‘There was a woman known to be so bold’: Gender in Petrarchism[1]

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As Valeria Finucci and Regina Schwartz put it, ‘The literature of psychoanalysis is preoccupied with the literature of the Renaissance’ (‘Worlds Within and Without’ 3). This relationship of influence has been addressed by Philip Armstrong (*Shakespeare in Psychoanalysis*), Malcolm Bowie (*Freud, Proust and Lacan: theory as fiction*), and Jane Gallop (*Reading Lacan*), amongst others. Both psychoanalysis and Renaissance literature can be seen to be particularly responsive to the language that shapes human possibility. This is not to suggest that subjectivity is purely discursive. I would not wish to advocate the lifting out of history of Renaissance literature, or of specific subjectivities. Rather, precisely because a psychoanalytic reading seeks the seams which join the self to the language of possibility, which the self inherits by virtue of being born into a specific time and place, it can be nuanced by the specificities of history and – in the example discussed here – genre. In this way a psychoanalytic reading can draw on the conditions of its text’s production in order to bring both history and a theory of subjectivity to bear on the language it seeks to elucidate.

This paper will make use of a psychoanalytic approach in order to read the sonnets of Mary Wroth, the first woman to publish a Petrarchan sequence. (The conditions of this act of publication are themselves telling, as will be discussed below.) I suggest that the poetics of Wroth’s sequence illustrate

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the gendered limitations of the Petrarchan self/other mode of subject constitution, and of the ontology of desire as lack. Wroth's sequence makes it clear that the poetic subject of desire in this crucial Western tradition is supposed to be male. To this end, I take Joel Fineman's Lacanian reading of Shakespeare's sonnets as a starting point for reading Wroth's Petrarchism.

There is a significant body of critical work that addresses the relationship between Wroth's gender and the poetics of her sequence (see Waller and Miller, Moore, Krontiris). This paper hopes to add to this work by contributing to the project of developing a psychoanalytic vocabulary for the issue, and, in the process, making a larger point about the gendered nature of subject positions within a genre. This last point locates my essay in a tradition of feminist psychoanalytic scholarship on the nature of phallocentric language (perhaps most famously exemplified by Luce Irigaray) and developed in the work of, amongst others, Teresa de Lauretis and Judith Butler, both of whom find ways to locate agency within what they broadly agree are the limitations of language for the female subject.

Thus, ultimately I argue that what Petrarchism makes clear is the structural relation, in this Western discourse of love, between the constitution of selfhood, desire and gender. This is both a universal and a specific statement: I contend, from a feminist position, that gender will always matter in the experience of oneself in one's world and thus in the shaping of one's internal and external possibilities. At the same time, identities are historically contingent, as are the social structures within which identities are formed (McKeon). Specific examples of the relationship between gender and subjectivity will cast the most light on interpretations of the time and place of the emergence of the examples, while also usefully functioning to insist on the broader point that gender, genre and access to speaking positions are all related.

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Petrarchism is a kind of love poetry with specific formal and thematic rules. It developed from the eclectic poetry of the Italian humanist Francesco Petrarca, whose *Canzoniere* or *Rime Sparse* was first printed in 1470. By 1600 there were over 170 editions in existence (Roche 70), a fact that speaks to the multiple incarnations of this mercurial text. The first English writer to translate Petrarch was Chaucer, who wrote a version of *Rime Sparse* 132 into *Troylus and Criseyde* (I 400–20). While there were sporadic references to Petrarch in the 127 years between Chaucer's death and Wyatt's trip to Italy in 1527, it was only with the latter that Petrarch's poetry was brought into dialogue with the medieval courtly tradition in a uniquely English sense (see Forster, Spiller and Sproxton). There is not enough space here to elaborate on the complex influences that fed into Petrarch's work, or to trace the equally complex ways Petrarch's poetry, in turn, fed into the writing of the French *Pléiade* (for example) or Renaissance Humanism's neo-Platonism, and from there into English Petrarchism. English Petrarchism constitutes a variation on Petrarch's own formal and thematic concerns. It is marked by its development in the court of Henry VIII by one of that court's consummate courtiers, Sir Thomas Wyatt, who found in Petrarch's discourse of desire a fitting model for expressing the conditions of life in the dangerous Tudor court. Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass suggest that the structures of the two kinds of desire – the ambition of the aspiring courtier, and the erotic longing of the lover – were similar. Thus they both could be modelled on court hierarchies in an attempt to refashion relations of power and submission to which both lover and courtier were subject. The courtier aspect of courtly love (Bates) is one reason why the speaking voice of English Petrarchism was gendered male, given the rules for public speaking in operation in early modern England, to which I will return below.

