"Injoying of true joye the most, and best": Desire and the Sonnet Sequences of Lady Mary Wroth and Adrienne Rich

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 ${f A}$ drienne Rich's classic definition of re-vision—"the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (Lies 35)—not only presents a critical model for reclaiming early modern women's writing, but also suggests the possibility of using Rich's own texts to analyse and re-vision earlier works. Rich's contemporary and political interest in re-visioning traditional forms such as the sonnet sequence makes her Twenty-One Love Poems (1976, 1978)¹ a particularly apt lens through which to read the first such sequence to be written by an English-speaking woman: Lady Mary Wroth's Pamphilia to Amphilanthus, published in 1621. Wroth radically inverts the focus of male writers on the physical charms of the female beloved, disclosing instead the bodily pangs of the female lover. Rich, although not definitively familiar with Wroth's work, continues Wroth's tradition of reworking and re-visioning the sonnet sequence from a twentieth-century, lesbian-feminist viewpoint. Wroth's expression of unrequited and concealed love is revisited and extended through Rich's more explicit discussion of lesbian

1 Rich initially published the sequence as a chapbook with Effie's Press before including it in her collection, *The Dream of a Common Language*.

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desire, thus developing a rarely discussed continuity in the variety of women's writing about love and longing. Through the constraints of the sonnet form and the use of traditional Petrarchan tropes such as the dream, both poets negotiate private and internal space within the public realm of the printed word. They turn the blazoning gaze back on the narrators to suggest the disintegration both of the love affairs and the speakers' bodies under the force of forbidden desire. At the same time, Wroth and Rich paradoxically re-birth the desiring female lover, using the sonnet structure to reform the lover's body within the new, external space of the poem.

Intertextual consideration of these two poets is a particularly useful way to build on formalist discussions of both sequences, which are less common than criticism that focuses on subjectivity, and, in the case of Mary Wroth, which too often attends primarily to biographical detail.² I will re-vision Wroth's groundbreaking expression of female desire through Rich's extensive descriptions, while drawing attention to the formal and linguistic overlaps of the two sequences. I argue that these revelations of forbidden desire are specifically tied to the sonnet form, as is the breakdown and re-formation of the distressed narrator. Rich's more radical reworking of the sonnet sequence draws attention to Wroth's earlier text as likewise "refusing to be circumscribed or colonized by the tradition ... refus[ing] to let form become format" and "claim[ing] a personal space and time and voice" (Rich "Format" 5).3 For despite the "emptiness, lack,

- 2 For formalist discussions of Wroth, see especially Heather Dubrow's Echoes of Desire: English Petrarchism and its Counterdiscourses, and Mary B. Moore's Desiring Voices: Women Sonneteers and Petrarchism. For Rich's sequence, see Jane Hedley's "Old songs with new words': The achievement of Adrienne Rich's 'Twenty-One Love Poems." Useful work on the development of female subjectivity and voice in Wroth's writing includes Diana E. Henderson's "Female Power and the Devaluation of Renaissance Love Lyrics," Jeff Masten's "Shall I turne blabb?': Circulation, Gender, and Subjectivity in Mary Wroth's Sonnets," and Gary Waller's "Mary Wroth and the Sidney Family Romance: Gender Construction in Early Modern England." Similar attention is placed on lesbian subjectivity and voice in Rich's work in Kevin McGuirk's "Philoctetes Radicalized: 'Twentyone Love Poems' and the Lyric Career of Adrienne Rich," and Sandra Runzo's "Intimacy, Complicity, and the Imagination: Adrienne Rich's Twenty-one Love Poems."
- 3 Following the example of Hayden Carruth's 1978 review of *The Dream of a* Common Language, Twenty-One Love Poems is generally accepted as a sonnet, or "sonnetlike" (Carruth 83) sequence. While more recently Jane Hedley has discussed Rich's work in the context of the Elizabethan sonnet tradition, earlier criticism (e.g. Adrian Oktenberg, Claire Keyes, Joanne Feit Deihl) tends to concern itself less with traditional context, and more with the relationship between Rich's formal innovations and her interest in reclaiming lesbian/female voice and linguistic agency.

loss, and absence" (Masten 81) depicted in Wroth's sonnets, the desiring voice becomes a notable presence within the fourteen-line form.

