

## *Love's Victory* in Production at Penshurst

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The staged Read Not Dead reading of *Love's Victory* by Globe Education in the Great Hall at Penshurst Place offered a tantalizing display of Lady Mary Wroth's text in production on site. This article considers the play 'in production at Penshurst' thinking firstly about the composition of the script as an idealised dramatization of Penshurst as setting, written to address a coterie audience who were more or less familiar with it as a home of Sidney values. I argue that the script's pastoral settings invoke Penshurst as a geographical place in order to advertise those values and to shepherd the spectators into celebrating them. As the tragicomic plot makes clear, however, this is not a straightforward process. Like any extended family, differences between individuals work as a centrifugal force likely to tear the communal bonds of the coterie. I trace how the pastoral settings, rooted in the soil of the Penshurst estate, provide fruitful spaces to exorcise conflicts and sow the seeds of regeneration. Secondly, my essay considers *Love's Victory* in production at Penshurst in terms of the effects that can be realised by playing the script there: not just in the Great Hall, where the Read not Dead reading took place, but with reference to the estate beyond the walls of the house.

At the end Act 4 of *Love's Victory* the coterie of shepherds agrees to meet in the same place at the rise of the sun "who all foule mists still cleers". Anyone "who shall then miss here, / A punishment by us ordain'd shall beare" (4.443-6).<sup>1</sup> These lines draw attention to the coterie's magnetic attraction to gather in its members, and its power to pass communal judgement on each of them. The play's representation of the shepherd community testifies to the ambiguity of the

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<sup>1</sup> Michael G. Brennan, ed. *Lady Mary Wroth's 'Love's Victory': The Penshurst Manuscript* (London: The Roxburghe Club, 1988). All quotations are taken from this edition and referenced with Act and line number.

coterie as both supportive and judgmental, benign and potentially oppressive. Critical definitions of the coterie as a group who share political, social and cultural kinship have been modified by a recognition that substantial differences between members invariably make coterie a much more dynamic, potentially unsettling environment for literary production. Gary Waller has drawn attention to the negative emotions of violence, conflict and disappointment that need to be attended to when considering the Sidney-Herbert family coterie.<sup>2</sup> Sarah Rodgers has gone so far as to argue that Lady Mary Wroth's prose romance *Urania* (1621) "uses the public medium of print to offer a critique of the private space of the coterie."<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, literary and familial coterie played an instrumental part in the production of women's writing. Sharon Joffe, for example, argues that the "kinship coterie" foregrounding "shared space" and "familial bonds" determined the writing of texts by women in the Shelley circle.<sup>4</sup> Marion Wynne-Davies has shown the elaborate networks of familial support and critical intervention that nurtured early modern women's writing (including Wroth's), while Edith Snook has argued that Wroth's texts suggest the empowering effects of "congeniality of friendship" within a coterie.<sup>5</sup> Mary Ellen Lamb's most recent essay on the literary coterie of Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke (1588-1601) and William Herbert, third Earl of Pembroke (1601-1630) conducts a masterfully detailed analysis of the different styles of patronage offered by the two Sidneys: identifying Mary Sidney as a more prescriptive "Mistress of the Muses" and

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<sup>2</sup> Gary Waller, *The Sidney Family Romance*

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Rodgers, "Embedded Poetry and Coterie Readers in Mary Wroth's *Urania*", *Studies in Philology*, 111:3 (2014) 470-85, 474

<sup>4</sup> Sharon Lynne Joffe, *The Kinship Coterie and the Literary Endeavors of the Women in the Shelley Circle*, *Studies in Nineteenth-Century British Literature*, 24 (New York, Peter Lang, 2007)

<sup>5</sup> Marion Wynne-Davies, *Women Writers and Familial Discourse in the English Renaissance: Relative Values* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). Edith Snook, *Women, Reading and the Cultural Politics of Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 160.

