

Introduction

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It has been a pleasure to edit the essays in this Special Issue, just as it was to hear all the papers at the conference *Dramatizing Penshurst: Site, Script, Sidneys* held at Penshurst Place. <http://wp.lancs.ac.uk/dramatizing-penshurst/>. My selection from the programme of papers, many of which will be published elsewhere, has been guided by the two key words: “dramatizing” and “Penshurst.” This edition of *Sidney Journal* focuses on Penshurst Place as a site of production. Firstly, for the production of a family coterie which, in turn, produced literary and dramatic texts which, in their own ways, reconfigured and reproduced the values of the Sidney-Herbert household for a range of readers and audiences. As the Sidney family home, Penshurst has always had a performative role, representing the identities of its owners through its symbolic content and impressive scale. The house and gardens are acting spaces within whose walls and boundaries inhabitants’ performative identities and their potential for re-creating themselves through literary or dramatic avatars are highlighted. Because Penshurst Place and gardens are materially involved in the Sidneys’ literary and dramatic production, it is especially appropriate that this Special Issue opens with an introduction to Penshurst as ‘Place’ by Philip Sidney, whose home it is. As the first Sidney contributor to the *Journal*, he is perpetuating a family tradition.

Philip Sidney’s essay explains how for much of its history, Penshurst Place has compounded its status as a family home with a host of other roles and— literary, official, recreational, professional – pursued there by all its various denizens since 1552. Inscribed with traces of its medieval past and the material changes made by the newly prominent Sidneys, the house has always had a performative role in representing the identities of its owners at local and national levels through its symbolic content and impressive scale. The formal gardens and the parkland beyond, whose grazing sheep provide a “pastoral

continuity”, are a site and subject of artistic contemplation and recreation as well as the centre of a working landed estate. By drawing attention to Penshurst as a lived-in space rather than an ideological object, Philip Sidney’s essay builds on the interdisciplinary approaches of critics like Gavin Alexander, Germaine Warkentin and Susie West, whose work on the literary, musical, architectural and performative “textures of life” at Penshurst have helped to produce a more nuanced understanding of the actions and interactions at work in the Sidney circle in the early modern period.

Penshurst’s place as a site of dramatic production was most recently realised with a staged reading of Lady Mary Wroth’s play *Love’s Victory* directed by Martin Hodgson for Globe Education in 2014. The performance, which was staged as part of the conference and is depicted on the front cover, is discussed by Marion Wynne-Davies below in a review illustrated with further photographs. The play and Lady Mary Wroth are thus a dominant theme in this issue. Susie West’s essay “Finding Wroth’s Loughton Hall” embraces the methodological challenges of writing about a lost house with a fragmentary archive in order to provide the first architectural history of the marital home of Lady Mary Sidney after she married Sir Robert Wroth in 1604. Loughton Hall, in Essex, was burnt down in 1836 and little is known of its appearance or history but Wroth remained there as a widow until her own death in 1651. It should therefore, West argues, take its place amongst the Sidney-Herbert houses from which Wroth’s work was produced. Its geographical location closely resembles the situation of the forest lodge in Wroth’s *Urania*, for example. West makes an innovative use of evidence by using seventeenth-century Hearth Tax records in her speculative reconstruction of the architecture of Loughton Hall. This is somewhat ironic, given what happened to the house, but allows us to rank the substantial brick building, complete with additional stables and outhouses, in comparison to other Sidney households and dwellings in Essex.

The landscape, particularly as it sloped down to waterways at Penshurst and at Loughton Hall, informs Rahel Orgis's reading "Attempted Murder on the Banks of the Medway: Melodramatising Penshurst Place in Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania*." Orgis contends that Wroth constructs a more imaginative and less autobiographically-informed vision of the Sidney home than has previously been explored by critics, in an episode involving the Prince of Venice and the villainous Vicianus at the end of Book I of *Urania*. Here Penshurst features as an idyllic backdrop to an attempted murder, to an unhappy love triangle and a prospective love marriage. The ambivalent melodramatic treatment of the Sidney home complicates the notion of Penshurst as a safe retreat and site of nostalgia. In addition, Orgis traces how Wroth's representation of Penshurst, can be considered as a microcosm for England, through which Wroth simultaneously pays homage, promotes family prestige, and criticises English society and politics.

The intertwining of family and courtly politics in *Love's Victory* is explored by Marion O'Connor whose essay offers a new reading of Silvesta with reference to the Countess of Bedford. In a detailed consideration of Lady Bedford's financial circumstances in 1618-19, O'Connor concludes that the Countess's practice of matchmaking for her near relations, including her second cousin, Barbara Sidney, was driven not so much by dynastic ambition as by her own financial needs. The role of Silvesta as matchmaker in *Love's Victory* and the curious resolution to her chaste relationship with the Forester, are likewise illuminated by the context of the Earl and Countess of Bedford's own marital circumstances. O'Connor's essay contributes substantially to the argument that the Sidney coterie and the courtly circle beyond are represented in Wroth's dramatic work as well as in her prose romance.

The political dimensions of literary production, especially in relation to Sidney family prestige as a new dynasty, are taken up in Mary Ellen Lamb's essay "Selling Mary Wroth's *Urania*: The Frontispiece and the Connoisseurship of Romance." Lamb analyzes several

complex ideological manoeuvres accomplished by the frontispiece to the romance, exploring how the elegance of this fictional landscape, stretching out beyond the sign of the Sidneys, conflates place and text to reimagine the entitlement assumed by aristocrats through the ownership of land as an entitlement assumed by Sidneys through the generation of refined and elegant text. This entitlement also extends to print readers, portrayed as discerning connoisseurs of the text. In the process, the frontispiece significantly intervenes in a contemporary reception of romance by affirming the prestige of this genre, rendering it suitable for male as well as female readers. Lamb concludes by proposing that the publication of Wroth's romance offers connoisseur-status to general print readers, thus challenging a class hierarchy dominated by an elite land-owning aristocracy, even while co-opting non-elite readers to promote the reputation of the Sidney-Herberts.