As numerous critics have shown, it was necessary for early modern women to discover methods of negotiating the tensions around public expressions of desire.4 When women put pen to page they risked their reputations, as their words, whether in manuscript circulation or appearing in print, became "associated with promiscuity" (Wall 281). The author herself, not simply her words, was seen to be making incursions into a world in which a woman was expected to be silent and chaste, thus transgressing boundaries and theoretically permitting herself to be read, and uncovered, by men. Wroth found legitimacy for her writing through her status as a member of the prominent and literary Sidney family and, in her poetry, appears to make use of the implicit controls around her direct expression of desire to represent her narrator's dissolution and reconstruction. As Diana Henderson points out, the tensions within Wroth's sonnets—between waking and dreaming, public and private—become expressions of the "opposition between her active desire and externally enforced passivity" (47). At the same time, these tensions are augmented by and inherent in the chosen form which contains, reiterates, and develops them into a presence who becomes an "injoying" woman, expressing and overcoming her painful desire.

The sonnet form, of course, traditionally is taken up by pining and unrequited lovers like Wroth's Pamphilia. Wroth, a belated practitioner of a form popular in the sixteenth century, followed in the footsteps of the early translators of Petrarch, Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, and ensuing sequences such as Spenser's Faerie Queene and Shakespeare's Sonnets. She was particularly influenced by the writings of her uncle, Sir Philip Sidney, whose Astrophil and Stella has been frequently acknowledged as an important model for Pamphilia to Amphilanthus.⁵ Wroth innovatively applied the standard tropes of the male lover to her female protagonist while maintaining the Petrarchan tensions that, as Heather Dubrow observes, negotiate and reveal polarities such as "power and powerlessness" (25) and blur "subject and object, male and female" (41). The sonnet thus inherently includes an instability, embodying it in

4 See especially Wendy Wall and Ann Rosalind Jones for formative discussions of these tensions.

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⁵ Wroth's editor, Josephine Roberts, suggests that the less well-known poems of Wroth's father, Robert Sidney, also influenced Wroth's writing, pointing to her "Crowne of Sonetts," which proceeded from Robert Sidney's earlier attempt at this form (47).

the tension, or turn, between octet and sestet, or between the first twelve lines and the final couplet. Sonnet sequences become an extended expression of tensions, providing the possibility for a wind-up and release within each sonnet as well as over the course of the entire work. Mary Moore's suggestion that the sonnet can be seen as a body—a "gendered, small, and bounded space made by rhymes" whose boundaries create "possible tropes of difficulty, containment, and confinement" (10)—reiterates the notion of contained tension, and aptly describes the sequences written by both Rich and Wroth. The torturous exploration of the difficulty of expressing or experiencing forbidden desire becomes defined by the new small bodies of the poem and the sequence, bodies which ultimately succeed in replacing disintegration with integrity and containment.

Given Rich's opportunity to write more explicitly and self-consciously than Wroth about forbidden desire, it is useful initially to enter her sequence in preparation for opening up the parallel structure of Wroth's poems. Rich's first sonnet, like Wroth's, introduces the Petrarchan trope of the dream that underpins the sequence and allows for a sense of otherworldly privacy within the public space of the written word. Rich resists the inward focus of the more traditional dream and instead locates her dreamscape on the streets of a city, choosing a public space that embodies a television-induced nightmare:

Wherever in this city, screens flicker with pornography, with science-fiction vampires, victimized hirelings bending to the lash, we also have to walk ... if simply as we walk through the rainsoaked garbage, the tabloid cruelties of our own neighborhoods. (I.1–6, Rich's ellipses)

Rich straddles the social world and the metaphorical inner world in the dream, emphasising the connection between "the tabloid cruelties / of our own neighbourhoods" and women's personal lives, insisting, "We need to grasp our lives inseparable / from those rancid dreams" (7–8). As she connects the private to the public, naming the two "inseparable" and thus refusing to conceal her desire, this refusal is imitated in her departure from the formal constraints of the sonnet. As Jane Hedley notes, "By not being sonnets, Rich's poems also remind us that sonnets accentuate the gap or distance ... between experience and its representation in language" (337). Her abandonment of rhyme and metre as well as her loose adherence to stanza length thus diminishes "the gap between language and experience that has been flaunted by the traditional sonnet sequence" (338). Through

her discussion of lesbian desire, Rich both undoes and emphasises the tensions inherent not only in the clash between women's lives and the public streets but also in the tendencies of the sonnet form.

