Helen Hackett

"When I Last Saw Thee, I Did Nott Thee See": Mary Wroth's Imagination

Lady Mary Wroth made unprecedented ventures, as a woman, into two genres strongly associated with fictionality, and hence with the imagination: the romance, and the erotic sonnet sequence. The fictionality of romance lay in its fantastical adventures in faraway realms, that of the sonnet in its association with the dissemblings of lovers. As Touchstone explains to Audrey in *As You Like It*, "the truest poetry is the most faining, and lovers are given to poetry, and what they swear in poetry may be said, as lovers, they do feign."[1] Both genres were also associated not only with authorial fabrication, but also with the enflamed and unruly female imaginations – one reason why female authors before Wroth had avoided them as disreputable.[2] The 1615 edition of Overbury's *Characters* (1615) depicted a chambermaid "carried away" by avid reading of romances, and inspired "to run out of her selfe, and become a Ladie Errant";[3] while Thomas Salter's *Mirrhor of Modestie* (1579) warned that daughters educated to be "connyng and skilfull writers, of Ditties, Sonnetes, Epigrames, and Ballades" would also "learne to be subtile and shamelesse Lovers."[4] Wroth,

[1] William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. Juliet Dusinberre, Arden Shakespeare 3rd Series (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 3.3.17–19.

[2] See Helen Hackett, *Women and Romance Fiction in the English Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 4–19.

[3] Sir Thomas Overbury et al., *New and choise characters, of severall authors* (London, 1615), ¶5r.

[4] Thomas Salter, *A mirrhor mete for all mothers, matrones, and maidens, intituled the Mirrhor of Modestie* (London, 1579), C1v–C2r.

then, defied repressive attitudes to the female imagination in daring to write *The Countesse of Mountgomeries Urania* and its accompanying sequence of love sonnets, *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*.

The function and operations of imagination were intensely scrutinised and debated in the early modern period, including its relation to gender. It was a faculty associated not only with literary creativity, but also with many hazards, including sensuality, idolatry, melancholy, delusions, demonic possession, "monstrous" births – and more.[5] Located at the turbulent confluence of diverse intellectual traditions – medical, philosophical, theological, and aesthetic – the early modern imagination has been aptly described by Sorana Corneanu and Koen Vermeir as "a complex and shifting historical product" and "a multivalent object, or a 'floating concept,' i.e., a concept with variable meanings that, however, performed a crucial functional role in grounding and connecting different discourses."[6] As Wroth made transgressive incursions into fictive genres, how did she understand their relation to the imagination? Where did she stand in relation to contemporary debates about the imagination in general, and the female imagination in particular? This essay will build on Mary Ellen Lamb's ground-breaking analyses of women's interventions in the genres of romance and love poetry by situating Wroth's representations of the imagination in the *Urania* and *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* in the context of such debates. It will investigate topics including interactions between the female imagination, melancholy, and the passions; the role of the

[5] See Helen Hackett, *The Elizabethan Mind* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2022), 188–257.

[6] Sorana Corneanu and Koen Vermeir, "Idols of the Imagination: Francis Bacon on the Imagination and the Medicine of the Mind," *Perspectives on Science* 20.2 (Summer 2012): 187, 189.

imagination in poetic composition and dreams; and one of Wroth's favourite tropes, the image of the beloved in the mind or heart of their lover. A fundamental question will reverberate throughout these discussions: how does Wroth understand the relation between imagination and truth?

Ideas about the imagination in the early seventeenth century

Wroth's ideas about the imagination were surely informed by her uncle Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesy*, which defines poesy as any fictive writing, or "feigning notable images".[7] Yet this work is notoriously ambivalent and evasive.[8] Sometimes it celebrates the powers of the poet – that is, the imaginative writer – to improve upon reality:

> Only the poet …, lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect into another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature.… [H]er world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.[9]

Elsewhere, however, Sidney seems anxious to dispel the association of imaginative "feigning" with falsehood and lack of purpose, insisting that poesy must serve the moral objective of "delightful teaching" (12).

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[7] Sir Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesy*, in *Sidney's "The Defence of Poesy" and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. Gavin Alexander (London: Penguin, 2005), 12.

[8] See Catherine Bates, *On Not Defending Poetry: Defence and Indefensibility in Sidney's "Defence of Poesy"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[9] Philip Sidney, *Defence of Poesy*, 8–9.

Wroth was evidently also familiar with Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, which she frequently echoes in the *Urania*.[10] We might consider Spenser highly imaginative in his creation of the vast, vivid, and complex fictive realm of Faerieland, yet he goes beyond Sidney's ambivalence toward the imagination in expressing outright distrust of its potential waywardness and wildness. His allegory of the human mind as the tower of Alma's castle follows contemporary medical works in dividing the mind into three chambers, housing imagination at the front, reason in the middle, and memory at the back. Imagination is personified as Phantastes, who seems "mad or foolish," and whose chamber is decorated with images of freaks and monsters: "Infernall Hags, Centaurs, feendes, Hippodames." It is filled with "flyes / Which buzzed all about," representing "idle thoughtes and fantasies, / Deuices, dreames, opinions vnsound."[11]

Suspicion of the imagination, and even hostility toward it, were in fact widespread in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. They can be found in a number of works on the mind recorded in a seventeenth-century catalogue of the library at Penshurst Place, Mary Wroth's childhood home, as recently published in an invaluable edition.[12] The catalogue, compiled in manuscript between around 1652 and 1665, lists a substantial collection of some 4,800 volumes, initiated by Wroth's grandfather Sir Henry Sidney (1529–1586), augmented

[10] See Lady Mary Wroth, *The First Part of The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, ed. Josephine A. Roberts (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), xxviii. Hereafter referred to as *Urania 1*.

[11] Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Harlow: Pearson, 2001), 2.9.50–52.

