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Creating the Beloved

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ABSTRACT

As discourses of desire, sonnet sequences contain various power relations. In traditional sequences (such as those authored by Petrarch, Philip Sidney, and Edmund Spenser), the male poet-lover seems to exalt the female beloved, claiming that *she* captivates *him*. However, in his praise of her, he subjugates her to his desire. That is, he primarily desires to explore and fashion his self while the woman merely serves as a kind of false-front, the ostensible occasion prompting his poetry. The beloved is actually the poet's self and the woman is a passive object whose shape the poet determines according to his own needs. Considering each sequence as a poet's contribution to a dialogue reveals that poets like Shakespeare, Mary Wroth, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Rossetti use the genre to articulate responses to the woman and the beloved self whom the traditional (read male) authors create; they write within the genre in order to write against it. Their responses disrupt the power-relations typically contained within sonnet sequences in order to recreate the beloved and, in the poems of Wroth, Barrett Browning, and Rossetti, to reclaim female subjectivity.

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Chapter One

Prevaricated Desire: Establishing the Presence of the Beloved in Petrarch's Rime sparse, Sir Philip Sidney's Astrophel and Stella, and Edmund Spenser's Amoretti and Epithalamion.

I will call her beloved who is not beloved.
-Romans 9:25

Not only will you confess to acts contravening the law, but you will seek to transform your desire, your every desire, into discourse.
-Michel Foucault The History of Sexuality

In his discussion in The History of Sexuality of the multifaceted power relations which accompany expressions or feelings of desire, Foucault argues that desire engenders language, that externalizing desire creates a discourse that will be used by the audience or hearer in order to examine and judge the speaking subject, and that the expression of desire transforms both the desire itself and the desiring individual:

one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile . . . [Furthermore,] the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation. (62)

The relationship between confessor and hearer which Foucault identifies provides a starting point for examining the interactions of love, desire, and power which result in the construction of the beloved in Petrarch's Rime sparse, Sir Philip Sidney's Astrophel and Stella, and Edmund Spenser's Amoretti and Epithalamion.

The need or desire to confess, and indeed, the treatment of the sonnets as confessional discourses, imply a fault, a transgression, and in the Christian sense, a sin; that transgression is intimately connected to the objects of the lovers' desire and each lover's means of constructing that object. Furthermore, because Petrarch, Sidney and Spenser, as sonneteers, seek to confess desire *of* and *to* a beloved woman (Laura, Stella and Elizabeth respectively); the question of who the subject of the sonnets is, the desired beloved or desiring lover, evades certain definition. As Michael Spiller notes in The Development of the Sonnet: An Introduction, an important component of the sonnets is the expression of the "self as desiring entity" (125). Subjectivity varies in the sonnet sequences between the lover who desires, and who--in desiring--empowers himself over the woman by constructing a predominantly silent, "fetishized and dismembered . . . female body" (Enterline 127), and the beloved woman who ostensibly is desired, but is (passively) empowered by her disdain of the man's love which consequently forces him into a state of despair. In Women, Love, and Power: Literature and Psychoanalytic Perspectives, Elaine Baruch asserts "that it would be well to remember that in love, the 'object,' meaning the person longed for, is sometimes more important than the subject, more important than life itself for many a male lover, in literature and sometimes in life" (3). Such is not the case in the sonnets written by Petrarch, Sidney and Spenser; instead, they create a discourse in which the beloved only seems to be esteemed over the male lover. Self-consideration motivates the confession (for instance, the Petrarchan lover declares "I am ashamed of *myself* within" (line 11, emphasis added)), but the beloved also

plays a crucial role, for she initiates the cupidinous desire that enables the lover to create a discourse which revolves around his self.

The ambiguous nature of subjectivity in the sequences results, in part, from the poets' awareness and manipulation of the etymology of the word "subject." As Ashraf Rushdy asserts in The Empty Garden, an important distinction must be made between being a subject of and being subject to an authority. That is, "*subject of* signifies only subjectivity" (61) while *subject to* suggests subjection (i.e. servility). The poet-lovers create discourses *of* which the beloved seems to be the subject. As a *captivating* woman, she ensnares and subjects him to her authority and desires. In fact, the woman is subjected *to* (and consequently constructed by) the poet-lover's desires while he himself is the actual subject of the sonnets.

Subjective ambiguity also allows the poets to inscribe their sonnets with an explicitly dual audience. As Wendy Wall notes in The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance, sonnet "writers inscribe a double audience: the spectating and morally critical male public, and the cruel and resisting mistress who ostensibly receives the verse" (40). Thus, the sonnets simultaneously confess and perform desire (and its discontents), while the reader becomes both a voyeur (or eavesdropper) and the authority (i.e. outside reference) who validates the poet-lover's experiences and confessions.

From the outset of the Rime sparse, Petrarch clearly perceives the effects of desire on the lover's self as being of greater importance than the actual--or ostensible--source of the desire, the beloved mistress. Petrarch addresses Laura in the third sonnet: "I did not

defend myself against [Love],/ for your lovely eyes, Lady, bound me” (3. 3-4). However, before he addresses her, he makes it clear that he is primarily concerned about his self.

As Lynn Enterline notes in “Embodied Voices: Petrarch Reading (Himself Reading)

Ovid,” “Petrarch attempts to ‘create’ himself in relation to . . . Laura” (133).¹ And, as

Thomas Roche points out in Petrarch and the English Sonnet Sequence:

Sonnet 1 makes no mention of a beloved woman or of a Laura; for the reader she is reduced or abstracted to Petrarch’s *errore*. In fact it might almost be said that Laura exists only insofar as Petrarch responds to her. (5)

The same is true of Sidney’s and Spenser’s poet-lovers. While Astrophel seems to give the woman prevalence by establishing her as the poems’ primary subject, buried within his rhetoric is the importance of himself, a fact made clear by even the title:

Astrophel and Stella. Astrophel is emphasized and must be considered before Stella.

The first two lines of the first sonnet (and therefore of the entire sequence) are about the lover, not the beloved: “Loving in truth, and faine *in verse my love to show*,/ That the deare She might take some pleasure of *my paine*” (emphasis added). Astrophel’s love and pain will shape the sequence which speaks *to* Stella but *of* Astrophel’s desire.

Spenser employs a similar rhetorical scheme. At the end of the first sonnet the lover claims that he cares for no-one besides the woman for whom the poems are written. He addresses the poem’s components: “Leaves, lines, and rymes, seeke her to please alone,/ whom if ye please, I care for other none” (13-4). While the lover seems to care

¹ In her argument, Enterline asserts the autobiographical nature of the Rime sparse. She understands the sonnets as the poet’s representation of himself “as the subject of language and of desire” (120). This is a matter of some debate that also extends to Sidney and Spenser. For instance, as Anthony Low notes, Sidney seems to keep a critical distance between himself and Astrophel but the fact that Astrophel “contains” “Phil” and alludes to Penelope Rich complicates a clean division between autobiography and poetic fiction.

only for the beloved mistress, the poem's construction suggests that this is not the case. That is, that he certainly does care for someone besides her is made clear by the emphasis of his own self in each quatrain. The woman's hands, which will handle the leaves like "captives trembling at the victors sight" (4), hold the lover's "life in their dead doing might" (2). Through the "happy lines" (5) the woman will "reade the sorrowes of [*his*] dying spright" (7, emphasis added). And, when the woman beholds the rhymes, *his* soul will receive "long lacked foode" (12). Although the reader learns little about the woman in this sonnet (except that she possesses "lilly hands" (1) of "dead doing might" (2), and "lamping eyes" (6), and that she is, in his eyes, an "Angel" (11)), he or she discovers a great deal about the lover himself; indeed, "[the lover's] self will exist [and continues to exist] if the leaves are read" (Spiller 145). The next sonnet addresses the lover's own "Unquiet thought" (1): the passion which "he no longer controls" (Dunlop 601). The rapid transition from a poem which seems to stress the beloved to one which addresses the lover's own passion emphasizes the importance of the lover himself.

In all three sequences, then, the woman becomes a reference grounded outside the lover's self who ignites his desire and so creates an occasion to or space in which he can speak. Consequently, what "beloved" signifies becomes unstable in the sonnets; the signified shifts between a narcissistic lover and a (predominantly) silent mistress as the lover constructs a self which depends on the woman but simultaneously transcends her. She is thereby rendered insignificant as the lover explores the inner throes of his self and no longer requires the outside reference. The Petrarchan lover's queries of "what am I? what was I?" (23. 30) after considering the effects of unrequited love on him and the self

that evolved from his youthful “error” illustrates the woman’s role as an outside reference which creates the poems’ (and the self’s) occasion. As Guiseppi Mazzotta notes in The Worlds of Petrarch, the lover becomes “an autonomous, isolated subject who reflects on his memories, impulses and desires and finds in the consciousness of his individuality, severed from all external ties, accidental preoccupations and concerns, his pure self” (3). The lovers of the sonnets therefore “deliberately [enter] the region of desire and suffering, writing in order to experience the fullest intensity of being” (Goodheart 7). To return to Foucault’s point, then, the sonnets as discourse certainly originate in desire, but desire also originates within the sonnets in order to become the means by which the lover fashions a self.