Elsewhere, Rich has elaborated on the connection between women's language and experience, suggesting that "our language has trapped as well as liberated us ... the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative ... we can begin to see and name—and therefore live—afresh" (*Lies* 35). By naming her desire within the context of a public space, by joining her life to "rancid dreams" and weaving her experience into language, she "depicts a kind of otherworld, both entrenched in the culture and marginal to it" (Runzo 63). Despite her attempts to link private desire to the social sphere, Rich seems to struggle with the notion of keeping "our lives inseparable," evincing a tension in her sonnets that leads her to carve out a separate space of time and voice. For those unfamiliar with her work, Rich initially hints at the same-sex identity of lover and beloved, revealing them most overtly as lesbian only at sonnet XII, over halfway through her sequence. By means of this deferral, she creates a form of the "otherworld" in which communication between lesbians can take place, while retaining an initial boundary of privacy and protection around the lovers' identities. It is dangerous to venture openly into the city and claim lesbian desire, just as it is dangerous for her precursor, Mary Wroth, to claim any public desire at all. As Sandra Runzo suggests, the danger seeps into the love affair, which, as in many Petrarchan scenarios, finds the lover for the most part physically separated from the beloved (69). But Rich adds the traditional focus to her awareness of the societal pressures on lesbian desire and relationships to drive her narrator into an internal but ultimately powerfully collaborative personal space. Rich's ability to name her desire, to claim language for her experience, ties the historical imperatives of the sonnet and its sequence to her new intentions, integrating the form with, yet liberating it from, its past.

Wroth, however, uses her dream to begin and maintain an internal space for her narrator throughout her sequence. She keeps the social and private worlds separate yet, in a move more ambitious for an early modern woman, reaches into the social through the written exposure of an internal struggle with love. Otherwise, the external, social world which Rich so pointedly introduces is nowhere to be seen. The internal is the world; Pamphilia becomes subject and object, lover and beloved; her private internal self becomes externalized and public through the

6 I use Josephine Roberts's numbering system to identify Wroth's sonnets.

published trope of the dream. This dream directly affects the dreamer's body, paring it down to its very core: a battered, bleeding heart shot full of Cupid's arrows:

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

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

He her obay'd, and martir'd my poore hart, I waking hop'd as dreames itt would depart Yett since: O mee: a lover I have binn. (P1.5–14)

The heart in particular helps to claim a unique personal space for Wroth's narrator. Although this is a standard Petrarchan emblem, significantly the narrator uses it to expose herself rather than her beloved (Henderson 55). As a female lover, Wroth's Pamphilia destabilizes the conventional expectations of the blazon, not only by gazing on herself, but also by refusing to create the "collection of exquisitely beautiful disassociated objects" (Vickers 266) conventionally expected in a sixteenth-century love sonnet. The body becomes the heart, and it is not exquisite.

Wroth's early modern spelling of "hart" offers another layer in understanding the pain inflicted on this organ. Nancy Vickers has observed a connection between the Ovidian tale of Actaeon and Diana and the Petrarchan blazon, suggesting that Petrarch's recognition of his own similarities to Actaeon led him to transfer his resulting fear of disintegration onto Laura, his beloved (273). In Wroth's sequence, Pamphilia becomes the heart/hart which is burned and torn—"martir'd"—to desire. But unlike Actaeon, her transformation leads to self-reconstruction, the small bodies of the sonnets gradually becoming "a bodiless embodiment of her suffering" (Henderson 53). By using language and form to etch the experience of desire into Pamphilia's body, Wroth, like Rich, both uses and alters the traditional sonnet. She renames the experience through language, ultimately allowing her narrator to "live—afresh" (Rich *Lies* 35).