[12] Germaine Warkentin, Joseph L. Black, and William R. Bowen, eds., *The Library of the Sidneys of Penshurst Place circa 1665* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

by her father Robert Sidney, First Earl of Leicester (1563–1626), and then vastly expanded by her brother, Robert Sidney, Second Earl of Leicester (1595–1677).[13] It informs us that the family owned a number of widely read and influential books that discussed the mind and the imagination from various angles, including Francis Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* (1605), Pierre Charron's *De la sagesse* (1604), Helkiah Crooke's *Mikrokosmographia* (1615), Marsilio Ficino's *De vita libri tres* (1489), a treatise on melancholy by André du Laurens (1597),[14] and Pierre de la Primaudaye's *Académie Françoise* (1577–90).[15] The young Mary (born in 1587) lived mainly at Penshurst until her marriage in 1604 and made frequent visits thereafter, usually including a month or more each summer.[16] Of course we cannot know exactly when each listed work was acquired for the Penshurst library, or which books Wroth read there, but she was evidently an avid reader, and we can be reasonably confident that these works were available to her. Even if she did not read them herself, they formed part of the discussions of the imagination that were active in her social and intellectual milieu.

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[13] Warkentin, Black, and Bowen, *Library of the Sidneys*, 13, 7, 14–16, 18–30.

[14] The full title of du Laurens's work is *Discours de la conservation de la veue: des maladies melancoliques, des catarrhes, et de la vieillesse.* Interestingly, the Penshurst catalogue refers only to the section on melancholy, listing the work as "Laurens de Malancholiques Maladies". Warkentin, Black, and Bowen, *Library of the Sidneys*, 222, item 95v05.

[15] Warkentin, Black, and Bowen, *Library of the Sidneys*, 51, item 3v03; 110, items 31v28 and 31v29; 130, item 41r15; 243, item 111r20; 222, item 95v05; 292, item 151r10. Each of these works went through multiple editions; in each case the date given above is for the earliest known edition.

[16] Margaret P. Hannay, *Mary Sidney, Lady Wroth* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 134, 147–48, 150, 152, 164, 165, 174–78, 184, 198, 200, 225, 254, 256.

Most of these works concurred with Spenser and his sources in identifying imagination as one of the three principal faculties of the mind, along with reason and memory.[17] Charron offers a typical explanation of the operations of these three faculties:

> The imagination first gathereth the kinds and figures of things both present, by the service of the five senses, and absent by the benefit of the common sense:[18] afterwards it presenteth them, if it will, to the understanding, which considereth of them, examineth, ruminateth, and judgeth; afterwards it puts them to the safe custodie of the memorie, as a Scrivener to his booke, to the end he may againe, if need shall require, draw them forth.[19]

In summary, the imagination converted sense-impressions of the real world into mental images; these were passed to reason or understanding for evaluation; then they were transferred to the memory for storage.

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[17] Francis Bacon, *The twoo bookes* […] *Of the proficience and advancement of learning, divine and humane* (London, 1605), 7r; Pierre Charron, *Of wisdome*, trans. Samson Lennard (London, 1608), 46; Helkiah Crooke, *Mikrokosmographia a description of the body of man* (London, 1615), 453, 504–05; André du Laurens, *A discourse of the preservation of the sight: of melancholike diseases; of rheumes, and of old age*, trans. Richard Surphlet (London, 1599), 72–73, 77; Pierre de la Primaudaye, *The second part of the French academie*, trans. Anon. (London, 1594), 89, 131, 147, 162.

[18] Common sense: the part of the imagination that received information from the bodily senses.

[19] Charron, *Of wisdome*, 50.

This process could become hazardous when reason failed to govern the imagination, and when the imagination was cut off from the bodily senses in sleep. It then turned into fantasy or fancy and was liable to run wild, as described eloquently by de la Primaudaye:

> this facultie of the fantasie is sudden, & so farre from stayednes, that even in the time of sleep it hardly taketh any rest, but is alwaies occupied in dreaming & doting, yea even about those things which never have bin, shalbe, or can be. For it staieth not in that which is shewed unto it by the senses that serve it, but taketh what pleaseth it, and addeth thereunto or diminisheth, changeth and rechangeth, mingleth and unmingleth, so that it cutteth asunder and seweth up againe as it listeth. So that there is nothing but the fantasie will imagine and counterfaite.… [I]t is a wonder to see the inventions it hath after some occasion is given it, and what newe and monstrous things it forgeth and coyneth, by sundry imaginations arising of those images and similitudes, from whence it hath the first paterne. So that in trueth, fantasie is a very dangerous thing. For if it bee not guided and brideled by reason, it troubleth and mooveth all the sense and understanding, as a tempest doeth the sea.[20]

Here the creative power of fantasy is acknowledged, and even inspires awe, but it also provokes fear of its restless energy, its deceitfulness, and its disruptive effects.

Nevertheless, de la Primaudaye, along with many others, also believed that the imagination could convey truth when God used it as a receptacle for prophetic dreams. He cites the example of Nebuchadnezzar in the Old Testament: "God revealed unto him by dreame in the vision of an Image, what should become of his Monarchie and Empire, and of those that followed him."[21] Such belief in the sleeping imagination as a portal for divine

[20] De la Primaudaye, *Second part*, 155–56.

[21] De la Primaudaye, *Second part*, 160.

revelations was sustained in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by popular manuals for the interpretation of dream-symbols. These included editions of the ancient work *Oneirocritica* by Artemidorus, two of which were present in the Penshurst library, one in Latin and one in French.[22] Yet the imagination could also allow evil supernatural forces into the mind: du Laurens warned that some dreams were "Diabolicall," caused by "the subtiltie of Satan, who goeth walking round about us every day, and seeketh to intrap us waking or sleeping," and who "troubleth our imaginations with an infinit number of vaine illusions."[23] Even more bewilderingly, dreams could have natural, physical causes, including an excess of a particular humour, or merely indigestion; or could be produced simply by the mental residue of the business of the day.[24] In practice it was impossible to be certain whether any particular dream was natural or supernatural, divine or demonic, meaningful or meaningless, adding to the reputation of the imagination for unreliability.

Troubling dreams were thought to be especially frequent and intense in sufferers from melancholy, whose imaginations were believed to be especially active. For Ficino, melancholy had potential to elevate the mind and create "priests of the Muses" – poets and intellectuals – but could also afflict them with poor physical health and a "sad and fearful" soul.[25] During the sixteenth century this concept of "genial melancholy," conferring brilliant mental abilities but at a cost of martyrdom to physical and mental disorders, acquired a certain glamour. According to du Laurens, this special kind of melancholy

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[22] Warkentin, Black, and Bowen, *Library of the Sidneys*, 49, item 3r13; 71, item 13r25.