William Herbert as occupying a more egalitarian writing relationship with members of his literary coterie, including figures from a lower class status like Jonson and Burbage, and his female cousins, Mary Wroth, Lucy Harington, and Lucy Hay, in spite of his political and economic power.<sup>6</sup>

Mary Ellen Lamb reminds us that, with reference to the Sidneys, the term ‘coterie’ must take into account the variability of erotic, familial, artistic ties between individual members that work alongside an “indefinable essence called ‘charisma’ which helps to bind it together.”<sup>7</sup> The Sidney family’s literary reputation, cultivated so powerfully by Mary Sidney Herbert in the publication of her brother’s writing, exerted its own charisma. Francis Connor has argued that the publication of folio copies of the *Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia* were a way of extending the coterie’s reach to a select audience to advertise its values.<sup>8</sup> Julie Crawford and Sarah Rodgers have likewise proposed that Wroth’s publication of the *Urania* is a means of extending her political control through writing. Crawford argues that by embedding her manuscript poems in the printed text Wroth translates them into a public context, “available in many copies to a wider, non-coterie audience.”<sup>9</sup> Mary Ellen Lamb’s article in this volume shows how Wroth’s *Urania* advertises her affiliation with the Sidney family, including Sir Philip Sidney and the Countess of Pembroke, on the frontispiece. It foregrounds the book’s project to promote the Sidney family’s elite, aristocratic status and to invite readers to participate virtually in the coterie as connoisseurs of aristocratic family values and refined literary writings. The legacy of a

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<sup>6</sup> Mary Ellen Lamb, “The Literary Coteries of Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke (1588-1601) and William Herbert, third Earl of Pembroke (1601-1630),” in *Re-Evaluating the Literary Coterie*, ed. Hannah Crumme (Palgrave, forthcoming)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 29.

<sup>8</sup> Francis X. Connor, *Literary Folios and idea of the Book in Early Modern England* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)

<sup>9</sup> Julie Crawford, *Mediatix: Women, Politics and Literary Production in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 160-205. Rodgers, “Embedded Poetry,” 477.

glorious past is a powerful tool to allure writers, readers, actors and spectators in the present. Lytle Shaw's comment on the literary coterie which served to 'canonize' or validate Frank O'Hara's writing seems just as applicable to the production of *Love's Victory*. He writes that "acts of poetic canonization contain a buried moment of kinship: they come out of families; they form and reform families."<sup>10</sup> For all its indebtedness to the dramatic tradition of pastoral tragicomedy, Lady Mary Wroth's play comes out of a literary family coterie and is dedicated, at least in part, to reforming that family.

While familial bonds are important, I want to focus on the coterie's relationship to physical space in order to explore what Mary Ellen Lamb calls "the complex ideological maneuvers" in Wroth's writing that intertwine the production of elegant aristocratic writing with the aristocratic ownership of land.<sup>11</sup> The word 'coterie', deriving from the French, links literary production with the land. Predating the OED's eighteenth century definition "a company or cabal", Randall Cotgrave's *Dictionary of the French and English Tongues* (1611) noted that 'Coterie' referred to a "*compagnie, societie, association of countrey people*". This derived, in turn, from a term for the land itself: "*Cotterie: a base, ignoble and servile tenure or tenement, not held in fee, and yielding only rent, or... de main fermé [enclosed land]*".<sup>12</sup>

In the early seventeenth century then, Wroth's 'cotterie' drama of shepherds and shepherdess was produced by and for the landscape of the Penshurst estate as much as by and for the intimate family group for which she was writing. Philip Sidney's introduction above elaborates the georgic quality of that spatial context as a site of sheep farming. Akiko Kusnoki points out that in *Love's Victory*, Wroth's pastoral plunges directly into the rural world, which

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<sup>10</sup> Lytle Shaw, *Frank O'Hara The Poetics of Coterie* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2006), 29.

<sup>11</sup> See p. 000 in this volume.

<sup>12</sup> Randall Cotgrave, *A Dictionary of French and English Tongues* (London, 1611)

sharpens the text's focus on desire.<sup>13</sup> I propose that the play self-consciously appropriates pastoral as female work: through the female protagonist who shepherds her human flock in the fictional world, and through the writer whose pen directs their fortunes through the production of a dramatic text. The Globe's *Read Not Dead* performance to its coterie audience exemplified how literary and dramatic production can also be a fruitful production of place: Penshurst Place.