While Pamphilia is represented by her bleeding heart, the identity of the beloved, Amphilanthus, is displaced onto the character of Cupid, the perpetrator of love. Wroth begins by diverting the reader's attention from the names of the lover and beloved onto the emblems of Cupid and

the heart, like Rich, hiding the characters' identities even as she reveals them.⁷ The first sonnet emphasises the tension between exposure and privacy, beginning and ending in a waking state while enclosing the dream in the centre. But the dream insinuates itself as early as the first line—"When nights black mantle could most darknes prove" (1)—which initiates the transition almost immediately, with "nights," the second word of the sequence, pulling the reader into the darkness of the marginal and dangerous otherworld of women's desire. As if in an attempt to control this new world, Pamphilia wishes for definitive limitations on her dream: as she wakes at the end of the first sonnet, she "hop'd as dreams itt would depart / Yett since: O mee: a lover I have binn" (13–14). Even though the dream state seeps into Pamphilia's waking life, causing her to fall in love, Wroth does structure formal boundaries for this world, the fourteen lines of the sonnet providing a shape in which the narrator can claim and identify herself as a lover even as she obscures this identity through emblematic reference.

Similar to the tension created between revelation and secrecy is that of desire as both dangerous and seductive. Rich's first sonnet begins to manifest the latter tension in the line following the first octet, a traditional spot for this type of turn. Among the "rancid dreams, that blurt of metal, those disgraces" (8) Rich interpolates a "red begonia perilously flashing" (9). While this line holds an aural reminiscence of the lash in line three, almost violent in its suddenness, it also registers the beauty to be discovered beneath the "rainsoaked garbage" (5). The flash of the begonia is reiterated but softened by the "long-legged young girls playing ball / in the junior highschool playground" (11–12) who embody an ease of female physicality and perhaps unselfconscious sensuality in their public space. The begonia and girls integrate the unseen or overlooked into the city, suggesting aspects of that undefined "we" whose "animal passion" (16) "No one has imagined" (13). Yet these flashes of identification and beauty remain obscured, "dappled with scars" (15); the lovers' bodies are metaphorically subsumed by those of sycamores, which continue to regenerate despite the layers of scar tissue. These sycamore bodies suggest

7 Notably, Wroth's desire for privacy may have been more than a literary convention, as it is uncertain whether she intended these poems for anything wider than manuscript circulation. As Josephine Roberts points out, "It is unclear to what extent, if any, the author participated in the publication of her work, for ... she claimed that the books of the *Urania* [to which the sequence was appended] 'were solde against my minde I never purposing to have had them published" (70).

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a dangerous monstrousness, an unimaginable other, a "lesbian body not only an extension of the female body but also at times a silent, potentially frightening figure behind that body" (Farwell 158). But this disturbing figure promises the new and surprising vision of the perilous flower and the persistent beauty of the budding trees, while linguistically corporealizing the unseen lesbian body, closing the gap between descriptive language and lived experience.

Playing with these same conundrums of secrecy and revelation, seduction and danger, Wroth encompasses them through the image of a powerful female, "bright Venus Queene of love" (6). Though minimally described, this goddess is both frightening and wondrous, which suggests that it is not only the lesbian body but the multiple bodies of women's forbidden desire that create silent and discomforting shadows. Like Rich's begonia, Wroth's Venus in her chariot is a splash of light breaking the darkness, even as she embodies the cruelty of the lash. It is she who controls Cupid, and thus the pain inflicted on Pamphilia's heart.8 While Cupid sits "att her feete ... still adding fire / To burning hearts" (7-8), she chooses one, places it on Pamphilia's breast and commands Cupid "Deare sonne, now shutt [shoot]" (11). Obediently, he carries out his task and "martir'd my poore hart" (12), tying his actions to female direction. This triangular relationship thus introduces a gendered dynamic of love and pain that, in Wroth's sequence, is initiated by one woman upon another, a dynamic more extensively developed by Rich in her later sonnets. However, Wroth later returns to Venus's influence, showing Pamphilia rejecting the goddess's apparently misleading ways as she strives towards calming and accepting her passion, proclaiming:

O Cupid! lett thy mother know her shame 'T'is time for her to leave this youthfull flame Which doth dishoner her, is ages blame, And takes away the greatnes of thy name;

Thou God of love, she only Queene of lust, Yett strives by weakning thee, to bee unjust. (P95.9–14)

8 While I see Venus and Pamphilia as connected and in some ways mutually supportive—after all, Venus is needed to create the emotional inspiration for these sonnets—Heather Dubrow understands these female presences exhibiting a clearer division between "the wholly passive speaker and the active and powerful goddess of love—a divide that manifests Wroth's own divided responses to female power and probably more specifically to the forms of it evident in writing sonnets" (140).

