A Feminine Crevice in the Male Genre:
Lady Mary Wroth’s *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* vs. Sir Philip Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*

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**Abstract**

This paper studies two sonnet sequences: Sir Philip Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella* and Lady Mary Wroth’s *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* from the French feminist perspective (especially Irigaray’s idea of mimesis). Following those conventions set by Petrarch, most of the sonnet sequences in the sixteenth and the earlier seventeenth centuries focus on exploring the contradictory feelings a lover experiences when he sues a beautiful but aloof lady, and therefore, are usually regarded as a male genre. As Sidney’s niece, Wroth was heavily influenced by Sidney and her sonnet sequence is seemingly a mimesis of Sidney’s. Through a feminist scrutiny, this paper tries to show that Wroth’s sonnet sequence is not only a repetition of this male genre but also subversion. Different from Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*, which silences and effaces the beloved lady, Wroth’s *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, retrieving the female voice and subjectivity, helps us have a better and balanced view of the sonnet world in the sixteenth and earlier seventeenth centuries.

**Keywords:** sonnet sequence, Petrarchan convention, sexual difference, male genre, mimesis, subversion

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In the sixteenth century, the sonnet is a most prevalent lyric genre. Its conventions were established by the Italian poet Petrarch (1304-1374), and were introduced to England by Sir Thomas Wyatt the Elder and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey in the reign of Henry VIII. The Petrarchan sonnet sequence is a series of fourteen-line sonnets exploring the contradictory feelings a lover experiences when he suits a beautiful but aloof lady. In England, Sir Philip Sidney’s sonnet cycle *Astrophil and Stella* (1591) is the first of the great Elizabethan sonnet cycles and is an imitation of Petrarchan sonnet sequence. One later sonnet sequence (1621) written by Lady Mary Wroth is a very special one because her *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* is written by a female poet with a female persona, who, by addressing her male beloved, expresses her love, emotions and conflicts. Lady Mary Wroth is extraordinary since in Western civilization, writing is a traditional privilege of the male as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have argued that “the text’s author is a father... More, his pen’s power, like his penis’s power, is not just the ability to generate life but the power to create a posterity to which he lays claim” (6). As Kim Walker’s observation in *Women Writers of the English Renaissance*, in the Renaissance, writing was not encouraged for women, and literary writing was even more problematic and caused more anxiety in society, especially when publica-

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1 Michael R. G Spiller in *The Development of The Sonnet: An Introduction* explains that the title *Astrophel and Stella* was given as far as is known by its first publisher, Thomas Newman, in 1591. Sidney refers to himself as “Astrophil,” the correct Greek coinage for “lover of a star” twice in *Astrophel and Stella* and everyone who uses the name before Newman’s edition spells it with an “i”. Modern practice is to use the “i” form but Spiller insists on using the spelling of the original printed title, that is, the “e” form (213). Here in this paper I will use the “i” form because it can remind people of its Greek origin and that is Sidney’s purpose in choosing this name. Yet, in those quotations, I will respect the individual author’s personal preference. Therefore, the spelling of that word “Astroph(e)l” will not be consistent in this paper.
tion was involved (21). When silence of women in both speech and writing is idealized, “Wroth is particularly significant because she chose to write in courtly genres that were traditionally the preserve of male writers” (Walker 170). Being a niece of Sir Philip Sidney, Lady Mary Wroth has been much influenced by Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*, but her sequence also presents a very good contrast to those written by male poets, especially the one written by her uncle, Sir Philip Sidney. In this paper, the scrutiny of Lady Mary Wroth’s *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* and Sir Philip Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella* in the frame of French feminism may help to show that Lady Mary Wroth’s sonnet sequence is both the mimicry and, more significantly, a marvelous subversion of this male genre.

In the patriarchal society, women have long been deprived of the right to speech; psychoanalysts even theorize this silence as the developmental inevitability. Lacan, for example, emphasizing the acquisition of language (the basic symbolic order) in his re-reading of Freud’s theory,² points out that the father’s intervention is necessary for the child to enter the symbolic order and it is the phallus which symbolizes the law on which the social order is founded. The law the father represents is the law of language and the subject is the subject of language. Therefore, in this phallocentric society a girl is not able to enter the symbolic order; that is, she cannot be the subject in an authorized speaking position because she is positioned as castrated and passive. This is why Lacan’s famous maxim says, “The woman does not exist” (*Television* 60). Yet, the famous French feminist Luce Irigaray says, in “Cosi Fan Tutti” in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, “That woman does not exist owing to the fact that language—a

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² My reading of Lacan mainly comes from *Ecrits: A Selection*.
language—rules as master, and that she threatens—as a sort of ‘prediscursive reality’?—to disrupt its order” (89). Man, as the master in the symbolic world, is the speaking subject of the masculine language; while woman, as the silenced other, is excluded from language, the symbolic order. Yet, Irigaray believes that woman has the dynamics to disrupt the symbolic order. In “Sexual Difference”, Irigaray preaches the establishment of a different symbolic order, in which the sexual differences can exist (The Irigaray Reader 165-77). Knowing the difficulty of reestablishing a different symbolic order, in “The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine,” Irigaray suggests that woman should start their revolution through mimicry with sexual difference. She thus explains:

There is, in an initial phase, perhaps only one “path,” the one historically assigned to the feminine: that of mimicry. One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it. Whereas a direct feminine challenge to this condition means demanding to speak as a (masculine) “subject,” that is, it means to postulate a relation to the intelligible that would maintain sexual indifference.

To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself—inasmuch as she is on the side of the “perceptible,” of “matter”—to “ideas,” in particular to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to
make "visible," by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language. (*The Sex Which Is Not One*, 76)

For Irigary, this mimicry is not just imitation or repetition but repetition with difference, especially sexual difference. In the process, the woman should resubmit herself with the sexual difference to the symbolic order, in order to make visible that which is concealed in the masculine discourse, and to make known the exploitation of woman in the masculine logic.

Wroth’s *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* basically follows Sidney’s example in *Astrophil and Stella* but her sex, the sex of the persona and some other sexual differences seem to make her work a mimicry with sexual difference that is suggested by Irigaray. As a female poet in the 17th century, Wroth, of course, does not have the intention to subvert the masculine order with sexual difference as is presented in Irigaray’s idea, but her work really makes visible the operation of the feminine in language that is supposed to be invisible. In my analysis of the two sonnet sequences, the focus will be put on the sexual differences in Wroth’s work that seem able to subvert the masculine repression in this male genre.