[23] Du Laurens, *Discourse*, 100.

[24] Du Laurens, *Discourse*, 95–100; Hackett, *Elizabethan Mind*, 232–42.

[25] Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life [De vita libri tres]*, trans. and ed. Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark (Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1998), 117, 115.

> maketh men wittie, and causeth them to excell others.… [T]heir conceit is very deepe, their memorie very fast, their bodie strong to endure labour, and when this humour groweth hot, by the vapours of blood, it causeth as it were, a kinde of divine ravishment, commonly called *Enthousiasma*,[26] which stirreth men up to plaie the Philosophers, Poets, and also to prophesie.[27]

He was even more fascinated, though, by distortions of the imagination caused by melancholy, asserting that "All melancholike persons have their imagination troubled, for that they devise with themselves a thousand fantasticall inventions and objects, which in deede are not at all: they have also verie oft their reason corrupted" (87). He recounted bizarre case studies of deluded melancholics who believed they had turned into a pitcher or a brick, or were made of glass or butter, or were dead and so refused to eat (100–04). The melancholy imagination ran to extremes: it could elevate the mind to brilliance, or it could debase it to misconception, folly, and even insanity.

Charron and Bacon were also conflicted in their attitudes to the imagination. For Charron, "to it doe properly appertaine, Inventions, Merry-conceits and Jests, Tricks of subtilty, Fictions and Lies, Figures and comparisons, Neatnesse, Elegancie, Gentilitie: because to it appertaine, Poetrie, Eloquence, Musicke, and generally whatsoever consisteth in Figure, Correspondencie, Harmonie and Proportion."[28] Imagination, then, was the source of poetry and other inventions, but also of subtle tricks and lies; and Charron also held that "they that excell in imagination, are sicke in understanding and memorie, and held for fooles and madde men" (49). For Bacon, meanwhile, the imagination was essential to the art of

[26] Excitement, inspiration.

[27] Du Laurens, *Discourse*, 86.

[28] Charron, *Of wisdome*, 50.

rhetoric, whose purpose he defined as "To apply Reason to Imagination, for the better mooving of the will."[29] He also shared with Charron recognition of its central role in the art of "poesie" or "fained historie," which could create "a more absolute varietie then can bee found in the Nature of things" (17v). Yet Bacon's main concern was discovering facts about the real world of nature, in which he believed imagination had no part: "whosoever shall entertaine high and vapourous imaginations, in steede of a laborious and sober enquirie of truth shall beget hopes and Beliefes of strange and impossible shapes" (32v).

In short, if Wroth browsed in books on the mind in Penshurst's library, or in some of the many books that these authors influenced, or if she enjoyed conversing with companions who were well read in such books – all of which are likely – then she would have encountered attitudes to the imagination that ranged from equivocal to dismissive, disparaging, and even fearful.

Male opinions of the female imagination

Early modern male authors generally assumed women's minds to be inferior. Charron wrote of "the weake and feeble sex of women,"[30] while de la Primaudaye declared that "nature commonly giveth more vigour, strength, authoritie, gravitie, and prudence, in deedes and wordes to men than to women."[31] In particular, women were believed to be deficient in reason, impairing their control over their imaginations, passions, and bodily impulses. Hence Crooke averred: "That Females are more wanton and petulant then Males, wee thinke

[29] Bacon, *Advancement*, 66v.

[30] Charron, *Of wisdome*, 485.

[31] Pierre de la Primaudaye, *The French academie*, trans. T[homas] B[owes] (London, 1586), 503.

hapneth because of the impotencie of their minds; for the imaginations of lustfull women are like the imaginations of bruite beastes which have no repugnancie or contradiction of reason to restraine them."[32] The weakness of women's minds and the waywardness of the female imagination are mentioned repeatedly in *The Faerie Queene*, where Phaedria exemplifies "fantasticke wit"; where the chamber of Phantastes contains images not only of freaks and monsters but also of the "fooles, louers, children, Dames" who imagine them; and where the masque of Cupid in the House of Busirane depicts as many love-maladies "as there be phantasies / In wauering wemens witt, that none can tell."[33]

The female imagination was thought to be strongly connected with the body. This was especially so in early modern beliefs about so-called "monstrous" births, as expounded by de la Primaudaye:

> it falleth out oftentimes, that the fancies and imaginations of great bellied women are so vehement and violent, that upon the bodies of the children they goe withall, they print the images and shapes of those things upon which they have fixed their fancies, and unto which by reason of their fancie, they are most affectionated.[34]

In this respect the female imagination had a real physical power that was impressive, and indeed alarming. In other ways, however, the female imagination was dismissed as the source of unrealities. Various supposedly supernatural occurrences were explained away as the delusions of foolish women; Ludwig Lavater's *Of Ghostes and Spirites Walking by Nyght* (1572), a book listed in the Penshurst library, accepted the reality of some apparitions but dismissed others as merely female hallucinations: "Wemen, which for the most parte are

[32] Crooke, *Mikrokosmographia*, 276.

[33] Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, 2.6.7, 2.9.50, 3.12.26.

[34] De la Primaudaye, *Second Part*, 157.

naturally geven to feare more than men …, do more often suppose they see or heare this or that thing, than men do."[35] Also in the Penshurst collection was Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), which accounted for supposed bewitchings as the melancholic power-fantasies of post-menopausal women: "the stopping of their monethlie melancholike flux or issue of bloud, in their age" made them "(through their weaknesse both of bodie and braine) the aptest persons to meete with such melancholike imaginations."[36] Robert Burton in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, a work first published in 1621, the same year as the print *Urania*, invoked authorities who "refer all that witches are said to do, to Imagination alone, and this humour of melancholy.… [T]hey do no such wonders at all, only their Brains are crazed."[37] He also reiterated that the female imagination could cause "monstrous" births and frightening nocturnal apparitions (1.2.3.2, 1.2.3.5).