This rejection gives Pamphilia a chance to speak more directly to Cupid, the metaphorical object and true focus of her forbidden heterosexual desire, suggesting the narrator's progress in coming to terms with, and uncovering the true nature of, her dream.

Following the dual entry into the dream world of desire and its propensity for leaving physical scars, both poets gradually introduce more graphic images of pain and torture, reflecting the passion that both entwines and separates the lover from her beloved. As in her first sonnet, Rich's sonnets IV and V approach this concern by recognizing the painful effect of the social on women's private selves:

... The mail lets fall a Xerox of something written by a man aged 27, a hostage, tortured in prison: My genitals have been the object of such a sadistic display They keep me constantly awake with the pain...

And my incurable anger, my unmendable wounds break open further with tears ... (IV.12–16, 19–20)

The tortured image of a man suggests "the dark obverse of the Renaissance blazon" (Hedley 344), not only through the conspicuous reference to his physical pain but also through the focus on the more rarely blazoned man. At the same time as Rich comments on a society that allows such torture, the narrator's interaction with the image returns her to her "unmendable wounds," to her own tortured, damaged self. Yet by publicly recording her own pain, Rich "finds or creates connective tissue between her body and the world" (Perreault 90): she allows the two to co-exist and be acknowledged, balancing the Petrarchan tension between the lack and presence of power. The inner experience of the narrator is then turned outwards as she demands reader acknowledgement of her lover and the pain her absence brings: "I am crying helplessly, / ... and you are not in my arms" (20-21). As the narrator's pain is precipitated by this printed leaflet thrust into the privacy of her home, the social or public world becomes intimately connected to the narrator's inner emotional state. The associative fragments that lead the narrator towards a heightened awareness of her own discomfort also become tied into the form of the sonnet sequence which, as Mary Moore suggests, is created through self-contained yet connected fragments, "thus reflecting the fragmentation of a self being conscious of itself" (22). Rich's destruction of the traditional form, then, reinforces the narrator's breakdown and resulting self-consciousness within a world that

reflectively provides the disassociated distractions of "the Pez Dorado, / the Discount Wares, the shoe-store..." (IV.2–3).

Wroth's Pamphilia, while not making such excursions into the fragmentary public world, similarly exhibits a tension between fragmentation and self-awareness as she divulges the extent of her private torture in P41:

What torments hast thou sufferd while above Joy, thou tortur'd wert with racks which longing bears Pinch'd with desires which yett butt wishing reares Firme in my faith, in constancy to move,

Yett is itt sayd that sure love can nott bee Wher soe small showe of passion is descrid, When thy chiefe paine is that I must itt hide From all save only one who showld itt see. (5-12)

Pamphilia continues to identify herself with her suffering heart, addressing it as it experiences further developments on the "paines" begun in her opening sonnet. Her tortures spring from an internal source, wrought from the dangerous cycle of passions coursing through her body, yet she, like Rich, attempts to reveal these inner emotional experiences through the written word. Even though Pamphilia attributes some of her pain to the necessity of concealing her desire, she undermines her complaint by not, in fact, hiding it at all. This paradoxical relationship is illuminated by Elaine Scarry, who suggests that the usual separation between internal and external is broken down through torture:

This dissolution of the boundary between inside and outside gives rise to ... an almost obscene conflation of private and public. It brings with it all the solitude of absolute privacy with none of its safety, all the self-exposure of the utterly public with none of its possibility for camaraderie or shared experience. (53)

