

# “The True Forme of Love”: Transforming the Petrarchan Tradition in the Poetry of Lady Mary Wroth (1587–1631)

Tomáš Jajtner

*The following article deals with the transformation of the Petrarchan idea of love in the work of Lady Mary Wroth (1587-1631), the first woman poet to write a secular sonnet sequence in English literature, Pamphilia to Amphilanthus. The author of the article discusses the literary and historical context of the work, the position of female poets in early modern England and then focuses on the main differences in Wroth’s treatment of the topic of heterosexual love: the reversal of gender roles, i.e., the woman being the “active” speaker of the sonnets; the de-objectifying of the lover and the perspective of love understood not as a possessive power struggle, but as an experience of togetherness, based on the gradual interpenetration of two equal partners.*

## Keywords

Renaissance English literature; Lady Mary Wroth; Petrarchanism; concept of love; women’s poetry

## 1. Introduction

“Since I exscribe your Sonnets, am become/A better lover, and much better Poët”. These words written by Ben Jonson and first published in his *Workes* (1640) point out some of the fascination, as well as a sense of the extraordinary, if not downright oddity of the poetic output of **Lady Mary Wroth** (1587-1631), the niece of Sir Philip Sidney and daughter of another English Renaissance poet, Sir Robert Sidney, the first Earl of Leicester (1563-1626). In fact, Wroth is the first female author of a prose romance in the English Renaissance, *The Countesse of Mountgomeries Urania* (1621), to which she attached a sonnet sequence *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, the second of its kind after the famous sequence of Anne Lok (or Locke) *Meditation of a Penitent Sinner: Written in Maner of a Parphrase upon the 51. Psalm of David* (1560)<sup>1</sup>.

Traditionally, the fascination and the oddity of Wroth's sequence have been based on the re-gendering of the traditional Petrarchan pattern: the mute object of the male's gaze becomes an active, speaking subject. However, Lady Mary Wroth does not just reverse the gender roles to offer the perspective "from the other side" by making the male the unattainable object of her love. She consciously questions some of the principles of the concept of love found in the Petrarchan tradition informed by the "maleness" of the discourse. Wroth explores the possibilities of a female voice to reopen the question of "the true forme of love". She wants to find room for accommodating the female perspective as an indispensable type for completing the picture, i.e., empowering women to "speak" and men to understand how to be "better lovers".

In the three most influential book-length studies of Mary Wroth in recent critical discussion (*Reading Mary Wroth: Representing Alternatives in Early Modern England*<sup>2</sup> Heather Dubrow's *Echoes of Desire: English Petrarchism and Its Counterdiscourses*<sup>3</sup> and the most recent collection of essays, *Re-Reading Mary Wroth*<sup>4</sup>), the prime methodological focus seems to have been the problems related to the emergence of the female poetic self in early modern England and the potentially subversive aspects of a female "anti-Petrarchan counter-discourse"<sup>5</sup> for the dominant contemporary poetic discourse defined by the controlling male. However, Wroth clearly presents more than a counterdiscourse breaking the boundaries of the gender ideal in early modern England: I would like to argue that she puts forward an alternative of a positive female poetic self, as something distinct to mere "non-maleness". The type associated with this alternative is suggested in the very tension of the protagonists' names and types: on the one hand, "Pamphilia", i.e., literally the "all-loving" one, on the other "Amphilanthus", i.e., "the lover of the two", or, indeed, a "double-lover". This "all-loving" Pamphilia type represents a different understanding of the erotic passion: the one that constantly de-centres itself and attempts to show the perspective of *the common*, and of *communication*, instead of focusing on the deadening process of objectifying the lover and making him the projection of one's own power aspirations.

In the first section, I will explore the historical context of the sequence and the initial preconditions of the female poetic voice in early modern England, in the latter parts I will analyse the various aspects of Wroth's concept of love as more than a scandalous rewriting (or, indeed, subverting) of the male voice, but as a striking attempt to claim the space for an autonomous female "poetic self".