The paradox that shapes the expressions of love and desire in the sonnets is that the woman’s virtue which initially inspired the man’s admiration prevents requital of the love, thereby strengthening his concupiscent longings and forcing him into despair. The ensuing discourse (i.e. the sonnets) confesses the struggle between desire and reason or will and wit which itself results from the lover’s experiences of a “labyrinth of various loves” (Johnson 99), including courtly and Neoplatonic love as well as the two categories of love which Thomas Roche identifies in Petrarch and the English Sonnet Sequences: *cupiditas* and *caritas* (5). Thus, while the “strange social system” (Parry 3) of courtly love contributes to the lover’s cupidinous desires, his experiences of love go beyond the limits it defines. In his introduction to The Art of Courtly Love, John Parry asserts that courtly love is “frankly sensual, . . . extramarital and does not contemplate matrimony as its object” (4). For the woman to remain virtuous, she must not accede to this type of

love. Philippa Berry notes in Of Chastity and Power, that “while the lady of courtly love was usually depicted as only temporarily unavailable, the female object of Petrarchan and Renaissance Neoplatonic love was defined as unequivocally chaste” (18). The man’s desire for sensual (extramarital) love and, simultaneously, for a chaste woman maintains the woman’s position as one who is *subject to* another. That is, by maintaining her chastity, she strengthens the poet-lover’s longings, leading him to eventually rail against her (as I shall consider later). However, sixteenth-century moral strictures dictated that if a woman did surrender her self to a man’s (and her own) physical appetite, she would become a worthless whore. Either way, the woman is subject to and constructed by male authority.

Roche cites St. Augustine’s On Christian Doctrine to clarify the difference between *cupiditas* and *caritas*:

I call “charity” the motion of the soul toward the enjoyment of God for His own sake, and the enjoyment of one’s self and of one’s neighbour for the sake of God; but “cupidity” is a motion of the soul toward the enjoyment of one’s own self, one’s neighbour, or any corporeal thing for the sake of something other than God. (6)

These beliefs were also an important component of the Protestant religion which influenced Sidney’s and Spenser’s lives and writing, as a sermon on “Charity” read in churches during the sixteenth-century indicates:

Charity is to love God with all our heart, all our heart, all our life, and all our powers and strength. With all our heart: that is to say, all our heart’s mind and study be set to believe his word, to trust in him, and *to love him above all other things that we love best in heaven or in earth*. (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge 63, emphasis added)

Cupiditas, the idolatrous love for “any created thing for its own sake . . . [replacing] God with an object of His creation” (Roche 6) which characterizes the error of Petrarch’s youthful love, the non-virtuous love which Astrophel craves and never moves beyond in Astrophel and Stella, and the “unquiet thought” which the lover of Amoretti and Epithalamion experiences, is not consummated in Petrarch’s, Spenser’s or Sidney’s sequence. Petrarch’s insistence on and turn to *caritas* as an older man who reflects upon the love of his youth, Spenser’s repeated reference to virtuous love and its consummation in divinely sanctioned marriage, and Astrophel’s continued state of “Most rude dispaire” (108. 7) at the sequence’s end all suggest that cupidinous love transgresses values of each poet’s society and therefore cannot be condoned.

The lovers of all three sonnet sequences experience a variation of *cupiditas* and the physical appetite which accompanies it. The emphasis in the sonnets on the ways in which cupidinous love affects or affected the shaping of the self once again suggests that the lover, not the woman, is the beloved subject of the sonnets. Spenser’s description of the process by which the physical desire is incited and the emotional and physical states it produces in An Hymne in Honour of Love resonates throughout the Rime sparse, Astrophel and Stella, and Amoretti and Epithalamion:

. . . that imperious boy [Cupid]
 Doth therwith tip his sharp empoisoned darts;
 Which glancing through the eyes with countenance coy,
 Rest not, till they have pierst the trembling harts,
 And *kindled flame* in all their inner parts,
Which suckes the blood, and drinketh up the lyfe
Of carefull wretches with consuming grieve. (120-6, emphasis added)

All three lovers experience the emotional state of despair accompanied by physical decline as a consequence of unrequited love. The two points which this passage of Spenser's Hymn exemplifies, and which reverberate through the sonnets, is that the lover—in particular, the effects of unrequited love on him—is the primary focus of the sonnets, and that the lover is disempowered by this love, as I shall discuss later.

The discourse revolves around and is made coherent by the lover's desire to fashion a self. In his use of Petrarch's Canzone 360 to differentiate *cupiditas* from *caritas*, Roche exposes the primary importance of the lover. In this poem, a debate between the lover and his "old sweet cruel lord," Love (1), judged by Reason, the lover declares that he has led a life of wretchedness under Cupid's yoke. As a youth, he gave in to will and subsequently disdained "many virtuous paths . . . [and] many joys, to serve this cruel flatterer" (17-9). The lover believes that he "was of a nature [i.e. a wit] to raise [himself] high above earth" (29-30, emphasis added) but has not because he has rested beneath Love's "harsh fierce yoke" (38). Love "has made [him] love God less than [he] ought and be less concerned for [himself]; for a lady [he has] equally disregarded all cares" (31-4). His desire to raise himself "high above the earth" (30) expounds not just desire to achieve purely charitable love, but also a desire for fame. Berry observes that "A heightened interest in individual self-determination was articulated in several Renaissance texts (such as Petrarch's Rime sparse) in terms of the search for material success, for wealth and fame" (17). The lover, not the woman, is the focus of the debate with love; he has indeed been (and continues to be) concerned for himself.

Cupidinous love which incites desire characterized by physical and sensual appetite, is driven by will (longing and desire) at the expense of wit (reason) and virtue (defined by the OED as “voluntary observance of the recognized moral laws or standards of right conduct”); thus, Spenser describes the darts that inspire such love as “empoisoned” in An Hymn in Honour of Love. Furthermore, the conception of cupidinous love in opposition to chaste love or *caritas* reflects Plato’s discussion in the Phaedrus, a text which influenced all three sonneteers:

when the charioteer sees the vision of the loved one, so that a sensation of warmth spreads from him over the whole soul and he begins to feel an itching and the stings of desire, the obedient horse, constrained now as always by a sense of shame, holds himself back from springing upon the beloved; but the other, utterly heedless now of the driver’s whip and goad, rushes forward prancing, and to the great discomfort of his yoke-fellow and the charioteer drives them to approach the lad and make mention of the sweetness of physical love. (62)

Physical desire therefore becomes a transgression, and as such, a motivation for the confession, shame, and repentance which the lover of the Rime sparse expresses in Sonnet #1 when he describes his love as an “error.” In Sonnet #4, Astrophel declares “I doe confesse--pardon a fault confest,/ My mouth too tender is for thy [Virtue’s] hard bit” (7-8). He requests Virtue’s pardon even though he has no intention of modifying his behavior. He uses the *idea* of the confession to unburden himself of the sinful nature of his desire and, paradoxically, to strengthen that desire.

Like the Petrarchan lover’s appeal to Reason, Astrophel’s confession issues from the struggle between “will and wit” (AS 4. 2). Fatigued (by only the fourth sonnet) from trying to love (and write of love) virtuously, Astrophel desires to give reign to his will or

desire. The division between love and virtue is made clear in the last line of sonnet #4—once Virtue sees Stella who “shrines in flesh so true a Deitie/. . . *Vertue* shalt [also] be in love” (13-4). Astrophel echoes and intensifies those sentiments in Sonnet #14; he is grieved by the accusation that “Desire/ Doth plunge [his] wel-form’d soule even in the mire/ Of sinfull thoughts, which do in ruine end” (6-8). Like the Petrarchan lover who seems to repent his cupidinous love, Astrophel acknowledges that his love may be a transgression because it forces the sacrifice of his wit. However, unlike the Petrarchan lover, *he* does not care: “Then Love is sinne, and let me sinfull be” (14). Astrophel’s conception of love is neither chaste nor virtuous, but rests on physical appetite; the pleasure or satisfaction expected from attaining the object of desire is of a physical nature, a type of satiation. Thus, he declares “But, ah, Desire still cries ‘give me some food’” (71. 14) after observing that Stella’s “beautie drawes the heart to love, [and]/ As fast [her] *Vertue* bends that love to good” (71. 12-3). Astrophel’s awareness that his capricious desire is a fault, a transgression, is made clear in his assertions: “I do confesse” (4. 7) and “let me sinfull be” (14. 14). Similarly, Petrarch’s description of his desire for Laura as his “first youthful error” (1.3) indicates that his cupidinous desire for Laura was a transgression; in Canzone 360 he restates and builds upon the sentiments of the first sonnet: “I make my plaint, *laden with pain, fear, and horror*, like a man who fears death and begs for justice” (5-8; emphasis added); the lover is painfully aware of the sinful nature of his love and desires Reason to “unburden him . . . liberate him . . . and promise him salvation” (Foucault 62). The transgression lies in not fulfilling his intellectual and spiritual potential, in seemingly wasting his talents on cupidinous love, and thus, in being

unreasonable. By turning to Reason, the Petrarchan lover hopes to “turn from [his] obstinate will” (360. 42), and regain a balance between his will and his wit. Thus, the cupidinous love itself is not the only transgression, its (ostensibly negative) effects in the shaping of the lover’s self also become a transgression. The Petrarchan lover and Astrophel (albeit reluctantly and indirectly) confess the seeming failure to achieve the potential afforded them by their wit. Now, the Petrarchan lover desires a kind of love, which will enable him to reach his intellectual and spiritual potential: *caritas*.

