

Articles

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Generic Memory in Mary Wroth's *Urania*

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In *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania* (1621), the first prose romance in English written by a woman, Mary Wroth creates a complex memorial of her inconstant lover Sir William Herbert that is both confessionally personal and satirically political. The work is commonly read as a *roman à clef* motivated by personal complaints, but recent criticism has explored how Wroth turns the obvious personal subject matter towards public comment. While much of this newer research focuses on gender issues, the narrative also lends itself to wider court criticism, particularly in the way that she uses fiction to alter and recast the past in ways that become critical of the issues important to her. As the niece of Philip Sidney and daughter of Robert Sidney, both important Elizabethan writers as well as influential courtiers, Wroth was familiar with the centers of both literature and power. Moreover, the long affair with her cousin William Herbert, the Earl of Pembroke, kept her close to the concerns of King James' court. It is no surprise, then, to find that her fiction entwines personal memories with political issues, especially when it comes to the views of the Sidneys and Herberts with whom James was often at odds.

What is unusual, however, is Wroth's transformation of personal and political conflicts into specifically generic problems within her fiction. Rather than dealing with these issues in a thinly veiled manner as in most *roman à clef* writing, Wroth transforms the recent past into highly stylized forms of story-telling and then manipulates their generic encoding in unusual ways. This allows her to use her fiction to exert a measure of control over the same political circumstances which left her familial, marital, and political status continually insecure. As almost all of her critics have noted, Wroth's romance is an extended reflection on personal trials which makes the *Urania* read like an uneasy mix of pointed topical allegories and counterfactual wish-fulfillment. Most of these reflections depend on the conventions of romance in which Wroth both idealizes her failed relationship with Herbert, the father of her two illegitimate children, and to present herself as a female heroine whose constancy becomes the central honored virtue. Thus, most accounts praise her innovations in creating a uniquely feminine virtue that can replace chivalric notions of honor or the male-centered perspective of most erotic characterizations of pastoral romance. Wroth's primary innovations, then, are specifically generic, and it is commonly noted that she possessed a uniquely sophisticated awareness of what it

means for a work both to belong to and alter a genre, particularly in terms of the Petrarchan conventions in her sonnet sequence *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*.^[1]

But Wroth's generic innovations are even more striking when she addresses issues of recent memory, whether they involve her personal situation or that of her family more generally, because she presents these situations as a conflict of genres. Wroth interrupts the *Urania*'s romance narrative with moments that break the otherwise typical generic expectations the form creates. These moments articulate politically difficult or controversial moments into conflicts of directly opposed images of how that situation might be resolved. What emerges from these conflicts is a sense that Wroth responds to political dilemmas not by trying to determine a solution to them, but, instead, by creating fictional circumstances in which each political perspective begins to look artificial, rhetorical, and potentially false, at least from the perspective of the larger romance narrative. When the plot continues, these moments appear to be mere performances which have little or no effect on the larger fictional world. As such, Wroth is able to exert a kind of literary control over political issues in which she was, in truth, subjected to the decisions and whims of others. The literary "memorials" of difficult experiences, then, become pointed and critical not by changing her recollection of past events, but by presenting them as if they were mere generic fictions, or at least that they could take such a form. For Wroth, romantic fiction does not alter memories of her past, but, instead, criticizes her past for being too much like fiction, or at least too generic to be taken seriously as it happened.

The clearest example of Wroth's political use of genre occurs in the oft-cited moment of *Urania*'s political mythmaking. Amphilanthus' peaceful election to Holy Roman Emperor is the culmination of a story-line which does not seem to fit the work's romance classification: it is straightforwardly epic. And yet this epic narrative culminates halfway through the printed text, leaving almost two more books which continue Amphilanthus' story, not as an epic hero, but as a knight-errant who wanders far from both his role as imperial hero and also from his erotic fulfillment with Pamphilia. An epic, idealized pan-European empire is set against a story of erotic deferral in which the establishment of a unified Europe seems to have no political consequences whatsoever. Josephine Roberts influentially reads Amphilanthus' election as a criticism of James' failed pacific strategies for religious unity on the continent.^[2] But, while certainly available as one reading of the section, that interpretation only makes sense if we isolate Amphilanthus' political role from the rest of the narrative in which he is ambiguously unsettled. (Wroth names him "lover of two" in a book which champions its heroine's constant fidelity to him.) Reading with an eye to how Wroth interlaces Amphilanthus' election with its narrative context, we find that Wroth is interested less in simply putting forward a critical "counter-myth," as Roberts calls it, to James' failures than in trying to understand how political visions are the consequences of particular genres of political thinking.^[3]

Following such a line of thinking through the text, I argue that the *Urania* employs the romantic trope of narrative interlace to pit genres against one another as incompatible political myths, to use to