## 2. The scandal of women poets: re-claiming the world for the female voice in Renaissance England

The first scandal of Wroth’s poetry is its very existence: indeed, some of the reactions to the publication of her roman à clef *The Countesse of Mountgomerie’s Urania* and the sonnet sequence *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* expressed a sense of outrage that such lines were produced at all. Edward, Lord Denny calls Wroth “Hermophradite in show, in deed a monster”, by whose “words and works all men may conster”<sup>6</sup>. In fact, Lord Denny must have been personally offended by the indirect association of him with the tale of an abusive father in *The Countesse of Mountgomerie’s Urania*<sup>7</sup>. Indeed, the “licence” with which Wroth reported some of the scandalous details of the life at the Jacobean court, added to the sense of shock related to the publication<sup>8</sup>, however, the incomprehension regarding the appropriateness of a secular female poetic idiom went much deeper than that. Denny sees Wroth as a “Hermophradite in show”, an asexual being who transgresses the traditional division of sex roles typical for early modern England<sup>9</sup>. Not surprisingly, therefore, most of the women poets were pushed to the safer realm of devotional verse, in which the scandal of “unruly” household rules<sup>10</sup> was somewhat mitigated by the praiseworthy effort to help women satisfy their spiritual needs<sup>11</sup>.

Nevertheless, even in the field of spiritual poetry, the goal of women poets was not simply to imitate men’s achievement: the work of both Rachel Speght and Aemilia Lanyer epitomize the need to claim a female approach in the field of spirituality, or even to address some of the stereotypes typically associated with women. Rachel Speght’s work, especially her polemical tract *A Mouzell for Melastomus* (1617) and her poetic meditation on death *Moralities Memorandum* (1621, i.e., published the same year as Lady Mary Wroth’s *Urania*) deal with the arguments raised in the long debate about the nature and dignity of women. Her arguments follow the liberal Protestant exegesis of Pauline texts related to marriage stressing the “different, but equal” attitude<sup>12</sup>. The same can also be said about the main tenor of Lanyer’s poetry: women are spiritually mature beings and the differences based on their sex are to be embraced as God-willed gifts to enrich the male world. Her long meditation on Christ’s passion *Salve Deus, Rex Judaeorum* (1611) contrasts the cruel handling of Christ by a number of men, while showing the innate feminine capacity for compassion and sacrificial love. Lanyer’s Christ is a saviour with strongly feminine features, quiet, obedient and loving who patiently takes and carries the cross to complete his complete surrender to wayward humanity. Christ

is depicted as an honourable, but powerless man whose only power is the capacity to bear the unbearable for the sake of love alone. This “woman’s spirituality” seems to uncover the indispensable role of women to balance the cynical logic of power materialized in Christ’s crucifixion<sup>13</sup>.

Typically, in her poem “To the Ladie Anne, Countesse of Dorset”, Lanyer contrasts the iron logic of men’s justice, of their calculations, power ambitions and greed. Thus she juxtaposes the image of Caiphaz (“the wicked Man”) with his “faithlesse dealing, feare of God neglected” with that of the compassionate, loving Countesse Anne representing the meek and “sweet” aspect of Christ’s logic:

These workes of mercy are so sweet, so deare  
 To him that is the Lord of Life and Loue,  
 That all thy prayers he vouchsafes to heare,  
 And sends his holy Spirit from aboue;  
 Thy eyes are op’ned, and thou seest so cleare,  
 No worldly thing can thy faire mind remoue;  
 Thy faith, thy prayers, and his speciall grace  
 Doth open Heau’n, where thou behold’st his face.  
 These are those Keyes Saint Peter did possesse,  
 Which with a Spirituall powre are giu’n to thee,  
 To heale the soules of those that doe transgresse,  
 By thy faire virtues; which, if once they see,  
 Vnto the like they doe their minds adresse,  
 Such as thou art, such they desire to be:  
 If they be blind, thou giu’st to them their sight;  
 If deafe or lame, they heare, and goe vpriht. (Lanyer 109)

The radicalism of this treatment of the role of women stands in sharp contrast to the potential consequences when a lady holds the “Keyes Saint Peter did possesse”. Her “Spirituall powre” may be transgressive, but such a power was, indeed, the one that helped “those that doe transgresse”.

The social implication of this spiritual model found in both Speght and Lanyer are clear: a woman thus has not only a different body and a different social position, but also an autonomous form of thought that questions the exclusive male claim to set the standards of thought. Indeed, this “transgressive” pattern seeking to transform the exclusivity of the claim is

also typical for Lady Mary Wroth who was trying to put forward her vision of a truly female voice in secular poetry.