Wroth’s *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, similar to Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*, is directly related to some events in the poet’s life. In *Astrophil and Stella*, it is believed that Sidney describes his love to Penelope Devereux after her marriage to Lord Rich. According to W. A. Ringler and Malcolm William Wallace, Sid- ney met Penelope Devereux in about 1575

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3 The events in Sidney’s life mentioned here are mainly references to W. A. Ringler’s *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney* and Malcolm William Wallace’s *The Life of Sir Philip Sidney.*
when she was only about thirteen years old, and her father intended to have Sidney marry Penelope Devereux and even mentioned that in his dying wish. Yet after Penelope’s father died and did not leave her and her sister any considerable amount of wealth, she was not so eligible to Sidney. It seems that Sidney had put aside absolutely all thought of this marriage, because he was anxious during part of the years 1577 and 1578 to win the consent of the Queen to his union with a princess of the house of Orange. According to Wallace, Sidney must have had very unusual opportunities of seeing Penelope Devereux for nearly five years before her marriage in 1581, because during that period he spent quite a great part of it living at her home, the home of the Earl of Leicester, who was Penelope’s stepfather and also to whose vast estates Sidney was the presumptive heir. This background information makes us wonder the reason that Sidney felt regret only after Penelope was engaged with Lord Rich. Besides, “it was only a few months after Penelope Devereux became Lady Rich that Sidney began to plan his own marriage with the daughter of his friend Walsingham” (Wallace 255). Therefore Wallace concludes, “Before this time we may be sure that his passion had swept over him, and there is no reason to believe that it had left him with a jaundiced eyes” (255). We do not know exactly when Sidney fell in love with Penelope but critics generally believe that most of the sonnets in this sequence were written after Penelope’s marriage to Lord Rich.4 And in the sequence Sidney seemingly spoke of

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4 J. A. Symonds in *Sir Philip Sidney* says, “I have committed myself to the opinion that *Astrophel and Stella* was composed, if not wholly, yet in by far the greater part, after Lady Rich’s marriage. Wallace says, “The first 32 sonnets, with the single exception of number 24—the punning invective against Lord Rich—were obviously written before Penelope’s marriage, and they bear out the theory that up to this time both Sidney and Penelope were heart-whole” (249).
his love to Lady Rich and of his woe that he could hardly get her through the speaker “Astrophil.” Therefore, Astrophil is actually the mouthpiece of Sidney.

The reason for Lady Mary Wroth to write her sonnet sequence is somewhat similar. Wroth’s husband died shortly after their first son was born and then in the following two years she had two illegitimate children, one in each year, with William Herbert. Since Lady Mary Wroth in *Urania* said that Pamphilia and Amphilanthus were first cousins, it causes Josephine A. Roberts to believe that only William Herbert, Wroth’s first cousin, would meet this qualification and he should be Amphilanthus (43). So, “[l]ike Astrophil, Pamphilia engages in an internal struggle between rebellion and submission to love” (Roberts 46).

In their real life both Philip Sidney and Mary Wroth fell in love with someone they should not love and through the speaker in their respective sonnet sequence they express their ambivalent feelings toward this love and the conflict between joy and woe they get from this love. Inspired and influence by her uncle Sidney, Wroth imitates Sidney’s sequence and follows the Petrarchan convention in her theme, conceits, and images, and we can find quite a few influences from Sidney in her love sonnets.7

There are some similarities in Wroth’s *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* and Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*. In quite a few sonnets in *Pamphilia to Am-
philanthus, Wroth imitates her uncle’s way in describing her feeling. For example, in Sonnet 14, Pamphilia declares that she loses her freedom because she is in love: “Am I thus conquer’d? have I lost the powers / That to withstand, which joy’s to ruin mee? / Must I bee still while itt my strength devowres / And captive leads mee prisoner, bound, unfree?” (1-4). This is similar to Sidney’s Sonnet 47, in which Astrophil says, “What, have I thus betray’d my liberty? / Can those black beams such burning marks engrave / In my free side, or am I born a slave, / Whose neck becomes such yoke of tyranny?” (1-4). Both of them lose their freedom and they try to regain their liberty by giving up the love. So, Astrophil says, “I may, I must, I can, I will, I do / Leave following that which it is gain to miss. / Let her go!” (10-12). And Pamphilia says, “Why should wee nott loves purblind charmes resist? / Must wee bee servile, doing what hee list? / Noe, seeke some hoste to harbour thee: I fly” (9-11). It is interesting that Astrophil passively says, “Let her go” while Pamphilia takes the initiative by saying, “I fly.” In spite of their intention to leave, at the end, they still cannot help but give up their freedom. Astrophil continues, “Soft, but here she comes! Go to, / Unkind, I love you not! O me, that eye / Doth make my heart to give my tongue the lie” (12-14). And Pamphilia ends her sonnet this way, “Thy babish trickes, and freedom doe profess; / Butt O my hurt, makes my lost hart confess / I love, and must: So farwell liberty” (12-14). It is obvious that Wroth follows Sidney’s example but her different sex makes this similarity significant. Wroth does not take the object role assigned to women in the male sonnet sequence, but her female protagonist speaks as a speaking subject to express her feelings. Hence we are able to understand that it is not only the male but also the female
that are in love lose their liberty.

There are also other similarities. For example, Wroth’s Sonnet 16, like Sidney’s Sonnet 39, is an apostrophe to sleep and both speakers express the idea that sleep is death-like and they can keep the dear images of their loved ones in sleep. Similar to Sidney’s Sonnet 94, Wroth’s Sonnet 28 is also an apostrophe to “grief” and in both sonnets the speaker at first complains the torture of grief and then suddenly turns to a resigned attitude to welcome “grief.” In Sidney’s Sonnet 96, Astrophil addresses “night,” “silence,” and “dark thought” and believes that they are quite alike: “Thought, with good cause thou likest so well the night, / Since kind or chance gives both one livery: / Both sadly black, both blackly darkned be, / Night barr’d from sun, thou from thy own sunlight; / Silence in both displays his sullen might” (1-5). Similarly, Wroth’s Sonnet 37 talks about the three companions, “night,” “silence,” and “grief”:

Night, welcome art thou to my mind destrest
Darke, heavy, sad, yet nott more sad then I
Never could’st thou find fitter company
For thine owne humor then I thus oprest.

Silence, and grievfe, with thee I best doe love
And from you three, I know I can nott move,
Then let us live companions without strife. (1-4; 12-14)

With all the similarities between Sidney’s and Wroth’s sonnet sequences, Wroth’s Pamphilia and Amphilanthus seems to be a mimicry of Sidney’s Astrophil and Stella. Yet, because of their different sexes, their works ex-
hibit something very different.

First, their titles show some interesting sexual differences. In Sidney’s sequence the Greek name “Astrophil” of the protagonist means “lover of a star” and “Stella,” the name of the heroin, represents “the star.” Through the names of the two main figures, Sidney shows the male’s active and positive attitude in showing love. Following Sidney’s example, Wroth also chooses names of Greek derivation for her central figures in *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*; however, the names in Lady Mary Wroth’s *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* tell a very different story. The protagonist’s name, Pamphilia, means “all-loving,” while her beloved is called Amphilanthus, a name signifying “the lover of two,” as Wroth explained in the prose text of the *Urania*, where he is shown to be unfaithful to Pamphilia (Roberts 42). Through the two names Wroth intentionally shows Pamphilia’s firm, wholehearted, and indestructible love toward Amphilanthus even though Amphilanthus is unfaithful and loves two women at the same time. If Sidney shows the male’s direct and daring attitude in expressing their love, Wroth’s Pamphilia exhibits women’s compromising and resigned attitude in love. Compared with Astrophil’s active position, Pamphilia seems to be more passive, willing to accept the unfaithful lover and to show all her love to move him. Yet, her courage in voicing out her love subverts the passive status of traditional woman and her sonnets help woman establish subjectivity and identity, since she speaks as a female subject in her sonnet sequence.