Roberts' word, which reduce political thinking to very stylized, and very limited, political visions. Roberts' reading to the contrary, the work displays a strong cynicism about politics which imagines various idealized political representations as incompatible rhetorical constructs, and it is easy to understand the sources of Wroth's cynicism in her life after the first part's publication in 1621. She was, after all, exiled from court for her illegitimate children by William Herbert, her Protestant Sidney family heritage was losing its predominance at court, and her relation to the pro-Spanish politics of Queen Anne's now scattered coterie looked increasingly like a tacit criticism of James' failing pacifist and de facto isolationist policies. But political cynicism hardly means that Wroth avoids thinking about the ways that political issues are figured in her work, and it seems, instead, that her way of dealing with her own misfortunes and dissensions in political matters may well have been to reflect on the problems inherent in how political problems can be articulated in fiction. Generic interlace becomes, for Wroth, a commentary on the intractability of her own personal and political commitments, much like her almost obsessive attention to the tragedy of constant lovers allowed her to transform her personal heartbreak into fictional and poetic control.

In the clearest political allegory of the published version of Wroth's *Urania*, she draws on the traditional conflict of epic-versus-romance. Here, Wroth begins by repeating the terms drawn out by David Quint in *Epic and Empire* where the fundamental opposition between epic and romance is political.^[4] Quint's general thesis is that epics are written by political victors who tell stories that end in magnificent triumphalism, most often the establishment of a new empire. Romances, on the other hand, are written by political losers (and are included in epics as moments when the empire was almost lost or when a hero momentarily forgets his destiny). Epics are teleological because they narrate the heroic establishment of a political entity while romances are digressive and wandering because they narrate stories of those who want to win, but haven't yet (and, thus, are still wandering). On Quint's model, epic is always a dominant society's preferred mode of narrative, and, even when epic includes romance in it (Aeneas dallying with Dido or the moment in Tasso), this only intensifies by way of contrast the epic's political destination. (And even romances, when they are political, really want to be epics in so far as they want to narrate social and political dominance rather than deferral and wandering.) What Wroth does, however, is to present an epic in the midst of a romance, rather than romance moments appearing in the midst of epics, as exemplified by Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* in which Rinaldo's dalliance on Armida's island presents a romance episode as a fundamental test of the hero's devotion to his destiny. The inversion changes the political consequences significantly from the pattern Quint identifies, and when Amphilanthus becomes Holy Roman Emperor in the middle of *Urania*'s Book III, epic ultimately becomes a test for the virtues of romance.



Figure 1 Title page of the original 1621 edition of The Countesse of Mountgomerie Urania. Reproduced from the holdings of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California. (Wroth, civ)

After the central characters are freed from the Throne of Love at the end of Book I, Books II and III follow two different sets of stories. The first set, which comprises most of the narrative, involves the events that follow after the characters meet the enchantress Melissea, whose prophecies set most of the characters on the path to being trapped in (and trying to achieve the quest of) the Enchanted Theater. This set of stories repeats many of the same themes which critics often address and which comprise what is characteristic of Uranian “romance”: troubled constancy, female lovers in difficult positions, and marriage problems. But, at the same time, a smaller group of stories, centering almost exclusively on male characters, follow the military trials of the knights who try to put Steriamus on the throne of Albania, displacing four usurpers. Along with this military campaign, Amphilanthus and his friend

Ollorandus of Bohemia try to rejoin their friends (after having to return to their respective home countries in order to gain the crowns), along the way establishing their heroic might, setting various corrupt regimes to rights, and culminating in Amphilanthus' election to Holy Roman Emperor after all of his other friends have established (or are about to establish) themselves as monarchs by either inheritance or marriage.