Overall, ideas about the female imagination during the period when Wroth was writing the *Urania* were complex and often contradictory. On the one hand it inspired awe and fear as a powerful force; but on the other it was frequently belittled as foolish, self-deluding, and in thrall to women's unstable bodies and unruly passions.

The imagination in the *Urania*

Wroth sometimes participates in negative depictions of the imagination, usually in connection with female characters whom she encourages the reader to disapprove of and dislike. The

[35] Warkentin, Black, and Bowen, *Library of the Sidneys*, 175, item 64r28; Ludwig Lavater, *Of Ghostes and Spirites Walking by Nyght*, trans. R[obert] H[arrison] (London, 1572), 14.

[36] Warkentin, Black, and Bowen, *Library of the Sidneys*, 315, item 172v06; Reginald Scot, *The discoverie of witchcraft* (London, 1584), 54.

[37] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Angus Gowland (Penguin, 2021), 1.2.1.5.

prime case is Antissia, the declared mistress of Amphilanthus in the early part of the 1621 print *Urania*. When she begins to suspect that Pamphilia is also in love with Amphilanthus, imagination fuels her jealousy: "imagination growing to beliefe, beliefe brought feare, feare doubt, and doubt the restlesse affliction, suspition."[38] Pamphilia denies everything and dismisses Antissia's concerns: "'What a progresse,' said Pamphilia, 'hath your troubled imagination made to find a poore cause, to forge a poorer vexation?'" (96). This is somewhat unfair, given that Antissia's suspicions are actually correct; but Wroth endorses Pamphilia's stoical self-government and discretion – what Lamb calls her "heroics of constancy"[39] – setting them against Antissia's unregulated passions and insatiable curiosity, such that in this context Antissia's busy imagination is a fault. Later, in the manuscript sequel to the *Urania*, Antissia's inability to control her passions and her imagination turns her into a poet represented by other characters as mad and incompetent, practising "that phantisy they call poeticall furies" and composing in "raging, raving, extravagant discoursive language."[40] Another counter-type to Pamphilia's noble self-government, the jealous, proud, and wrathful Nereana, is also guilty of excessive imagination: when she deludedly misreads Perissus's pity for her as love, "he found her false imagination grow troublesome."[41]

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[38] Wroth, *Urania 1*, 93.

[39] Mary Ellen Lamb, *Gender and Authorship in the Sidney Circle* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 163–67.

[40] Lady Mary Wroth, *The Second Part of the Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, ed. Josephine A. Roberts, Suzanne Gossett, and Janel Mueller (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1999), 33, 41. Hereafter referred to as *Urania 2*.

[41] Wroth, *Urania 1*, 336.

Such negative cases may suggest that Wroth had internalised some of the prevalent criticism of the female imagination as unregulated by reason. However, as Lamb suggests,[42] and as Paul Salzman explores further in his essay for the present collection, the comparison between Pamphilia and Antissia is complex. As women expressing turbulent inner passions in poetry they are more alike than the comments of other characters might suggest; and in fact Wroth usually presents the imagination in a favourable light, especially when attributed to Pamphilia, her fictional avatar. As Pamphilia silently suffers the pain of secret love for the elusive Amphilanthus, she is praised for her ability to withdraw into her imagination even when in company: "shee could bee in greatest assemblies as private with her owne thoughts, as if in her Cabinet, and there have as much discourse with her imagination and cruell memory, as if in the presence."[43] Strikingly, her private thoughts and imaginations do not seem to console her, as we might expect, but combine with "cruell memory" to create the exquisite mental and emotional pain that refines her interiority and by which she consistently defines herself. Later, a vivid domestic simile is used to convey this inner torment: we read of "her continuall passions, which not utter'd did weare her spirits and waste them, as rich imbroyderies will spoyle one another, if laid without papers betweene them, fretting each other, as her thoughts and imaginations did her rich and incomprable minde" (499). Pamphilia's imaginations and passions are at once afflictions to her "rich and incomprable minde," and marks of its exceptional sensitivity and nobility.

Relations between the imagination and the passions were discussed in *The Passions of the Minde* by Thomas Wright, a work first published in 1601, expanded in 1604, and attracting renewed interest when Wroth was completing the *Urania*, with editions in 1620 and

[42] Lamb, *Gender and Authorship*, 159–62, 167–69.

[43] Wroth, *Urania 1*, 459.

1621. Wright defined a passion as "a sensual motion of our appetitive facultie, through imagination of some good or ill thing," adding that "we know most certaynely, that our sensitive appetite cannot love, hate, feare, hope, &c. but that by imagination."[44] Burton similarly connected the imagination and the passions: "this imagination is the *medium deferens* [means of conferral] of passions, by whose means they work and produce many times prodigious effects."[45] Pamphilia exemplifies this reciprocal relationship, and interaction between the imagination and the passions is often the source of her poetry. As we saw earlier, although the imagination was widely criticised in the early modern period as unruly, sensual, and deceptive, it also had positive associations with the creation of poetry, especially in those gifted with genial melancholy. Pamphilia conforms to this model when she repeatedly withdraws into solitude to express her hidden passions in verses. In one such episode, having taken refuge in her chamber from a difficult scene involving Amphilanthus and Antissia, she weeps, laments, and contemplates the moon, "all things quiet, but her ceaselesse mourning soule." Taking to her bed, she reads over some papers, then "took pen and paper, and being excellent in writing, writ these verses following."[46]

Pamphilia is not the only accomplished female poet in the *Urania*: others include her friends Urania and Alarina and her aunt the Queen of Naples.[47] Wroth was able to build on the precedent of her uncle Philip's *Arcadia*, in which Philoclea, Pamela, and Gynecia all

[44] Thomas Wright, *The passions of the minde in generall* (London, 1604), 8, 31.

[45] Burton, *Anatomy*, 1.2.3.2.

[46] Wroth, *Urania 1*, 62.