In addition, how the two main characters are connected in the title is also meaningful. Both sonneteers entitle their works by including the main characters’ names and in this way the niece’s *Pamphilia to Amphi-
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... lanthus echoes the uncle’s *Astrophil and Stella*. However, Wroth chooses the preposition “to” in her title, instead of the conjunction “and” as Sidney does in his, and this reflects her attempt to write in and against the tradition of this male genre. Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella* seems to indicate that there is going to be an illustration of both characters in this sequence, while Lady Mary Wroth intends to write only about Pamphilia’s feelings to her loved one, Amphilanthus. Since he wants to talk about both Astrophil and Stella, Sidney has to and he really does speak not only for Astrophil but also for Stella; whereas Wroth only expresses Pamphilia’s feelings, with no intention to speak for Amphilanthus.

While speaking for Stella, Sidney, the male poet, actually silences his female character, since her words are given to her by the male poet. In Sidney’s sequence we find the male persona’s depiction of Stella’s beauty and cruelty, the male persona’s inference and conjecture of Stella’s action and response; all this is done through the male-centered discourse of the poet. Besides, the poet’s voicing for the female character results in a double gap, both textual and sexual, between the speaker and the character and therefore we will always doubt the authenticity of the thought and feelings of the female character since they are described by the male poet. Since the male imposes voice on the female character, the whole sequence seems but the male poet’s self-aggrandizement, which ruins the reliability of the whole sequence.

In *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, though Lady Mary Wroth subverts the Petrarchan tradition by using a female speaker, the female timidity and resigned attitude toward the male domination as seen in the work surreptitiously reveals that she dare not aspire to the male authority, and can only
speak for the female character but not for the male character. Thus, Wroth’s sequence presents only a female’s secret and private dedication to her beloved. Nevertheless, this sonnet sequence with a female protagonist seems more significant among those sonnet sequences by male poets in that it retrieves the female voice in a male dominant world, in which women’s voice can seldom be heard.

In addition to the differences in their titles, Wroth also makes visible some sexual differences through the female speaker in her sequence. Different from Sir Philip Sidney’s sonnet sequence, Lady Mary Wroth’s Pamphilia to Amphilanthus helps us see through the love relationship at that time from a different perspective.

First, Wroth’s intention and purpose are quite different from Sidney’s. As mentioned above, Sidney intends to have a public discussion of this love relation while Wroth only depicts the female character’s private feelings toward her beloved.

In the first sonnet of Astrophil and Stella, Sidney talks about his purposes in writing this sequence: “I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe, / Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain” (5-6). So, this sonnet sequence contains two seemingly contradictory purposes: one is to describe the deep woe of the protagonist, Astrophil, and the other to entertain Stella, the supposed reader of the whole sequence. In quite a few of the sonnets Sidney paradoxically exhibits Astrophil’s woe and the pleasure he gets from the woe. For example, in sonnet 57 the speaker declares that woe has taken him totally, and he hopes that his most woeful words

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8 The quotations from Astrophil and Stella in this paper are taken from The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney edited by William A. Ringler, Jr. and Silver Poets of the Sixteenth Century edited by Gerald Bullett.
will find Stella alone, and that she will sweetly sing his plaints “and she, with face and voice, / So sweets my pains that my pains me rejoice” (13-14). In sonnet 58 Astrophil again claims that though he tries to anatomize his woe when he writes the poem, yet when Stella’s sweet voice reads it, he still gets the most joyful delight. He says,

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\text{. . . in piercing phrases late} \\
\text{The anatomy of all my woes I wrate;} \\
\text{Stella’s sweet breath the same to me did read.} \\
\text{O voice! O face! Maugre my speech’s might,} \\
\text{Which wooed woe, most ravishing delight} \\
\text{Even those sad words even in sad me did breed.} \quad (9-14)
\]

Stella’s singing or reading his poems will delight him because he expects that she will be moved by his woe and grant him her love. It seems that Sidney makes use of Astrophil to speak out his mind and the only purpose is to get Penelope’s love.

According to the biographical background mentioned above, however, Sidney’s real purpose is not only Penelope’s love. We must not forget that in England, at that time, sonnets, in addition to the private purpose of showing love, had more important public purpose. According to Ringler and Wallace, Sidney had been extraordinarily active in social and political affairs, but after the spring of 1582 he retired from court and spent several months in apparent inactivity. Thus, Wallace concludes, “The impression which one gains from this first section of the sonnets is of a man, moody and angry with fate, one who would fain have some man’s work to do, who is conscious of abilities that are rusting unused, and who is voicing his
mood of dissatisfaction with life in the form of conventional love sonnets” (251). So, Penelope is, in a way, an excuse to give Sidney the chance to express his complaint for the lack of recognition of his ability. Besides, Waller in *English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century* mentions that in England Petrarchanism is adapted to political purposes. “So Petrarchanism was not simply a charming and sophisticated fashion for court entertainment or for fictionalizing love affairs. It became, especially in the last twenty years of the century, part of public policy” (79). In addition, in *The Development of the Sonnet* Michael R. G. Spiller also declares that “Queen Elizabeth demanded simultaneously respect for her chastity and constant expressions of desire, and it may well be that, in writing to, for and about Stella, Sidney was displacing his frustrated political ambitions” (118).

Here we can see that honor, fame, or reputation seems to play a more important role in a man’s life than woman. This also helps explain why he began to write the sonnet sequence to show his love only after he gave up the engagement with Penelope and she got married to Lord Rich. It is more likely that he had complaint and dissatisfaction in mind and he needed a substitute to help him express them.