The “sinful” nature of the lovers’ failures blurs the boundary between secular and sacred love, once again emphasizes the effects of love on the fashioning of a self and, at least in Petrarch’s sonnets, induces the lover to look beyond *cupiditas* to *caritas*. However, the debate which Petrarch composes in Canzone 360 complicates a neat division between *cupiditas* and *caritas*. Love claims that the lover has “risen to some fame through me [Love], who have raised up his intellect to where it could never have raised itself . . . [and that] Now he has forgotten me along with the lady whom I gave him as the support of his frail life” (88. 145-7). The only point in Love’s argument which the lover contests is that Love soon took Laura back after “giving” her to him: “He gave her to me indeed, but soon he took her back!” (149-50). The lover fails to counter the accusation that he used Laura and Love as mere stimuli which allowed him not only to achieve fame, but also to turn inward to explore and fashion his self and consequently experience regeneration by turning to charitable, sacred love. Furthermore, the sonnets themselves stand as evidence that without the inspiration afforded by cupidinous desire,

Petrarch's name would not rest "among brilliant wits" (113).² In Sonnet #25, the speaker reassures another who suffers, or has suffered due to Cupidinous love:

And if, returning to the life of Love, you have found in your way
ditches or hills that try to make you abandon your lovely desire,

it was to show how thorny the path is, how mountainous and
hard the ascent by which one must rise to true worth. (9-14)

Here, love and desire are the love of merciful God, and the desire to achieve higher moral worth: *caritas*. The lover's "error" is metaphorized as "ditches or hills": necessary tests of an individual's wit as he rises to moral rejuvenation in reconciliation with God.

Returning to the debate between Love and the lover, then, Love's assertion--the final argument in the debate--that *he* did not take Laura back, "but One who desired her for Himself" (150) suggests two conclusions: that both the lover and Love err (God took Laura back because she was worshipped in an idolatrous nature), and that even this late in his development, the lover has not yet learned the erroneous nature of his love for her.

Unlike Astrophel, or even the Petrarchan lover, the lover of Spenser's Amoretti and Epithalamion insists that the beloved "hath kindled *heavenly* fyre" (III. 3, emphasis added), that Love in the form of Cupid wounds "base affections" which can be eased or overcome by the contemplation of "chast desires" (VIII. 6 and 8), and that his love is "not lyke to lusts of baser kynd" (VI. 3). The lover of the Amoretti seemingly differentiates

² This assertion within the sonnets themselves calls attention to Petrarch's awareness of metatextuality--"texts which deal with their own status as texts" (Spiller 215). It also increases the tension between the narrating "I" and Petrarch himself. Petrarch's name most certainly rests "among brilliant wits." His awareness of the sonnets' success and the status subsequently afforded to him combined with critical uncertainty regarding the factual basis of components of the sonnets (e.g. the existence of Laura herself) has led to extended debates regarding the autobiographical nature of the Rime sparse; this debate extends to other sonnet sequences, including Astrophel and Stella, Amoretti and Epithalamion, Shakespeare's Sonnets, Wroth's Pamphilia to Amphilanthus, and also (or perhaps especially) Barrett Browning's Sonnets from the Portuguese, and Christina Rossetti's Monna Innominata.

the flames of his desire from the “sensation of warmth” (62) which Plato ascribes to the cupidinously desiring lover, the flames which “[suck] the blood, and drinketh up the lyfe/ Of [even] carefull wretches” (Hymne 125-6). He describes the fire of his desire as “living fire” (VII. 12, VIII. 1) which is “Kindled above unto the maker neere” (VIII. 2).

However, the fact that he too experiences (and even addresses) “Unquiet thought” (II.1), passion from which he attempts to segregate and differentiate himself, suggests that cupidinous desires afflict him too. Evidence of such desire exists later in the sequence. In Sonnet XVI the lover declares that he “hardly scap’t with paine” the “legions of loves” who “[darted] their deadly arrowes fyre bright” (6, 7, 14). Furthermore, in Sonnet XVIII he describes his love as a “plaint” (7); he joins Sidney and Petrarch in experiencing the despair that results from the mistress’s cold, cruel disdain of his love: “So doe I weepe, and wayle, and pleade in vain,/ whiles she as steele and flint doth still remayne” (XVIII. 13-4). In Sonnet XXX the cupidinous nature of his desire is made explicit:

My love is lyke to yse, and I to fyre;
how comes it then that this her cold so great
is not dissolv’d through my so hot desyre,
but harder grows the more I her intreat? (1-4)

The fire is not of a divine nature, but is kindled by “hot desire” (I. 3) or “lusts of baser kynd” (VI. 3). In Sonnet XXX, the lover who seemingly pursues only chaste love experiences the pain of unrequited capricious desire; the chaste thoughts which he mentions earlier do nothing to dispel the heat of his desire at this moment.

Jon Quitslund’s summary of Plato’s conception of love in the Republic clarifies the seeming disparities in Spenser’s treatment of love in his sonnets: “Virtue is described as a harmony of parts in a hierarchy, the three parts of the soul being reason, noble

irascibility and concupiscence” (547). The Platonic idea of virtuous love folds into Spenser’s understanding and treatment of Petrarchanism and *caritas* in the Amoretti and Epithalamion. As William Kennedy notes in Authorizing Petrarch, “Spenser absorbed that model [of amatory poetry provided by the Rime sparse] directly and, through many Petrarchan imitations, indirectly” (539). These Petrarchan motifs include the “speaker’s inner turmoil,” his falling “captive to personified Love,” and the idea that “Love ambushes the speaker, binds his eyes to the beloved’s and subjects him to a passion of oxymoronic contraries that she in her proud disdain will not requite” (Kennedy 539). Spenser also counters elements of the Rime sparse in order to break away from the “set of clichés” (Kennedy 540) which characterized Petrarchanism. The most obvious example of this strategy is the consummation of love in the virtuous and charitable marriage in the Epithalamion while the Petrarchan lover achieves moral and spiritual regeneration in God’s grace, or *caritas*. Thus, in the words of William Johnson, in the Amoretti and Epithalamion, “the lover displays how he has worked himself into the labyrinth of various loves--courtly, Petrarchan, [and] neo-Platonic” (99). He also moves away from the brand of “Petrarchanism” employed by Sidney. That is, while Sidney’s sequences tends to mock the Petrarchan and courtly traditions in a witty and salacious manner, the Amoretti arises from and focuses upon a Christian matrix. For instance, Sonnet LXVII blends the Petrarchan and Christian traditions. Roche diarizes a Christianized calendrical structure within the Amoretti and Epithalamion (534-5). According to his findings, sonnets LXVII and LXVIII are Easter sonnets, occurring after Lent (i.e. sonnets XXII-LXVIII are Lenten), and in which voluntary submission to God and his teachings provide

the model by which the man should structure his love for the beloved woman. In sonnet LXVII the woman submits, of her own will, to captivity:

There she beholding me with mylder looke,
sought not to fly, but fearelesse still did bide:
till I in hand her yet halfe trembling tooke,
and with her owne goodwill hir fymely tyde. (9-12)

The imagery of the (dear) deer and her voluntary submission are not only drawn from the sonnet convention, but they are also “those of the medieval liturgical tradition of the Easter Eve baptism of the catechumenes” (Dunlop 641). The Spenserian lover therefore comes to understand love as the interconnection of different types of love, a fact made explicit in sonnet LXVIII. His love for Elizabeth evolves from his understanding of God’s love for humanity: “So let us love, deare love, lyke as we ought,/ love is the lesson which the Lord us taught” (13-4). Unlike the Petrarchan lover, then, the Spenserian lover moves beyond *cupiditas* to a form of *caritas* which does not deny earthly love. However, despite the Christian overtones to the Spenserian lover’s understanding of love, the fact remains that the woman submits to him: she is caught and “tyde” (12) while he remains in the capturing (i.e. authoritative or powerful) position which allows him to construct and guide her.