[47] E.g. Wroth, *Urania 1*, 1–2, 484, 489–90.

compose poems to express heightened passions.[48] She goes further, though, in her repeated emphasis on Pamphilia's exceptional poetic gifts and in making poetic composition central to her identity. Indeed, the sonnet sequence in the voice of this persona, *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, was composed before the *Urania*, then revised and repurposed to form the culmination of the 1621 print edition of the romance.[49] Wroth innovates in claiming for Pamphilia the elevated Ficinian form of creative melancholy that was generally attributed only to men. Even more radically, since Pamphilia is a semi-autobiographical figure, Wroth also implicitly claims this exalted form of melancholy for herself.[50] In a counterblast to representations of the female imagination by male authorities as a source of foolish misconceptions and crazed delusions, she develops instead a view of the imagination as passionate and profound, and as an emotional resource and creative power for women.

In the fictional world of the *Urania*, not only can a woman possess an elevated poetic imagination: this is also a realm where dreams are generally true. *The Faerie Queene* offered a precedent for the female imagination as receptacle for a prophetic dream in Britomart's

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[48] Sir Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, ed. Maurice Evans (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 241–42, 378, 633–35, 643, 650–52, 659–60, 662–63, 681–84.

[49] Lady Mary Wroth, *"Pamphilia to Amphilanthus" in Manuscript and Print*, ed. Ilona Bell and Steven W. May (Toronto: Iter Press, 2017), 1–19, 52–3.

[50] See Aurélie Griffin, *La Muse de l'humeur noire: "Urania" de Lady Mary Wroth: une poétique de la mélancholie* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2018); Helen Hackett, "'A Book, and Solitariness': Melancholia, Gender, and Literary Subjectivity in Mary Wroth's *Urania*," in *Renaissance Configurations: Voices, Bodies, Spaces, 1580–1690*, ed. Gordon McMullan (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 64–85.

sleeping vision at the Temple of Isis.[51] However, just as Wroth took further Sidney's depictions of the female poetic imagination, so her romance exceeds others in its use of prophetic dreams, often located in the highly sensitive imagination of Pamphilia. They include this vivid dream of her desertion by Amphilanthus for a new mistress:

> Shee dreamt, that shee had him in her armes, discoursing with him; but hee sad, and not speaking, of a sudden rose, and went to the doore, where shee thought shee saw Lucenia calling to him, to whom hee went, and downe the staires with her, then tooke Coach and fled away with her, which made her crie with that haste and loudnesse, but hee went still with Lucenia, never looking towards her, and so she lost sight of them, Coach and all.[52]

Even more distressingly, in *Urania 2*, the manuscript sequel, Pamphilia dreams vividly of a sumptuous wedding ceremony in which Amphilanthus is led to the altar in black, turning to her only to say brief words of farewell.[53] She thereby learns the devastating truth that, despite having previously exchanged vows with her in the presence of witnesses, Amphilanthus has betrayed her by marrying another woman. Amphilanthus in turn is tormented by a dream of his abandoned love: in sleep, Pamphilia appears and accuses him, "You are faulce, perjur'de, and I undun" (134–35).[54]

We cannot tell whether Wroth believed in prophetic dreams in real life, or just in the magical world of her romance. Here, all kinds of enchantments and supernatural events are possible, and truthful dreams are useful narrative devices, both to provide haunting, doom-

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[51] Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, 5.7.12–23.

[52] Wroth, *Urania 1*, 581.

[53] Wroth, *Urania 2*, 108.

[54] See Hackett, "A Book, and Solitariness," 75–76.

laden tableaux and to inform characters of events elsewhere. However, they also represent something more profound in terms of Wroth's development of a female poetics. After all, a romance, especially one that is also a *roman à clef*, is rather like a dream in representing reality in a removed, adapted, and encoded form. Lamb has written of Wroth's "sophisticated blurring of fiction and autobiography … in which one person may be refracted into a variety of characters, and not all details need be consistent" – just as in a dream.[55] Viewed in this light, Wroth's truth-claims for her fictional dreams may be read as implying a kind of veracity in her fiction as a whole: not exact or literal, but with a truth to inner experience. De la Primaudaye, as well as marvelling at the creative energy of fantasy, also wrote that in dreams "the images and resemblance of those things which the bodily senses perceived waking, are represented to our internall senses when we are asleepe";[56] just so, romance could create an alternative reality, separate from, but related to, the non-fictional or waking world.

Wroth's artistic choices included writing romance, a genre (despite the lack of female authors) strongly characterised as feminine;[57] identifying the passionate female imagination as the source of poetry; and asserting the truth-potential of dreams (and, by implication, of romance). These choices cohere to form, in effect, a defence of female poesy.

The imagination and the heart

[55] Mary Ellen Lamb, "The Biopolitics of Romance in Mary Wroth's *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*," *English Literary Renaissance* 31 (2001): 109–10.

[56] De la Primaudaye, *Second Part*, 145.

[57] Helen Hackett, '"Yet tell me some such fiction": Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania* and the "femininity" of romance,' in *Women, Texts and Histories 1575–1760*, ed. Diane Purkiss and Clare Brant (London: Routledge, 1992), 39–68.

Dreams in both the *Urania* and *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* are frequently about the absent beloved, and can be consolatory as well as distressing. For instance, one sonnet in Wroth's sequence opens:

> When I last saw thee, I didd nott thee see,
>
> itt was thy Image, w*hi*ch in my thoughts lay
>
> soe lively figur'd, as noe times delay
>
> could suffer mee in hart to parted bee;
>
> And sleepe soe favorable is to mee,
>
> as nott to lett thy lov'd remembrance stray.[58]

There is a sense here that the idealised image of Amphilanthus in Pamphilia's thoughts – unchanging, ever-present, and her own – is distinctly preferable to her real, straying beloved (who is particularly unreliable and hurtful in the manuscript version of the poems). Nor is she dependent on dreams to create this image; her powerful imagination can evoke it in conscious moments too. In the *Urania*, waking early one morning, "though the sight which she desired, was hid from her, she might yet by the light of her imaginations (as in a picture) behold, and make those lights serve in his absence."[59] On another occasion,

> when each retired to their rest, shee went unto her watch of endlesse thoughts: into her chamber she hasted, then to bed, but what to doe? alas not within that to sleepe, but with more scope to let imagination play in vexing her; there did shee call his face unto

[58] Wroth, *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, 97. All quotations are from the MS version of the poems, in which Bell argues that Wroth expresses her passions more freely than in the print version.