By 1547, both Wyatt and Surrey (the other courtier who helped most to popularise Petrarch's work in a different metre to Wyatt) were dead. However, their poetry continued to circulate in manuscript. Ten years later their work was made widely available for the first time by Richard Tottel's publication of *Songes and Sonettes, written by the right honourable Lorde Henry Haward late Earle of Surrey, and other*. *Tottel's Miscellany*, as it has become known, was very popular, and spawned many such collections of lyrics in the period. The first extant sonnet sequence in English is Anne Lok's religious poetry (1560); thereafter Thomas Watson's *Hekatompathia* (1582), an amatory sonnet sequence, included some 18-line poems. There was some experimentation with sonnet sequencing between *Tottel's Miscellany* and Sidney's seminal *Astrophil and Stella*, published for the first time in 1591, although most of these sequences were not concerned with love or Petrarchan posturing (Harris). It was not until the 1590s, following Sidney's sequence, that English Petrarchism became the poetic craze and social posture for which it became notorious.

Petrarchism's popularity in late sixteenth-century England ensured that its ideas about love, desire, the emotions of the lover, and the characterisation of the beloved saturated contemporary cultural discourse. As a way of speaking about unrequited love its influence was felt, and continues to be felt, outside the realm of the literary. It is now thoroughly part of the cultural mythology of love and loving in Western philosophy and literature, and thus, of psychoanalysis. Freud assumes a Petrarchan understanding of the desiring positions of lover and beloved in his interpretation of female homosexuality (Freud, 'The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman'; see also Montefiore 108); and Lacan draws on courtly love (an informing tradition of Petrarchism) in order to trope modern heterosexual relations ('Courtly love as anamorphosis').

The aspects of English Petrarchism relevant to this discussion are: the presence of an ideal and idealised woman, and the characterisation of the lover as always frustrated in his attempts to woo her. Indeed, her perfection

is encoded in her unavailability; as emphasised by Philip Sidney's Astrophil, the star lover, whose beloved was Stella, the unreachable. It is the unfulfillable nature of Petrarchan desire that occasions the poetry. Were the mistress ever to concede to the poet's importunities, his poetry of longing would have to cease.

Many theories have been put forward as to why Petrarchism achieved the popularity it did. As I have suggested, the erotic structures set up in Petrarchism enabled a modelling for other kinds of desire. By the time of Elizabeth's court, male courtier poets in the court of a 'virgin' queen (where rhetorical competition for notice was crucial to career advancement) made good use of the poetic subject position of a man asking for the favour of a perfectly powerful woman. This very act of asking (see Jones and Stallybrass, Berry, Braden, Marotti) demonstrated his worth. English Petrarchism, in other words, although apparently a lyrical outpouring of genuine emotion, is a carefully crafted, very public, performance. The Petrarchan poet is the individual subject striving for differentiation from the tradition that creates him as generic (Heather Dubrow calls this 'diacritical desire'). What he desires is both the lady and poetic recognition: Petrarch's Laura is also the poetic laurel of the poet laureate. By praising the beloved, the poet seeks to attract praise to himself. The love poetry functions as a performance of self which, if successful, will constitute the attempt to bring the self into a particular state of being. It is a kind of self-fashioning.[2]

Petrarchism, then, is a poetic register which enables an exploration of how the self establishes itself in relation to its world; how it stakes its claim to subjectivity. It uses a self/other constituting relation. This is also in keeping with the neo-Platonic roots of the sonnet tradition, where the lover is attracted by the beloved's beauty to her goodness, and then guided by her goodness towards his own spiritual advancement.

The ultimate inscription of the Petrarchan subject is often taken to be the poet of Shakespeare's sonnets, who is both Petrarchan and 'para-Petrarchan' in who and how he desires.[3] Shakespeare's sonnets, published

in 1609, are credited with radically re-working some of the fundamental, and by-then tired, rules of Petrarchism. Joel Fineman has famously argued that 'in his sonnets, Shakespeare comes upon, i.e., he "invents", the *only* ways in which or through which subjectivity, understood as a particular literary phenomenon, can be coherently thought and effectively produced in the literature of the West' (*Shakespeare's Perjured Eye* 6).[4]

To summarise Fineman's extremely dense argument: by moving from modes of writing that correspond to Lacan's Imaginary, to the Symbolic, Shakespeare moves from a visionary subject, a subject of vision, who presents what he sees, to a subject whose language can only re-present. Linguistic representation succeeds visual reflection in Shakespeare's sonnets.

This teleology of the modern poetic subject corresponds to the sequence's structural use of two beloveds. Traditionally, the first 126 sonnets are read as being addressed to a fair young nobleman, and the last twenty-eight to a woman, called the Dark Lady because of her complexion, but also because of her sexual morality. The sonnets to the young man, says Fineman, are sonnets of visionary truth, of sameness. The young man is 'fair, kind, and true' (Sonnet 105): not just blonde but light, which enables vision; not just compassionate but kind to his kind – to those like him, which includes his poet; and for these reasons, not just faithful, but an accurate reflection. Shakespeare's poet stresses this homology, in lines like, ''Tis thee (myself) that for myself I praise' (Sonnet 62).