### **3. *Your sight is all the food I doe desire: beyond the limits of the Petrarchan discourse***

The initial framework of Wroth’s sequence *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* is of the “lover’s malady” type<sup>14</sup>: in a dream, the author is transposed to the court of Venus, in which she is given a new “flaming” heart by Cupid and since then she has not yet recovered from the dream and has been a “Louer” ever since<sup>15</sup>. When contrasting the “before and after” falling in love, he mentions the “Knowledge of my selfe” in the state of being awake during the day, and the ensnaring aspect of the “night’s blacke Mantle” and of sleep, “deaths Image”, which “hired” her “senses” (cf. Wroth, I<sup>16</sup>). However, this “self-knowledge” collapses, since there is no way of coming back to the “pre-love” state: in other words, Pamphilia cannot *not* love, or, indeed, cannot *stop loving*, regardless of how difficult a challenge this may prove to be.

In that sense, the position of Cupid in the sonnet sequence deviates from the established Petrarchan convention, in which Cupid acts through the charms of the lady, especially of her eyes (Cf. Larson 234). In fact, in Sonnet 3 Pamphilia asks Cupid/Love to remember his “selfe” and then think about the lover: for the “all-loving” Pamphilia, love is an *un-selfing* affair, away from the full and exclusive possession of the individual self. The Cupid representing the male, conquering concept of love, i.e., affirming one’s self in the act of longing, is invited to understand the virtue of constancy as the distinguishing mark of the feminine:

YEt is there hope, then Love but play thy part,  
Remember well thy selfe, and think on me;  
Shine in those eyes which conquer’d haue my heart,  
And see if mine, be slacke to answer thee.  
Lodge in that breast, and pittie moouing see,  
For flames which in mine burne in truest smart,  
Exciling thoughts, that touch Inconstancy,  
Or those which waste not in the constant Art,  
Watch but my sleepe, if I take any rest,

For thought of you, my spirit so distrest,  
As, pale and famish'd, I for mercy cry.  
Will you your seruant leave: thinke but on this,  
Who weares Love's Crowne, must not doe so amisse  
But seeke their good, who on thy force do lye.

If the initial situation of Wroth's sequence in relation to the Petrarchan mode of subjectivity attests "to the emergence of this subjectivity only in terms of its lack", as Jeff Masten argues<sup>17</sup>, the topic of constancy puts forward not a simple "counterdiscourse", but an effort to present an alternative form of Petrarchan subjectivity. Male vulnerability expressed in the "inauthentic theatricality of stock Petrarchanism" (Masten 73) is contrasted here with Wroth's sober insistence on the value of constancy and loyalty. In Sonnet 7, the poet submits to Cupid and accepts the situation:

[...] Behold, I yeeld; let forces be dismist,  
I am thy Subiect conquer'd bound to stand  
Neuer thy foe, but did thy claime assist,  
Seeking thy due of those who did withstand.  
But now it seemes thou would'st I should thee loue,  
I doe confesse, t'was thy will made mee choose,  
And thy faire shewes made me a Louer proue,  
When I my freedome did for paine refuse.  
Yet this Sir god, your Boy-ship I despise,  
Your charmes I obey, but loue not want of eyes.

In that sense, Wroth seems to suggest the identity between subjectivity and being a "Subiect" in love in the realm of Cupid, the god of desire. She does not claim autonomy, but the submission "to a higher, better authority" (Dubrow 150) than that of a "desiring" "cupido" (literally "desire, longing, lust")<sup>18</sup>.

As Naomi J. Miller points out, the Sidneys (both her uncle Philip and father Robert) make frequent use of military imagery representing a "lover's predicament in martial terms", either actively as an act of conquest or as an effort to resist the captivating aspect of the beauty of the beloved<sup>19</sup>. Wroth's Pamphilia, however, represents an active effort to embrace the predicament of the lover's malady. Her love to Amphilanthus is, indeed, a painful passage of uncertainty and insecurity, yet in the end, the self-affirming aspect of the Petrarchan idiom gives way to what we may call "bond-affirming" mutuality.