Feminist scholars such as Jennifer Monroe<sup>14</sup> have traced the connections between formal knot gardens, embroidery and women's writing. Gardens represent a rigorous form of control over land that extends a lady's capacity with the needle and, in Wroth's case, the pen, in the writing of pastoral romance, a play and a sonnet sequence whose likeness to a maze has been noted. The formal gardens at Penshurst Place were built by Sir Henry Sidney in the 1560s and continued by Wroth's father, Sir Robert Sidney, in the walling of the orchard to grow apricots and peaches as well as apples. They are still in place today, surviving both the fashion for re-landscaping inspired by Capability Brown and the effects of Second World War, and have been the inspiration for the development of the mile of yew hedges and enclosures into a series of small garden small garden "rooms" by William Sidney, 1st Viscount De L'Isle VC KG, and his son Philip, the current Viscount.<sup>15</sup> The site thus offers great potential to explore what an outdoor

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<sup>13</sup> Akiko Kusunoki, *Gender and Representations of the Female Subject in Early Modern England* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 89.

<sup>14</sup> Jennifer Monrow, "'In This Strang Labourinth, How Shall I Turne?': Needlework, Gardens and Writing in Mary Wroth's 'Pamphilia to Amphilanthus,'" *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 24:1 (2005), 33-55, drawing on Rosika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: The Women's Press, 1984).

<sup>15</sup> *Penshurst Place and Gardens*, ed. The Hon. Philip Sidney (Penshurst Place and Jigsaw Design & Publishing Ltd., 2013); Susie West, 'Penshurst Place and Leicester House,' in *The Ashgate Companion to the Sidneys 1500-1700*, Volume 1: Lives (Routledge, 2015), 281-6.

production, such as the alfresco entertainments described in *The Countess of Pembroke's Ivychurch*, might have been like.<sup>16</sup>

As I argued in *Playing Spaces in Early Women's Drama*, the settings of *Love's Victory* move beyond formal gardens and were probably composed with the wider landscape of the Penshurst estate in mind.<sup>17</sup> Walter Burgess's beautiful Survey of Penshurst, which lists features like Lady Gamage's Bower and the "Kissing Beech" at the end of the long walk of trees, suggest the suitability of sites for an al fresco performance.<sup>18</sup> The Bower "Erected by the Lady Barbara Countess of Leicester" (Wroth's mother) would have been an ideal setting for the all-female meeting in Act 3 Scene 2 where Dalina tells the shepherdesses

Now w'are alone lett every one confess  
Truly to other what our lucks have bin,  
How often lik'd, and lov'd, and soe express  
Owr passions past: shall we this sport begin?  
Non can accuse us, non can us betray  
Unles owr selves, owr owne selves will bewray.

(3.125-130)

Likewise, the scene where Philisses retires to the woods to confide his love for Musella to the trees, and she conceals herself in a grove to overhear him, seems to map beautifully onto the "long walk" with the so-called "kissing beech" at the edge of the woods. The argument for reading the love relationship between Musella and Philisses as a coterie dramatization of

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<sup>16</sup> Abraham Fraunce's *The Countess of Pembroke's Ivychurch* (1591) represents Pembrokiana, based on the Countess of Pembroke, meeting with the members of her coterie in the woods to sing and recite their laments for the shepherd Amyntas.

<sup>17</sup> Alison Findlay, *Playing Spaces in Early Women's Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)

<sup>18</sup> These features also appear in Jan Kip's C18th engraving of Penshurst.

Wroth's long love affair with her cousin William Herbert, receives support from critical analysis of Wroth's poem "Penshurst Mount" and Herbert's elegy "Why with unkindest Swiftnes doe thou turn".<sup>19</sup> As Garth Bond and Marion Wynne-Davies have shown, these poems refer to Penshurst as the place in which memorializes a secret marriage between them before their subsequent marriages to other people in 1604. William Herbert's poem uses place to "call to accompt", to ground or root, what passed between them:

thy pleasant garden and that Leavy mount.

whose topp is w[i]th an open Arbor crownd

and spanned w[i]th greenest Pallizades round,

whereon the powers of night may oft have seene vs,

And heard the contracts that have binn betweene vs.<sup>20</sup>

Wroth's poetic response in "Penshurst Mount" reproves him for reminding her of the misery of lost love "in thys very Place" which "torturs in Excesse" and brings no "salve" or healing (one sixteenth century meaning of the word 'salve' being a mixture of tar and grease, for smearing sheep (OED Ic)).<sup>21</sup> The leafy tryst scene between Philisses and Musella in *Love's Victory* may be the longed-for "salve" that Wroth seeks. Philisses confesses the "flames" and "griefs" he suffers because of his love for Musella to the "secret guard" of the "blessed woods" (4.5-10). In spite of her awareness of the restraints demanded by female modesty, Musella, is emboldened to reveal

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<sup>19</sup> See Garth Bond "Amphilanthus to Pamphilia: William Herbert, Mary Wroth and Penshurst Mount," *Sidney Journal*, 13:1 (2013), 51-80 and Marion Wynne Davies, "'So Much Worth: Autobiographical Narratives in the Work of Lady Mary Wroth,'" in *Betraying Our Selves: Forms of Self-Representation in Early Modern English Texts*, ed. Henk Dragstra, Sheila Oway and Helen Wilcox (New York: St Martin's Press, 2000), 76-93.