[59] Wroth, *Urania 1*, 90.

her eyes, his speech unto her eares, his judgement to her understanding, his braverie to her wit; all these but like that heape of starres, whose equall lusture makes the milky way. (215)

Pamphilia's active mental fashioning of an idealised version of Amphilanthus, combining all his best qualities – "that heape of starres" – while omitting his flaws, has something in common with Philip Sidney's account in *The Defence of Poesy* of how a poet constructs an "*idea*". It is "not wholly imaginative, as we are wont to say by them that build castles in the air," but may be a perfected, exemplary image of, for instance, Cyrus, improving upon the work of nature.[60] At the same time, Pamphilia's mental image-making gains special power from love, reflecting another recurrent theme of her uncle's works: the likeness of poets and lovers in their shared gift of constructing images that surpass reality.[61]

Wroth frequently worked with this concept of an inner image of the idealised essence of the beloved, as well as the related concept of an exchange of such images or essences between lovers. She may have drawn upon Ficino's commentary on Plato's *Symposium*, whose Italian version, *Sopra lo amore over' convito di Platone* (1544) is listed in the Penshurst library catalogue.[62] Ficino writes that lovers live in one another, and "exchange themselves with each other. … The lover engraves the figure of the beloved on his own soul."[63] Often, however, Pamphilia holds the image of Amphilanthus not in her mind or soul,

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[60] Philip Sidney, *Defence of Poesy*, 9.

[61] See Gavin Alexander, "Loving and Reading in Sidney," *Studies in Philology* 114.1 (Winter 2017): 39–66.

[62] Warkentin, Black, and Bowen, *Library of the Sidneys*, 243, item 111r24.

[63] Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, trans. Sears Jayne (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1985), 55, 57.

but in her heart, as in the sonnet "When I beeheld the Image of my deare": "Yett in my hart unseene of jealous eye / the truer Image shall in triumph lye."[64] The heart was understood as the seat of the passions, and Wright explained its relation to the imagination:

> First then, to our imagination commeth, by sense or memorie, some object to be knowne, convenient or disconvenient to Nature, the which beeing knowne … in the imagination which resideth in the former part of the braine, (as we proove) when we imagine any thing, presently the purer spirites flocke from the brayne, by certayne secret channels to the heart, where they pitch at the doore, signifying what an obiect was presented, convenient or disconvenient for it. The heart immediatly bendeth, either to prosecute it, or to eschewe it.[65]

In other words, when the imagination creates a mental image, it transmits it (by means of spirits) from the brain to the heart. Wroth finds productive both this concept of an imprint upon the heart, and the related concept of an exchange of hearts between lovers. At one point Pamphilia feels Amphilanthus's heart within her, "deerely held in her best dearest breast, which still sent sweetest thoughts to her imagination." This prompts her to call on "the passionate eyes of my imaginary sight," revelling in visions of "those pleasures wee have had, those best spent houres, when we each other held in sweet discourse," creating "infinitenesse of content in these imaginations." Her reverie is interrupted by news of the arrival of the real Amphilanthus, in whose company she continues to conceal her love, listens attentively to tales of his adventures, and competes for his attention with Antissia.[66] As in

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[64] Wroth, *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, 178.

[65] Wright, *Passions*, 45.

[66] Wroth, *Urania 1*, 317–20.

"When I last saw thee," there is a distinct sense that her internal image of her beloved is more rewarding than the reality.

A further related trope involves the inscription of the beloved's name upon the heart. Wright explained that a more sensitive imagination would create more intense passions and a deeper imprint: "if the imagination bee very apprehensive, it sendeth greater store of spirites to the heart, and maketh greater impression."[67] Wroth literalises this in the episode of the Hell of Deceit, in which Pamphilia and Amphilanthus are visualised as having each other's names written on their hearts. While hunting, they are separated by an enchantment, and Pamphilia sees a vision of Amphilanthus with two of his rival mistresses,

> Musalina sitting in a Chaire of Gold, a Crowne on her head, and Lucenia holding a sword, which Musalina tooke in her hand, and before them Amphilanthus was standing, with his heart ript open, and Pamphilia written in it, Musalina ready with the point of the sword to conclude all, by razing that name out, and so his heart as the wound to perish.[68]

Meanwhile Amphilanthus himself has a complementary vision of Pamphilia in a cave:

> there did hee perceive perfectly within it Pamphilia dead, lying within an arch, her breast open and in it his name made, in little flames burning like pretty lamps which made the letters, as if set round with diamonds, and so cleare it was, as hee distinctly saw the letters ingraven at the bottome in Characters of bloud. (655)

Running throughout Wroth's work, then, we find a cluster of related tropes that connect the imagination with the heart as seat of the passions: the image of the beloved in the lover's heart; the exchange of hearts between lovers; and the heart inscribed with the name of the

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[67] Wright, *Passions*, 47.

[68] Wroth, *Urania 1*, 583.

beloved. The loving female imagination "feign[s] notable images" and writes texts in the heart, intrinsically aligning female passion with the processes whereby poetry is made.

Wroth's fascination with the imagining and feeling heart as the place where love is registered could have arisen from a number of influences. Carrying the image of a beloved in the mind or heart, or an exchange of hearts with the beloved, were tropes which reached back at least as far as Petrarch.[69] They can be linked to the early modern social practices of the exchange of poems (especially sonnets) and of material images (especially portrait miniatures) as tokens of intimacy and shared interiority, to be cherished and stored close to the heart or in a private cabinet.[70] As for more violent and painful images of the heart as exposed or marked, Wroth's episode of the Hell of Deceit echoes the spectacle of the captive Amoret's wounded breast and extracted, bleeding heart in Spenser's House of Busirane.[71] Her imagination may also have been fired by the graphic anatomical images of the exposed and dissected heart available to her in Crooke's *Mikrokosmographia* in the Penshurst Library (fig. 1). Crooke's accompanying description identifies the heart as "the fountaine of the Vitall Faculty and spirit" which is "scituated in the midst of the cavity of the chest in a Noble place as it were a Prince", both physically and spiritually at the centre of being.[72]

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[69] See Petrarch, *Sonnets and Shorter Poems*, trans. David R. Slavitt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 5, Poem 5; 15, Poem 15; 16, Poem 16; 80, Poem 94; 82, Poem 96; 92, Poem 107; 109, Poem 130; 134, Poem 157; 135, Poem 158; 182, Poem 205; 187, Poem 212; 222, Poem 250; 253, Poem 284; 305, Poem 340; 308, Poem 343.