By looking at the generic interactions within the work and treating them as a type of political allegory, we can also understand how Wroth has organized a narrative which, to many critics, appears structurally confused. There seems to be a general consensus that Part I of the *Urania* has little narrative structure apart from Amphilanthus' fluctuating fidelity to Pamphilia and the *ad nauseum* repetition of jilted lover stories. Mary Ellen Lamb's otherwise constructive *Gender and Authorship in the Sidney Circle* makes this claim, going so far as to include two plot summary appendices which make it sound like the plot of the *Urania* is all but impossible to untangle.^[5] Her essay "The Biopolitics of Romance in Mary Wroth's The Countess of Montgomery's *Urania*" also tries to make a virtue of "anti-narrativity" and "an aesthetics of diffusion," which seems to me to mistake "confusion" for deferral and lack of closure. Nonetheless, it seems to me that we can quite easily find Part I to be broadly organized by a rather conventional romance quest structure.^[6] Book I of the first published manuscript (divided into four Books) is dominated by the quest to free the first group of lovers from the Throne of Love. Books II and III follow the male characters' attempt to free the various women from the Enchanted Theater. And Book IV describes Amphilanthus' lieutenants trying to find and free him from Musalina and Limena's Hell of Deceit. In each case, despite the proliferation of digressions and stories told by sub characters (and the Albanian revolution in Books II and III, which I discuss below) the narrative consistently returns to a pattern of trying to get couples back together when one half is "enchanted" in order to establish a happy union after challenges to their constancy. The generic shift from epic to romance (along with other shifts that occur in other politically charged moments where lyric complaint and picaresque are at issue) are the most significant departures from what is otherwise an easily recognizable romance device and are, thus, conspicuous. I argue that when the narrative veers into these modes, Wroth associates a particular political vision with each of them. In the epic moments of Books II and III when Amphilanthus rises to power, for example, she describes an alternative vision of a unified Europe under a universal (and peaceful) empire.^[7] In each case, the *Urania* uses generic thinking and her readers' expectations and memory of generic codes for political allegory. She also questions the ability of a single genre or type of story telling to portay the difficulty and conflicted nature of her own political positions, and just as her characters move through and beyond the political possibilities of each genre, Wroth herself moved through and beyond the political identities offered her (a favored-then-exiled female courtier, a Protestant Sidney, a member of Queen Anne's court, etc.).^[8]

What Wroth has done, then, when the question of empire and King James' pacific policies come to the fore is provide us with a small epic narrative in the midst of a larger romance narrative. She even

stresses the generic difference by completing the epic just before Amphilanthus becomes trapped in the Enchanted Theater, the magical quest that dominates the middle of the *Urania*, and which is involved in marking his larger failures as a lover. The interlacing of generic forms becomes particularly emphasized here, in addition to the interlacing of different narrative threads that come together in the scenes at the Enchanted Theater. In the epic narrative, however, Amphilanthus' infidelity, which defines his character throughout the rest of the book, is never even mentioned. The question then becomes how are we to understand Amphilanthus' character, praised on the one hand as the "Light of the Western World" and on the other as the central source of Wroth's alter-ego Pamphilia's unhappiness. And, furthermore, since Amphilanthus' election has been seen as central to defining Wroth's stance on international politics, I think it is important to read the political consequences, not just of the potential idealizing picture of a European empire, but of why Wroth would undercut it by including it at a moment in the narrative where she highlights Amphilanthus' romantic failures. The epic storyline may seem straightforward as a counter-myth, if the reading by Roberts mentioned previously is correct, but it becomes much more sophisticated when Wroth calls attention to its strange inclusion in the larger context of the narrative in which its generic encoding and its generic differences become conspicuous.

First, we should note that the epic mode fits well with the reading of Amphilanthus' election as an implicit criticism of King James. Wroth wrote her romance in the midst of both political and personal encounters with early seventeenth-century international problems and imperial ambitions. These issues were not only topically resonant with the English monarch's desire for a unified Christendom, but also with her family's leadership in the Protestant faction (particularly her father Robert Sidney and William Herbert himself) which hoped for England's leadership in a continental Protestant league.^[9] Her familial and national involvement with these issues came to a head two years before the first part of the *Urania* was printed in the Bohemian revolt of 1619, but James' failure to support his son-in-law Elector Palatine Frederick against the Catholics within the Holy Roman Empire led many, the Sidneys and Herberts not least among them, to doubt their monarch's resolve, or at least his pacific strategies, in bringing about a unified Christian Europe.^[10] Wroth's romance recalls these events not only geographically, as most of Part I occurs within central Europe, but also by imagining that a new Holy Roman Emperor could bring about universal peace and establish international peace and justice, just as the Sidneys and Herberts desired.

Amphilanthus' election to Holy Roman Emperor comes as no surprise and formally establishes his office as keeper of international justice which he previously championed because of his straightforward virtuous nature. Early in Part I, before we even meet him, we learn that he has been named "King of the Romans" (he had previously been King of Naples) after defeating the usurping Duke of Saxony (45). This first act is repeated throughout most of Books I and II as he overthrows usurpers and establishes justice for figures who have lost their crown or their liberty. In each case, his actions gain him the love of those he has helped, and Wroth repeatedly shows this love translating into

freely given oaths of loyalty. Consequently, the “epic” resolution of Amphilanthus’ military story is one not only of conquest, but of *just* conquest in which the establishment of empire is something universally good and never marred by questions of Amphilanthus’ legitimacy. Wroth makes this clear in the speech given by the Prince of Transylvania announcing the hero’s unlooked-for election:

Ollorandus your worthy friend, having the greatest stroke in the election, making all the assembly remember your right hath chosen you, and truly Sir not onely hee, but all, as soone as you were named gave an equall consent, as if borne and made of one temper to serve you, having justly chose you to it. ...my selfe, Sir, am fortunate to bee commanded in this service to you, whom above all men, I honour, your owne true virtue causd that respect in me (441).