<sup>20</sup> The poem in Huntington Library MS HM 198, part 2, 105r-v is transcribed by Bond as an appendix to his article above (pp. 75-7). Quotations are taken from here, lines 7-12.

<sup>21</sup> 'Penshurst Mount' is British Library MSAdditional 23229 fols 91r-92r is likewise transcribed as an Appendix by Bond. The lines quoted are lines 23 and 30.

herself and asks him: “Butt have you made itt knowne to her you love / That for her scorne, you doe thes torments prove?”. (4.69-70). Martin Hodgson, director of the ‘Read not Dead’ performance, read Philisses’ response ‘Yes, now I have’ (4.71) as a cue for a kiss.

Because Philisses continues ‘I’le plainlier speak’ (4.72), I think any kiss would probably be postponed to line 110 when the dialogue mends the broken contract referred to in the poems. Musella confesses she loves him “and soe ever must, / Though time, and fortune should bee still unjust”, exploiting the pastoral retreat to acknowledge and rewrite the divisions that had separated Wroth and William Herbert. Philisses vows to die rather than “prove faulse or show unconstancie”, while Musella vows “Now doubt you mee, nor my true hart mistrust, / For dy I will before I prove unjust” (4.105-110). The two characters perform the lovers’ “old contracting” with even more self-conscious artifice than the Duke’s plotting in *Measure for Measure* (3.2.275), especially if these lines were enunciated by Wroth and Herbert. It may be that the site of the Kissing Beach on the Burgess Survey marks a tactile meeting of lips as well as spoken vows.

In the forest scenes, the play moves beyond the formal gardens into a different terrain which has not been theorized to the same degree. The connection between women’s writing and husbandry on the wider estate – farming – is necessary to read the ‘coterie’ drama of *Love’s Victory*. Physical enclosure of land of stock is, obviously, a means to protection and control; the most extensive literary example being Milton’s description of the walled Garden of Eden in Book IV of *Paradise Lost*, ‘where Shepherds pen their Flocks at eve / In hurdl’d Cotes amid the field secure.’<sup>22</sup> Milton’s irony - that the complacency of the shepherds within allows Satan to savage the sheepcote like a wolf – reminds us that the coterie, like the “Cote” is not necessarily a

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<sup>22</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1677) in *John Milton, The Oxford Authors*, ed. Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) Book IV lines 185-6.

“field secure” since interactions within it are unpredictable. The rustic coterie of *Love’s Victory* is subject to powerfully self-destructive conflicts from within as much as from without. The most obvious instances are cases of romantic rivalry, as in Simeana and Climeana’s love for Lissius, or Rustic’s determination to pursue his match with Musella which threatens the vows she and Philisses have made. More quietly, Phillis’s unrequited love for Philisses gives a poignant reminder of the suffering that accompanies constant love, perhaps another dramatization of Pamphilia and Wroth’s emotional hurt.

Relationships in the coterie may also be supportive. We see examples in the same-sex bonds between Silvesta and Musella and Philisses and Lissius, or when Musella intervenes to solve the romantic difficulties between Simeana and Lissius. Musella’s role is that of a shepherd, ever conscious of the landscape in which her human flock grazes. She warns Simeana:

You have your love brought to death’s river brink.

Repent, you have him wrong’d, and now cherish

The dying lad, who els soone will perish.