A good example of this can be found in Sonnet 14: love is associated with the feelings of captivity, with pain and with the surrender of liberty. Nevertheless, the final line of the sonnet affirms this loss of liberty as the currency of Pamphilia’s love:

AM I thus conquer’d? haue I lost the powers,  
That to withstand, which ioyes to ruine me?  
Must I bee still, while it my strength deuoures,  
And captiue leads me prisoner bound, vnfree?  
Loue first shall [leauē] mens phant’sies to them free,  
Desire shall quench loues flames, Spring, hate sweet showres;  
Loue shall loose all his Darts, haue sight, and see  
His shame and wishings, hinder happy houres.  
Why should we not loues purblind charms resist?  
Must we be seruile, doing what he list?  
No, seeke some hoste too harbour thee: I flye  
Thy babish tricks, and freedome doe professe;  
But O my hurt makes my lost heart confesse:  
I loue, and must; so farewell liberty.

The following sonnet thematizes “men’s phantasies”, i.e., the intoxicating sense of beauty and the ennobling vision gained from gazing at the object of love. Pamphilia, on the other hand, prefers the “night” associated with feminine gender and capable of sharing women’s fate. Moreover, Wroth’s Pamphilia, the “all-loving”, feels a powerful sense of solidarity with other women in her position (“to vs, and mee among the opprest”)<sup>20</sup>:

TRuly (poore night) thou welcome art to me,  
I loue thee better in this sad attire  
Then that which rayseth some mens fant’sies higher,  
Like painted outsides, which foule inward be.  
I loue thy graue and saddest lookes to see,  
Which seems my soule and dying heart entire,  
Like to the ashes of some happy fire,  
That flam’d in ioy, but quench’d in misery.  
I loue thy count’nance, and thy sober pace,  
Which euenly goes, and as of louing grace  
To vs, and mee among the rest opprest,

Giues quiet peace to my poore selfe alone,  
And freely grants day leaue; when thou art gone,  
To giue cleare light, to see all ill redrest.

This experience of sharing thus presents a significant shift from the quest for the individual self so typical for the classical Petrarchan type defined by the exposed vulnerability of the lover in the state of being in love<sup>21</sup>.

The progression of the sequence in *Pamphilia and Amphilanthus* also makes clear that Pamphilia's initial malady and passivity turns into a conscious decision for love: she is thus neither a Petrarchan lover tormented by the ensnaring gaze of the beloved, nor just a passive victim of Cupid's whims. Her love may have been originally imposed on her from the outside, but she affirms it: "Yet loue I will, till I but ashes proue" (Sonnet 47). In that sense, love ceases to be "an imaginary edict imposed by the gods" and becomes "an individual choice" (Cf. Roberts 50).

The ultimate consummation of love in Wroth's sequence is its maturity to strive for the "true forme", i.e., for its de-centred, un-selfed form, to whose discussion I will now proceed.

#### **4. Time gaue time but to be holy: de-centring love and de-objectifying the lover**

Early in the sequence, in the fifth song, Wroth addresses Time, as the "cause of my vnrest", which represents the cruel fate of the lover's insecurity and other plagues of being in love. The resolution of the poem again refers to the "selfe" understood as a closed entity which cherishes only its own pleasures. Indeed, the aspiration of earthly love is the progress to the divine, i.e., to be re-centred or de-centred from the "selfe" to the "holy" communion with God:

Blame thy selfe, and not my folly,  
Time gaue time but to be holy,  
True Loue, such ends best loueth:  
Unworthy Loue doth seeke for ends,  
A worthy Loue but worth pretends;  
Nor other thoughts it proueth.



The poem proceeds to the affirmation of “time” whose consummation is its self-consummation at the end of time, when the progressing nature of things will be joined with the “constancy” of the heavenly. At that moment time stops being an agent of division and torment, but will reveal the fullness of reality:

Then stay thy swiftnes cruell Time,  
And let me once more blessed clime  
To ioy, that I may prayse thee:  
Let me pleasure sweetly tasting,  
Ioy in Loue, and faith not wasting,  
and on Fames wings Ile raise thee.

Neuer shall thy glory dying,  
Be vntill thine owne vntyng,  
That Tyme noe longer liueth,  
‘Tis a gaine such time to lend,  
Since so thy fame shall neuer end,  
But ioy for what she giueth.