Despite and because of her construction of absolute privacy, Pamphilia continues to be wracked by pain; the written word exposes her in her tortured isolation, giving her no security in this revelation that receives the public gaze. She uncovers the intimacy and intensity of her desire and pain, forcing the reader to feel like the voyeur that Rich's narrator becomes when she gazes on the Xerox of the tortured man. While Rich's narrator responds to the external source of pain by internalizing it and then cyclically returning it to the outer world by calling out for her absent lover, Pamphilia burrows deeper, responding to her heart's bloody weeping

with a deep tenderness, internally recirculating the passions of desire and distress. Her tenderness allows her to be "Firme in my faith, in constancy to move" (8), an underlying state that supports the transformation that occurs over the course of Wroth's sequence. And it is this constancy that provides Pamphilia with a source of strength in the last lines of this sonnet, leading her to assert the positive aspects of her private longing: "For know more passion in my hart doth move / Then in a million that make show of love" (13–14). She appears to move towards the state that Scarry suggests is part of the recovery from the isolation of torture, the act of creation that "includes both the creating of the object and the object's recreating of the human being" (310). This poem thus becomes an integral part of the process of loving: by holding the written feelings the sonnet deepens the experience and understanding of the emotions, allowing the narrator to progress in her self-knowledge.

The combination of loving and of writing one's love, thereby compelling self-awareness, is particularly painful. Rich also considers the interaction between writing and transformative knowledge in sonnet v:

... Once open the books, you have to face the underside of everything you've loved the rack and pincers held in readiness, the gag even the best voices have had to mumble through, the silence burying unwanted children women, deviants, witnesses—in desert sand. (3–8)

The act of writing, of creating a lasting public record, brings to light not only what is but what is not there: children, women, deviants, and witnesses. Rich's "rack and pincers," echoing Wroth's "racks" and "pinch'd," suggest not only the vilification awaiting those who dare to transgress the enforced silences, but also the physical torture of the necessity to "itt hide." And yet, as in childbirth, 9 the experience refuses to stay hidden and is physically birthed onto the page, recording "what it has been forbidden even to mention" (Rich Lies 13). Despite the poets' awareness of the forbidden nature of their subject, both women write through the gag of silence to reveal their loves, lesbian and heterosexual. They resist the forces that attempt to keep it concealed in the private world, hidden "in desert sand," using the Petrarchan trope of the dream to do so. In this half-world, neither fully private nor public, Rich and Wroth fill in

⁹ Implied in both poems, with Rich's "unwanted children" (v.7) and Wroth's "longing bears" and "wishing reares" (P41.6, 7).

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beloved.

of men who would not, women who could not, speak to our life—this still unexcavated hole called civilization, this act of translation, this half-world. (Rich v.17-20)

... the absence

Although Rich is able to re-vision the sonnet in a way that might fully recognize her desires, Wroth remains constrained in her ability to acknowledge Pamphilia's desire directly. While the sonnet gives Wroth agency to speak, it also returns her to a gendered identity, her position as a woman, contained in an "unexcavated hole," who must encode the communication of her love. Yet this hole, for Wroth, also seems to serve as a shield around and container for the intensity of her feelings. As Helen Hackett suggests, the narrator "represents herself as at once speaking into a void, and speaking only to herself" (182). Even the visual focus of the poem is repeatedly turned inward onto the narrator, the occupant of the hole, rather than outward to the beloved, both maintaining and inverting the traditional gaze on the female body. For example in P₃₉ Pamphilia describes the purpose of the inverted, private gaze: "Take heed mine eyes, how you your lookes doe cast / Least they beetray my harts most secrett thought" (1–2). Both active protectors and potential betrayers, her eyes balance her desire with her need for secrecy through a traditional reliance on the blazon and its counterpart, the voyeuristic reader. Although she appears to acknowledge external watchers, she also resists their intrusive stares: "lett them themselves looke blinde / Watch, gaze, and marke till they to madnes runn" (11–12). Her shielding inward gaze reflects the voyeurism back outwards, harming not Pamphilia but the voyeurs themselves. She is protected from those who might sexualize her and reserves the right of the blazon for herself. 10 Her body becomes a private text, meant to be read by herself, rather than by a man. This secretive code turns desire outside in to communicate the internal experience of loving rather than to describe the external charms of the beloved: "While you, mine eyes injoye full sight of love / Contented that such hapinesses move" (13-14). It is her internal vision, her "injoying" of a love that claims the "personal space and time and voice" advocated by Rich, that ultimately brings her to this contentment.