(4.284-6)

These lines have additional resonance in the context of the Penshurst estate whose grounds roll down to the river Medway. Musella is worried about her ‘lost sheep’. She is effectively the shepherd of the community, presiding over their meetings and nurturing their interests. When she first appears in Act 1, she immediately notices Phillis’s absence – another lost sheep – and recognizes the danger of Cupid’s darts which have made her “lonely waulk to seeke for rest” (1.291-4). She alludes to her rescue of Philisses by telling Rustic that she was “seeking of a long lost lambe / Which now I found ev’n as along you came” (4.147-8). Musella is praised by Lissius for her care which has restored balance to the coterie of shepherd-lovers and “turn’d this cloudy

day / To sweet and pleasant light” (4.323-4), and she cues the other shepherds’ and shepherdesses’ entrance with the line “Here comes the flock” (4.349). Casting Musella as a careful shepherdess guiding her human flock is a bold appropriation of the Christian trope. In Milton the incompetence of the human shepherds (Adam and Eve) allows Satan to enter and creates the fortunate fall, setting the scene for Christ to enter as the good shepherd. By contrast, the georgic world of *Love’s Victory* is one in which, as Naomi Miller has shown, Wroth changes the subject.<sup>23</sup> A female protagonist nurtures the land and its people to fruitful procreation under the omniscient eye of a classical goddess, Venus, and her instrument Silvesta, all ultimately controlled by Wroth as playwright. Wroth’s pastoral project thus prefigures that of Ann Yearsley, whose literary endeavours Horace Walpole discouraged telling her “she must remember that she is Lactilla, not a Pastora, and is to tend real cows, not Arcadian sheep.” Yearsley’s response to his misogynist arrogance: “We ladies our omnipotence conceal” echoes the strategy used by Wroth in writing *Love’s Victory*.<sup>24</sup>

The literary production of *Love’s Victory* is like the ‘cote’: it is a shelter, a boundary, framework, or ‘pen’, for imaginatively managing the Sidney-Herbert coterie. While the name Penshurst derives from the Saxon ‘pen’ meaning hill and ‘hyrst’, a wood,<sup>25</sup> by the seventeenth century, it would certainly have conjured ideas of enclosure: both the positive sense of protection and the more negative sense of exclusivity.<sup>26</sup> Writing is self-consciously figured alongside

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<sup>23</sup> Naomi J. Miller, *Changing the Subject: Mary Wroth and the Figurations of Gender in Early Modern England* (Lexington KY: Kentucky University Press, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> See Vassiliki Markidou, “‘As o’er the upland lands I take my way’: Rural Landscape and the Chronotopes of Memory and Threshold in Ann Yearsley’s ‘Clifton Hall’,” *Victoriographies*, 5:1 (2015), 1-16, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Caroline Sheridan Norton, *The English Annual* (London: Edward Churton, 1836), 131.

<sup>26</sup> John Moore, *A Target for Tillage, briefly containing the most necessary, pretious and profitable use thereof for both king and state* (London, 1612), for example, refers back to More’s *Utopia* to complain that “these men (that enclose the commons) they pull down houses, they

shepherding in the play, most obviously in Act 2 Scene 1 where Arcas invites the shepherds to draw their fortunes from a book:

Heer is a booke wherin each one shall draw  
A fortune, and therby theyr luck shalbee  
Coniectur'd, like you this? You ne're itt saw.

(2.136-8)

This game appears to come from French courtly tradition, where the book is allowed to fall open at a particular page and the player puts a pin into it, thereby pricking his or her fortune which is then read out. In *Love's Victory* the player takes a leaf from the book and the game is realigned to the rural 'coterie'. Lissius says that "he 'chieves best of all must beare the bell" (2.1.142), he who draws the best fortune must be the leader, leading the (other) sheep with a bell if we think of the community as a flock. The wish to lead is dramatized by the eagerness of some participants to take hold of the book. When it is Musella's turn to draw, Rustic's attempt to control her and her fortune is shown in asking Arcas "lett mee hold the booke" and his assurance to her "What shalbee you need nott feare, / Rustick doth thy fortune beare." (2.143 and 151-2). Having drawn her fortune, however, Musella withdraws physically from Rustic, reminding him that her fortune is "mine own... choise" (2.156) and asks Philisses to read it aloud to her.

Whose is the book of Fortunes? In the fictional world it is brought on by the villain Arcas. Above him, Venus is the writer of the book, plotting to put the scoffing mortals through suffering to teach them "humble homage" and respect for love (1.12). Philisses argues that the goddess Fortune is allied to Venus: "They cannot parted be" (2.189-90). Beyond this, the

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overthrow towns leaving Churches to stand alone in some places, serving only as a pen for their sheep." Nicholas Breton (a member of William Herbert's coterie), lists "horses in the stable, oxen in the stall, sheep in the pen, hogs in the sty" amongst his examples of the virtues of country contentment in *The Court and the Country* (London 1618).