The poet tries to find recourse in this strategy of ideal substitution when he has to deal with the disruptive, the splitting force, introduced by the Dark Lady, who, Fineman says, is the sign of linguistic and sexual difference. In one of the sonnets which suggests that the two beloveds have paired off, abandoning their poet, he says:

> That thou hast her it is not all my grief,
> And yet it may be said I loved her dearly;
> That she hath thee is of my wailing chief;

> A loss in love that touches me more nearly . . .
> But here's the joy, my friend and I are one;
> Sweet flattery! Then she loves but me alone.
> (Sonnet 42)

The woman brings in the 'difference' that the poet 'leaves out' of his ideal romance with the young man (Sonnet 105, line 8). The structure of the sequence (and within individual sonnets) thus depends upon 'the opposition between vision and language', and 'the mode of likeness associated with vision is opposed to the mode of difference associated with language' (Fineman, *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye* 16).

Fineman is evidently drawing on Lacan and on the structuralist and post-structuralist notions of language which influenced his theory of the unconscious. Because the woman is the difference which comes between the homologous men, 'the difference between likeness and difference is difference itself' (Fineman, *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye* 16). In other words, if the progression from the Imaginary to the Symbolic is the acquisition of modern poetic subjectivity, this subject, by the definition provided by Fineman, is male, and also, as I shall argue in more detail shortly, misogynistic.

Another way of putting this is that the Lacanian subject is misogynistic. Fineman argues elsewhere that Lacan is Shakespearean in his theoretical accounts of subjectivity. That is, Shakespeare's modern poetic subject, as expressed in the sonnets, is the same subject described by Lacan. Paul Verhaeghe's description of the Lacanian subject makes these resonances clear: '[T]he subject, confronted with the enigma of the desire of the Other, tries to verbalise this desire and thus constitutes itself . . . without ever succeeding in filling the gap between subject and Other' (cit. in Homer 74). In order to be confronted thus, the Lacanian subject first moves through 'a process of alienation through language' (Homer 74). This is the movement of the subject traced by Fineman in Shakespeare's sonnets. Fineman goes so far as to state that 'the Lacanian subject in particular, and the

psychoanalytic subject in general, [are] epiphenomenal consequences of the Renaissance invention of the literary subject' ('Shakespeare's Ear' 8).

Certainly early modern ideologies of sexual difference and gender identity have been important for much of the literary critical scholarship in the field in the last four decades. Cultural materialist, new historicist and feminist critics have sought to understand how the desiring early modern subject made sense of gender and sexuality.[5]

Fineman's reading of the subject of Shakespeare's sonnets thus suggests a way in to reading the first Petrarchan sequence by an Englishwoman. If Shakespeare's poet marks the invention of a modern poetic subjectivity, then Wroth's sequence, whose publication postdates Shakespeare's sonnets by some twelve years, suggests that this subjectivity most easily accommodates a speaker who is gendered male. This gendered subjectivity, which can be accounted for in Lacanian terms, arises out of the historical conditions of possibility for women to speak in public in early modern England.

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The more we learn about the position of women in early modernity, the harder it is to generalise about it (Pacheco), but the prevailing discourses suggest that whether or not women were understood as inferior to men (Laqueur), their sexuality was in need of rigorous control. Female sexuality (whichever way we understand its workings in the period) is different to, and therefore, in the logic of a patriarchal economy, subject to, the male.

What psychoanalysis sees as the inescapable fact of sexual difference underlies how it begins its task of mapping the origins of consciousness. Since language, in structuralist terms, is seen to be a system of differences, and the entry into gender is the subject's first experience of difference, sexual difference is the primary category of meaning-making in the human psyche. Desire comes about when the subject realises the lack that marks

him or her as a subject. If desire is lack, and this lack is impossible to fill, then it is doubly so for female subjects, who, following traditional psychoanalytic thought, are both the cause and the sign of lack.

This burden, whether or not it accurately describes a trans-historical and trans-cultural framework, certainly describes a misogynistic Western tradition. Jonathan Dollimore points out that 'the related notions of desire as lack, the impossibility of desire, and the desiring subject as ineluctably split have history in Western thought older than psychoanalysis' (256). This history includes Plato, Augustine, and Hegel (Grosz, 'Refiguring Lesbian Desire'). What psychoanalysis offers us is a theoretical model and a vocabulary which at the least seeks to describe the relation between the constitution of the subject and the gendering practices of this Western history.

Profound heterosexism is implicit in Freud's theorisation of the incest taboo and the subsequent repressions and substitutions which form the 'normal' desiring subject, and which Lacan extended into the notion of the unconscious as the realm of the signifier. If we follow Judith Butler's assertion that when sex is 'understood … to necessitate gender – where gender is a psychic and/or cultural designation of the self – and desire – where desire is heterosexual and therefore differentiates itself through an oppositional relation to that other gender' (30), then gender requires heterosexuality.

Fineman is explicit that in his formulation, Shakespeare's modern poetic subject's heterosexual desire is desire for 'that which is not admired' (*Shakespeare's Perjured Eye* 17). By definition, entrance in to this Symbolic order, requires the acknowledgement, through the female body, of the loss of the phallus. Clearly, 'that which is not admired' is the female.