Furthermore, as most critics agree, Penelope’s love is not the most important purpose, nor is she the only reader. It is well known that the traditional love sonnet is both public and private. The sonnet seems to be addressed to the lady but actually the poet is always conscious of other readers. In the Elizabethan love sonnets, in order to make love seem an almost heroic subject, the lover within the poetry has to reflect and refer to the world outside him, in order to present something more magnificent than just his own state of mind. Therefore in Elizabethan sonnet se-
quences, “the most important audiences are the ones unnamed, those of us who, through the poems’ history, will read them, meditate upon, and act out their drama” (Waller 148). Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella* follows this convention. Though the sequence seems to be addressed to Stella, in fact, it is a public discussion of the love between Astrophil and Stella. Sidney is always conscious of the existence of other readers and other readers are spoken of or appealed to in some sonnets. In Sonnets 15 and 28 the speaker addresses the reader directly. In Sonnet 74, the speaker asks, “How falls it then, that with so smooth an ease / My thoughts I speak, and what I speak doth flow / In verse, and that my verse best wits doth please?” (9-11). It is likely that in Sidney’s mind, there are always the best wits that he wants to please. Ostensibly, Sidney writes the whole sonnet sequence to move a lady in order to get her love. Yet, actually he has some other goal in mind. In some poems (Sonnets 14, 20, 21, 69) Astrophil talks to his friends, in some other poems (Sonnets 23, 26) he disputes with his contemporary wits, and in still other poems he challenges other poets’ or lovers’ skills. For example, in Sonnets 6, 15, and 28, the speaker challenges other poets’ artifice. He emphasizes that other lovers or poets plead with Muses for help or imitate “poor Petrarch’s long-deceased woes” (Sonnet 15: 7), and he believes that they “take wrong ways” (Sonnet 15: 9). He claims that “I can speak what I feel, and feel as much as they” (Sonnet 6: 12) and “I in pure simplicity / Breathe out the flames which burn within my heart, / Love only reading unto me this art” (Sonnet 28: 12-14). In sonnet 34, Astrophil says that he wants to write to ease his burthened heart and he is worried that wise men will think his words are nothing but foolish trifles (“fond ware”), and in sonnet 54 he states that those courtly ladies,
including Stella, cannot understand his art of expressing love just because he does not follow the conventional way of showing love. In Sonnet 104, he talks about those envious wits’ criticism of his poems. Astrophil asserts that his way of expressing love is different from his contemporary poets and he is proud of his creativity, although he modestly says that “Profess indeed I do not Cupid’s art” (Sonnet 54: 10). We can see that through Astrophil, Sidney seems to show his concerns about his devices and his artifice. And in Sonnet 15 Astrophil says, “But if, both for your love and skill, your name / You seek to nurse at fullest breasts of Fame, / Stella behold, and then begin to indite” (12-14). So, fame is really in his mind and he believes that a poet can get fame by just writing down Stella’s beauty. In Sonnet 34 when Astrophil tries to answer his own question: “Art not ashamed’d to publish thy disease?” he says, “Nay, that may breed my fame, it is so rare” (6). In the next sonnet, the lover-poet asks, “What may words say, or what may words not say, / Where Truth itself must speak like Flattery?” (1-2). Through this complaint, the poet tries to show that because he is good at poetic language, his sincerity will be misunderstood as flattery. Then at the end of this poem, Astrophil further says, “Wit learns in thee perfection to express: / Not thou by praise, but praise in thee is rais’d. / It is a praise to praise, when thou art prais’d” (12-14). Through Astrophil’s compliment on Stella, Sidney also compliments himself. While commenting Sonnet 35, Levao also says, “Astrophil’s protestations of sincerity—his concern that truth sounds too much like flattery—are at once a witty (and soon to be outrageous) compliment and a means of turning his attention back on his own creative act” (161). In Sonnet 90 Astrophil further tries to convince Stella by saying that “Stella, think not that I
by verse seek fame / Who seek, who hope, who love, who live but thee” (1-2). It is obvious that to win the fame is rooted in his mind, and his denying can be just an awkward way of concealing. Therefore, to win his beloved seems an excuse and a means for Sidney to get his fame, both in literary field and political field. As Waller comments, “. . . while Astrophil claims his love is independent of and superior to the public world, such an antithesis is self-deceiving” (155). As both a literary convention and a serious courtly game, as mentioned above, the love sonnet is the field for the interaction of discourse of love and that of politics. According to the biographical background mentioned above, we can say that Astrophil’s words show Sidney’s feelings and intentions.

Different from Sidney’s Astrophil and Stella, Wroth’s Pamphilia to Amphilanthus, as the title shows, tries to speak out only what is in the female speaker’s mind, with no intention to be heard by other readers or gain any fame from the public. Actually, as written by a female, Pamphilia to Amphilanthus had almost been excluded from the public. Originally Pamhilia to Amphilanthus appeared at the end of Urania, a prose romance about the love between Pamphilia and Amphilanthus. When it first appeared in 1621, it faced a serious criticism from Edward Denny because he read it as an attack upon himself and his family. “Denny responded with two letters and a poem of revenge, . . . , which begins by accusing Wroth of being a ‘Hermaphrodite in show,’ and concludes by encouraging women’s textual silence and confinement to religious activity” (Smith 408). Denny also used the discourses of gender in his attack upon Wroth: “ 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” (Smith 408). At that time women were supposed to write
only holy poems and should devote themselves to religious activities just
like what Wroth’s aunt, Countess of Pembroke, has done. What Wroth
has done is a trespassing into a male territory, which seems to be an impu-
dent insubordination. It is difficult for Wroth to have the work published,
not to mention trying to get fame through it.

Actually Wroth herself was also anxious of this transgressing. Ac-
cording to Rosalind Smith, two months before Lord Denny’s criticism,
Wroth had written to the Duke of Buckingham to stop the sale of the text. At
last, however, she still had the work published. This explains the male
suppression of female voice at that time and this also partially explains
Wroth’s intention to withdraw, to retreat into her private world, which is
quite different from the intention of her uncle, Sir Philip Sidney. In the
whole sonnet sequence we can see that Pamphilia speaks to Amphilanthus,
to Love, to Cupid, to night, to Time, to eyes, to grief, or even to herself but
seldom to some other readers. Wroth follows the Petrarchan traditions in
her theme, conceits, images and so on but she also subverts the tradition
through the female speaker and her retreat into private space. In quite a
few sonnets, Wroth speaks through Pamphilia to show her preference of
private and interiorized space. In sonnet 23 she describes her indulgence
in her thought: “When every one to pleasing pastime hies / Some hunt,
some hauke, some play, while some delight / In sweet discourse, and
musique showes joys might / Yet I my thoughts doe farr above thes prise”

9 In Rosalind Smith’s “Lady Mary Wroth’s Pamphilia to Amphilanthus: The Politics of Withdrawal”
there are detailed description and scrutiny of the criticism the sonnet sequence has faced and Lady
Mary Wroth’s withdrawal of the sequence.
While others find pleasure in the active pastime, she just wants to submerge into her own thought of love so she says, “When others hunt, my thoughts I have in chase; / If hauke, my minde at wished end doth fly, / Discourse, I with my spiritt taeke, and cry / While others, musique choose as greatest grace” (9-12). Her retreat to the private world seems to symbolize female’s passive status in a male dominant world but it can also be seen as a rejection of the mainstream thinking. Instead of playing the courtly games, Wroth shows Pamphilia’s difference through retreating into the private world and discoursing with “my spirit.” Her sonnets “stage a movement which is relentlessly private, withdrawing into an interiorized space; they foreground a refusal to speak in the public, exhibitionist voice of traditional Petrarchan discourse” (Masten 69). This is no doubt the demonstration of the female difference in the Petrarchan sonnet sequence. In sonnet 38, Wroth’s speaker also discusses women’s situation of being marginalized in the dominant culture. Pamphilia says, “What pleasure can a bannish’d creature have / In all the pastimes that invented arr / By witt or learning” (1-3). Although she is banished by the dominant culture like Pamphilia, yet through writing as a speaking subject, Wroth finds her pleasure and her way out.