It is important to a consideration of constructions of the beloved (both self and mistress) to note that the lovers of all three sequences assert a desire, indeed a *need*, for pity. How and why each lover requires pity depends on the love which he expresses and desires; indeed, pity is not a static concept, but changes throughout the sequences. In the first sonnet, the speaker of the Rime sparse declares:

I weep and speak between vain

hopes and vain sorrow, where there is anyone who
 understands
 love through experience, *I hope to find pity, not only
 pardon.* (5-8)

As an older man recapitulating upon his experiences of cupidinous love when he was a younger man—his “error” (1.3)—he desires that his readers pardon him for erring (i.e. for idolizing and cupidinously desiring Laura), but he also desires (i.e. attempts to persuade) the reader to pity him. Although Astrophel and the speaker of the Amoretti and Epithalamion never actually *ask* the reader to pity them, they use pathos within the imagery and conceits in order to persuade the reader to pity. For example, the image of a restless Astrophel in Sonnet #4 who suffers inner turmoil as a result of the debate between “will and wit” (2), who has “litle reason . . . left” (10), and whose “simple soule [is] opprest” by “vaine love” (3) is certainly pathetic; if the reader fails to pity Astrophel because Stella refuses to requite his love, he or she can certainly pity the mental and emotional state which he experiences as a result of Stella’s disdain. The image of the pleading, weeping, sighing, wailing lover in Spenser’s Sonnet XVIII similarly pries a form of pity from the reader: the pity of “anyone who understands love [at least of the unrequited variety] through experience” (RS 1. 8). Pity is intimately connected to the confessional nature of the discourses, for in pitying, the reader acts as the interlocutive authority who *intervenes* by “judging, punishing, forgiving, consoling and reconciling” (Foucault 62) in order to allow for the “intrinsic modifications” in the self of the confessor. Petrarch makes the link between confession and the desire for pity explicit—he desires pity *and* pardon. His “hope” for “pity” and “pardon” (8) indicates that the reader will judge both his desire and him, the desiring individual. Furthermore, his assertions “I

was in part another man from what I am now" (4) and "*But now* I see well how for a long time I was the talk of the/ crowd" (9-10, emphasis added) identify how the lover, as an older man retrospectively constructing a discourse of his youthful desire, experiences "intrinsic modifications"--the discourse "unburdens him of his wrongs" or errors in pursuing a "cupidinous and idolatrous" love for Laura which made her "the sole object of his desires" (Roche 6). Recognizing the nature of his love for Laura allows him to redirect his love towards God. The assertions which he makes in Sonnet 1 indicate Petrarch's understanding of love (both physical and spiritual) as a "subjective association" that, though painful, "involves the whole of oneself and impels one to shatter the walls around oneself and discover within oneself new worlds and new, unsuspected states of the soul" (Mazzotta 9). The lover of Petrarch's Rime sparse is changed by transforming his desire into language; the "new worlds" and "states of the soul" which he discovers are Christian ones.

If, after reading the sonnets, the audience accepts both that the lover is "ashamed of [himself] within" (1.11) for desiring in a cupidinous way, and that he seeks "repentance" (13), he or she pardons him and thereby acts as the authority whom Foucault describes who does not necessarily *punish* the lover, but may judge, forgive, and reconcile him. The poet-lover thereby manipulates the reader into validating the self which he constructs.

By uttering a discourse that requires a virtual interlocutor, the sonneteers use a rhetorical scheme that creates a type of dialogue out of a dramatic monologue. That is, as a lengthy speech by a single person which therefore limits the audience's knowledge of

the subject and tells the audience more about the speaker than the ostensible subject of the poems (the beloved) and which also acts to solicit a *specific* response from the reader (and therefore requires the reader's interaction with the discourse), each sonnet sequence becomes a hybridization of the monologue and dialogue, of the public with the private. The poems as dramatic monologue are heard; as the utterances of a private discourse or soliloquy, they are overheard. As Wendy Wall notes, in the sixteenth-century, the sonnets were "part of a widespread system of reading and writing that prized the text as a catalyst for production and appropriation rather than an autonomous finished artifact"; they became a type of "participatory poetics" in which writing is "an intervention into other texts made possible by the fluid textuality of manuscript culture . . . individual poems behaved as textually permeable forms, editorially open to amendment, dialogue and conversation" (33-34).

Each sonneteer desires that his beloved (as well as the reader) pity him. Astrophel emphasizes such pity in the first quatrain of the first sonnet:

Loving in truth, and faine in verse my love to show,
That the deare She might take some pleasure of my paine,
Pleasure might cause her to reade, reading might make her know,
Knowledge might *pitie* winne, and *pitie* grace obtaine. (1-4)

Through pity he intends to gain grace--itself a complex, multilayered term which simultaneously suggests secular and Christianized mercy as well as sexual gratification. Astrophel believes that pity will lead to the relationship's consummation. The lover of Amoretti and Epithalamion declares:

Yet cannot I with many a dropping teare,
and long intreaty soften her hard hart:
that she will once vouchsafe my plaint to heare,

or looke with *pitty* on my payneful smart. (XVIII. 5-8)

Two sonnets later he cries, "In vain I seeke and sew to her for grace" (XX. 1). In Canzone 23 the Petrarchan lover describes how his lady "moved with pity, deigned to gaze on me and recognized and saw that the punishment was equal to sin, benignly she reduced me to my first state" (132-35). In the same poem, he describes how he "sang always, calling for mercy" (63), and attempted and hoped to make himself "in her eyes from unworthy, worth of mercy" (101-2) by making his "amorous woes resound in so sweet or soft a temper that her harsh and ferocious heart was *humbled*" (64-6, emphasis added).

The role of the woman in all three sonnet sequences is complicated by the lover's desire for her pity: she is the object of his capricious desire and as such is a subject of the discourse which each lover creates. But the lover's complaints, which assert desire for *her* pity, subsequently make the discourse confessional in nature and place the male speaker in the subjective position, so the beloved becomes the authority or judge whom Foucault identifies. The lover's rhetoric establishes a dynamic exchange--the woman is more than a virtual presence. Indeed, as Wall notes, "the *active* reader vital to the practice of coterie exchange [of which sonnets were a part] is pervasively figured as the courted woman" (38, emphasis added). Thus, while the lover's primary desire is to fashion a self within the sonnet sequences, the desire for the woman's love, achieved by gaining her pity, is required in order to facilitate the achievement of and to validate that primary desire.

By seeking merciful love in the form of pity, each lover folds a Christianized discourse into the discourse of his predominantly capricious desire. Pity is defined by the OED as “a feeling or emotion of tenderness aroused by the suffering, distress, or misfortune of another, and prompting a desire for a relief” (932). In demonstrating mercy by pitying the lover, the beloved would allow him to obtain grace which is not only secular, “the condition or fact of being favoured” (OED 719), but which also resonates with scriptural tones, “the free and unmerited favour of God as manifested in the salvation of sinners” (OED 719). As considered earlier, such grace (or favour) is also sexual. Thus, if the beloved pitied the lover and so requited his love--a *charitable* response to cupidinous lust-- then the beloved would indicate that she had heard and judged the lover’s confession and, in a God-like fashion, desired to “forgive, console and reconcile him” to both her and himself (Foucault 63). Indeed, by pitying the lover, the beloved’s desire would be nothing more than the “desire for a relief” (OED 932) of the lover’s suffering, a *selfless* form of desire and love.

In Laura: Uncovering Gender and Genre in Wyatt, Donne, and Marvell, Laura Estrin insists that “we . . . stop to think about what the woman . . . in Petrarchan poetry is doing” (1). She evokes the idea of “imbricated meaning of gender” (7) in her perception of Petrarchanism as

a series of anamorphic representations imbricated by three principal spaces: the main plot with Laura as Daphne, or woman who denies sexuality; and the two subplots--with Laura as Eve, or woman who returns sexuality; and Laura as Mercury, or woman who invents her own life by escaping configuration altogether. The process of anamorphosis . . . involves redefining the position of the corresponding Petrarch, as respectively: Apollo, whose sublimated desire becomes the poem, Adam, whose

returned desire renders the poem superfluous; and Battus,
 who as victim of Laura-Mercury's rock punishment . . .
 bears witness to his own ambivalence. (9)

In other words, Estrin argues that Laura--the beloved--as a construct of Petrarchanism, possesses agency which causes, or itself is the result of, the speaker's loss of agency. In Echoes of Desire: English Petrarchanism and its Counterdiscourses, Heather Dubrow adopts a similar argument: "The paradigm of the dominant and manipulative poet and silenced mistress is deceptive not merely because it neglects that variety . . . of registers within the female speech constructed in Petrarchan texts . . . but also because it typically presupposes the stability of gender categories" (11). Certainly "slippages between . . . powerful and powerless" (Dubrow 12) occur in sonnet sequences--the lover's claim that he is a powerless captive of the woman while he writes a narrative that simultaneously captures her is a recognized--indeed, a well-known--feature of courtly and Petrarchan love discourses. And the speaker of the sonnets is indeed multi-dimensional, a fact which resonates within and between the many sonnet sequences written by different poets: as William Kennedy observes, "The history of Petrarchanism is a narrative of multiple Petrarchs" (in Dubrow 5). While the beloved also exhibits the traits of multi-dimensionality which Estrin and Dubrow identify, the fact remains that Laura, Stella and Elizabeth, existing as characters or constructs within the narratives of the sonnet sequences, remain just that: constructions of various male identities and voices which exist and function for a specific purpose; the very few words uttered by the women are recorded and manipulated by the speakers in order to contribute certainly to the speaker's fashioning of her, but most importantly, to the fashioning of his self. The woman and the

words she articulates in the sonnets are held captive in the lover's conception and writing of them. As Margaret Homans asserts in "Syllables of Velvet": Dickinson, Rossetti, and the Rhetoric of Sexuality," "quite often the feminine object of desire is portrayed as more powerful than the masculine speaking self [which] proves nothing more than that as an object she is subject to his figurings" (571).