The notion that it is his virtue that causes respect and loyalty in others “as if borne and made of one temper to serve you” reinforces that Amphilanthus rules not because of his power to conquer but because of his love for them and the love he inspires in them. All of the electors are friends of Amphilanthus’ but friends who, like the Bohemian Ollorandus, he has helped to maintain or regain positions to which they were born.^[1] Amphilanthus is presented as the ideal knight and becomes Emperor not because of his chivalric valor or combination of military virtues, as with many a typical chivalric romance hero, but because he acts to preserve what rightfully belongs to others and to keep people in positions that are justly their own. In his fight to overcome tyrants in Albania, Romania, Macedon, Hungaria, Bohemia, and Celicia, Amphilanthus always justifies this imperial role, not of dominating other monarchs, but of helping them to maintain their own rightful sovereignty. Peace in the *Urania* is always achieved after a usurper or tyrant has been replaced with a rightful ruler, and the utopian vision is in Amphilanthus’ promise of bringing about this rightful order throughout the world.

However, before Amphilanthus gains his title and, having just put Steriamus back on the throne of Albany, bringing a large portion of the political tension to a close, Wroth has Amphilanthus, by chance, cross paths with an old lover, Musalina. She even highlights the incongruity of his actions by suggesting that, in the midst of his political virtue runs a streak of adolescent distraction:

Amphilanthus was like the King, received and followed by all men, acknowledging their peace, gaine, and liberty to come from him. Then backe againe to Neapolis he and Ollorandus went to conduct Musalina, one of his first Loves in his youthfull travailes, where some time they spent in all sweet and studied for delights, the search [for the Enchanted Theater] being quite forgot...(397).

The passage contrasts two forms of love that Wroth will begin to explore after Amphilanthus is elected Emperor and subsequently betrays Pamphilia: selfless and selfish love. So far in the narrative, Amphilanthus' selfless love has earned him the love and loyalty of everyone he meets, so much so that he is named Emperor and treated universally as a guarantor of justice. Apparently, however, even being the exemplar of selfless love does not exclude the possibility of selfish love, the Tyrant love which dominates so much of Wroth's lyric writing (both in the *Urania* and in *Pamphilia and Amphilanthus*). In the remainder of Book III, Wroth turns the consequences of this selfish love into a critique of the utopian ideal of a just empire, a critique which, in political terms, examines the difficulty of maintaining justice between rightful sovereigns within a greater empire. Amphilanthus' infidelity to Pamphilia becomes a political problem by showing the difficulty of imagining at one and the same time an emperor who can recognize the legitimate sovereignty of the constituents of his empire while also insisting on his own separate sovereignty. The difficulty of loving fairly and, in Wroth's terms, loving with constancy becomes a problem of conceiving a sovereign emperor who can maintain the legitimate sovereignty of other rulers without interfering with their liberty. In other words, Amphilanthus's success is ultimately an ironic representation of James' hopes for a peaceful empire, one in which his success occurs at once too easily and too impermanently.

What is more, however, this debate between forms of love coincides with Amphilanthus' return to the romance form of magical quest structures. Just after receiving news of his election, Amphilanthus arrives at the Enchanted Theater (and enchantments have had nothing to do with his military exploits that garnered him international respect). Furthermore, his dalliance with Musalina, barely mentioned when he first encounters her just before rejoining the Albanian campaign, takes narrative priority when he returns to the role of knight errant rather than conqueror and general. Consequently, the selfless love that grounded the political ideal of empire is lost when Amphilanthus returns to his role as a private lover and an adventurer in the more magical romance landscape of enchantments that dominates the rest of the book. Wroth writes the same character as a champion in the "epic" plot and as a figure in fidelity in the "romance" plot. Figuring out how to reconcile Amphilanthus' two "characters" becomes the crux of understanding how Wroth uses generic restructuring of personal and political memories.

By the time the Prince of Transylvania delivers his news to Amphilanthus, the Emperor is already in a courtship with Musalina. Furthermore, having just finished the Albanian campaign, Amphilanthus and the other princes learn that most of the main female characters, Pamphilia among them, have been trapped in the Enchanted Theater, awaiting his prophesized arrival to free them. The messenger's appearance seems to remind the Roman King of his quest only momentarily. Interestingly, he has also just met the Queen of Bulgaria whose earlier encounter with Rosindy and Meriana granted her the title "Empress of Pride." The Transylvanian, about to give Amphilanthus the news of his election, briefly compliments the Bulgarian Queen, and Wroth takes a moment to note that "she tooke it like her owne conceit, and so as shee lovd him better for commending her, then for his owne worth" (441). Chiding

one who responds to praise rather than virtue should perhaps qualify our reception of the grand compliment Amphilanthus receives as “the earths glory” (441) when presented with his new title.