As has been seen earlier, the love-centred universe of the sequence circles around the issue of constancy, Pamphilia’s most cherished value. American scholar Risa S. Bear points out that the extraordinary element in Wroth’s sequence is not the presence and celebration of this virtue, but the fact that Pamphilia expects the same from Amphilanthus<sup>22</sup>. The double standard typical for the man<sup>23</sup> – in fact hinted at in the very name of the male lover, *Amphilanthus*, “lover of two”, i.e., an inconstant lover – is to join Pamphilia in the common goal of a de-centred love, based on a common standard informed by ethics.

In Song I, Pamphilia reminds Amphilanthus of the obligation and commitment of love: not rhetoric, but “truth” is the goal to which “louers” aspire. Moreover, this truth is equated with faithfulness and directness, i.e., with the capacity to keep “promises”, with avoiding deceit and with the struggle towards “constancy”:

LOuers learne to speake but truth,  
Swear not, and your oathes forgoe,  
Giue your age a constant youth,  
Vow noe more then what you'le doe.

Thinke it sacriledge to breake  
What you promise, shall in loue  
And in teares what you doe speake  
Forget not, when the ends you proue.

Doe not thinke it glory is  
To entice, and then deceiue,  
Your chiefe honors lye in this,  
By worth what wonne is, not to leaue.

In Sonnet 21, Pamphilia emphasizes the value and significance of *conscience*: if Amphilanthus possesses conscience he should be able to express his sympathy with her pain:

WHen last I saw thee, I did not thee see,  
It was thine Image which in my thoughts lay  
So liuely figur'd, as no times delay  
Could suffer me in heart to parted be.  
And sleepe so fauourable is to me,  
As not to let thy lou'd remembrance stray:  
Lest that I waking might haue cause to say,  
there was one minute found to forgett thee.  
Then, since my faith is such, so kinde my sleepe,  
That gladly thee presents into my thought,  
And still true Louer-like thy face doth keepe,  
So as some pleasure shadow-like is wrought.  
Pitty my louing, nay of consience giue  
Reward to me in whom thy self doth liue.

The final couple of the sonnet clearly transforms the Petrarchan egocentric self-pity, since Wroth refers not to her-*self* but to her “louing”, whose doubleness is stressed in the final line with the shared intimacy of the female lover “in whom thy self doth liue”, i.e., in whom there is no longer the re-discovered

sense of the self reflected in the lover and reflectively ennobling itself – as in the Petrarchan tradition<sup>24</sup> – but a sense of a potential community, as if already “alive” in the lover.

In that sense, Wroth’s concept of love is not only *de-centred*, but also *de-objectified*. Unlike in the traditional Petrarchan sonnet sequence, Wroth conspicuously omits many of the details traditionally attributed to the Petrarchan sonnet sequence – such as kisses, blazons, promises, no references to Amphilanthus’s words, etc. (Cf. Lewalski 44). In fact, in Sonnet 40, Pamphilia openly rejects these forms of love as being dishonourable:

IT is not Loue which you poore fooles do deeme,  
That doth appeare by fond and outward shoves  
Of kissing, toying, or by swearings gloze  
O no, these are farre off from loues esteeme.

Her style is consciously less ornate and less rhetorical. Although Wroth uses traditional conceits – e.g., equating eyes with stars, the volatile nature of her love with the ship on the ocean – he always seems to keep the standard of the intimate, reserved idiom resembling the simplicity of the Puritan plain style. Indeed, “the sonnets stage a movement which is relentlessly private, withdrawing into an interiorized space [...] they articulate a woman’s resolute constancy, self-sovereignty, and unwillingness to circulate among men [...]” (Masten 69).

Her love thus finds an appropriate expression, but always dialectically in relation to the in-dwelling of the love relation in the actual person. A good example of this treatment can be found in Sonnet 41, where a traditional conceit comparing stars and eyes and focusing on the Petrarchan gaze gives way to the de-objectifying concept of love “content” with residing in the beloved. The lover is no longer driven into the insecurity of doubt and anxiety of loneliness, but experiences a de-centring sense of “togetherness”:

YOu blessed Starres, which doe Heauen’s glory show,  
And at your brightnesse make our eyes admire:  
Yet enuy not, though I on earth below,  
Inioy a sight which moues in me more fire.  
I doe confesse such beauty breeds desire  
You shine, and clearest light on vs bestow:  
Yet doth a sight on Earth more warmth inspire

Into my louing soule, his grace to know.  
 Cleare, bright, and shining, as you are, is this  
 Light of my ioy: fix't stedfast, nor will moue  
 His light from me, nor I chang from his loue;  
 But still increase as [th'eith] of all my blisse.  
 His sight giues life vnto my loue-rould [eyes],  
 My loue content, because in his loue lies.