Though she follows most of the Petrarchan conventions, Wroth does not believe in the expressionist theatricality of those male sonneteers. While Astrophil exaggerates his love by saying:

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\begin{align*}
\text{I do not envy Aristotle’s wit,} \\
\text{Nor do aspire to Caesar’s bleeding fame,} \\
\text{Nor aught do care though some above me sit,} \\
\text{Nor hope nor wish another course to frame,}
\end{align*}
\]
But that which once may win thy cruel heart:
Thou art my wit and thou my virtue art.  (64: 9-14)

Pamphila argues in Sonnet 40 that “Itt is nott love which you poore fooles do deeme / That doth apeare by fond, and outward showes / Of kissing, toying, or by swearings glose, / O noe thes ar farr off from loves esteeme” (1-4). According to the female speaker, the outward show of those males is not the guarantee of love. In addition, neither sighs nor tears can prove true love: “”T'is nott a showe of sighes, or teares can prove / Who loves indeed which blasts of fained love / Increase, or dy as favors from them slide” (9-11). Pamphilie believes that “in the soule true love in safety lies” (12). Instead of publicly announcing her love to Amphilanthus, Pamphilie wants to hide her love and save it for Amphilanthus, so in Sonnet 36 after she declares how well her poor heart understands how deep she is in love she argues “Yett is itt sayd that sure love can nott bee / Wher soe small showe of passion is descrid, / When thy [the heart’s] chiefe paine is that I must itt hide / From all save only one who showld itt see” (9-12). In the final couplet she further affirms that she has far more passion than those who make show of their love: “For know more passion in my hart doth move / Then in a million that make show of love” (13-14). Pamphilie cherishes her love and her thought and argues against the exaggeration of those contemporary wits. She believes that the more you are in love, the less possible you are able to show the love in words. She says, “Nor can I as those pleasant witts injoy / My owne fram’d words, which I account the dross / Of purer thoughts, . . .” (5-7). She admits that her poems are nothing but the dross of purer thoughts because her love is too much to be expressed by words. Then she further explains: “Alas, think I,
your plenty shewes your want, / For wher most feelings is, words are more scant” (9-10). Here, Wroth again powerfully exhibits the difference between man’s and woman’s way of showing love.

While the male poets speak as the speaking subjects and take pride in their expressionistic language, Wroth, as the excluded other, seems able to understand the limitation of language maybe because the female’s true feelings and love are impossible to be wholly expressed in the masculine logic. Though in the last part Pamphilia apologizes by saying that it is not that she does not like those wits, it is just that she envies them and is cross with herself because she is not able to write those splendid words, yet it is obvious that she does not believe in the truth behind the magnificent exaggeration. It is understandable that Wroth is not able to express her true love in the splendid expressions of those male poets, since in the masculine logic, she is the other that is banished from that symbolic order. Yet, Wroth’s being withdrawn from the public and her inability to express her love exaggeratedly, in contrast to Sidney’s publicity and theatricality, seem more reliable in expressing the true love. Masten contrasts Wroth’s sonnet sequence with those by the male sonneteers and believes that most male sonneteers’ public and theatrical way of showing love can only present the shapes of love; while Wroth shows the authenticity in her private language, which is the true form of love (70-76). For a woman writer in a male-dominant culture, the public sphere is not the place for her to show her love and she has no other choice but retreat to her private language. This reflects the male oppression of women at that time but it also gives Wroth the vantage of authenticity and we can find more sincerity in her sequence than in Sidney’s. As mentioned above, Sidney’s theatrical and
expressionistic language seems only the showing off of his mastery of poetic art and a means for him to get fame whereas without the ability to master the male language, Wroth just writes down privately what is in her mind and tries to show the deep love in her heart.

It is also significant that Wroth does not take the female role as the passive object or addressee in those male poets’ sequence; that is, she does not choose to answer to those male poets as a woman who is spoken to. Instead, Wroth chooses to speak as an active subject, who speaks out her love to a male object. In this way she reverses the subject / object relation between man and woman in traditional love sonnets. She demonstrates that woman can be the subject to pursue love, not just the object to be wooed. Through speaking as a subject, it seems that Wroth does “recover the place of her exploitation by discourse” (The Sex Which Is Not One 76), as suggested by Irigaray; through retrieving the woman’s voice, it seems Wroth makes visible woman’s feelings which, in Irigaray’s words, “are elaborated in/by a masculine logic” (The Sex Which Is Not One 76) in those male poets’ sonnets.10

Different from Astrophil’s wish to get fame in Sidney’s sequence, Pamphilia’s purpose does not include gaining fame. According to Pamphilia’s explanation, the main purpose behind the sequence seems just to show her love and get some comfort through writing. In Sonnet 8 she says, suffering from the grief of unreturned love, “I seeke for some smale ease by lines” (3). Her purpose, to show love in order to persuade Amphilanthus into constancy, is quite private. To get fame, which is Astrophil’s purpose, never occurs in her mind. Besides, Wroth is not so proud

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10 Irigaray’s idea mentioned here has been elaborated on the second page of this paper.
of her poetic skill as her uncle Sidney, and she makes Pamphilia humbly say in Sonnet 39, "Nor can I as those pleasant wits injoy/ My owne fram’d words, which I account the dross/ Of purer thoughts, or reckon them as moss/ While they (witt sick) them selves to breath imploy" (5-8). Here Pamphilia again shows her lack of confidence in mastering language. Through their respective speaker we can see that Wroth, of course, is not so good at poetic language and techniques as Sidney but her private and withdrawn style shows her authenticity and sincerity which far exceed Sidney’s.

In addition to the different purposes, Pamphilia’s reason for falling in love is also quite a contrast to Astrophil’s. In Sidney’s sequence, Astrophil falls in love with Stella because of her incredible beauty and yet in Wroth’s sequence, no external charm of Amphilanthus has been mentioned. This also indicates a special sexual difference.

In *Astrophil and Stella*, the bulky depictions of Stella’s beauty show that her beauty is greatly emphasized. Actually, it seems that on account of Stella’s beauty, Astrophil falls in love with her and is eager to get her love. It is her beauty that gives him inspiration and impetus to show his love. In order to justify his deep love to Stella, Astrophil tries to convince the reader of her beauty. In Sonnet 21 Astrophil’s friend thinks that he is infatuated by love and so his mind is marred; he asks Astrophil to use learning as the spade to dig out the golden mine, his wisdom. To this advice, Astrophil answers, “Hath this world aught so fair as Stella is?” (14). To Astrophil, Stella’s beauty is unparalleled. Although Astrophil emphasizes in some poems that Stella owns both beauty and virtue, most of the time he describes her beauty only. In Sonnet 25 Astrophil claims: “It is
most true; for since I her did see, / Virtue’s great beauty in that I prove, / And find the effect: for I do burn in love” (12-14) and in Sonnet 71 he further says: “Who will in fairest book of Nature know / How virtue may best lodg’d in beauty be, / Let him but learn of Love to read in thee, / Stella, those fair lines which true goodness show” (1-4). These two are the only places where Astrophil speaks about Stella’s virtue. And Astrophil believes that Stella’s beauty testifies to her virtue. Since she is so beautiful she must be virtuous. Regardless of the logic of this argument, it is obvious that external physical beauty is more appealing to Astrophil.