His experience in the Theater stands in direct contrast to the unqualified praise he receives from the electors in Germany. It casts doubt on his worthiness for the throne and his ultimately questionable role in the quest to free his friends from the Enchanted Theater implies that while he has proven himself in one form of love, he has yet to prove himself in other ways. First, Amphilanthus’ ability to lift the charm that keeps Pamphilia and the others trapped is only part of what is necessary. The gate remains locked until “the man most loving, and most beloved, used his force, who should release them [Amphilanthus], but himselfe be inclosed till by the freeing of the sweetest and loveliest creature [Veralinda]...he should be redeem’d” (373). Before Veralinda arrives, Amphilanthus is also trapped within the theater and, while there, Wroth emphasizes the effect of his infidelity on Pamphilia. All the other characters are in pairs, except for Pamphilia who sits alone, and Amphilanthus sits beside Musalina, directly before Pamphilia. (The Queen of Bulgaria also sits beside Amphilanthus, again emphasizing his proximity to pride.) But what stands out most in this passage is the contrast between the way Amphilanthus’ actions persuaded the princes of Germany and the effect he has on Pamphilia:

a sad spectacle, but she must and did indure it, though how,
with such unquietnesse, affliction, and multitudes of teares
as what succeeded? losse of so much beauty, as made many
have cause (I meane slight lovers) to see her lesse amiable,
then less love-worthy, and so she was left, and this is the truth
of mans affection, yet did hee not imagine, or rather would
not consider this was caused by his leaving her, she poore
Lady beholding nothing but affliction, and making herself
the true subject to it, yet did she not, nor would accuse him,
who was altogether so faulty as condemnd to be, though
more then she deserved unkind (442).

The man later called the “Light of the Western World,” is here cast first as so unkind that he destroys his love’s beauty, and, furthermore, as oblivious to his effect on her, a mere two signature pages after his election as “the earths glory.” In contrast to his political success, this Amphilanthus seems ineffective since he is not sufficient to undo the enchantment, but also thoughtless and cruel with Pamphilia. The emperor alienates the one he supposedly loves most.

If Amphilanthus’ selfless love and quest for justice exhibited towards his friends and allies is the masculine virtue Wroth champions, then constancy is the virtue of her heroines. Almost all the major female characters in the *Urania* are deserted, forgotten, or even betrayed by the men they love for at least a short time. Pamphilia, however, is its champion, and she transcends to its allegorical representation when she “becomes” Constancy by taking the keys from the iconic figure of constancy

in the first enchantment, the Throne of Love where “at which instant Constancy vanished, as metamorphosing herself into her [Pamphilia’s] breast” (170).^[12] After Amphilanthus’ election, however, Pamphilia’s rhetoric of constancy acquires political overtones not found in Wroth’s early discussions of the virtue. Wroth even suggests that constancy changes how we are to conceive of empire, as she reimagines constancy not as a public empire of justice but as a private empire of the mind immediately following Amphilanthus’ election. The consequences of this new formulation occur in the attempts of her friends Urania and Veralinda to comfort her after seeing Amphilanthus with Merlina in the theater, and the picture they offer of Amphilanthus is the exact opposite of the unifying champion of justice:

“Those days are past, my deere Veralinda,” cride Pamphilia,
 “and hee is changed, and proved a man.”

“Hee was ever thought soe,” sayd Veralinda. ... “Butt you were, and are the discreetest of your sex. Yett you would have impossibilities: you say Amphilanthus is a man. Why, did you ever know any man, especially any brave man, continue constant to the end? ... All men are faulty. I would nott my self have my Lord Constant, for feare of a miracle. ... Banish him as a traier. ... Hee is a brave man; soe are more. Hee is a mighty man of command; others are as great. Hee did love you; soe did as good, as great as hee. Butt say hee hath left you: lett him goe in his owne pathe; treatd nott in itt, an other is more straitte. Follow that, and bee the Emperess of the world, commaunding the Empire of your owne minde.” (461-2)

In this advice of Veralinda’s, we see Wroth turning empire into a sense of a thoroughly private self. This is a self that turns away from love and towards a kind of protected isolation. The “Empire of your owne minde” is a response to a man who seemed like the “world’s majesty,” but who turns out to be simply a failed man. Pamphilia, however, does not fully accept Veralinda’s advice and, instead, tries to understand a different path in which she can remain constant to Amphilanthus and his virtue even as he betrays her. However, in the end, it is unclear whether constancy really allows Pamphilia to achieve any more than this private “Empire of the mind,” the political consequences of which are ultimately to cast the notion of Amphilanthus’ empire of justice as a false hope.