Louise Schleiner reconciles the slippage between captive and capturing and thereby reconciles the dichotomy between the powerful and the powerless in Cultural Semiotics, Spenser, and the Captive Woman.³ She contrasts the captive woman: "female respected having to remain" to the capturing woman: "female respected causing male to have to remain" (120).⁴ Schleiner identifies both the sixteenth-century male anxiety arising from "femaleness" that governs rather than is governed (120), and that constructions of the capturing woman were *in part* the English poets' solution to a critical sixteenth-century sociological and patriarchal problem: "how to manage the queen" (122). Most importantly, she recognizes that these women, including Stella and Spenser's Elizabeth, are constructions within a discourse; despite both the women's factual basis, and, in the case of Astrophel and Stella and Amoretti and Epithalamion, the discourse's emergence from and contribution to a courtly tradition which was employed as a means of complimenting and gaining the favour of Queen Elizabeth, the discourse as

³ Although Schleiner's model applies directly to Spenser's Shepheardes Calendar, she herself acknowledges its applicability to other sixteenth-century texts, including sonnet sequences. While the subtleties of the linguistic discussion which Schleiner engages are beyond the scope of this discussion, her consideration of the captive woman is relevant to the sonneteers' conceptualization and use of her.

⁴ Significantly, Schleiner uses "respected" to indicate "the figure's [woman's] loading as carrier of legitimation for hegemony" (119). If the woman were not respected by the lover, the outcome of his desire would no doubt be different; he may not be so willing to tolerate unrequited love and consequently would force "requital."

a whole is made coherent by the self-gazing postures which the speakers adopt. The sonneteers' constructions of the beloved woman result from anxieties about the female; female desire, chastity and agency threaten not only the patriarchal ordering of sixteenth-century English society (despite or perhaps because of the fact that a queen headed that society), but they also threaten the self or consciousness which a male individual within that society had constructed. The images of the captive male lover within the sonnets confirm that anxiety.

The anxiety resulting from the woman's "elusive 'nature'" (Berry 18) and her ability to seemingly hold the lover in a state of hapless despair results in the male lover's construction of her as a tyrant figure or even, in *Astrophel and Stella*, as a witch. While the Petrarchan lover never addresses the woman as a tyrant, he certainly maintains that she exercises her (ostensible) authority over him in an oppressive manner. He describes her as Love's "patroness": "a powerful Lady, against whom wit or force or asking pardon has helped or helps me little" (23. 35-37). She becomes a cold, unmerciful and oppressive tyrant in deed if not in title. Astrophel, on the other hand, explicitly describes his beloved as a tyrant. He begins Sonnet #47 by wondering if Stella is capable of reducing him to slavery or if he was "borne a slave,/ whose necke becomes such yoke of tyranny" (2-4). By the Fifth Song, "rage . . . rules the reynes, which guided were by Pleasure" (15); he no longer perceives himself as one naturally suited to slavery. Instead, he addresses Stella as a tyrant:

I lay then to thy charge unjustest Tyrannie,
If Rule by force without all claimes a Tyran showeth,
For thou doest lord my heart, who am not borne thy slave,
And which is worse, makes me most guiltlesse torments have,
A rightfull Prince by unright deeds a Tyran groweth. (56-60)

Nor do Astrophel's abasements cease here; he continues by declaring that she is a witch:

A witch, I say thou art, though thou so faire appeare;
For I protest, my sight never thy face enjoyeth,
For I in me am chang'd, I am alive and dead:
My feet are turned to roots, my heart becometh lead,
No witchcraft is so evill, as which man's mind destroyeth. (74-8)

Astrophel creates an ironic reversal of men's and women's social positions in sixteenth-century England. That is, women were born chattels (if not slaves) and they were simultaneously "alive and dead" because the majority of them were not allowed to fashion selves in the same manner that men (like Astrophel) were.

At this point in the sequence, Stella, as a tyrant and witch (among other non-flattering titles) yet "(alas) . . . still of [Astrophel] beloved" (Fifth Song, 87), fits Schleiner's description of the capturing woman: "the capturing women are always dysphoric though often seductive, having . . . the aura, sometimes even the explicit quality of witchcraft" (122). Stella, however, is not intentionally seductive, nor does she actively (or even passively) solicit lordship over Astrophel's heart; Astrophel's rage, which leads him to "think of [the beloved's] faults" (Fifth Song. 16) reveals sixteenth-century male consternation regarding feminine autonomy. Berry identifies such autonomy as incompatible to "the self-serving interests of the masculine subject" (18). In other words, the woman as beloved, tyrant, or witch, is not the focus of Astrophel's rage—her effects upon him and his consciousness are, a fact confirmed by the lines: "And which is worse, makes me most guiltlesse torments have" (Fifth Song. 59) and "No witchcraft is so evill, as which a man's mind destroyeth" (Fifth Song. 78). As Page Ann Du Bois argues in "The Devil's Gateway": Women's Bodies and the Earthly Paradise," "men

concentrate on women's treachery, which lures the unsuspecting toward their bodies, thus towards loss of power, sin, and death" (45). The recurring images of the lurking and deceptive Cupid who constantly ambushes unsuspecting men (usually from the woman's eyes or hair) testify to such belief in female treachery. The adverse effects of unrequited love on him, that is, the "guiltless torments," or pangs of cupidinous desire which he suffers, result in a despairing self of which the reader is weary and scornful by this point in the sequence; by constructing the beloved as tyrannous because she fails to pity him, that self becomes the fault of the beloved.

Like Laura, Elizabeth of the Amoretti and Epithalamion is described as cruel because she holds the lover's "poor captived heart" (XLII. 8): "Is it *her nature* or is it her will,/ to be so cruell to an humbled foe?" (XLI. 1-2, emphasis added). As early as Sonnet X, the lover describes Elizabeth as "the Tyrannesse" (5) who "lordeth in licentious blisse/ of her freewill" (3-4). The woman's "freewill," or autonomy, is clearly at the heart of the lover's anxiety. Indeed, his description of her freewill as "licentious" (i.e. unruly and of the appetite) indicates the anxiety which female autonomy instilled in men; a woman who exercised authority was considered a whore.

The lover subsequently uses her disdain of his love to subvert that autonomy. When he says "O fayrest fayre never let it be named,/ that so fayre beauty was so fowly shamed" (XLI. 13-4) by taking "delight t' encrease a wretches woe" (7), he names that very shame and thereby fouls her beauty, a fact which is confirmed in the strong rhyme between "named" and "shamed." Like Astrophel and the Petrarchan lover, he constructs

the woman as cruel in order to emphasize his own emotions. The beloved's role--and indeed, her self--is limited by the lover's inward gazing.

Each lover's appeals for his beloved's pity function in a similar way. They all establish the woman as an authority, as powerful over the male lover, in order to use that position to subsequently subvert her. As Eugene Goodheart observes in Desire and Its Discontents, "Power is oppressive and needs to be resisted" (17). Attributing false tyrannical-like power to the beloved allows each lover to construct himself as oppressed with a need to resist that oppression. Resistance, then, constructs the beloved (as previously discussed) as unmerciful and un pitying, uncharitable, and thus, as a "fowly shamed beauty" (AE XLI. 14); she fails to respond to the man's pleas in an appropriate manner: she fails to pity him, and in so doing she fails to subvert her own desires and love selflessly. In Petrarch's words, *she* (ironically) becomes the selfish one, whose "desire ends in [her] self" (46. 11) and therefore fails to affirm *his* self.

Despite his claims to captivity and disempowerment, the male speaker of the sonnets controls the discourse which he uses to capture the beloved metaphorically, thereby helping to alleviate his anxieties about any autonomy which his beloved may possess. The sonnets which seem to pay tribute to the woman, those which emblazon her, and those few in which she does indeed speak, fail to describe even the woman's physical person. Laura, Stella, and Elizabeth become objects: "valued primarily for their looks and/or reproductive function, valued for their bodies" (Baruch 3). In Berry's words, "the various stylized conceits [such as the blazon, result in] . . . the poet's metonymic displacement of his mistress' body" (137). In "The Uncanny Stranger on

Display': The Female Body in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Love Poetry," Moira P. Baker argues that blazons function to "confiscate" or "appropriate" the female body (7). The male speaker "(dis)embodies female power and thus attempts to master it, textually, at least, if not sexually" (7). Consequently, the beloved becomes an "absent presence" (*AS* 106. 1): "her phantom [is] everywhere, her reality nowhere" (Baruch 27). Indeed, Laura as an absent presence becomes a prominent feature of the *Rime sparse*; the last 100 poems (from 267 to 367) are written after Laura's death. It is in these poems, when Laura's absence is absolute that the Petrarchan lover begins to move away from *cupiditas*.