Fineman suggests that Shakespeare's poetic subject experiences the retrospective nature of his ideal homologous love through the debased nature of his heterosexual lust:

> [T]he very present and the very presence of the lady . . . will situate the poetics of ideal visionary presence in a retrospective

> past, marking it as something which exists 'now' only as an imaginary ideal *after which* the poet lusts. . . . [H]er very presence will elicit a desire that her very presence at the same time will frustrate (*Shakespeare's Perjured Eye* 24).

The poet, in other words, lusts after the woman; he experiences lust after he encounters her and loses his young man ('the fair youth') to her. Her disruption of his idealised visionary poetics, her introduction of difference – of femaleness – introduces the awareness of sexual difference necessary to the acquisition of modern poetic (that is to say, in Fineman's argument, of Lacanian, psychoanalytic) subjectivity. At the same time she introduces the awareness of loss, the lost plenitude of the Imaginary relationship with his young man. She marks heterosexual desire. As her difference enables the poet's shift into the realm of the Symbolic, so this move ensures his existence as split subject, as desiring subject, as subject experiencing a lack that he will never fill.

The desire of this subject is disgusting: 'The expense of spirit in a waste of shame / Is lust in action' (Sonnet 129). The self entering this language, then, is not only male, but the nature of his desire includes an awareness of its inadequacy, which, since it is desire for the woman, adds to its misogyny.

There is a further complication for the female subject in this model. For Freud, the libido is masculine, and 'the phrase "female libido" cannot possibly be justified' (*New Introductory Lectures* 169). At psychoanalysis's inception, active female desire was an impossibility: even for Lacan feminine *jouissance*, defined as essentially different from its masculine counterpart, is beyond language and thus unknowable. Certainly within Petrarchism, the female beloved is precluded from active desire. Her goodness, which ensures her worth, is a result of her chastity.

In early modern gender ideology, the eager woman was by definition suspect, her eagerness the proof of her lack of control. The link between sexual availability and the willingness to engage in public discourse was

explicit. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Hero is accused of talking with a man at her window, and this is proof that she is 'an approved wanton', 'a common stale', 'more intemperate in [her] blood, / Than Venus, or those pampered animals / That rage in savage sensuality' (IV i 39–55). A pamphlet of 1638, entitled *The Anatomy of a Woman's Tongue*, provides common sense advice in its ditty,

> There was a woman known to be so bold
> That she was noted for a common scold . . .
> She should be ducked over head and ears
> In a deep pond, before her overseers.
> (Cit. in Goreau, *The Whole Duty of a Woman* 145)

Lynda Boose has drawn out the early modern connections between unruly female speech and female sexuality in 'Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds: Taming the Woman's Unruly Member'. Accounting for the linking, and the distrust, of women's sexuality and speech, Boose points out that for early modern dominant ideology,

> Through Eve's open mouth . . . sin and disorder entered the world. Through her verbal and sexual seduction of Adam – through her use of that other open female bodily threshold – sin then became the inescapable curse of humankind. . . . Perpetually guilty, perpetually disorderly, perpetually seductive, Eve and her descendents become *the* problem that society must control. . . .

In psychoanalytic terms,

> A discourse that locates the tongue as the body's 'unruly member' situates female speech as a symbolic relocation of

> the male organ, an unlawful appropriation of phallic authority in which the symbolics of male castration are ominously complicit. If the chastity belt was an earlier design to prevent entrance into one aperture of the deceitfully open female body, the scold's bridle, preventing exit from another, might be imagined as a derivative inversion of the same obsession. Moreover, the very impetus to produce an instrument that actually bridled the tongue and bound it down into a woman's mouth suggests an even more complicated obsession about women's bodies/women's authority than does the chastity belt. . . . Here, the obsession must directly acknowledge, even as it attempts to suppress, the presence in woman of the primary signifier of an authority presumed to be masculine (204).

Thus, the right to speak in public in the early modern period entailed access to an 'authority presumed to be masculine'.

Wroth's poetry demonstrates the difficulty for a heterosexual woman to be the first subject of Petrarchan desire. Published in 1621, the sequence stages an engagement with the Petrarchan rules of speaking desire that reveals the profoundly gendered nature of those rules. Her poetic speaker has to manage the contradiction of being both actively and publicly desiring (as the Petrarchan form by definition inscribes), and a woman who merits admiration – mutually exclusive positions within this social and poetic framework.

The conditions of the sequence's production themselves bespeak the problematic status of a woman claiming the 'authority presumed to be masculine' which publication entailed (Wall). The sequence was appended to Wroth's prose romance, *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*. Edward Denny, Baron of Waltham, accused Wroth of slandering his family in one of the episodes in the *Urania.* Accordingly, Denny wrote Wroth a poem, the original title of which referred to the relevant characters in her romance.

'To Pamphilia from the father-in-law of Seralius' also appeared in seventeenth-century commonplace books under the title, 'To the Lady Mary Wroth for writeing the *Countes of Montgomeryes Urania*' (Roberts, 'Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania*' 33).