In her subsequent discussions with Urania, Pamphilia articulates the form of constancy that she will try to maintain, but she does so in such a way that constancy in love comes to look less like loyalty to another than in love of oneself:

To leave him for being false, would shew my love was not for his sake, but mine owne, that because he loved me, I therefore loved him, but when hee leaves I can doe so to. O no deere Cousen I loved him for himselfe, and would have loved him had hee not loved mee, and will love though he dispise me; this is true love, and if not this the contrary, should I rejoyce for misse of any ill might from trusting, or being true to his amisse, in such bond had my blessing beene, and my curse the fayling of them, or had they hapned. Pamphilia must be of a new composition before she can let such thoughts fall into her constant brest, which is a Sanctuary of zealous affection, and so well hath love instructed me, as I can never leave my master nor his precepts, but still maintaine a virtuous constancy (470).

Although initially inspired by Amphilanthus' virtue, Pamphilia continues to love him in spite of his betrayal in order to maintain the integrity of her virtue. Pamphilia's love turns from love of Amphilanthus for himself to a love of her own love. This stands in stark contrast to the kind of love Amphilanthus inspired in those he rescued in which love was reciprocally earned through the public admiration of virtue. Here, Pamphilia's virtue becomes a private affair. Urania's responses to Pamphilia further this emphasis by stressing the political consequences of Pamphilia's despair, not for her ties to other kingdoms, but to her own subjects. While Pamphilia is in despair, Urania rebukes her: "if your people knew this, how can they hope of your government, that can no better governe one poore passion? How can you command others, that cannot master your self; or make laws, that cannot counsel, or soveraignise over a poore thought?" (468) This suggests that sovereignty is figured as command rather than as maintaining justice, a very different notion from Amphilanthus' justice. This form of constancy is focused on maintaining oneself and the political emphasis upon being good to one's subjects does not advance a notion of justice, or defending right legitimacies. Instead, even Pamphilia's good rule is cast as loving oneself in order to keep possession of what already belongs to her: her subjects' goodwill. But maintaining popularity among subordinates rather than inspiring loyalty among equals, Pamphilia's constancy produces an "Empire of the mind" that appears much more subject to the tyrant of selfish, or at least self-absorbed, love than Amphilanthus' empire had promised.

I do not want to overstate my case, and I should remark that this somewhat negative interpretation stands in contrast to the more affirmative self-sovereignty that many feminist critics have found in these same passages.^[13] Naomi Miller has argued in a reading of Urania's attempt to lift Pamphilia from her despair that if the object of constancy is to one's own integrity in love rather than to a jealous

lover, constancy can become a source of strength and agency.^[14] It is this sense of constancy to oneself, Miller argues, that justifies Pamphilia's later public marriage to the Tartarian Rodomandro, although her heart still belongs to Amphilanthus. This more complex form of constancy allows Pamphilia to be publicly constant to her husband while privately (and chastely) constant to Amphilanthus. As Miller says, "Pamphilia begins to forge new parameters for a subjectivity that is not singular, bound by social definitions of female sexuality and domesticity, but rather multiple, encompassing both public roles and private self."^[15] One of the most important consequences of this change in self-understanding according to Miller is Pamphilia's ability to find satisfaction in relationships with other women rather than her beloved (most notably Urania, Veralinda, and Limena), relationships that do not operate on hierarchical power relations, or the constant "tyranny" of love and "subjection" to jealousy that Pamphilia so often bemoans.

Sovereignty of the self is indeed a powerful configuration of the role of feminine sovereignty, but, against Miller, I would argue that after the promise of Amphilanthus' universal empire, Pamphilia's political understanding of constancy is a mere consolation. Wroth's promise for the resolution of the entire narrative, in which Amphilanthus and Pamphilia could finally marry, suggests that constancy may retain some lack of fulfillment. In Part II, Wroth suggests that the two could come to some sort of harmonic union, with "noe superior, nor commanding power butt in love betweene united hearts."^[16] The manuscript, however, ends before we know what such a resolution would look like, and, in political terms, what a marriage of East and West into an empire that spans the entire known world would involve. That the marriage never happens, however, is key to how we are to interpret the political implications of Wroth's romance, and this deferral is already figured in the way in which Wroth crosses the personal and political consequences of Amphilanthus' actions in Book III.