Just as the lover fragments the beloved's body in blazons, he (mis)appropriates her speech. In Canzone 23, the Laura makes two terse exclamations which become lost in the lover's proliferating rhetoric about himself:

She who with her glance steals souls, opened my breast and
took my heart with her hand, saying to me "Make no word of
this." Later I saw her alone in another garment such that I did
not know her, oh human sense! rather I told her the truth, full of
fear, and she to her accustomed form quickly returning made
me, alas, an almost living and terrified stone.
She spoke, so angry to see that she made me tremble within
that stone, hearing: "I am not perhaps who you think I am." (72-84)

Once again the beloved becomes the victim of oppression. The speaker manipulates her words by blanketing them in the pathos of his self in order to gain the reader's pity. Although he is much more subtle, he is as guilty as Astrophel of disrespecting the woman's speech (despite his praises of it in other poems like blazons), using her own words to subvert her. In Sonnet #63, Astrophel misuses "Grammar rules" (1) in order to superimpose the meaning he desires onto her exclamation of "No, no!" (8). As Ringler

observes in his commentary on the poem, “in the sixteenth century the double negative was a common and accepted English usage, so that his ‘grammar-rules’ apply only to Latin and not to English” (478). Furthermore, the poem immediately following his manipulation of her speech, the First Song, is a blazon; after Stella’s alleged requital of his love, his “breast orecharg’d to Musicke lendeth” (First Song. 34). This ostensible “song of praise” (as its refrain goes), is actually a song of fragmentation and subversion. The last thing he emblazons is Stella’s voice “which soule from sences sunders” (29). Stella’s speech, which resulted in his crying out in song, effects a separation of his soul from his body and earthly desires. Like Spenser, then, he seems to pursue a more virtuous love at this point. The song also reinvokes Sonnet #35 in which Astrophel declares: “It is a praise to praise, when thou art praisde” (14). Astrophel expects the “participatory poetics” which Wall identifies; he expects a suitable (i.e. pitying and praising) response from Stella in return for his song of extended praise of her. He thereby sets himself up for inevitable disappointment and the sinking into deeper despair than that which he experienced prior to Sonnet #63.

However, paradoxically, a suitable response from Stella could undermine the discourse (and therefore the self it contains) which Astrophel has so painstakingly created. In Post-Petrarchanism: Origins and Innovations of the Western Lyric Sequence, Roland Greene observes that a lyric sequence such as Astrophel and Stella

is largely concerned with representing the states and actions of a unitary human self—or a self struggling to seem unitary. . . . The sequence [also] puts its speaker in relation to another character cast in the role of object . . . and largely invents its politics, society and world from the exchanges of these two. Because these fictions play out the humanist conviction that selves ought to be unified and the equally

humanist terror that they are not, the second person is often appropriated so as to cover the gaps and inconsistencies in the first, which is to say there is likely room for only one speaking voice in such texts. (14)

Stella's response would be doubly threatening to Astrophel; as discussed earlier, she serves as a reference which allows Astrophel to fashion a self. Because her female voice could easily undo his constructs of her self and thereby undo the self which Astrophel has fashioned, "the only voice . . . [she has] is that of Echo" (Baruch 17). Astrophel is perfectly aware of the threat Stella poses when he writes the First Song; thus, it becomes yet another mechanism for emphasizing the beloved's cruelty and eventually leads to his configuration of her as a tyrant and witch. Stella never had the chance to be anything but a tyrant.

Unlike Astrophel, and despite the lover's earlier anxiety regarding the beloved's "freewill," (X. 4) the beloved's voice, ironically, does not seem to threaten the lover's self in Amoretti and Epithalamion, but "becomes an important and perfectly placed part of the lover's process of discovery" (Dunlop 635). Sonnet LVIII, the sonnet Elizabeth "speaks," is responsible for "the crucial change in his attitude" (Dunlop 635). After asserting that "All flesh is frayle" (5), including the lover's earthly (i.e. cupidinous and courtly) desires for her, she observes that the male lover sets himself up for a fall: "he that standeth on the hyghest stayre/ fals lowest: for on earth nought hath endurance" (11-2). Spenser appropriates the female voice--for Elizabeth Boyle's authorship of the poem is doubtful--in order to introduce a turn in the sequence. By encouraging the lover to virtuous love which she can requite, Elizabeth prepares the way for the marriage which occurs in the Epithalamion. Spenser seems to use the woman's voice to diffuse anxiety

arising from female autonomy: the marriage seems to suggest consummation of the beloved's self with that of the lover. However, as Berry argues, this is not necessarily the case: "interest in [the beloved's] (licit or illicit) sexuality is closely related to her formerly privileged position within Petrarchan discourse. She is gradually subordinated to the poet as spouse in Spenser's sequence" (137). The lover of Amoretti and Epithalamion, then, achieves what Astrophel fails to do: he truly subverts the beloved (by gaining her love) in order to reduce the threat she presents to his self. He thereby uses the beloved to affirm that self.

In his discussion of power relations, Foucault establishes what he terms "the negative relation":

It [Western society] never establishes any connection between power and sex that is not negative: rejection, exclusion, refusal, blockage, concealment, or mask. Where sex and pleasure are concerned, power can "do" nothing but say no to them; what it produces, if anything, is absences and gaps, it overlooks elements, introduces discontinuities, separates what is joined, and marks off boundaries. Its effects take the general form of limit and lack. (83)

The sonnet sequences of Petrarch, Sidney and Spenser engage but twist such a conceptualization of power relations. As the interlocutor and authority to whom the lover's confessions and pleas for pity are addressed, the woman is placed in a position of power over the lover. However, even if she fails to act mercifully by requiting the speaker's love, (which she does throughout the Rime sparse, Astrophel and Stella, and most of Amoretti), the only power she possesses is the ability to say "no," and even this is appropriated in order to be used against her. The beloved provides the original space which allows the sonneteers to speak; her denial of the man's love and desire produces

yet another “gap” which allows him to manipulate that denial in his (usually successful) attempts to subvert both her so-called (or constructed) power, and her self. On the other hand, the male lover controls the discourse and therefore is really in the position of power; attributing power to the woman is nothing more than the carnivalesque conventionalized in discourses of courtly love in which the “normal” hierarchy (i.e. the man dominates the woman) is reversed. As such, all *he* can do is say “no” to the woman’s rejection of him (or take her by force—an action not unknown to discourses of desire, including sonnet sequences).⁵ While the Petrarchan lover eventually thanks the woman for her rejection of his love (requital would have prevented him from realizing the “erroneous” nature of his desire and thereby prevented him from reaching a higher spiritual state), Astrophel continues in a state of “most rude dispaire” (108. 7). The contorted power relations in the sonnets contribute to the production and expression of (the critically recognized) sublimated desire, as well as to the instability associated with the word “beloved.” Thus, they are crucial to the speaker’s need to fashion a self. The lover’s desire is more than sublimated; prevaricated desire establishes the woman as beloved when the truly beloved is in fact him-self.

⁵ Barnaby Barnes’ sonnet sequence Parthenophil and Parthenophe is the most well-known sequence in which the “cruel fair” woman is taken by force after denying the lover (voluntary) requital of his love.

Chapter Two

“Beauty should look so”: (Re) Creation of the Subject in Shakespeare’s Sonnets

Fair is foul and foul is fair.

-Macbeth I.i.11

It is as if there were an amorous Topic, whose figure was a site (topos). Now the property of a Topic is to be somewhat empty: a Topic is statutorily half coded, half projective (or projective because coded). What we have been able to say . . . is no more than a modest supplement offered to the reader to be made free with, to be added to, subtracted from, and passed onto others.

-Roland Barthes. A Lover’s Discourse (5)

Ashraf Rushdy’s definition of culture in The Empty Garden: The Subject of Late Milton relies upon experiences at the level of the individual, or subject: “culture may be defined by the structures and operations which involve ways of knowing and ways of being” (6). He then elaborates upon this definition, maintaining that “ordering experience” as well as “constructing reality” on the individual level contribute to cultural formation (8): culture shapes the individual subject and is simultaneously shaped *by* that subject. Thus, as Tamsin Lorraine states in Gender, Identity, and the Production of Meaning, the subject is “not a private entity but an intersection of inter-related cultural systems” (14).

Shakespeare’s sonnet sequence enacts a very similar process within the genre (or perhaps culture) established by Petrarch, and other sonneteers, including Sidney and Spenser. That is, Shakespeare’s sequence of sonnets itself, as an intimate, yet public discourse perpetuated by an “amorous Topic” (Barthes 5) of desire, praise, and despair results from certain “structures and operations” (i.e. the traditional sonnet sequences) which establish particular (yet discreetly varied) ways of knowing and being (as

examined in the previous chapter). Each of Petrarch's, Sidney's and Spenser's speakers orders his experiences and constructs his reality in response to his desire for a woman who disdains (but in the Amoretti and Epithalamion eventually requites) his love. In writing *his* sonnets, Shakespeare certainly "[chooses] to become [a] subject" of that culture (Rushdy 8)--or more accurately, *he* joins (becoming a subject of) the sonnet-writing culture while he makes *Will* (as the speaker is named in 136) a subject of the amorous culture defined by the topos of the sonnets.