The desire to find solace in the togetherness of love in the sequence are interspersed with efforts to present the ideals of a “true forme” (Sonnet 6), “vertuous loue”, “pure and spotlesse loue” (Sonnet 26), and “honor” against the fictions of the rhetorical relishes (“the ancient fictions”) and modes of life typical for the male world with their pastimes (“some hunt, some hauke, some play” – Sonnet 23). While the male world is defined by the quantitative, objectifying forms of the experience of love, Pamphilia rests in her “louing”: “For know, more passion in my heart doth moue,/Then in a million that make shew of loue” (Sonnet 36).

Wroth's *Pamphilia* sees the perspective of love *in spe* as a commitment beyond the initial “dream” from the Court of Venus, as a process of maturation. While the dream vision in Petrarchanism “generally permits forms of wish fulfillment, as Freud asserts, dreams generally do: the chaste mistress may be embraced in one's dreams, the threatening satyr killed” (Dubrow 138), here the climax shows the dynamics of the dream vision to be materialized in a state beyond “Phant'sies”, beyond the imaginary. The final crown of sonnets (“dedicated to Love”) are meant to assess the experience of love as described in the earlier sonnets. The very last poem of the collection starts with an admonition to the “muse”: “lay thy selfe to rest,/Sleepe in the quiet of a faithfull loue”. The self-reflecting self gives way to a silence of a “faithfull loue”:

MY Muse now happy lay thy selfe to rest,  
 Sleepe in the quiet of a faithfull loue,  
 Write you no more, but let these Phant'sies mooue  
 Some other hearts, wake not to new vnrest.  
 But if you Study be those thoughts adrest  
 To truth, which shall eternall goodnes prooue;  
 Enjoying of true ioy the most, and best  
 The endles gaine which neuer will remoue.  
 Leauē the discourse of *Venus*, and her sonne

To young beginners, and their braines inspire  
With storyes of great Loue, and from that fire,  
Get heat to write the fortunes they haue wonne.  
And thus leaue off; what’s past shewes you can loue,  
Now let your Constancy your Honor proue.

The final emphasis on the “Constancy” and “Honor” prove yet again the de-objectified nature of Pamphilia’s love: love is a commitment and her true object, i.e., her “true forme” is love itself, not the individual partners, or, indeed, the roles they assume. In that sense, Wroth rejects the mortifying “reification of the beloved” (Fienberg 1991, 177): her ideal of love is the end of objectification, i.e., love informed solely by the mutually enriching otherness of the two sexes presupposing their fundamental equality:

This project by itself stands on its head the Petrarchan tradition of courtly love poetry, for Amphilanthus, unlike Stella, Caelica, Phyllis, and a hundred others to whom sonnet cycles were addressed, is not an object. He is instead enlisted in Pamphilia’s quest for a mutually supported happiness founded upon the relinquishing of objectification, the mode by which oppressive power relations are constructed. (Bear, Introduction)

In the de-objectification of the lover, Wroth’s concept of love describes a full circle: love can be energized by love alone, i.e., by a free and mutual commitment. The paradoxical object of love is to create subjects that are not “subject” to one another, but to the goal of love to reach the divine. In that sense, Wroth does not need to “go divine” to present her subjectivity: the programme of her love to Amphilanthus presupposes the spiritual basis of a cultivating, “un-selfing” mutuality in a personal, spousal relationship to God.

## 5. Conclusion

Wroth’s sequence *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* represents more than a literary curiosity as the sheer rarity of early modern English women’s poetry might suggest. Her sequence is informed with a clear knowledge of the dominant Petrarchan idiom and the best fruits of the tradition in England, including her two close relatives, her father Robert and uncle Philip from the great

Sidney family. Her mastery of the discourse could make it possible for her to *question* some of the principles upon which the whole Petrarchan concept of love is based: especially, the process by which women were silenced and objectified, and how the whole concept of love was driven by a self-complacent and egocentric quest for oneself in the beloved.