At the end of the romance, we still have an Amphilanthus who is nominally Emperor, but whose actions, apart from his heroic deeds, leave us curious about what other virtues he possesses that make him worth his title. (Furthermore, he remains a "knight errant," never settling into his throne.) Similarly, Pamphilia remains unhappy despite her increasing insight into the power of constancy. Throughout their story, the marriage of the "light of the western world" and "Pamphilia the Eastern Star," the ultimate Empire, remains an unfulfilled promise, and a happy political marriage of different countries is as far away as a happy marriage between Wroth and Herbert. Their roles in fact seem to be mutually frustrating. As an Emperor, Amphilanthus does not represent a foreign policy that sees its constituent nations as equals. His successes lead him repeatedly to gain higher forms of authority (King of the Romans and then Holy Roman Emperor). As an imperial figure, his authority and sovereignty are always tinged with the possibility of selfishness, pride, and authoritarianism, and, after gaining the title of Emperor, his primary narrative role is to frustrate Pamphilia's love (the political glory of the Albanian campaign is never repeated). Pamphilia's relations, particularly with her female friends and their nations, works on a model of equality, and her hope for a marriage with Amphilanthus is, as others have shown, fearful of being dominated and desirous of a relationship of

union without sovereignty. As Maureen Quilligan has noted, Pamphilia's "erotic desire is another language for the nuanced flux of hierarchically organized power relations," and the self-sovereignty she learns from Urania is one way of avoiding the hierarchical consequences of love, or of submitting herself wholly to another.^[17] Amphilanthus's imperial, authoritarian role, however, depends on just such a hierarchy, and this is perhaps why his Empire never truly encompasses the independent East. But, at the same time, Pamphilia's constancy remains internal and passive, in stark contrast to Amphilanthus' apparent ability to inspire loyalty in others.

Even more than this potential criticism of empire itself, however, we find that the *Urania's* model of a political ideal looks quite different when articulated in different genres. Within epic, empire is a glorified end state. In romance, it is an impossible refuge. And yet, within the narrative as we have it, Wroth puts both forms forward as valid. The strangest contrast of all is that Amphilanthus remains Pamphilia's beloved (and the beloved of the Western World) despite his obvious failures. He is simultaneously perfect and flawed, and since the characters always react to him from within the context of either epic or romance (they are not given another option), there is no third place from which to reconcile the opposites. Amphilanthus is judged based on the genre from which one judges, and Wroth's refusal to offer a place outside of either epic or romance from which to view Amphilanthus makes the problem less one of whether or not "empire" itself is politically desirable, but turns the problem into one of genres of political desirability. At least in regards to how we view Amphilanthus, genre is both limiting (insofar as we, and the narrator, are forced to ignore certain aspects of his character at different times) and inescapable.

For Wroth, then, the problem of writing about her personal past, in casting herself as Pamphilia and Herbert as Amphilanthus, and her family's contentious political past, by casting Amphilanthus as an emperor at once more and less successful than James, becomes a problem of marrying stories and genres that do not and cannot cohere. In the eyes of the militant Protestant faction, James' policies were a failed epic. And in Wroth's eyes, her affair with Herbert was a failed romance. By crossing them and recasting them in ways in which the failures of one story interrupt the failures of the other, Wroth draws attention to the ways that memories already have the form of stories, even very generic stories, while at the same time failing to live up to the expectations set by the type of story they may be. For Wroth, genre is a necessary but insufficient, and perhaps even enlighteningly limited, tool for remembering the past.

[1] See particularly Rosalind Smith's "Lady Mary Wroth's *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*: The Politics of Withdrawal" (*English Literary Renaissance* 30.3 (2000): 408-421), Maureen Quilligan's "The Constant Subject: Instability and Female Authority in Wroth's *Urania* Poems" in *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth-Century Poetry* (ed. Elizabeth D. Harvey and

Katherine Eisaman Maus. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990. 307-35), and Nona Fienberg's "Mary Wroth and the Invention of Female Poetic Subjectivity" in *Reading Mary Wroth: Representing Alternatives in Early Modern England* (eds. Naomi Miller and Gary Waller, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991: 175-190).

[2] Mary Wroth, *The First Part of The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, ed. Josephine Roberts (Binghamton, N. Y.: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995): xlii. All parenthetical citations are from this edition. Note as well that "Part I" refers to the published manuscript. Wroth left an unpublished manuscript continuing that narrative referred to as "Part II" in the critical literature. Part I, furthermore, is broken into 4 sections labeled "Books."

[3] Ibid.

[4] *Epic and Empire: Politics and Poetic Form from Virgil to Milton* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

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

[6] Mary Ellen Lamb, "The Biopolitics of Romance in Mary Wroth's *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*" (*English Literary Renaissance* 31.4 (2001): 107-130), 108.

[7] In a longer version of this study, I show how Wroth makes similar moves with different generic clashes. In Pamphilia's lyric complaints that halt the narrative completely after Amphilanthus' infidelity with Musalina in Book III, Wroth articulates a defense against tyranny which is, I argue, skeptical not only of the imperial rhetoric in the "epic" mode, but of monarchy. Then, in Book IV when the narrative occasionally shifts to London, the picaresque atmosphere presents an isolated, self-sufficient England which revels in its own unromantic exceptionalism.