How fair is Stella? We only see her through the male speaker’s eyes, that is, Astrophil’s description of her. It seems that it is Stella’s physical beauty that impresses and inspires Astrophil most. Yet in the whole sequence we can scarcely find concrete description of Stella’s countenance and most of Astrophil’s description is filled with abstract metaphors or trite conceits. Sonnet 7 provides the description of Stella’s eyes and from this one we can get more concrete idea of her looks. Astrophil says, “When Nature made her chief work, Stella’s eyes, / In colour black why wrapt she beams so bright?” (1-2) and then through rhetorical questions Astrophil tells us that she frames daintiest lust in beamy black, she thus knits and strengthens our sight, and she shows that black can be beautiful “whereas black seems Beauty’s contrary” (10). So, we know that Stella’s eyes are black, and though at that time black is not regarded as beautiful Stella’s black eyes are still beautifully unparalleled. In Sonnet 22 Astrophil says that when other ladies use everyday to keep away the sunlight in vain, “Stella alone with face unarmed marcht” (9); then, Astrophil concludes that “The sun, that others burn’d, did her but kiss” (14). Now, we get to know
that Stella is white and not afraid of the sunlight. These are the only concrete descriptions of Stella we can get from the sequence.

Sonnet 77 is devoted almost totally to Stella’s beauty but the description is quite abstract; for example, “That face whose lecture shows what perfect beauty is, / That presence which doth give dark hearts a living light / That grace which Venus weeps that she herself doth miss” (2-4). Sonnet 9 is also one that is almost wholly devoted to the description of Stella’s beauty, and it seems a more concrete one, in which Astrophil compares Stella’s face to Queen Virtue’s court and believes that it is “Prepar’d by Nature’s choicest furniture” (2). Then Astrophil describes the magnificence of the court to imply the beauty of Stella:

Hath his front built of alabaster pure;
Gold is the covering of that stately place.
The door by which sometimes comes forth her grace
Red porphir is, which lock of pearl makes sure,
Whose porches rich—which name of cheeks endure—
Marble, mixt red and white, do interlace.
The windows now, through which this heavenly guest
Look over the world and can find nothing such
Which dare claim from those lights the name of best,
Of touch they are, that without touch do touch,
Which Cupid’s self, from Beauty’s mine did draw:
Of touch they are, and poor I am their straw. (3-14)

The front is Stella’s forehead and the door, her lips, which locks the pearl, her teeth. Her cheeks are red and white marble. The windows that claim the best light of course are her bright eyes. This depiction has a
double meaning. With the courtly beauty, Stella actually stands for the magnificent court, and ostensibly through depicting and idealizing the speaker’s beloved, the poet expresses his love and loyalty to the court, but at the same time the poet’s intention to control his beloved and what she stands for is also implied. On account of Sidney’s biography this re-presentation of Stella can be seen as the projection of the poet’s desire.

According to psychoanalysis, in the Oedipal stage, when the father interferes, the child suffers from the anxiety of separation from the mother. After the child enters the symbolic, he can never possess the desired object—m/other—and this desire or this lack is repressed into the unconscious. Therefore, after that, the boy enters the symbolic order and becomes the speaking subject, while the girl, excluded from the symbolic order, becomes just an object for the boy to form the illusory place of truth and wholeness. So, woman is the Other and woman only comes into being as the object/other of man, which is always stared at by the male gaze. According to Lacan, “The gaze I encounter— . . . is, not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other” (Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis 84). Accordingly, the male gaze is not a gaze for real, it is a gaze imagined by the male, which indicates what the male desires from the Other, the female. Lacan further explains the relation between the male gaze and desire: “We can apprehend this privilege of the gaze in the function of desire, by pouring ourselves, as it were, along the veins through which the domain of vision has been integrated into the field of desire” (Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis 85). Through gaze, the domain of vision has been integrated into the field of desire. Therefore, what you gaze at is actually what you desire in your mind.
Consequently, this male gaze that Astrophil has does not present the real Stella but only the Stella imagined by him as the Other—the object of his desire. Maybe this is the reason that we can not find the real, physical Stella in Sidney’s love sonnets. Through the protagonist, Astrophil, Sidney is only representing his own desire for the woman, or more precisely, his desire for fame, so it is arguable whether he really loves Lady Rich; he loves undoubtedly the image he creates for himself. As Irigaray says, “Woman, in this sexual imaginary, is only a more or less obliging prop for the enactment of man’s fantasies” (This Sex Which Is Not One 25). And this somewhat explains the phenomenon that female’s looks are more emphasized in the love relationship at that time.

In Wroth’s Pamphilia to Amphilanthus, Pamphilia, the female protagonist, gives us a very different reason from that of the male; without mentioning the outward looking of Amphilanthus, Pamphilia uses the mythological characters of love to explain the reason that she falls in love:

In sleepe, a Chariot drawne by wing’d desire
I sawe: wher sate bright Venus Queene of love,
And att her feete her sonne, still adding fire
To burning hearts which she did hold above,

Butt one hart flaming more then all the rest
The goddess held, and putt itt to my brest,
Deare sonne, now shutt sayd she: thus must wee winn;

Hee her obay’d, and martyr’d my poore hart,
I, waking hop’d as dreames itt would depart
Yett since: O mee: a lover I have binn. (5-14)
Instead of being attracted by Amphilanthus’ external charm, Pamphilia seems to use this imaginary dream to indicate that love just happens and there is no reasonable explanation for it. Compared with Sidney’s Astrophil, who is attracted by Stella’s external beauty, Wroth’s Pamphilia understands that love just happens and true love should not depend on the beautiful looks. Since Pamphilia is made to love Amphilanthus by some supernatural power, the charm of the external appearance of Amphilanthus is not important. Therefore, in the whole sequence, although Wroth, influenced by her uncle and other poets at that time, compares her Amphilanthus’ eyes to the sun or the stars in some sonnets (Sonnets 2, 41, 43), she never mentions the outward looks of Amphilanthus. Therefore, there are “no blazons scattering the parts of her beloved, no fetishizing of a veil, a foot, an eyebrow, and thus no self-creation out of the scattered parts of the beloved” (Fienberg 177). Illustrating just her feeling in facing this love, Wroth does not impose her own idea or thinking on her lover. Sidney, as mentioned above, seems to efface his lover by imposing his own voice and male gaze on her, but he still needs the existence of this other to project his desire; Wroth, however, without appropriating or annihilating the other’s existence, focuses on expressing her love and her grief through writing, and thus brings into existence alternative forms of relation, perception and expression. Different from Sidney’s sequence, Wroth’s Pamphilia to Amphilanthus seems to create a new possibility by focusing on the expressing of her true love as a female subject. The female as the gazed object with no subjectivity in those males’ sonnets now become the subject and finally finds her subjectivity through writing.