Denny's main terms of censure are revealing. He attacks her behaviour in terms of her gender. This entails the reprimand that she should stick to writing about religious matters (no doubt a nod in the direction of her famous aunt Mary Sidney):

> Hermaphrodite in show, in deed a monster
> As by thy words and works all men may conster
> Thy wrathful spite conceived an idle book . . .
> Wherein thou strikes at some mans noble blood
> . . . [Thy] vain comparison for want of wit
> Takes up the oystershell to play with it
> Yet common oysters such as thine gape wide
> And take in pearls or worse at every tide . . .
> How easy wer't to pay thee with thine own
> Returning that which thou thy self hast thrown
> And write a thousand lies of thee at least . . .
> By which thy plainly seest in thine own glass
> How easy tis to bring a lie to pass
> Thus hast thou made thyself a lying wonder
> Fools and their babbles seldom part asunder
> Work o'the Works leave idle books alone
> For wise and worthier women have written none.[6]

Her act of writing negates her femininity, making her a hermaphrodite and a monster. Worse than this, his reference to her 'common oyster' gaping wide to receive all the rubbish of the sea can be read not only as an attack on her mind and her ability to reason, but as an insulting and pornographic

slur on her sexual behaviour. Wroth may have had illegitimate children with a man with whom she had a relationship for most of her life (her cousin, William Herbert, most likely the Amphilanthus of the sequence's title), but Denny's insult implies that she is indiscriminately sexually available. He thus attempts to undermine what she has written by implying she is a shameful failure to her 'sex'.

Wroth replied with a poem that copies the rhymes of Denny's line for line. Called 'Railing Rimes returned upon the Author by Mistress Mary Wroth', it replies:

> Hermaphrodite in sense in Art a monster
> As by your railing rimes the world may conster
> Your spiteful words against a harmless book
> Shows that an ass much like the sire doth look
> Men truly noble fear no touch of blood . . .
> Can such comparisons seem the want of wit
> When oysters have enflamed your blood with it
> But it appears your guiltiness gaped wide
> And filled with dirty doubt your brains swollen tide . . .
> How easily do you now receive your own
> Turned on your self from whence the squib was thrown . . .
> By which you live to see in your own glass
> How hard it is for you to lie and pass
> Thus you have made yourself a lying wonder
> Fools and their pastimes should not part asunder
> Take this then now let railing rimes alone
> For wise and worthier men have written none.

Since she cannot return the attack in a specifically gendered manner, because he has not transgressed socially accepted gender norms, she instead shows him to be a fool.

Nevertheless, the *Urania* was retracted in December of the year it was published. This was perhaps owing to Wroth's status as an impoverished widow, banished from courtly favour. She expended a fair amount of energy trying to reclaim all the copies of the *Urania.* Her situation was so grave she had to appeal to the powerful friends she still had. In her letter to the politically influential Duke of Buckingham she says: 'My Lord . . . I have with all care caused the sale of [my booke] to bee forbidden . . . which from the first were solde againste my minde I never purposing to have had them published' (Roberts, 'Labyrinth of the Mind' 236). Whether or not this is true, she asks Buckingham to procure her the king's warrant to force all copies of the book in circulation to be returned. The extent of the displeasure she had incurred may be inferred from a letter she wrote to William Feilding, Earl of Denbigh, in which she enclosed copies of both of the furious letters Denny had sent her. In the first of these he tells her to 'repent you of so many ill spent years of so vaine a booke and . . . redeeme the tym with writing as large a volume of heavenly lays and holy love as you have of lascivious tales and amorous toyes'. Significantly, he invokes her aunt, Mary Sidney (Herbert), Countess of Pembroke,

> who translated so many godly books and especially the holly psalmes of David, that no doubt now shee sings in the quier of Heaven those devine meditations . . . which being left us heer on earth will begett hir dayley more and more glory in heaven as others by [*whome*] <them> shalbe enlightened . . . with which prayer for you I end (cit. in *Poems of Lady Mary Wroth* 239).

Denny is invoking the commonplace stereotype of the pious woman, with its concomitant implication that a woman's only active duty is to uplift others spiritually with her purity and goodness (the role of the Petrarchan mistress, and, arguably, the role of the woman within Petrarchism). Thus it

is not only outrageous but selfish and unnatural that Wroth wrote about 'lascivious tales' instead of 'holy love'. This stricture on her right to write about worldly matters is apposite to her poet Pamphilia's difficulties in articulating her desire publicly, a difficulty she never resolves in the course of her sequence.

Despite her best attempts at appealing to people in power whom she knew or with whom she had connections, the king, that 'woman-hating, hag-ridden Scot' (Davies 28) eventually intervened, and Wroth was forced to recall all the copies of her manuscript. In her letter to Feilding, Wroth also included copies of the poems, with Denny's insulting remarks and her clever reply, 'in hope that through his influence with James, [Feilding] might "make all well with his Majestie"' (Roberts, 'Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania*' 126). Denny triumphantly writes to her,

> Madam. I will make no further replie to your distempers; I but still profess and ever be redie to justifie what in my letter I have averred. You may have heard I doubt not by some of your best frends what hath come to the Kings eares. . . . Thus without your Ladyships further trouble I still must rest;/ Your truly well wishing frend/ if you could think so/ Edward Denny (cit. in *Poems of Lady Mary Wroth* 241).