[70] See Patricia Fumerton, "'Secret' Arts: Elizabethan Miniatures and Sonnets," *Representations* 15 (1986): 57–97.

[71] Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, 3.12.20–21.

[72] Crooke, *Mikrokosmographia*, 367–68.

<**Figure 1.** Helkiah Crooke, *Mikrokosmographia* (London, 1615), 369 (misnumbered 357), table 9. The Huntington Library, San Marino, California, call no. 53894.>

Probably most important, however, for Wroth's conceptualisation of the imagining, inscribed, or exchanged heart were sources from her own family circle. These include various poems in Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, notably the popular and often-reproduced "My true love hath my hart, and I have his,"[73] and in his *Astrophil and Stella*. In Sonnet 88, for instance, the speaker is undaunted by Stella's absence because he has "inward sight" of her image in his heart:

> Tush absence, while thy mistes eclipse that light,
>
> My Orphan sence flies to the inward sight,
>
> Where memory sets foorth the beames of love.
>
> That where before hart loved and eyes did see,
>
> In hart both sight and love now coupled be;
>
> United powers make each the stronger prove.[74]

[73] Sir Philip Sidney, *Poems*, ed. William A. Ringler, Jr. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 75–76, OA 45. See also "In vaine, mine Eyes, you labour to amende" (38, OA 14); "Since so mine eyes are subject to your sight" (39, OA 16); and "Do not disdaine, ô streight up raised Pine" (77, OA 47).

[74] Philip Sidney, *Poems*, 223.

Indeed, the famous conclusion of Sonnet 1, "'Foole' said my Muse to me, 'looke in thy heart and write,'" arguably implies that what lies in the speaker's heart is the image of Stella.[75] Wroth's father Robert also used the trope of the inner image of the beloved:

> But when I think I have my quiet met
> And that love foiled yields to his overthrow,
> The idol of her beauties proud doth show
> Unto my thoughts, in beams which never set.[76]

In Wroth's own generation, the poetry of her cousin and lover, William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke – generally understood to be the real-life counterpart of the fictional Amphilanthus – drew on the same traditions. As Lamb and others have shown, his poems often formed part of dialogues with Wroth,[77] suggesting that tropes of the imagining or

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[75] Philip Sidney, *Poems*, 165. See also: 166–67, AS 4.12; 167, AS 5.5–7; 180–81, AS 32.13–14; 183–84, AS 38.6; 185, AS 39.14; 184–85, AS 40.13–14; 186, AS 43.13; 235, AS 105.4.

[76] Robert Sidney, *Poems*, ed. P. J. Croft (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 163, Sonnet 8.

[77] Garth Bond, "Mary Wroth and William Herbert at Penshurst, in Manuscript and Print," *Sidney Journal* 31.1 (2013): 51–80; Mary Ellen Lamb, "'Can You Suspect a Change in Me?': Poems by Mary Wroth and William Herbert, Third Earl of Pembroke," in *Re-reading Mary Wroth*, ed. Katherine Larson and Naomi Miller, with Andrew Strycharski (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 53–68; Mary Ellen Lamb, "The Poetry of William Herbert, Third Earl of Pembroke," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Sidneys, 1500–1700: Vol. 2: Literature*, ed. Margaret P. Hannay, Mary Ellen Lamb, and Michael G. Brennan (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 272–74; Marion Wynne-Davies, "'For Worth, not Weakness, Makes in Use but One': Literary Dialogues in an English Renaissance Family," in *"This Double Voice":*

engraved heart formed part of a shared intimate language. Their poetic exchanges using motifs of exchanged hearts, or exchanged images in the heart, have an intensely metatextual quality. There are examples in the excellent recent edition of Pembroke's poems by Mary Ellen Lamb, Garth Bond, and Steven W. May. In "Can you suspect a change in me," Pembroke writes that Love refrained from engraving an image in the "dainty flesh" of his beloved's heart, "But wrought in mine without remorse, / Till he of it thy perfect Statue made."[78] In an even more striking example, a poem opening "When mine eyes, first admiring your rare beauty", the speaker displays his knowledge of contemporary theories about the operations of imagination. He narrates how his eyes "stole the Picture of your face"; how it passed into his mind, where it was approved by Reason and Judgment; and how "both agreed to place it in my heart." He concludes:

> Then, since I was not born to be so blest,
> Your real self fair Mistress to obtain,
> Yet must your image dwell within my brest,
> And in that secret Closet still remain:
> Where all alone retir'd, I'le sit and view
> Your Picture, Mistress, since I may not you.[79]

Gendered Writing in Early Modern England, ed. Danielle Clarke and Elizabeth Clarke (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 164–84.

[78] William Herbert, *The Poems of William Herbert, Third Earl of Pembroke*, ed. Mary Ellen Lamb, Garth Bond, and Steven W. May (New York and Toronto: Iter Press, 2024), 38.

[79] Herbert, *Poems*, 62. The editors write that "The inclusion of this poem in the Pembroke canon is not entirely secure," but "There are no other contenders for attribution" (221). For other poems using related motifs see 15, 31, 33, and 48.

As Scott Manning Stevens and William W. E. Slights have shown, the heart featured extensively in early modern religious iconography.[80] Protestant love poetry of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries drew extensively on Catholic traditions that had been outlawed in religious practice, self-consciously committing idolatry of the beloved in references to shrines, pilgrimages, and supplications to saints.[81] Robert Sidney, for instance, in the poem quoted above, calls the inner image of his mistress an "idol." To some extent Wroth's representations of the suffering or displaced heart participate in the erotic secularisation of Catholic iconography, evoking the torments of martyrs, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and images in which Jesus exchanged hearts with a saint.[82] However, her depictions of the presence of the beloved within the heart also draw upon Protestant practices of introspective prayer. Within Protestant theology, the heart was the site of conscience and the place where the reception of divine grace would be perceived; hence it was essential to scrutinise it in private prayers and meditations.[83] It was the inner space where the believer should welcome God and cherish his teachings, as reflected in a supplication in the Book of Common Prayer "that the wordes which we have heard this daye with our outward eares, may

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[80] Scott Manning Stevens, "Sacred Heart and Secular Brain," in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York: Routledge, 1997), 263–82; William W. E. Slights, *The Heart in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[81] See Helen Hackett, "The art of blasphemy? Interfusions of the erotic and the sacred in the poetry of Donne, Barnes, and Constable," *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 28.3 (Summer 2004), 27–54.