[8] My reading is structurally similar to what I find to be the most perceptive feminist interpretation of the *Urania* in Naomi J. Miller's *Changing the Subject: Mary Wroth and Figurations of Gender in Early Modern England* (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1996). Against the majority of feminist readings of Wroth's work, Miller wants to avoid pigeonholing Wroth into either a victim of her culture or a straightforwardly oppositional and subversive writer, both of which, she argues, place Wroth in a position of a reactive rather than creative subjectivity. Instead, she tries to read Wroth as a writer who explored multiple "figurations" of gender within her cultural and literary resources, none of which she wanted to hold as her definitive position. As Miller says, "[m]y aim is to explore a range of the sometimes ambiguous or seemingly contradictory textual discourses that attended Mary Wroth's efforts to claim a voice not just as a second-generation Sidney and a 'second sex' author in a misogynist court culture, but as a seventeenth-century woman writer with a diverse cultural heritage and legacy" (13-4). This sense of Wroth using her fictions to explore multiple possibilities rather than

craft a single perspective seems absolutely right given the diversity of female perspectives within the stories and, if I am right, the use of different genres and political agendas. For Miller, this “multiplicity” became a source of agency and self-determination (or at least choice of given options) for a woman limited by her culture, and, in my argument, multiplicity in forms of political representation generates a similar level of critical distance on political matters.

[9] Mary Sidney Wroth was Philip Sidney’s niece, daughter to Robert Sidney. There is a host of historical and literary critical literature addressing the Sidneys’ and Herberts’ involvement on the continent, but Wroth has been excluded from these discussions. For standard accounts of the families’ political affiliations (with attention to literary contexts), see Michael Brennan’s *Literary Patronage in the English Renaissance: The Pembroke Family* (New York: Routledge, 1988), Margaret Hannay’s *Philip's Phoenix: Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), and Blair Worden’s *The Sound of Virtue: Philip Sidney's Arcadia and Elizabethan Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

[10] For specific accounts of the fate of James’ imperial ambitions and rhetoric during this time, see Simon Adams, “Spain or the Netherlands? The Dilemmas of Early Stuart Foreign Policy,” in *Before the English Civil War: Essays on Stuart Politics and Government*, ed. Howard Tomlinson (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983), 79-102, and W. B. Patterson, *King James VI and I and the Reunion of Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 202-230.

[11] The *Urania* is not free of more straightforward topical allegories. Amphilanthus’ setting of Ollorandus, the rightful ruler of Bohemia, back on his throne is a direct jab at James’ inaction. Unlike Frederick, who lived the rest of his life in exile, Ollorandus becomes the primary spokesman for Amphilanthus’ suitability to rule as Emperor, suggesting quite a different public reaction than met with James’ neglect of the Bohemia elector. Roberts finds Ollorandus to be a *a clef* representation of Sir Benjamin Rudyerd, Herbert’s friend and political ally who also spent a great deal of time traveling, like the Bohemian character, in the pursuit of Protestant alliances (most prominently joining Sir Henry Wotton in the Low Countries in 1610 (Roberts, xcii). However, if Amphilanthus is to be both Herbert and an idealized James, it makes sense that Ollorandus could also be an idealized Frederick, the friend and son-in-law who could have supported James’ unifying aims.

[12] For an extended discussion of Wroth’s literalization of allegory, see Beilin’s “‘The Onely Perfect Vertue’: Constancy in Mary Wroth’s *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*,” *Spenser Studies: A Renaissance Poetry Annual* 2 (1981): 229-45.

[13] In addition to Miller’s account, which I discuss in the text, see Shannon Miller, “Constructing the Female Self: Architectural Structures in Mary Wroth's *Urania*,” in *Renaissance Culture and the Everyday*, ed. Patricia Fumerton and Simon Hunt (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1999): 139-61, Maureen Quilligan, “Lady Mary Wroth: Female Authority and the Family Romance,” in

Unfolded Tales: Essays on Renaissance Romance, eds. George M. Logan and Gordon Teskey (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989): 257-80, and Paul Salzman, "The Strang(e) Constructions of Mary Wroth's *Urania*: Arcadian Romance and the Public Realm," in *English Renaissance Prose: History, Language, and Politics*, ed. Neil Rhodes (Tempe: Arizona State Univ. Press, 1997): 109-24.

[14] Naomi Miller, *Changing the Subject*, 61-63.

[15] *Ibid.*, 61.

[16] Mary Wroth, *The Second Part of The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, eds. Josephine Roberts, Suzanne Gossett and Janel Mueller (Binghamton, N. Y.: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1999): 345.

[17] Maureen Quilligan, "The Constant Subject: Instability and Female Authority in Wroth's *Urania* Poems," in *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth-Century Poetry*, ed. Elizabeth D. Harvey and Katherine Eisaman Maus (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990): 307-35, 325.