¹⁰ Gary Waller sees this protective action in a "more aggressive" role of "catching," or trapping and neutralizing 'all waching eyes." This ensures that Pamphilia "is not merely fixed by the gaze but turns it to an active and defiant exhibitionism." (56).

The female gaze of Rich's narrator, though more balanced between the in- and external, similarly undercuts that of the voyeuristic male. The male, while included as a tortured body, is not acknowledged as lover or beloved. It seems that he can enter this sequence only by admitting his own exclusion and dismemberment, his gaze neutralized, much as Wroth's voyeurs are turned "blinde" and let "to madnes runn." Instead, Rich claims space and time for the lesbian gaze, extending and developing her right to blazon the female body. By naming the parts Wroth cannot, Rich attempts to undo the distance between traditional Petrarchan lovers and to establish the sonnet's ability to include requited love and the female gaze. Her commitment to renaming and re-visioning leads her to balance her use of the blazon, to include the bodies of both the lover and the beloved, most notably in "(The Floating Poem, Unnumbered)" that describes a physical consummation of love between the two women. This poem, which slips between sonnets XIV and XV, thus formally indicating its challenge to tradition, intimately describes the women's face-to-face lovemaking: "a gentle and female-centered sexuality that the narrative cannot incorporate" (Farwell 164). The mutuality of the contact, the reciprocity of the gaze between lesbians, as Kevin McGuirk observes, "replace[s] the gaze of desire dominant in the male tradition" (73). Despite the written exposure of the lovers, Rich, like Wroth, uses language and form to create a hidden space, protecting the women within images that close around their bodies: "the half-curled frond / of the fiddlehead fern in forests" (3-4); "my rose-wet cave" (12). As with Pamphilia's exposed heart, there is both vulnerability and an intimate privacy to these enclosing metaphors that allow and protect the lovers' reciprocity. But this reciprocity ultimately returns the narrator to her internal self, her "injoying" existence: "reaching where I had been waiting years for you / in my rose-wet cave—whatever happens, this is" (11-12).

The return to the inner self of the narrator, consistent in Wroth's sequence, ultimately suggests the participation of the sonnet form in creating a new, protective frame for this tender being. Pamphilia's movement inward eventually leads to a new, labyrinthine body, the "Crowne of Sonetts dedicated to Love," set within the larger structure of the sequence. 11 As she enters the crown, Pamphilia also steps into a "strang labourinth" (P77.1) in which she takes up "the thread of love" (14). The circularity of the crown gives the impression that the narrator herself is being encircled, that the labyrinth's spiralling path encloses and perhaps supports her in

¹¹ The crown includes fourteen poems, from P77–P90.

her searching. The enclosed sequence emphasises the sense of an added internal space within the already private experience of the narrator. 12 Just as Pamphilia's gaze is self-directed and protective, so the crown offers further protection which "both guarantees and symbolises the unpenetrated, enclosed purity of her body" (Hackett 183). As Moore suggests, it might even offer Pamphilia an alternative body, "a self that is isolated, enclosed and complex" (127). The wounds sustained by the torturous experience of desire are healed when Pamphilia inserts herself into another form that can seal itself simply through the repetition of lines. Each pass through the labyrinth increases her self-knowledge and returns her to the thread of love that both troubles and saves her, that pushes her to speak of her passion yet emphasises her inward gaze. 13

The repeatedly inward-turning gaze, whether developed through a labyrinth or a "rose-wet cave" appears to exemplify the observation made by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar that "the female artist makes her journey ... to revitalize the darkness, to retrieve what has been lost, to regenerate, reconceive, and give birth" (99). The enclosed space becomes not only "a womb for poetic production" (Moore 145) but also for self-reproduction. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that following Rich's sonnet of consummation her lovers separate, and both Rich and Wroth finish their sequences by writing in the singular, allowing the narrators to involve themselves in an equally intense self-gaze which leads to a circular sense of completion. Rich's last two sonnets, xx and xxI, integrate the beloved into the narrator, drawing on the reciprocity experienced in the "floating" sonnet of love-making, and suggesting wholeness despite the distance that grows between the lovers:

and I discern a woman I loved, drowning in secrets, fear wound round her throat and choking her like hair. And this is she with whom I tried to speak, whose hurt, expressive head turning aside from pain, is dragged down deeper where it cannot hear me, and soon I shall know I was talking to my own soul. (xx.6-12)

- 12 This might be reminiscent of the "closet," the private, spatially inner, room belonging to some early modern aristocratic women.
- 13 Heather Dubrow's observation that "Petrarchan repetition ... often represents a drive that is exemplified by but not confined to desire ... that is ... to assert mastery" (37) might be understood to suggest not only mastery over language, but also, as seen in Wroth's sequence, mastery over passions, and thereby oneself.