Furthermore, the main concerns of the two sonnet sequences and the
ways in which the two poets present those concerns are also very significant. In Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*, a typical Petrarchan sonnet sequence, love or the conflict resulting from love is the inevitable theme. Accordingly, through the whole sonnet sequence, most of the poems on Stella talk about the effect of her beauty, her cruelty, and her absence on Astrophil. Similarly, in *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* Wroth employs the most space describing Pamphilia’s being enslaved by love. Yet, while Sidney’s speaker complains about Stella’s cruelty, Wroth’s Pamaphilia shows female’s suffering from the male’s inconsistency. “Wroth’s speaker finds the words that Petrarch’s Laura, Sidney’s Stella, and Shakespeare’s Dark Lady had been denied. In declaring ‘thus is my learning by my bondage’ she is, through the poetics of the Petrarchan tradition, asserting her freedom to rewrite that tradition” (Fienberg 183).

In Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*, Stella’s beauty arouses Astrophil’s love and causes his suffering because this love is not returned. As mentioned above, there are poems which directly describe Stella’s beauty, but most of the time the lover-poet focuses on his suffering caused by that beauty; therefore, the main concern of the poet is the effect the female has on the male, instead of the female beauty itself. Sonnet 36 is a typical example, in which Astrophil compares Stella’s beauty to armies and his forces are razed: “. . . through my long-battered eyes, / Whole armies of thy beauties entered in? / And there, long since, Love thy lieutenant lies; / My forces razed, thy banners rais’d within” (3-6). Sonnet 47 is another typical description of the tyranny of love and of Stella’s beauty, in which the poet depicts Astrophil’s ambivalent feeling toward this sorrowful love. At the beginning Astrophil wonders, “What, have I thus betray’d my lib-
Can those black beams such burning marks engrave / In my free side, or am I born a slave, / Whose neck becomes such yoke of tyranny?” (1-4), and then knowing that he cannot help but be enslaved by love, he tries to persuade himself to leave, “I may, I must, I can, I will, I do / Leave following that which it is gain to miss. / Let her go! . . .” (10-12). He tries to tell Stella that he does not love her, but then he exclaims, “O me, that eye / Doth make my heart to give my tongue the lie!” (13-14). In quite a few sonnets, the poet uses Astrophil to speak out his woe. In Sonnet 16, he compares his falling in love to being poisoned; in Sonnet 18, he says that he wastes his wealth, his youth, his wit, and almost everything for the sake of Stella; in Sonnet 27, he often ignores his friends because of Stella; and in Sonnet 34, when Astrophil has to write to ease his “burthened heart,” he is afraid that wise men will laugh at him and he says, “. . . Perhaps some find / Stella’s great powers that so confuse my mind” (13-14). Through Sonnet 38 to Sonnet 40, Astrophil describes how Stella disturbs his sleep and makes him moan because he dreams of Stella. In Sonnet 42, Stella’s eyes are depicted as “Only-lov’d tyrants, just in cruelty” and the lover-poet begs these eyes: “Do not, O do not, from poor me remove: / Keep still my zenith, ever shine on me” (7-8). All these examples show that Sidney is fond of expressing the male’s grief. It shows that the beloved lady has great power on Astrophil, but actually the male’s feeling is still the main focus in this sonnet sequence, and the function of the female character is mainly to give the sonneteer a reason to express his feeling. Taking into account the political purpose of this sonnet circle, we can see that through the male’s gaze, the male’s desire is exhibited and subjectivity built; and through the description of the female’s effect on him or more
exactly, the torture resulting from the female’s beauty, the male’s identity is set up.

In addition to Stella’s beauty, Sidney also employs a lot of space to discuss Stella’s cruelty. In Sonnet 8, it is said that Love, that is, Cupid, is a boy who believes that he can find ease and warmth in Stella’s beautiful face and yet the speaker says, “But she, most fair, most cold, made him thence take his flight / To my close heart, where, while some firebrands he did lay, / He burnt unawares his wings, and cannot fly away” (12-14). Through this metaphor, the poet emphasizes that although she is cold, love still arouses the flame in Astrophil’s heart and love will always stay there in his heart. In Sonnet 44, Stella’s cruelty is again emphasized. Astrophil says that he writes out the woe in his mind, but “. . . she hears and yet no pity I find, / But more I cry, less grace she doth impart” (5-6). Then finally he finds out that “. . . the sovs of mine annoys / Are metamorphos’d straight to tunes of joys” (13-14). In the next sonnet (Sonnet 45), Astrophil says that Stella will be moved to tears by a false story but not by his sorrow: “Stella oft sees the very face of woe / Painted in my beclouded stormy face, / But cannot skill to pity my disgrace” (1-3). In Sonnet 57, Astrophil hopes that his woe can find Stella alone so as to move her, and then he says that Stella’s soul is “arm’d but with such a dainty rind” (7); in Sonnet 60 Astrophil describes that when he sees Stella he can only get disdains and disgrace and yet when he is away Stella “shows love and pity to my absent case” (8). Stella is so capricious that Astrophil does not know how to respond and “Then, some good body, tell me how I do, / Whose presence absence, absence presence is: / Blest in my curse, and cursed in my bliss” (12-14). With a beautiful face and a cruel heart, Stella seems to
be the combination of angel and witch. This is also the Petrarchan tradition. Astrophil’s woe is rooted in Stella’s beauty and cruelty. She is so beautiful that he is deep in love with her, but she is so cruel to him that he can never move her by his woe. In most Petrarchan sonnet sequences beautiful women are cruel and, by making use of their beauty, enjoy torturing the male suitors. Sidney puts emphasis on how Astrophil is tortured by Stella’s cruelty because Stella is not moved by his deep love and always refuses to grant him her love. It seems that the male cannot accept the fact that the female has the freedom to make her own choice. So long as he cannot get her love he puts the blame on her cruelty. “Her alluring unapproachability, the icy fire of her own passion, allow her only to locate herself within a discourse in which women are given the role of being a focus of gaze, the object of men’s obsessions and insecurities” (Waller 82).