This squabble over Wroth's right to write in particular ways illustrates that to venture into the realm of circulation beyond a controlled family sphere, especially in order to make public display of apparently personal matters (one of the functions of Petrarchism), was an activity fraught with specific risks for women. It indicates, too, that Wroth herself was aware of these rules, and subject to them. This was the case, her poetry suggests, as she engaged in the task of writing a Petrarchan sequence from the point of view of a woman lover.

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That Wroth is actively engaged in appropriating a tradition is clear in the first sonnet of the cycle. Lying asleep, in 'Death's image', Pamphilia dreams of Venus and Cupid:

> . . . one heart flaming more then all the rest
> The goddess held, and putt itt to my brest,
> Deare sonne, now shutt sayd she . . .
> Hee her obay'd, and martir'd my poore hart,
> I, waking, hop'd as dreams itt would depart
> Yett since: O mee, a lover I have binn.

For the heart of the poet to be singled out from 'all the rest' is typically Petrarchan, as is the idea that the speaker is in pain as a result of her love. Here, however, stylised Petrarchan pain is inflected by the double torment: Pamphilia's heart, already burning, is subsequently martyred by Cupid in a striking image of impalement. Venus's cruelty is notable. The emphasis that results from the intense doubling is repeated in this opening sonnet. Pamphilia invokes both an image and a dream. By supplanting the acquisition of her lover-status in a dream within an image, she actively defers the poetic speaker from the Petrarchan staples into which this opening sonnet simultaneously inserts her.

Throughout the sequence Pamphilia displays an awareness of Petrarchan conventions by intensely invoking, and simultaneously deferring from, them. For instance, she never blazons her beloved. Instead, she obsessively splits herself into parts – her eyes and her heart are the most frequently apostrophised. In 'Song 3' (*Poems* 21), a radical fragmentation of self can be found which moves from the physical into the psychic:

Stay, my thoughts, do nott aspire
To vaine hopes of high desire:
See you nott all means bereft
To injoye? Noe joy is left;
Yett still mee thinks my thoughts doe say
Some hopes do live amid dismay . . .
Thought hath yett some comfort giv'ne
Which dispaire hath from us drivn . . .

The fragmentation typical of the Petrarchan lady is internalised: within the song she is separate from her thoughts, a kind of dual vision of personal subjectivity: 'dispaire hath [comfort] from *us* drivn'. Turning explicitly inward, the first female Petrarchan lover does not find a subject position. Instead, she becomes multiple: the Irigarayan not-one, outside of the Symbolic economy which cannot accommodate her.

The intensification of Petrarchan tropes, which is simultaneously a distancing from them, is also found in the ways Pamphilia utilises the typical trope of the lover's lost heart. The peculiarly painful inflection established in the first sonnet continues throughout the sequence (it extends into the trope of burning with desire, as will be seen below). Punning on 'part', and thus establishing an economy of parts, she says to Amphilanthus,

In your journey take my hart . . .
Soe in part, wee shall nott part . . .
Butt can I live having lost
Chieftest part of mee . . .
Yett deere hart goe, soone returne
As good there, as heere to burne.
(Song 4, *Poems* 28)

The suffering, burning lover is typical of the genre; the lover split into parts by her very identity as Petrarchan lover is not. She has to cope with the lack which she understands as being caused by the giving away of her heart, a standard Petrarchan trope. Thus, having engaged in the activity of giving away the 'Chieftest part' of any lover's self, she goes on to predicate a fundamental absence within herself which can only be filled by his organ:

> Butt if you will bee kind . . .
> Send mee your hart which in mines place shall feed . . .
> Ther shall itt see the sacrifises made
> Of pure, and spotless love which shall not vade
> While soule, and body are together found.
> (Song 4, *Poems* 30)

By conceptualising herself as having an empty space whose possibility for acquiring content depends on what he can supply, she invariably invokes the no-thing whose pun on sexual difference was contemporary slang. There are further consequences for Pamphilia's conception of her heart's displacement. The image of her lover's voracious heart feeding inside her breast and voyeuristically viewing her innermost 'sacrifises', gives a violent, uncomfortable twist to the typical Petrarchan trope of the lost heart. That she explicitly emphasises the 'pure, and spotless' nature of her love takes on a gendered resonance, given that her need for Amphilanthus's heart is an expression of desire. By contrasting her beloved's rapacious, gazing heart with her own 'pure, and spotless love', Pamphilia withdraws from the reality of the sexual importunity vocalised by, for example, Astrophil, who as a male lover can say, 'But ah, Desire still cries, give me some food' (*Astrophil and Stella* 71). By purging her longing of desire, Pamphilia remains within the public discourse of the good woman. She also takes on the identity typically available to a woman within Petrarchism, she who does not desire. In psychoanalytic terms, she who does not desire is no subject at all.

Pamphilia's need to purge her poetry of her desire because of the rules for speaking of desire for women, results in the image of her displaced heart – the gap at the centre – remaining a lacuna. The desire that would enable the movement into subjectivity is lacking, is replaced by lack.

