearken "to each others speech as if above / All els they sweet, and learned were" (6-7). Pamphilia's description of honest communication is especially poignant when we consider her perspective as a female sonneteer. A true lover, whether male or

female, listens carefully and with devoted respect when the other speaks. A true lover believes the speech of his or her partner to be "sweet" and "learned" (7). In describing this type of relationship, Wroth went beyond the norms of the time, for while the growth in the seventeenth-century of Protestant and Christian Humanist groups had encouraged learning and education among women, this education had severe limitations and strict purposes. Betty Travitsky explains that "the humanists and the reformers joined religious enthusiasm and educational impulses into ideologies aimed at producing pious, learned women" (7). The main reason for this education was so that mothers could inculcate Christian beliefs in children to secure their salvation, but women were still expected to remain silent in the presence of their husbands, who were the heads of their families as Christ is the head of the Church (as women were reminded frequently). Lady Mary Wroth expresses quiet dissatisfaction with this subordination to men through Pamphilia's vision of shared words between lovers who listen to each other with interest and respect.

In the following stanza (P82.9-14) and ensuing sonnet (P83), Pamphilia continues to emphasize the respect that is paramount in an ideal love, yet she takes the concept one step further to focus on the

Increased self-respect and improved self-image which follows true love:

Itt doth enrich the witts, and make you see  
 That in your self, which you knew nott before,  
 Forcing you to admire such guifts showld bee  
 Hid from your knowledg, yett in you the store;

Millions of thes adorne the throne of Love,  
 How blest bee they then, who his favours prove.

(P82.9-14)

Not only does true love open one's eyes and ears to perceive that which is good in the other person, but love will "make you see / That in your self" (9-10) which has been hidden before. "Millions of thes" gifts "adorne the throne of Love" (13) and are within the individual. Love, Pamphilia professes, forces one to see that which is worthy and talented in oneself as these gifts are drawn out by love's power. This self-image voiced by Pamphilia, hopeful as she recognizes her own potential, stands at a far extreme from the self-loathing and self-deprecation she expressed in earlier poems. While she had been resigned to "mourne" alone since her lover "showld never sitt in mourning shade" and since her heart was "soe well to sorrow us'd" (P57.10-11,7), Pamphila now imagines the possibilities for herself as one of the "blest" (14) who "adorne the throne of Love" (13). In light of the

meekness and humility which was expected of a virtuous woman, a love which "forced" one to recognize that which was praiseworthy within her would be perceived as a liberating and generous gift. Pamphilia's presentation of a mutual and self-respecting love becomes all the more refreshing and innovative when we consider the prevailing humility and insecurity of many seventeenth-century women. In 1630, Dorothy Leigh wrote to her son, asking him to remember "the great mercy of God toward you, in making you men and placing you amongst the wise" (17); even as she wrote, Leigh felt it necessary to justify her reason for writing as being "to encourage women (who, I fear will blush at my boldness) not to be ashamed to shew their affinities, but to give men the first chief place; yet us labor to come in second" (15-16). Through Pamphilia's description of an ideal love, Lady Mary Wroth presents a vision of an existence where a woman would not be required to be apologetic for her talents and "guifts" (9) but would discover and admire the attributes previously "hid from . . . knowledg" (12) as if she had unearthed a long-buried treasure. Sonnet 83, which begins, "How blest bee they then, who his favors prove," continues to elaborate on the idea of a mutual respect and growth in love expressed in the poem preceding it:

Love will a painter make you, such, as you  
 Shall able bee to drawe your only deere



More lively, parfett, lasting, and more true  
 Then rarest woorkman, and to you more neere,  
 (P83.9-12)

Like a painter, a true lover's eyes will be opened to possibilities and beauty that others cannot see. Through the eyes of an artist, the beloved will become "more likely, parfett, lasting, and more true / Then rarest woorkman, and to you more neere" (11-12). Pamphilia's own art, as a poet, has also grown in her exploration of true love as she imagines a communion beyond her own earthly experiences.