In addition, Stella’s physical absence is also an important theme because it also results in Astrophil’s grief. Sonnet 66 seems to be the turning point because Astrophil seems to have the hope of gaining Stella’s love. He says, “Stella’s eyes sent to me the beams of bliss, / Looking on me while I lookest other way: / But when mine eyes back to their heaven did move, / They fled with blush which guilty seem’d of love” (11-14). After that, instead of complaining about Stella’s cruelty, Astrophil talks more about his feelings in their departure. In Sonnet 87, when they are forced to depart and Astrophil finds that Stella also feels sad: “I saw that tears did in her eyes appear, / I saw that sighs her sweetest lips did part, / And her sad words my saddened sense did hear” (6-8). Though the speaker feels sad too but he also “swam in joy, such love in her was seen” (11). In Sonnet 88, Astrophil says that absence will not influence their love because they
have memory. In the next sonnet (Sonnet 89), Astrophil compares Stella’s absence to “the most irksome night, / With darkest shade doth overcome my day, / Since Stella’s eyes, wont to give me my day” (1-3). Sonnet 91 also has the same theme and in which Astrophil speaks to Stella, “. . . fair you, my sun, thus overspread / With Absence’ veil—I live in Sorrow’s night” (3-4). In Sonnet 105, Astrophil even curses absence. This absence is inevitable in the sonnet sequence because its effect on the lover-poet is always emphasized. Again, the absence of the beloved lady is the means for the male lover-poet to express his sorrow and accomplish his writing. As Waller notes, the beloved is “focused upon only as the inspirer of the male protagonist’s words and the occasion for his enjoyable miserable feelings. She is notable primarily for her absence. She is absent, in a sense, in order that the poetry can be written at all” (81). This surprisingly corresponds to Irigaray’s comments on Freud’s theory of female sexuality, in which Irigaray criticizes, “Women herself is never at issue in these statements: the feminine is defined as the necessary complement to the operation of male sexuality, and, more often, as a negative image that provides male sexuality with an unfailingly phallic self-representation” (The Sex Which Is Not One 70).

Putting emphasis on the beloved woman’s beauty, cruelty and absence, the male speaker seems to get his identity and subjectivity through this female’s effect on him. The beloved lady, however, is silenced and effaced. As Cixous mentions in “Sorties” that woman’s function “as matter to be subjected to the desire he wishes to impart” (The Helene Cixous Reader 39). Women, as the focus of male gaze and the object of male desire, seem unable to find subjectivity in the male discourse.
Yet, in juxtaposition to Sidney’s male sonnet sequence, Wroth’s love sonnets provide a chance for us to hear the female voice as a subject, to subvert the stigma attached to beautiful women, and to help disrupt the “one,” “same,” and “established” male discourse. Irigaray once describes Freud as “a prisoner of a certain economy of the logos,” because “he defines sexual difference by giving *a priori* value to Sameness . . .” and “Freud asserts that the ‘masculine’ is the sexual model, that no representation of desire can fail to take it as the standard, can fail to submit to it” (*The Sex Which Is Not One* 72). And this is also why Irigaray criticizes Freud’s theory of sexuality as “homosexuality” and as mentioned above she believes that “the path of mimicry” should be the initial phase for women to challenge this sexual indifference and she says, “if women can play with mimeses, it is because they are capable of bringing new nourishment to its operation,” and she believes, “It is here [mimesis], of course, that the hypothesis of a reversal—within the phallic order—is always possible” (*The Sex Which Is Not One* 76-77).

In those male sonnets, the woman is always described as “the lack,” as “the object of desire,” or as “a complement to the operation of male sexuality,” as shown in the above analysis of Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*. Wroth’s sonnets finally redress this stigma. Making Pamphilia speak as a subject, Wroth helps discover a feminine place in a male discourse. Through her sonnets, we can understand that the female also suffer from their male lovers’ inconsistency and cruelty. In the world of discourse as in the world of love, men and women should share the same status. Yet, because of the male’s privileged role in manipulating language, women are silenced and made inferior to men. Wroth, however, helps found the fe-
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male subjectivity through her interiorized poetry.

Another significance of Wroth’s sonnet sequence is that it retrieves the female voice so that we can see feelings of both sexes. Finally, the male voice will not be the only voice, the female feelings will not be excluded and male discrimination against women will not be sustained. When Irigaray discusses the possibility for discovering a feminine place in discourse, she suggests,

In other words, the issue is not one of elaborating a new theory of which woman would be the subject or object, but of jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretension to the production of a truth and of a meaning that are excessively univocal. Which presupposes that women do not aspire simply to be men’s equals in knowledge. That they do not claim to be rivaling men in constructing a logic of the feminine that would still take onto-theo-logic as its model, but that they are rather attempting to wrest this question away from the economy of the logos. They should not put it, then in the form “What is woman?” but rather, repeating/interpreting the way in which, within discourse, the feminine finds itself defined as lack, deficiency, or as imitation and negative image of the subject, they should signify that with respect to this logic a disruptive excess is possible on the feminine side. (The Sex Which Is Not One 78)

Wroth’s work may not be regarded as “a disruptive excess,” by which Irigaray refers to the fluid style of woman writing, to the masculine logic; yet,
speaking as a female in love sonnets, the traditional discourse of the male, Wroth repeats/interprets the way the feminine defined as lack, deficiency or negative image. Without constructing a logic of the feminine, Wroth finds a place for the feminine and at the same time, she reverses the original feminine object and makes it the speaking subject. Maybe, as Irigaray claims, whether the woman is the subject or the object is not the point, but in Wroth’s case, when Pamphilia, the female character, speaks out what is on her mind, she really subverts the univocal masculine meaning and truth in sonnet sequence.

Wroth’s work may not be innovative enough to create the discourse for female but her mimesis of the traditional male’s sonnet sequence is not only a mimicry but also a subversion of the male genre. Through comparing and contrasting Sidney’s Astropol and Stella and Wroth’s Pamphilia to Amphilanthus, we can see that the effaced and silenced woman in the male genre can be regained through the female speaking subject in Wroth’s sequence. We hear the female voice and know the female feelings as contrasts to those features imposed on women by the male poets, and this helps us have a better view of the sonnet world in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

Works Cited


A Feminine Crevice in the Male Genre


**A Feminine Crevice in the Male Genre**

男性文體中之女性縫隙——
論瑪莉‧洛斯之《潘菲莉亞致安菲藍瑟斯》
與非立浦‧西尼之《艾斯特非與斯黛拉》

郭慧珍∗

提要

本篇論文旨在於以法國女性主義(特別是伊西嘉黑之模仿觀點)研讀瑪莉‧洛
斯之《潘菲莉亞致安菲藍瑟斯》與非立浦‧西尼之《艾斯特非與斯黛拉》二
本十四行詩集。大多數英國十六世紀及十七世紀的十四行詩集皆承襲佩托拉克所
建立的傳統，主要描繪一位男士在追求一位高貴美麗卻冷漠的仕女時所經歷的矛
盾複雜的情感，也因此常被視為男性文體。作為西尼的姪女，洛斯深受西尼的影
響，她的十四行詩集更被視為是西尼詩集的仿作。本文希望經由女性主義角度的
解讀，證實洛斯的詩集不僅模仿更同時顛覆了此一男性文體。西尼在詩集中抹煞
了女性角色的聲音及面容，洛斯的詩集尋回了女性的聲音與主體，也使我們對十
六世紀及十七世紀初的十四行詩有了更深入而平衡的了解。

關鍵詞：十四行詩集、佩托拉克傳統、性別差異、男性文體、仿作、顛覆

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