Absence and loss, as typical Petrarchan motifs, are central to Wroth's poetry, but again their invocation is different in quality, bringing an absoluteness which contains no hope for change: 'The missing of the sunn awhile makes night / Butt absence of my joy sees never Light' (*Poems* 23). The fundamental absence at the heart, and in the heart, of the speaker of these poems sits uncomfortably, as does Pamphilia herself, with the courtly, public nature of Petrarchism.

This publicity is something of which Petrarchan lovers are well aware. Astrophil defines himself against those myriad poets who 'poor *Petrarchs* long deceased woes . . . / do sing' (*Astrophil and Stella* 15), and although he may be staking his claim as an inventor, as opposed to a slavish imitator with nothing interesting to add to an exhausted tradition, his poetry still rests firmly and confidently on the tradition he derides. Without poor Petrarch's long deceased woes, there would be no Astrophil; and he needs the public awareness of the Petrarchan tradition in order to set himself up as a true lover, not merely a poet utilising a tradition. 'I can speake what I feele, and feele as much as they,' he says, 'But thinke that all the Map of my state I display / When trembling voice brings forth that I do Stella love' (*Astrophil and Stella* 6). Similarly Pamphilia says, 'Itt is nott love which you poore fooles do deeme / That doth apeare by fond, and outward showes' (*Poems* 46). It is a typical strategy of the best Petrarchan lovers to identify themselves as being truly in love, and not merely with the poetry they can produce from a Petrarchan situation. After all, poetry of praise that doesn't profess its praise as genuine is no praise at all. Both Astrophil and Shakespeare's Will display this awareness. It is significant here that Pamphilia's responses to her context display, not an opportunity to enhance

her own status as a lover, but a self-imposed deprivation of meaning – another self-created absence.

First, she is very aware of a need to be silent in order to protect herself – she has to ensure that she does not 'betray my harts most secrett thought' (*Poems* 39) – which directly contradicts the 'relentlessly public' nature of Petrarchism (Masten 76). Silence is a feature of Renaissance love poetry – witness Shakespeare's tautological 'Who is it that says most, which can say more / Than this rich praise, that you alone are you' (Sonnet 84) or his insistence that, looking on the young man, 'we . . . lack tongues to praise' (Sonnet 106), or Astrophil's 'What may words say, or what may words not say, / Where truth itself must speake like flatterie?' (*Astrophil and Stella* 35).

However, not to be able to speak because you have not the skill, because you cannot, is very different to not being able to speak because you are afraid to, because you may not. As a woman in a Renaissance context, Pamphilia does not have the same access to the language of Petrarchan love and desire as Sidney's Astrophil or Shakespeare's Will. It would violate decorum if a woman were to speak public praise of a beloved. Male poets could enter into a public debate about the problems of expressing sincere love within a tradition of praise poetry; women were not to enter public debate at all, let alone one concerned with the expression of desire. In this way the historical possibilities inform the Symbolic, and the position of desiring speaker is marked by gender as an informing constituent.

In order to avoid having to speak her love, then, Pamphilia says to those around her:

> Good now, bee still, and doe nott mee torment
> With multituds of questions, bee att rest,
> . . . must I ever bee oprest
> With your toungue torture which will ne'er bee spent?
> Well then I see noe way butt this will fright

> That Divell speach; Alas I ame possesst,
> And mad folks senceles ar of wisdomes right.
> (*Poems* 52)

Thus her words, the very entities of subjectivity for the Petrarchan poet and for the Lacanian subject, are rendered worse than nonsensical: 'I ame possesst / And mad folks senceles ar of wisdomes right'. Speech becomes a devil, the torture instrument of the outside world from which Pamphilia must hide her love, and therefore her words – that is: her desire, her desiring self, her self. While she has succeeded in producing a Petrarchan sonnet sequence, she has also to recant that very sequence, as the Symbolic register in which she must attempt to work has no pre-constituted space for her voice. Thus as she invokes the tradition, so she simultaneously defers from it. In *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* the poetry moves in a circular motion that makes the process of self-constitution a hollow activity, an activity of absence. Wroth therefore creates a new kind of Petrarchan absence: the absence of the female lover in the Petrarchan Symbolic.

Consequently, in her poetry Pamphilia repeatedly mourns her status as Petrarchan lover: 'if with griefe I now must coupled bee / Sorrow I'le wed: Dispaire thus governs mee' (*Poems* 10) ; 'I should nott have bin made this stage of woe / Wher sad disasters have theyr open showe' (*Poems* 48). She distrusts Petrarchan desire, because of its public aspect. What is enabling for the male poet is compromising for the female speaker. Wroth's subject's entry into the realm of public desire is accompanied by 'Feare to be mark'd', that is, seen (but, perhaps, unconsciously, also gendered in the terms offered by the Petrarchan economy):

> When I beheld the Image of my deere
> With greedy lookes mine eyes would that way bend,
> Fear, and desire did inwardly contend;
> Feare to be mark'd, desire to drawe still neere,