However, Shakespeare's assumption of the sonneteer's mantle reflects Barthes' conception of a "half coded, half projective" Topic; Shakespeare most certainly "makes free with, adds to, [and] subtracts from" the amatory Topic established by his forerunners. By establishing an erotic triangle--the rivalry between Will, a seemingly ideal, albeit male, beloved (the so-called "fair friend"), and the less than ideal, (foul but fair) mistress--Shakespeare complicates both the nature of the speaker's desire and the subjectivity that emerges from the discourse. Indeed, in his creation of what Heather Dubrow conservatively terms "an alternative to Petrarchan love" (132), Shakespeare contorts the power relations beyond the complexity achieved in the Rime sparse, Astrophel and Stella, and Amoretti and Epithalamion. And, although he uses elements of the confessional mode (and the power relations it inscribes) to contribute to the construction of Will, the fair friend, and the mistress, unlike Petrarch, Sidney or Spenser, he overtly blurs the distinction between, and thereby equivocates, each of the three rival's identities. The resulting break-down of the division between the self of the speaker and that of each beloved establishes a poetic space that confuses or even lacks the sense of order which

directs the more traditional sonnet sequences. Shakespeare constructs the three selves and subjectivity within his sequence by seeming to praise (making fair) a male beloved, by alternately praising and criticizing a female beloved who is not fair according to traditional courtly and sonnet poetics (making foul fair and fair foul), and by equating the speaking self with each beloved. This process further complicates both the distinction between fair and foul, and the issue of desire in the genre of sonnet writing.

As considered earlier, Petrarch's exclamation of "what am I? what was I?" (23.30) after considering his experience of unrequited love, illustrates the woman's role as an outside reference which creates the poems' occasion. That exclamation simultaneously characterizes the understanding that "the self . . . [perceives] its own stages and . . . [acknowledges] that in its fluidity the self is made up of a series of different selves. The previous selves that the present self perceives begin to take on qualities that the self had previously ascribed to others" (Rushdy 13). Petrarch anticipates Lorraine's discussion of the Hegelian approach to the Self. Lorraine notes a specific interaction between desire and knowledge: "not only do human beings want knowledge about their world; they want to position themselves with respect to that world" (8). In other words, tension exists between an essential and existential understanding of the self. The essential self stresses "knowing" (Merriam-Webster 397) while the existential self is formed through the "acts and choices" (Merriam-Webster 397) which--when taken together--create an individual's existence. An examination of the self requires that the subject be positioned and understood within his or her specific "world." Thus, the choices that subject makes are important to an understanding of the self.

Petrarch's use of "what" (which denotes inquiry into the nature or identity of a *thing* or inanimate object) instead of "who" signifies an *objective* subject who attempts to position a past self as well as his present understanding of his self within his world. The object of that subject's desire, in this case, Laura, is required for both the past and present positionings, but it too must be revised as the subject changes; thus, the self "reconstructs first its object, then itself and its relationship to the object, and then its object again in the attempt to come closer to its own experience of knowledge and truth" (Lorraine 9). Laura becomes or is replaced by the "Beautiful Virgin" in the last poem of the Rime sparse (366. 1) and the poet-lover as subject eventually achieves *caritas*. By using "what" instead of "who" and by juxtaposing the present with the past, Petrarch indicates a specific change in state while he re-enforces the assertion that his love of Laura was an error: "I am another self; my former self was other" (Rushdy 13). Once again, the beloved clearly serves as the means or vehicle by which the Petrarchan lover achieves a self (or selves) and presence (in both the literary and spiritual worlds).

The division between the past (or other) and present (or non-other) selves is not so clear in Shakespeare's sonnets. By furthering the sonneteers' tradition of complicating the subject of the sonnets—with subject denoting the "amorous Topic," itself, as well as Will (the speaking subject) and the beloved(s), the desirable object(s) of and to whom Will speaks—Shakespeare obscures the clear division between the past (other) self and the present (true) self and therefore questions the ability to succeed in becoming a non-other presence.

In Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England: A Cultural Poetics, Bruce Smith notes that "Shakespeare's persona in the first nineteen sonnets speaks as an older man to a younger, as experience to innocence, as disciplined desire to overpowering beauty" (251). Unlike the Rime sparse, then, in which the "double sense of time" (Smith 251) is *internal* to the lover's self, Shakespeare's sonnets contain a "double sense of time" (Smith 251) which is not only seemingly *external* to the speaker's present self, but which is also contained within the connection between Will and the fair friend. However, by constructing Will and the beloved fair friend as sharers of an identity, the difference in age and time frame and therefore, as in the Rime sparse, between past and present selves, becomes internalized once again as a component of Will's self (and his beloved's). Sonnet 22 exemplifies both the tension between the youthful self of the beloved and the older self of the speaker, and the equivocation of those selves. The final couplet of this sonnet seems to depict the well-known and commonly used metonym for reciprocated love in which love becomes not just the lovers' hearts, but is also the loss of the lovers' hearts to each other: "Presume not on thy heart when mine is slain;/ Thy gav'st me thine, not to give back again" (13-4). However, the play of the language within the body of the sonnet illustrates that this is not a complete understanding of the couplet.

Shakespeare initiates the equivocation of Will's and the fair friend's selves in the first two lines of the sonnet: "My glass shall not persuade me I am old/ So long as youth and thou are of one date." This is a curious beginning to a poem which closely follows a series of poems in which he has gone to great lengths to establish the age difference between the two men. Clearly, Will's "glass" (1) is not just the physical object, but is

also the youth, his beloved. Shakespeare thereby subtly suggests the Platonic idea that the lover and beloved become mirrors to each other when their love is reciprocated: “he . . . [sees] himself in his lover as in a glass . . . He is experiencing a counter-love which is the reflection of the love he inspires” (*Phaedrus* 255). The first nineteen sonnets contribute to the establishment of the Platonic nature of the relationship--Will often describes a beloved upon whom he “waits . . . in reverence and awe” (*Phaedrus* 254). For instance, in the first line of the first sonnet, he describes the beloved as one of the world’s “fairest creatures” upon whom “we” enjoy looking. Furthermore, from the outset of the sequence, and particularly within the first nineteen sonnets, Shakespeare focuses on the production of children as the primary means of preserving and perpetuating the beloved’s beauty and existence: “From fairest creatures we desire increase,/ That thereby beauty’s rose might never die” (1. 1-2).¹ Will *demands* eternal existence for the beloved (in order that he may always, somewhat akin to a god, be admired and revered). Indeed, if not preserved in children, the beloved, along with Will and the mistress, is certainly contained within the pages of the sonnets: “So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,/ So long lives this [the sonnets], and this gives life to thee” (18. 13-4).²

Although Will claims what *seems* to be reciprocated love in sonnet 22, Shakespeare also raises questions in the first nineteen sonnets regarding the reciprocity (and also therefore of the Platonic nature) of the love. Plato states that reciprocated love

¹ This is not the only sonnet in which Will considers children (or “Issue” (9.3)) as the means to achieving immortality. Sonnets 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 12 and 13 all examine this topic (before the shift into consideration of the poems themselves as a type of off-spring which bestow immortality).

² Like Petrarch, then, Shakespeare is aware of the success his sonnets will experience. Unlike Petrarch, he does not *ostensibly* write for his own “fame.”

results from the beloved's "own nature [which] disposes him to feel kindly towards his admirer" (*Phaedrus* 255). Because he fails to produce children and therefore allows for (or authorizes) the disappearance of his beauty from the world's view, he is described as selfish in more than one sonnet: "who is he so fond will be the tomb/ Of his self-love" (3. 7-8). Will wonders if his beloved is so selfish that he is willing to be his own tomb (i.e. he will not live beyond death because he fails to produce off-spring). In sonnet 10, Will accuses him of loving no-one despite the fact that he is loved by many: "Grant, if thou wilt, thou art beloved of many,/ But that thou none lov'st is most evident" (3-4). He then pleads in the couplet, "Make thee another self, for love of me" (13-14). Before sonnet 22, then, the beloved's (selfish) nature does not "dispose him to feel kindly towards his admirer."³

By re-establishing the relationship between Will and the fair friend as seemingly reciprocated, Platonic love shortly after sonnet 20 in which their love is eroticized,⁴

³ Shakespeare creates a form of Narcissistic love in his construction of the selfish beloved. Like Narcissus, the beloved, here, loves not even his self, but the shadow or image of his self. Spenser describes such love in Book III of *The Faerie Queene*:

But wicked fortune mine, though mind be good,
Can haue no end, nor hope of my desire,
But feed on shadowes, whiles I die for food,
And like a shadow wexe, whiles with entire
Affection, I doe languish and expire.
I fonder, then *Cephisus* foolish child,
Who hauing vewed in a fountaine shere
His face, was with the loue thereof beguild;
I fonder loue a shade, the bodie farre exiled. (III. II. 44)

To love one's self is to love a mere shadow; a form of love which neither Spenser nor Shakespeare condone.

⁴ As with many of Shakespeare's sonnets, opinions regarding the "meaning" of sonnet 20 differ. For instance, while Booth claims that the Renaissance ambiguity regarding the words "love" and "lover" undermine readings that the poem signifies a homosexual relationship (431-2), Smith examines these same words and their (lack of) use in poems addressed to the woman to support *his* assertion that in sonnet 20, "Hornosocial desire changes by degrees into homosexual desire" (248). There seems to be little disagreement, however, that the poem contains erotic elements.