Despite Pamphilia's vision of an ideal love, she never fully becomes a transcendent and divine poet, for she never forgets or escapes the earthly realities which interfere with the possibilities of such a love. Criticizing inconstant lovers such as Amphilanthus, Pamphilia notes that "Hee that shunns love doth love himself the less / And cursed hee whose spiritt nott admires / The worth of love" (P84.1-3). With this statement, Pamphilia implies that perhaps the insecurity often assigned to herself and other women is a fitting description of those like Amphilanthus who are "impostures" in love, "maintainers of all follyes ill begunn" (P86.11-12). Throughout the remaining sonnets which compose the crown dedicated to love, Pamphilia attempts to place her transcendent image of perfect love among earthly realities. She comes to

admit that it was "a timeless, and unseasonable birth"  
(P87.5),

Unprofitably pleasing, and unsound  
When heaven gave liberty to frayle dull earth  
To bringe forth plenty that in illis abound  
Which ripest yett doe bring a sertaine dearth.  
(P87.1-4)

With the oxymoronic "unprofitably pleasing" (1), Pamphilia projects her own ambivalence toward the liberty which heaven gave to "frayle dull earth" (2). Pamphilia recognizes that both depictions of Cupid--immature and sensual or wise and transcendent--are extreme and limiting stereotypes, and she is able to see a more realistic and humanly complex love after her exploration of both:

Bee given to him who triumphs in his right  
Nor vading bee, butt like those blossoms fayre  
Which fall for good, and lose theyr coulers bright  
Yett dy nott, butt with fruite theyr loss repaire

Soe may love make you pale with loving care  
When sweet injoying shall restore that light  
More cleare in beauty then wee can compare

(P88.1-7)

As part of earthly freedom, Pamphilia urges herself and her reader to choose to "bee given to him who triumphs in his right" (1), for she has gained a new and clearer

understanding of love. Just as blossoms fall to the ground, not to die, but to bear fruit, so has the divine and perfect vision of love, originating in heaven, fallen to earth. Earthly love, which must exist among inconstant and imperfect humans, will be painful and draining, "mak[ing] you pale with loving care" (5). Yet, if in our human frailty we can patiently, constantly, and diligently focus on the example of divine love, we will begin to "restore that light / More cleare in beauty then wee can compare" (6-7). Pamphilia has learned, as the crown comes to a close, that indeed "love to bee devine doth heere apeere / Free from all fogs butt shining faire, and cleere" (13-14), yet when Pamphilia offers the "Great King of Love . . . this crowne, my self, and all that I have more (P89.11-13), she offers him a whole person--with all the human complexities and unexpected irrationalities--rather than a transcendent or divine lover.

Because Pamphilia recognizes that her own humanity and the human weakness of Amphilanthus will not allow a perfect love, the last sonnet of the crown offers love a constant but realistic tribute:

The tribute which my hart doth truly pay  
 Is faith untouch'd, pure thoughts discharge the score  
 Of debts for mee, wher constancy bears sway,  
 And rules as Lord, unharm'd by envyes sore,

Yett other mischiefs faile nott to attend,  
 As enimies to you, my foes must bee;  
 Curst jealousie doth all her forces bend  
 To my undoing; thus my harmes I see.

Soe though in Love I fervently doe burne,  
 In this strange labourinth how shall I turne?

(P90.5-14)

Pamphilia promises her "faith untouch'd . . . wher constancy bears sway, / And rules as Lord, unharm'd by envyes sore" (6-8). Remaining a "constant" lover throughout the sequence, Pamphilia now is able to maintain her faith in love while she simultaneously realizes the pain and imperfection that is inevitable due to "mischiefs" and "enimies" of love. She will be dedicated to the concept of ideal love, but she must find a way to keep her faith in love alive against "curst jealousie [who] doth all her forces bend / To my undoing, thus my harmes I see" (11-12). By the end of the crowne and her exploration of true love, Pamphilia has come full circle to provide the final link of the ruler's crown. The sonnet ends in a question--"In this strange labourinth how shall I turne?" (14)--recalling the first line of the first sonnet in the crown and emphasizing the complexity and unpredictability of human nature--and therefore, human love.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Other examples of this form can be found in Sir Philip Sidney's Old Arcadia, Samuel Daniel's Delia, George Chapman's "A Coronet for his Mistress Philosophy," John Donne's "La Corona," and Robert Sidney's incomplete crown which includes four poems and a quatrain of the fifth.