It is the forbidden nature of the love between these women and its tendency to compel secrecy that has caused its failure. The attempt to "move openly together" (II.14) does not overcome the choking fear that has often accompanied lesbian desire. As she states in sonnet XVII, before the lovers definitively separate:

and these are the forces they had ranged against us and these are the forces we had ranged within us, within us and against us, against us and within us. (XVII.14-16)

Like Wroth, Rich battles restrictions around the expression of forbidden desire, but she also attempts to resist the Petrarchan trope of the distant beloved; her female lovers do "move openly together" within the protected space of the sonnet sequence. Even as she appears to return to the more traditional isolation of the Petrarchan lover, the creative body of Rich's sequence permits the beloved to become present despite her absence, to be recognized by the narrator as "my own soul." The public world of Rich's city spirals inward, allowing her female subjects to merge in the incorporate body of the sonnet sequence.

As the focus on the narrator takes over in the last two poems of Rich's sequence, her sonnets appear to merge also into the labyrinthine body created by Wroth's crown. In Rich's final sonnet, her narrator stands among "the blue and foreign stones / of the great round rippled by stone implements" (XXI.1-2). This mythical location, circular and enclosed, gives her, like Pamphilia, the structure within which she can name her experience and "live—afresh":

And this is not Stonehenge simply nor any place but the mind casting back to where her solitude, shared, could be chosen without loneliness (5–8)

Rich's narrator radically refuses to accept the loneliness attached to women's forbidden desire. She suggests, instead, that her solitude can be shared with other women, that her retreat into the self might, as sonnet xx reveals, include the beloved. While this state is not found "easily nor without pains to stake out / the circle" (9–10), it is, like Pamphilia's inward circling within the labyrinth, a legitimate and potentially revolutionary decision: Rich's narrator "choose[s] to be a figure in that light" (11).

Wroth's final sonnet also reveals a narrator who has, through and despite her tortured self-exposure, come to discover a solitary yet inclu-

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sive self. Having found the required strength through the written word—as Heather Dubrow suggests, Wroth "rewrites [the Petrarchan] situation to investigate her own emotions and thus wrest agency from objectification" (159)—she can now relinquish her pen, her task completed: "My muse now hapy, lay thy self to rest" (P103.1). Pamphilia has proved herself a desiring woman; her proclamation that "what's past showes you can love" (13) leads to greater self-knowledge and a traditional evocation of increased spiritual contentment and devotion, an "Injoying of true joye the most, and best, / The endles gaine which never will remove" (7-8). Despite the explicit end of writing suggested by the dismissal of the muse, "the sonnet reasserts the poet's role, addressing an audience of future love poets, suggesting Pamphilia's, and thereby Wroth's, poetic progeny" (Moore 149), foreshadowing Rich's inclusive individuation. The poet returns to the experience explored by the sequence, offering it not only as a model for understanding the nature of forbidden desire, but also as proof of its existence, recognizing that, like Rich, she has chosen to speak her passion: "I choose to walk here. And to draw this circle" ("Twenty-One" XXI.15). Both sequences look back on themselves, completing a cycle, forming a new, experienced body through the dream-world of the sonnets.

By looking back over their completed sequences, Rich and Wroth acknowledge the form's contribution to the expression of forbidden desire, providing the poets with a voice that permits them to find and choose an "injoying" which, though solitary, is inclusive and potentially subversive. While the dream supplies the poets with an entrance into love, offering privacy for its dangerous disclosure, the sonnet provides a form through which these desires can be publicly discussed. Despite the torture, dislocation, and disintegration found within the sonnets, the poems develop a new, spiralling, labyrinthine body for the narrators' wounded selves, allowing them to name and experience desire through the transformative, yet traditional, supports of the sonnet sequence.

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