> And in my soule a speritt would appear,
> Which boldness warranted, and did pretend
> To bee my genius, yett I durst not lend
> My eyes in trust wher others seemed soe cleere . . .
> Yet in my hart unseene of jealous eye
> The truer Image shall in triumph lye.
>
> (*Poems* 98)

The return to her heart, to the image of the beloved engraved there, is typically Petrarchan, as in Sidney's famous line, 'Fool, said my Muse to me, Look in thy heart and write' (*Astrophil and Stella* 1). What is noteworthy in this, and other poems to this effect in the sequence, is that the act of being seen by others' 'jealous eye[s]' is the reason for Pamphilia's retreat inward to an ideal Imaginary state. The entry into the Petrarchan Symbolic is a move she constantly resists, and yet it is this move that the Petrarchan poet typically embraces. Indeed, it is his *raison d'être*. Arguably, her poet is reluctant to embrace the gendered position available to her in this economy. In this sequence, Wroth repudiates the binary on which sexual difference depends, by refusing, or being unable, to invoke any of the strategies which rely on the self-other mode of subject-constitution. She cannot use her beloved as a mirror, because she has no access to the right to gaze (Distiller, 'A Gendered Petrarchanism'); any gazing she does must be internal, 'in my hart, unseene of jealous eye'. Furthermore, he is no use to her as an ideal Image because he is always already looking elsewhere, as his name suggests: 'Amphilanthus' means 'lover of two'.

If the psychoanalytic subject achieves himself by entering into the state of desire, which involves constantly reaching back towards an Imagined union whose potential for plenitude draws him ever onwards, so the act of reaching for the beloved expressed in Petrarchism is a gesture towards a fulfilment whose achievement would signal the end of the poetry, the cessation and silence of death. But Amphilanthus has never been a potential

source of Imaginary union; any such possibility is always already disrupted by the focus of his desire elsewhere, as well as by the injunction against being seen to look at him. Therefore Pamphilia's desire cannot be expressed as a lack always-already moving towards its fulfilment, a desire that exists in the movement forward. If one of the models for desire in Western thought accounts for the lack that enables it by seeing the female body as lacking, Wroth's Pamphilia's desire, lacking its object differently, reveals the cost for a desiring female speaker of the psychoanalytic logic which feminises lack (Grosz, 'Refiguring Lesbian Desire'). Instead, as I have suggested, her lack comes to stand for the lack of the subject who is gendered female in such an economy. Her lack obsessively, circularly, inscribes the no-thing on which the until-now-always-male Petrarchan lover's speaking depends for its thing-ness, its signifying phallic presence (albeit, in Lacanian terms, an illusion of presence).

Her Petrarchan desire, rather than offering her the (albeit always-deferred) chance for redemption, is obsessively cast and re-cast in the sequence as dangerous or destructive, rather than constitutive. Petrarchan poets typically burn with desire as evidence of their suffering; Pamphilia is immolated by hers. From the sequence's opening sonnet, where her 'heart blazing more than all the rest' is impaled by Cupid's arrow, marking her in typically Petrarchan fashion as the isolated lover, the trope of 'the fires of love' (*Poems* 33) is a primary image in the sequence. But the fire image, although conventional, is unconventionally apocalyptic in this instance: Pamphilia's 'soule, and dying hart intire' are likened to 'the ashes of some happy fire' (*Poems* 15); 'Mine eyes can scarce sustain the flames my heart / Doth trust in them my passions to impart . . . / Yett love I will till I butt ashes prove' (*Poems* 55). The subjectivity brought into being by this desire is ultimately a kind of burnt offering, something reduced to ashes, to nothing but traces.

At the end of the sequence, Pamphilia renounces this fire, fully aware that in rejecting desire she is choosing silence:

> My muse . . . lay thyself to rest . . .
> Write you noe more . . .
> 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 . . .
>
> (*Poems* 103)

She opts for 'constancy' in the final line of this last poem, which in this context signifies both unchanging emotion, and chastity. Pamphilia's choice of chastity, although it means she has to stop writing, is also a choice to renounce this suffering without end, without profit, without hope, that is her gendered experience of Petrarchan subjectivity. While the suffering poet is a typically Petrarchan position, what it leaves out in Pamphilia's case is the *jouissance* of the self performed in, achieving, the Symbolic. This, I suggest, is because as a subject gendered female, her access to selfhood is compromised by the economy which seeks to define her.

NOTES

1. The argument made in this article is developed in more detail in my forthcoming book on *Desire and Gender in the Sonnet Tradition*.
2. For a discussion on the psychoanalytical aspects of the courtier's self-fashioning, see Korda.
3. Heather Dubrow, following Ilona Bell, uses this term to mark an awareness that to be 'un'-Petrarchan is also to be typically Petrarchan (*Echoes of Desire* 7).
4. Lynn Enterline traces this linguistic subject to Petrarch's adaptation of Ovid.
5. For further examples, see Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy* and 'Disrupting sexual difference'. See also Rose, Smith, Montrose and Jardine.
6. This poem, and its reply, and all poems from *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, are from Roberts's edition of *The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth*, as is the numerical designation of each sonnet.

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