[82] Slights, *Heart in the Age of Shakespeare*, 48, 51, 179.

[83] Slights, *Heart in the Age of Shakespeare*, 12–13, 25, 33, 101.

through thi grace be so grafted inwardly in our hartes, that they may bring furth in us the fruite of good living."[84] Such beliefs were reflected in another Sidney family source, the Psalm-paraphrases begun by Philip and completed by his sister Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke. As Katherine R. Larson has discussed, the Sidney-Pembroke Psalter goes beyond other translations and paraphrases of the Psalms in its emphasis on dialogue between the speaker and God, located within the heart as metaphorical closet – interior, enclosed, and private.[85] Existing frequent references to the heart in the Psalms were spatialised and intensified by the Sidney siblings to convey an intimate sharing of inner selfhood with God, as if with a lover. Psalm 17, verse 3, for instance, reads in the Geneva Bible "Thou hast proved and visited mine heart in the night," which became in Philip's version "Thou that by proofe acquainted art / With Inward secrets of my heart."[86] Similarly, in Mary's hands the Geneva Bible's "I have hid thy promes in mine heart" was rendered as "Thy speeches have I hidd / Close locked up in casket of my heart."[87]

Stevens observes that identification of the heart as the location of conscience and of intimate encounters with God "allowed the heart to 'know' things in a way the brain could

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[84] *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, ed. Brian Cummings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 139.

[85] Katherine R. Larson, *Early Modern Women in Conversation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 63–81.

[86] *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition*, introd. Lloyd E. Berry (1969; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), Old Testament, 237v; Philip Sidney, *Poems*, 289.

[87] Psalm 119, B.11, *Geneva Bible*, 261r; Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, "The Sidney Psalter," in Isabella Whitney, Mary Sidney, and Aemilia Lanyer, *Renaissance Women Poets*, ed. Danielle Clarke (London: Penguin, 2000), 143.

not."[88] Slights makes a similar point: "Looking into the heart became the dominant paradigm for the act of self-scrutiny in the early modern period. What was revealed in the profoundest of these meditations was the heart discovering how it knew what it knew."[89] The heart, then, was a place where the deepest truths were experienced by feeling, not by reasoning. While the *Urania* is a resolutely secular work – and this is one of its radical properties, in a period when many women worked within more respectable religious genres – Wroth may be seen as claiming spiritual truth for Pamphilia's imaginations and passions by locating them so emphatically in the heart and thereby mobilising sacred associations.

Conclusion: the imagination and truth

As we saw in earlier sections of this essay, many early modern writers associated the imagination with untruth. For Thomas Wright it was particularly prone to falsify when working in concert with the passions: "hee that once apprehendeth the pleasure of the passion, ordinarily followeth it, and the passion increaseth the imagination thereof, and the stronger imagination rendreth the passion more vehement." This could create "a false conceite in the minde," since:

> the understanding looking into the imagination, findeth nothing almost but the mother and nurse of his passion for consideration, where you may well see how the imagination putteth greene spectacles before the eyes of our witte, to make it see nothing but greene, that is, serving for the consideration of the Passion.[90]

[88] Stevens, "Sacred Heart," 271.

[89] Slights, *Heart in the Age of Shakespeare*, 99–100.

[90] Wright, *Passions*, 51–52.

In other words, the imagination, when in thrall to a particular passion, distorted perception, and hence interfered with reason and judgment.

Evidence from the *Urania* and *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* suggests that Wroth took a fundamentally different view of the combined powers of the imagination and the passions. For her these conjoined faculties were the source of authentic poetic expressions of thoughts and feelings, and of insightful dreams. They could also create an image of the beloved in the heart which had at least two kinds of truth: it was "true" in the sense of being a constant, reliable presence; and it was "true" as the Platonic essence of all that was best about the beloved. Just as the poet (or writer of fictions), according to Sidney, could "mak[e] things … better than nature bringeth forth", so Wroth asserted her own and her author-heroine's ability to create an ideal version of the beloved that was "better than nature.".

Of course Pamphilia is not literally Wroth, Amphilanthus is not literally William Herbert, and the world of Wroth's romance and sonnets stands at a remove from reality – yet it has at its core a concept of emotional authenticity. We see this when Pamphilia is with Limena, "her second selfe," another semi-fictionalised version of Wroth herself, multiplying the *Urania*'s intersections between invention and reality. Pamphilia implores Limena to narrate her experiences in love:

> speake then of love, and speake to me, who love that sweete discourse, (next to my love) above all other things, if that you cannot say more of your selfe, then your deare trust hath grac'd me withall, tell of some others, which as truly shall be silently inclosed in my breast, as that of yours; let me but understand the choice varieties of Love, and the mistakings, the changes, the crosses; if none of these you know, yet tell me some such fiction, it may be I shall be as lucklesse as the most unfortunate; shew

> me examples, for I am so void of hope, much lesse of true assurance, as I am already at the height of all my joy.[91]

Here the distinction between fact and fiction is of no consequence to Pamphilia – and, we may infer, to her creator too – as long as the stories told speak to emotional experience and help their audience to "understand the choice varieties of Love."

As we have seen, Wroth was writing at a time when the imagination was widely distrusted and disparaged, and when the female imagination was the object of particular disdain. When we set her writings in this context their radicalism becomes even clearer. The genres of romance and sonnet sequence, and the family traditions that she inherited in these genres, enabled her to create an assertively proto-feminist world of imagination: a world where melancholy genius can be possessed by women as much as men; where the imagination and the passions are empowering rather than disabling; and, above all, where things don't have to be real to be true.

[91] Wroth, *Urania 1*, 225.