director of the fortunes of all the characters is, of course, Wroth. In a metatheatrical gesture, the prop book of fortunes used in performance could be Wroth's full script of *Love's Victory*, perhaps even the pre-bound copy that is the Penshurst Manuscript. If, as in professional theatre, the actors in *Love's Victory* were only given their 'parts', the full story of *Love's Victory*, with the fortunes of all the company, would be apparent only in the full book of the play. Arcas presents it as new: "You ne're itt saw" and even his attempt to plot is overcome by Wroth's controlling hand in the comic resolution found in the Penshurst manuscript. Drawing lots, taking leaves from the original Penshurst Manuscript, was obviously not a viable option for the Globe's Read Not Dead team but staging a book that looks something like Wroth's presentation manuscript advertises the power of literary production in a performance. Sarah Rodgers argues that the *Urania* "evinces an anxiety" about how texts are circulated within the coterie group.<sup>27</sup> In *Love's Victory*, by contrast, Wroth advertises her control of riddles and the circulation of text. Even if 'insiders' were credited with the ability to decipher riddles, Wroth is ultimately the shepherdess who "chieves best of all" and "must bear the bell" in shaping the coterie and the fortunes of the Sidney family through her writing.

It has been conventional to read Wroth's play as a rewriting which produces an idealized resolution to the frustrated passions of the family through the romance of Philisses and Musella. Josephine Roberts noticed the connections to *Astrophil and Stella* and to Sir Philip Sidney's love for Penelope Rich in the names of the protagonists (Philisses-Philip-Astrophil and Musella Muse-Stella). Marion Wynne-Davies has argued that the allusions work on a second generational level as well, with Philisses and Musella fantasizing a happy fulfillment of Mary Wroth's romantic relationship with William Herbert. The Penshurst Manuscript is decorated with the

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<sup>27</sup> Sarah Rodgers, "Embedded Poetry," 273.

intertwined letters and with fermesses, or slashed Ss, a *signe cryptique* used by the French aristocracy to mark secret communications, especially love letters, all suggesting that *Love's Victory* is a love riddle presented by Mary Wroth to William Herbert. This possibility would have been much more explicit in performance if they played the roles of Musella and Philisses.<sup>28</sup>

There is another significant “love’s victory” in the play, however: that of Venus over Lissius, the scornful lover whose pride is punished when he is struck by Cupid’s arrow. He is subsequently accused of inconstancy and is finally forgiven by Simeana, who is, in turn, tutored by Musella. Could both Lissius *and* Philisses be literary sketches of William Herbert? There is something akin to the joy of revenge identified by Tania Modleski in the classic pattern of popular romance fiction,<sup>29</sup> when Dalina hears Lissius’s lament and notes, with metatheatrical awareness:

Lissius is taken, well sayd. Cupid now  
You partly have perform'd your taken vow.  
Of all owr shepherds, I ne're thought that hee  
Wowld of thy foolish troope a follower bee.  
But this itt is a Goddess to dispise...

(4.305-9)

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<sup>28</sup> Josephine Roberts, “Deciphering Women’s Pastoral: Coded Language in Wroth’s *Love’s Victory*,” in *Representing Women in Renaissance England*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 163-74. Marion Wynne-Davies, “So Much Worth”: Autobiographical Narratives in the Work of Lady Mary Wroth”, in *Betraying Our Selves: Forms of Self-Representation in Early Modern English Texts*, ed. Jenk Dagstra, Sheila Otway and Helen Wilcox (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 76-93. Ilona Bell, “The Circulation of Writings by Lady Mary Wroth”, in *Ashgate Research Companion to the Sidneys*, Vol. 2, ed. Margaret P. Hannay, Mary Ellen Lamb and Michael G. Brennan (Farnham: Ashgate 2015), 77-85.

<sup>29</sup> Tania Modleski, *Loving with A Vengeance: mass produced fantasies for women* (New York: Methuen, 1984), 45.

If Wroth, like Venus, enjoyed the revenge fantasy of conjuring love and suffering in one who appeared indifferent or inconstant, then her control over Lissius's emotions in the script may well have been a source of personal pleasure. The forthcoming edition of William Hebert's poems prepared by Mary Ellen Lamb, Steve May and Garth Bond should allow us to join in with the coterie game of intertextuality. The play prominently figures love's victory as a literary production. Venus's priests pronounce that all hearts should obey "Cupid's sway" and that not even princes can refuse:

He your secret thoughts can spy,  
Being his else from each eye.  
Let your songs bee still of love;  
Write no Satires which may prove  
Least offensive to his name.  
If you doe, you will butt frame  
Words against your selves, and lines  
Wher his good, and your ill shines.