Wroth pursues her own “female” discourse of love as an inclusive one, i.e., “all-loving”, for whom love seems to be an experience of “two-ness”, not the exclusive “double-ness” typical for Amphilanthus, the “lover of two”. The latter, male concept of love suggests that love may take place in two dimensions of the self-same existence simultaneously, i.e., as love exploring the experience of togetherness, but also as an experience of the complacent self, reflecting circularly upon itself. Pamphilia finds such a separation impossible, for as she says in Sonnet 8 of the *Crowne of Sonnets* “HE that shuns Loue, doth loue himselfe the lesse”.

Ultimately, Wroth presents a relational type of female subjectivity, for which the concept of “autonomy” often mentioned in the recent publications on the topic does not seem to be appropriate. Her logic is that of a “shared heteronomy” of “Loue”, which re-establishes hetero-sexual difference as a space for a *personal*, i.e., *relational* integration of sex and gender. Freedom of love is neither submission, nor power, but the freedom of the common.

In that sense, the poetry of Lady Mary Wroth offers more than a glimpse into the position of women in early modern England: it is a meditation on the nature of love transformed from passion into commitment and on the necessity of approaching this experience from two different perspectives. All of these aspects have an urgent appeal in every generation. Indeed, this is what makes Worth’s poetry still such a rewarding and charming read.

### Notes

1. This work is taken to be the very first sonnet sequence written in the English language. Further on this topic cf. Michael R. G Spille: “A literary ‘first’: the sonnet sequence of Anne Locke (1560) an appreciation of Anne Locke’s Sonnet Sequence: A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner ... with Locke’s Epistle to the ... Duchesse of Suffolke”. *Renaissance Studies* 11.1 (March 1997): 41-55.
2. Edited by Naomi J. Miller and Gary F. Waller (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991).
3. Published by Cornell University Press (Ithaca and London, 1995).
4. Edited by Katherine Larson and Naomi J. Miller (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

5. This is, indeed, the thesis put forward persuasively by Heather Dubrow in her mentioned influential study *Echoes of Desire: English Petrarchism and Its Counterdiscourses* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), especially in Chapter Four entitled “Petrarchan Executors: Sidney, Shakespeare, Wroth”: 99-161.
6. Here I quote from *The Sidney Page* of the University of Cambridge. Available at <http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/wroth/othertexts2v2.htm#denny> (20 February 2016).
7. For further on the topic, see Nona Fienberg’s essay “Mary Wroth’s Poetics of the Self” in *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* (42/1, Winter 2002): 122 ff.
8. E.g., in John Chamberlain’s letter to Dudley Carleton the author expresses his outrage at the “great liberty or rather license to traduce whom she please, and thinks she dances in a net.” Quoted from Nandini Das “Biography of Lady Mary Wroth”, *The Sidney Page*.
9. A comprehensive study of English Renaissance manuals for women can be found in Hull, Suzanne W.: *Chaste, Silent and Obedient: English Books for Women 1475-1640* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1982). A similar study with a broader focus is Ruth Kelso’s *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), in which the author discusses major works by women between 1400 and 1600. A short valuable summary (with references and quotations) can also be found in the introduction to the *Renascence Edition of Pamphilia and Amphilanthus* by Risa S. Bear from the University of Oregon. The website is available at <http://www.luminarium.org/renascence-editions/mary.html>. This is also the edition from which I quote in this article.
10. An interesting instance of an early Tudor work preying on the stereotypes related to women and on the dangerous implications of their dominance in the household, as well as their love autonomy can be found in John Haywood’s interlude *A Mery Play Betwene Johan Johan, the Husbande, Tyb, his Wyfe, and Syr Jhan, the Preest*. The play has been superbly analysed by Sylwia Borowska-Szerszun in her study “The Unruly Household in John Heywood’s *Johan Johan*” (*Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* 43, 2007): 265-273.
11. In fact, the few women Renaissance authors in current academic anthologies include the mentioned Anne Lok (or Locke, 1530-after 1590), Scottish poet Elizabeth Melvill, Lady Culros (c.1578-c.1640), Mary Sidney Herbert (1561-1621), Rachel Speght (1597-date of death unknown) and Aemilia Lanyer (1569-1645). The only notable exception to the rule of “going divine” was perhaps Isabella Whitney (1548–1573), arguably the very first Englishwoman known to have published secular verse. Further on this topic Cf. also Naomi J. Miller: “Lady Mary Wroth and Women’s Love Poetry” in *Early Modern English Poetry: A Critical Companion*. Oxford: OUP, 2007: 195-205.
12. This regards especially the justification of women’s subordination, inferiority or insufficient education. Cf. Barbara Kiefer Lewalski’s introduction to *The Polemics and Poems of Rachel Speght* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996): xi-xxxvi.
13. Cf. Jajtner, Tomáš. “To All vertuous Ladies in Generall: Voicing Female Spirituality in the Poems of Aemilia Lanyer (1569-1645)”. *Ostrava Journal of English Philology* 7.2 (2015): 47-62.
14. I am referring to the typology found in K.K. Ruthaven’s summary of the various conceits found in Renaissance English poetry. (Cf. Ruthaven, K.K.: *Conceit* (London: Methuen, 1969). Under the lover’s malady type, he understands the irrational and unpredictable nature of the lover’s experience. As regards the structure, perhaps the most typical aspect of this type is the frequent use of oxymora and paradoxes. (Cf. Ruthaven: 39).