<sup>2</sup> Many Renaissance sonnet-sequence writers apply Neo-Platonic concepts to their sequences. The most explicitly Neo-Platonic of these sequences are Petrarch's Rime and Spenser's Amoretti, but others which include an idealized sonnet lady are Sidney's Astrophil and Stella, Daniel's Delia, Greville's Caelica, and Drayton's Idea.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Following her realization and exploration of human imperfection in love, Pamphilia is still able to maintain a fragile hope in the final sonnets of the sequences. Wroth herself did not abandon her hope to be a writer despite the cultural constraints she faced as a seventeenth-century woman but, instead, worked within the limitations imposed by the definitive feminine virtues of silence, chastity, and obedience to find her own original discourse. Writing within the traditional boundaries of the sonnet sequence yet creating something new and innovative in Pamphilia's honest self-exploration, Wroth constructs a positive and encouraging metaphor for the lives of all those artists who search for freedom within existing traditions and dominant cultures.

Similarly, Pamphilia's voice at the end of the sequence does not surrender to bitterness and despondency because of her failed attempt to idealize love but reflects instead a sense of completion and peace gained through a realistic rather than

transcendent understanding of human--and her  
own--potential:

My muse now hapy, lay thy self to rest,  
Sleepe in the quiett of a faithfull love,  
Write you noe more, butt lett thes phant'sies move  
Some other harts, wake nott to new unrest,

Butt if you study, bee those thoughts adrest  
To truth, which shall eternall goodnes prove;  
Injoying of true love, the most, and best,  
The endles gaine which never will remove;

Leave the discourse of Venus, and her sunn  
To young beeginers, and theyr brains inspire  
With storys of great love, and from that fire  
Gett heat to write the fortunes they have wunn,

And thus leave off, what's past showes you can love,  
Now lett your constancy your honor prove,

Pamphilia.

(P103.1-14)

Once again departing from the tradition of the male  
sonneteers, Pamphilia comes to her conclusion not  
because of Amphilanthus's love but in spite of his  
inconstancy. She is able to "lay [her] self to rest, /  
[and to] Sleepe in the quiett of a faithfull love,"  
(1-2) because Pamphilia now realizes that she is capable

of constancy and faith in love despite the human weaknesses of jealousy and infidelity. She focuses her mental attitude on "thos thoughts adrest / To truth, which shall eternall goodnes prove" (5-6). That truth, she discovers, is the possibility of "Injoying . . . true joye" (7)--even in this earthly existence, for since she is able to maintain faith and trust in love's power, she has hope of finding someone with whom to share that belief.

This conclusion does not offer an immediate resolution or gratification to Pamphilia's suffering and ambivalence throughout the sequence, but it offers yet another example in Wroth's poetry of finding a way to exist within the confines of the complexities which life presents. Pamphilia closes the sequence by saying, "what's past shoves you can love, / Now lett your constancy your honor prove" (13-14). Ending with the notions of "showing" and "proving," the final lines of the sonnet remind the reader that the sequence acts as evidence--evidence that Pamphilia (and therefore other women as well) can remain constant throughout earthly adversity; evidence that stereotypes and one-sided projections are inadequate representations of reality, when applied either to humans or to concepts such as love; and, finally, evidence that Wroth--by sharing her sensitive, honest presentation of human emotions and



her innovations to the traditional sonnet sequence--was able to discover her own voice as an artist of the English Renaissance.

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