(2.319-26)

The lover is strongly advised to change his literary style from satire to love poetry. Any writing that mocks love, he is warned, will become the subject of mockery at the hands of Venus and, behind her, Wroth. Lissius is the on-stage target of these lines. His satiric comments about the Forester and inability to appreciate the "ends of whining love" (1.269), frame words against himself when he is scorned by Simeana. His hyperbolic response, performing the abject lover to the full by abasing himself as a "vassall" to the "powerfull, conquering god of love" (4.217-20) can raise laughter in performance, co-opting spectators to join the mockery plotted by Venus.

Wroth's writing takes control of both the scornful lover and the courtly conventions adopted by male sonneteers, including her kinsmen.

One could make the same point about *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*: that this romance gives Wroth a literary means to manage the dynamics at work between members of her coterie, and beyond that, extend her political influence over connoisseur readers who could participate in the circulation of cultural capital and emotional energy generated by the coterie. I would argue that *Love's Victory* is different because it is a play. The script is, by its very nature, a more immediately and intrinsically social, interactive form. It is written to be enacted by the voices and bodies of members of the Sidney-Herbert coterie: the very people whose relationships the writing seeks to manage. Phenomenological approaches to literature, drawing on the philosophy of Marcel Merleau-Ponty, have demonstrated how consciousness is always embodied, which is pertinent when thinking about the effects and affect of the script as acted.<sup>30</sup> For example, the actor playing Philisses (whichever member of the coterie this was or was imagined in role), is obliged to take into his mouth and body the admission of love and the principle of constancy which Wroth seems so desperate to find in William Herbert, when he [the actor] says "Then know, for your deere sake my sorrow is" or vows "to dye / When I prove faulse, or show unconstancie" (4.74 and 105-6). Likewise, the character Lissius reads out Dalina's fortune thus:

Those that cannot stedy bee

To themselves, the like must see,

Fickle people, fickle chuse,

Slightly like, and soe refuse.

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<sup>30</sup> Marcel Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* trans. Donald A. Landes (London: Routledge, 2014)

This your fortune, who can say,  
Herein justice bears not sway!

(2.189-97)

Whether these lines were spoken by William Herbert or not, the script uses the fictional world, governed by Worth's 'Book of Fortunes' or script, to put her ideology into the embodied consciousness of men for spectators to witness. It is a good example of what drama therapist Susannah Pendzik has identified as a key function of dramatic reality: the ability of "manifesting the imagined in the here and now", of making concrete a possibility.<sup>31</sup> Pendzik points out that once a possibility – as, for example, the undying love of William Herbert for Mary Worth or of Penelope Rich for Philip Sidney – is acted out through the thinly-disguised avatars of the dramatic characters, that possibility takes on a legitimacy of its own. In the role of Philisses, this possibility, however far-fetched it might have seemed to Wroth, is given a concrete, material reality which is hard to simply dismiss as hollow once it has been embodied by an actor. Performative utterances, like the vow "to dy / When I prove faulse, or show unconstancie" (4.105-6), increase the force of legitimation. Thus the idealized constant lover and Wroth's dream of reciprocated romantic love enduring through the crisis of enforced marriage and imminent death, is given validity through its concrete re-enactment in her script. Whereas the second unpublished part of the *Urania* breaks off without the fulfillment of Pamphilia's dreams, *Love's Victory* realizes the possibility of romantic fulfillment in the material present by virtue of its genre as drama.

A production of *Love's Victory* creates a *shared experience* of dramatic reality between actors and spectators. All are aware that here the boundary between me / not me is blurred. The

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<sup>31</sup> Susannah Pendzik, "On dramatic reality and its therapeutic function in drama therapy," *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 33 (2006), 271-280.