15. Clearly, the first sonnet is a reworking of the famous first sonnet of Dante's *Vita Nuova*: "A ciascun'alma presa e gentil core".
16. Hereafter I refer to the numbering of the works as found in the *Renaissance Edition* of Risa S. Bear.
17. Cf. Masten, Jeff: "Circulation, Gender and Subjectivity in Wroth's Sonnets" in Naomi J. Miller and Gary F. Waller (Eds.) *Mary Wroth: Representing Alternatives in Early Modern England*: 81.
18. "In one scenario common to love poetry, the passivity of the Petrarchan lover is a sign of weakness and failure; in Wroth's revised scenario, by adducing the concept of constancy, she turns that passivity into a positive value." Dubrow: 159.
19. Naomi J. Miller: "The Role of the Lady in Lady Mary Wroth's *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*" in *The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print*. Anne M. Haselkorn and Betty S. Travitsky, Eds. Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1990: 298.
20. Cf. Naomi J. Miller: "Rewriting Lyric Fictions": 300.
21. On the Petrarchan concept of love cf. *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The Rime Sparse and Other Lyrics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1976: 9-11.
22. Risa S. Bear ... Introduction. Available at <http://www.luminarium.org/renaissance-editions/mary.html>
23. Bear actually refers to the famous section in Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* in which one of courtiers, Bernardo Accolti, talks about a rule which the men set for themselves, namely "that a dissolute life in us is not a vice, or fault, or disgrace". Nevertheless, "in women it means such utter opprobrium and shame that any woman of whom ill is once spoken is disgraced forever, whether what is said be calumny or not". Castiglione, Baldasar. *The Book of the Courtier*. Trans. Charles S. Singleton. New York: Doubleday, 1959: 188.
24. In this context, Naomi J. Miller refers to Sonnet 45 of *Astrophil and Stella*, in which Astrophil asks Stella for pity for his "disgrace" while his "wo[woe]" is "painted" upon his face. (Cf. Naomi J. Miller: "Rewriting Lyric Fictions", 302). In contrast to Miller, however, I would stress the egocentrism of the "image-making" process in the self-understanding of the Sidneyan lover.

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TOMÁŠ JAJTNER

**TOMÁŠ JAJTNER** is Assistant Professor of English literature at the English Department at the Faculty of Arts, University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice. He completed his Ph.D. in 2006 at Charles University, Prague (dissertation: *Concepts of Harmony in Five Metaphysical Poets*, publ. 2012). In 2013 he received his second doctorate, in theology, from the Faculty of Catholic Theology also at Charles University, Prague. He was Assistant Professor at New York University, Prague and at Metropolitan University, Prague. He has published several book reviews, essays and articles on English and Czech literature and modern Catholic spirituality. He has also been active as a translator from English, German and French into his native Czech. His recent research interests include early modern English literature (drama and poetry), modern British conservatism and relations between literature and spirituality and literature and music.

*[tjajtner@ff.jcu.cz](mailto:tjajtner@ff.jcu.cz)*