My own essay traces a similar ideological manoeuvre in Wroth's *Love's Victory*, starting with a consideration of the "coterie" as a phenomenon defined with reference to literary production and to the land. I argue that the role of shepherdess, guiding her flock away from danger and into the safety of the pen, relates to the character of Musella, to Wroth as playwright, and to the rural landscape of the Penshurst estate. I propose that, in performance, the Book of Fortunes used by the characters in Act 2 is a prop which exemplifies Wroth's ultimate control over the characters and the actors who play them. I further argue that by virtue of its genre as drama, Wroth's text allows her to shepherd members of the Sidney-Herbert coterie, including William Herbert, into playing the roles and speaking the words she desires. With reference to the 2014 Read not Dead performance at Penshurst, attended by members of the current Sidney family, I suggest how spectators of *Love's Victory* can be incorporated into the perpetuation of Sidney family values.

The production by Globe Education drew attention to the importance of music in the play, a feature that critical readings often ignore. Katherine R. Larson's essay "Playing at

Penshurst: The Songs and Musical Games of Mary Wroth's *Love's Victory*" seeks to rectify this gap by examining the songs that pervade *Love's Victory* through the architectural and sociocultural lens of Penshurst. Although the music that enlivened *Love's Victory* in any original performance is no longer extant, song is integral to the structure and narrative development of Wroth's tragicomedy. The lively singing enjoyed by Wroth's shepherds and shepherdesses is a major part of the pastoral entertainment for the play's off-stage audience, as the 2014 staged reading showed. Larson also draws attention to the ways that Wroth's protagonists esort to song to confide their amorous feelings, as they do in the *Urania*. These moments exemplify Wroth's fascination with the affective power of song and its relationship to specific sites of textual circulation.

Love's Victory exists in two versions, the Penshurst Manuscript, which was used for the performance and the shorter Huntington Manuscript. Marta Straznicky's essay "Reading the Huntington Manuscript of Wroth's *Loves Victorie* (HM 600)" presents a counter-argument to conventional readings of the Huntington as an earlier, incomplete version of the Penshurst manuscript, arguing that the complex forms of fileation between the two cannot be described in chronological terms alone, if at all. Straznicky reasons that claims about the relative textual authority of the two manuscripts can therefore be advanced only with respect to specific variants and not to either manuscript as a whole. While Penshurst appears in many respects to transcribe the Huntington text, incorporating revisions that are marked interlineally as insertions in Huntington, the opposite is also found, with Huntington transcribing Penshurst and incorporating revisions found in the purportedly later text. The essay argues that the differences between the two texts offer important opportunities for reading the play differently: notably, with reference to the comic energy of Venus and Cupid. While the Huntington scripted text ends with a bitter and imminently tragic conclusion, Straznicky

suggests that, in performance, a non-verbal ending may have produced a happier conclusion to the play.

The landscape of literary production rooted at Penshurst looks set to continue in the future. Straznický's forthcoming edition of the play as part of a collection of *Women's Household Drama*, co-edited with Sara Mueller, will open up new possibilities for reading and performing the Huntington Manuscript.¹ Viscount De L'Isle has given permission for a new edition of the Penshurst Manuscript, which is currently being prepared by Alison Findlay, Philip Sidney and Michael Brennan for publication by the Revels Plays. An edition of William Hebert's poems is being undertaken by Mary Ellen Lamb, Steve May and Garth Bond and, when published, will allow readers to participate more fully in the Sidney coterie's intertextual games. Several publications on Wroth have already animated the landscape of Sidney scholarship since the conference and while these essays were being prepared for publication. Among these, Akiko Kusunoki's *Gender and Representations of the Female Subject in Early Modern England: Creating Their Own Meanings* compares Wroth's writing with that of her contemporaries.² Paul Salzman and Marion Wynne-Davies's collection of essays *Mary Wroth and Shakespeare* continues the important job of counterbalancing the canon, even though Wroth has "now risen to something approaching canonical status" as the

¹ *Women's Household Drama: "Loves Victorie," "The Concealed Fansyes," and "A Pastorall,"* edited by Marta Straznický and Sara Mueller. The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series (forthcoming)

² Akiko Kusunoki, *Gender and Representations of the Female Subject in Early Modern England: Creating Their Own Meanings* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

editors comment.³ The question of “what Mary Wroth had to do with Shakespeare”⁴ is taken up in Penny McCarthy’s book on the *Sonnets*, reviewed in this issue by Mary Ellen Lamb. Whether or not one is persuaded by McCarthy’s thesis, her selection of Wroth as Shakespeare’s mistress, and the Countess of Pembroke as the older friend addressed in Sonnets 18-30 testifies to the visibility of these women as both Shakespeare and Sidney’s sisters. Their prominence is due to the pioneering work of feminist critics like Josephine Roberts, Margaret Hannay and Mary Ellen Lamb whose work has inspired and guided our own so much. I would like to express my personal thanks to Mary Ellen Lamb who was our keynote speaker at the Peshurst conference, and who has worked so hard in her role as editor of *Sidney Journal* in formatting and preparing the text of this Special Issue. We felt the presence of Josephine Roberts or Margaret Hannay in spirit at the 2014 conference at Peshurst, which was generously hosted by Lord and Lady De L’Isle, We would like to dedicate this Special Issue to Margaret with heartfelt thanks for all she has given to us.

³ Paul Salzman and Marion Wynne-Davies, eds. *Mary Wroth and Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 2015), p.1.

⁴ *Ibid.*