fictional character is alien (a member of a peasant coterie) and alike (embodied and enacted by an elite member of the Sidney-Herbert coterie). The performance is, in turn, watched by members of that coterie and by those invited or, in the case of the Read not Dead performance, by paying connoisseurs who have bought into Wroth's female-centered rewriting of the Sidney family romance as cultural capital. The ambiguity of strangeness (fictional coterie) and sameness (coterie) gives spectators and actors freedom to express difficult feelings and to move across time, reliving memories of romantic encounters in the past: between William Herbert and Mary Wroth at Penshurst Mount, for example. The liberty from everyday rules which dramatic reality bestows on participants and viewers makes it highly therapeutic. Words and actions on stage can be 'owned' or claimed as acts of personal agency and acknowledged with a sense of responsibility. They bring about what Merleau-Ponty calls a state of "radical reflection" in which an embodied subject is creatively and self-consciously engaged in the placing of his or her identity and modes of perception in dialogue with the world around so that "we have the experience of an I, not in the sense of an absolute subjectivity, but rather one that is indivisibly unmade and remade by the course of time."<sup>32</sup> If, as I am arguing, *Love's Victory* was designed for live production for and / or by the Sidney family coterie, it is a brilliantly deft manipulation whereby the interaction of the coterie's members can be re-negotiated.

Pendzik credits dramatic reality with a metamorphic energy. Live enactment in the real / unreal realm of dramatic reality is a creative process in which extra-ordinary, inner experiences can grow because "they encounter a hospitable habitat – an alternative dimension of the real to which they belong."<sup>33</sup> In *Love's Victory* the rustic coterie roots inner experiences, depth of desire, encounters with despair, loss and with death (all of which Wroth knew well), into the

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<sup>32</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 228.

<sup>33</sup> Pendzik, "On dramatic reality". 275.

‘real’ world of material reality of Penshurst Place. Rooted this, it has the power to effect change. As Pendzik argues, “when dramatic reality is *invested* with significant contents, it rarely hands them back as they were before.”<sup>34</sup> *Love’s Victory* is deeply invested with significant contents, not just for Wroth but for members of her coterie who participated in a performance whether as actors or spectators or both. The play’s extraordinary ending takes participants through the valley of death to the moment of resurrection in a spectacular example of what Pendzik sees as the magical capacity of dramatic reality to be “as flexible as dough”, a space of possibility:

*Priests:* Philisses, of us take Musella faire,

Wee joine your hands, rise and abandon care.

Venus hath caus’d this wounder for her glory,

And the Triumph of love’s victory.

*Venus* Lovers bee nott amas’d this is my deed,

Who could nott suffer your deere harts to bleed.

Come forth, and joy your faith hath bin thus tride,

Who truly would for true love’s sake have dy’de.

(5.483-90)

As enacted at Penshurst, perhaps in the chapel or underneath the minstrels’ gallery in the Baron’s Hall, this display gives legitimacy to Lady Mary Wroth’s vision of a consummation of romance by making it happen in the concrete world of the Sidney estate. The actors’ hands are joined; it becomes a legitimate family history, both retrospective and prospective. The Mother’s celebration of Musella and Philisses’ match “blessed be / And children, and they children’s children see” bears out Shaw’s idea that moments of poetic legitimation “come out of families;

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 276.

they form and reform families.” Perhaps nowhere on the Penshurst estate is this felt as strongly as in the Baron’s Hall, steeped in generations of communal – coterie – living. The origins of the hall as a living space for all classes of the medieval household community are preserved in the fabric of the timbered roof which is held up by the carved wooden figures of peasants and estate workers, while the nobility and their guests meet below.

The regenerative, expansive power of love’s victory was clear from the staged reading at in Baron’s Hall on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2014. The “children’s children” of subsequent generations watched the performance in the persons of Lord and Lady De L’Isle and their two grown up children. They were surrounded by an extended coterie of conference delegates, Friends of the Globe and other paying guests. The late evening light which streamed through the vast windows of Baron’s Hall from the gardens, bathed actors, Sidneys and common connoisseurs alike. Pierre Bourdieu’s view that “the definition of cultural nobility is the stake in a struggle which has gone on unceasingly, from the seventeenth century to the present day”<sup>35</sup> was palpable. Wroth’s political project to perpetuate the aristocratic and sophisticated literary values of her Sidney heritage was realized by live performance to a ‘coterie’ gathered in the family home to experience temporary membership of that household community. By witnessing the tragicomic transformations of *Love’s Victory* as embodied connoisseurs of the script, of women’s writing, of the house and the gardens, it was easy to share in a celebration of the play’s revival as a reinscription of “the treasures of love’s lasting glory” (5.578) at Penshurst Place.

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<sup>35</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice and introduced by Tony Bennett (Abingdon: Routledge 2010), p. xxv