Shakespeare makes that love seem less (or at least questionably) illicit (for, Renaissance readers who, according to Alan Bray in "Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England," "admired . . . the image of the masculine friend" would have found themselves wondering if they faced the "execrated and feared . . . figure called the sodomite" (41)). The unattainable woman of the tradition has been modified into an unattainable man while the taboo of adulterous love (which prevented the requital of courtly love) has been replaced by the taboo of homosexual love. Establishing the love as reciprocated and Platonic also establishes a space within which Shakespeare can effectively equivocate Will's and the fair friend's identities.

The second quatrain of sonnet 22 further develops the idea that Will and his beloved share an identity. In his notes on this sonnet, Stephen Booth suggests that lines 5, 6 and 7: "For all that beauty that doth cover thee/ Is but the seemly raiment of my heart/ Which in thy breast doth live, as thine in me" stem from a proverb: "The lover *is* not where he lives but where he loves" (170, emphasis added). In other words, Will's self resides in, and by extension *is*, the beloved's self, an idea which Will himself makes overt in sonnet 39:

O, how thy worth with manners may I sing,
 When thou art all the better part of me?
 What can mine own praise to mine own self bring?
 And what is't but mine own when I praise thee? (1-4)

Following the equation of Will with the fair friend, the final quatrain of sonnet 22 then establishes the caring and nurturing nature of Will's love:

O, therefore, love, be of thyself so wary
 As I, not for myself, but for thee will,
 Bearing thy heart which I will keep so chary
 As tender nurse her babe from faring ill. (9-12)

While the permutations of the language are complex and multifarious,⁵ the overarching sense is one of unselfishness (on Will's behalf, a posture which he encourages his beloved to adopt also) resulting from the loss of his heart (and by extension, his self) in exchange for his beloved's. But, Will's encouraging of his beloved to "be of [his]self so wary" (9) suggests that Will's love is not purely requited: being careful of one's own self, in *this* situation, means being careful of one's lover's self also. Because Will attempts to encourage his beloved to care for his own self, he implies or suggests that the beloved does not care for Will (or perhaps, for Will's self) and therefore does not requite Will's love. This initial hunch is confirmed by the jolting juxtaposition of the tenderness in the tone and imagery of the quatrain, (in particular, the last line in which Will describes how he will care for the beloved's heart: "As tender nurse her babe from faring ill" (12)) with the harshness of the couplet which immediately follows it: "Presume not on they heart when mine is slain,/ Thou gav'st me thine, not to give back again (13-4). Interestingly, by re-establishing Will as his beloved's senior in age (i.e. the nurse versus the babe), line 12 undermines the equivocation of age which Shakespeare establishes in the first two lines of the sonnet, and therefore undermines the premise on which the sonnet, and the exchange of hearts which it contains, is built: Will weakens his own description of the nature of their love. Clearly, then, "Presume not on thy heart when mine is slain," (13) denotes more than the metonym in which the heart stands for love; the use of "when"

⁵ For instance, as Booth notes, "for thee Will" (l. 10) simultaneously denotes "'will [be careful of myself] for your benefit,' 'will [be careful] of you' and may also play on the speaker's name: 'I am Will for your benefit'; or--since the speaker is the beloved and the beloved is the speaker--'you who are Will'" (170-1).

instead of “if” suggests certainty--the beloved will in-deed “slay” Will’s heart, which once again suggests that the love which Will expresses is not of the requited variety.

Like Petrarch, Sidney and Spenser, then, Will experiences and expresses love as desire or “Unquiet thought” (Spenser Amoretti I.1), passion over which he does (or *will*) not exercise *complete* control. Unlike such expressions in Petrarch’s, Sidney’s and Spenser’s sonnets, the expression of this desire in Shakespeare’s sonnets is more covert, predominantly embedded in the play of language. Shakespeare constructs the love as seemingly requited and Platonic; however, Will’s belief that his beloved *will* slay his heart in conjunction with the beloved’s selfish nature (at least, from Will’s perspective he is selfish) suggests that the fair friend is not so kindly disposed towards Will as he should be (according to the Platonic dialogue): this beloved joins Laura, Stella, and Elizabeth as unpitying and cruel. Furthermore, while Will’s (veiled) expression of a type of cupidinous desire for the man whom he calls “the master-mistress of my passion” (20. 2) creates doubt in the understanding of the relationship as friendship, it also prevents Will from achieving Platonic love. Like the lovers of Petrarch’s, Sidney’s and Spenser’s sonnets, Will (as his very name signifies) is driven by desire. In sonnet 51 Shakespeare reveals the true nature of Will’s desire by using a scenario in which Will leaves and subsequently returns to his beloved on horseback. Upon returning, Will declares, no horse

can . . . with my desire keep pace;
Therefore desire, of perfect’st love being made,
Shall neigh--no dull flesh--in his fiery race . . .
Towards thee I’ll run, and give him leave to go. (51. 9-10,14).

Will makes no attempt to subjugate his appetite to reason; indeed, it even *outruns* the Platonic “bad horse” of desire (*Phaedrus* 254)). His desirous state, as Plato decrees, precludes the attainment of requited love.

In this respect, Shakespeare participates in the Petrarchan tradition of naming. While “Will” may refer to Shakespeare himself (so, like Sidney, he deliberately incorporates some elements of his self or autobiography in his sequence), it also functions metonymically--like the names Laura (used in the *Rime sparse* to refer to the woman herself as well as the laurels of poetry, gold, wind, breath, and a breeze), Astrophel, Stella, Pamphilia, and Amphilanthus. Interestingly, while Wroth adopts metonymic names for her sequence (i.e. with little if any autobiographical reference), Barrett Browning and Rossetti completely and deliberately drop the names of the lover and beloved. Despite this fact (or perhaps because of it), critics and historians are even more determined to relate the poems to autobiographical facts--a trend and tendency which I shall discuss in more detail in Chapter 4.

Will, as a subject of the sonnet mode and within the sonnet tradition, “deliberately enters the region of desire and suffering, writing in order to experience the fullest intensity of being” (Goodheart 7). However, while he seemingly longs for his beloved to return his love, he simultaneously establishes a sense that his beloved is not so fair as perhaps a beloved should be. In *The Inward Language: Sonnets of Wyatt, Sidney, and Shakespeare*, Anne Ferry notes that when he writes “O let me true in love but truly write” (21. 8), Shakespeare “raises questions about the relation of what the lover experiences as ‘true in love’ to what as poet he may ‘truly write’” (171). The line suggests that those

who are truly in love do not, or can not, write truly: either their love or their discourse is not true. More-so than Petrarch, Spenser, or even Sidney, Shakespeare addresses the gap that exists between desire and language. That is, Shakespeare was well aware of the fact that the limitations of language, in particular, the authorized code of sonneteering, prevent the complete transformation of desire into discourse. By creating a persona who “gives the impression of leading a continuous inward existence distinct from his outward show” (Ferry 173), Shakespeare emphasizes the gap between being “true in love” and “writing truly.” Such “a false face,” allows him to “exploit . . . the multiple meanings” of the sonnets’ vocabulary: “In doing so he mocks the styles of courtly makers” (Ferry 176). As a consequence, the fair friend exists in a diffused form while Will assumes the role of subject in the sequence and simultaneously expresses a form of self-love by equating his own identity with that of his beloved. In other words, like Laura, Stella, and Elizabeth, the beloved seems fair but is often described in terms which question that fairness; he exists in a fragmented form in which he often becomes less than ideal while he is simultaneously established as the fair beloved.

Smith describes the beloved as “Not . . . [a] real presence, but as [a] mental image” (231). Understanding the beloved as a mental image explains the lack of urgency in Shakespeare’s sonnets; apart from the outbreak of desire in sonnet 51, Will’s desire for the fair friend tends to be more covert and controlled (or perhaps controllable), and his despair is less prominent and physical than that experienced and expressed by personae of more traditional sonnet sequences. By distancing the physical presence of such emotions, Shakespeare creates a space within which he may re-examine and, in Barthes’ terms of an

“amatory Topic” (Barthes 5), re-code and re-project, traditional fixtures—in particular the creation and role of the beloved—of courtly poetry. To use the distinctions which Eve Sedgwick establishes in Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire, as either a homosocial or homosexual relationship, Shakespeare re-inscribes the figure or site of the beloved which previous sonneteers create with the model of classical Greek homosexual love: “the pursuit of the adolescent boy by the older man was described by stereotypes that we associate with romantic heterosexual love (conquest, surrender, the ‘cruel fair,’ the absence of desire in the love object), with the passive part going to the boy” (Sedgwick 4). The homosocial/sexual relationship becomes part of a system in which “women are merely the vehicles by which men breed more men, for the gratification of other men” (Sedgwick 33). As Will cries, in sonnet 10, “Make thee another self, for love of me” (13).⁶ While Shakespeare mocks the lack of truth or sincerity in the work, particularly in the sonnets, of courtly writers, he also, paradoxically, finds a system by which *he* may well “write truly” and possibly, even, of a “true love” if the young man is a patron. Thus, the doubling within the voice may also be using the genre, which was dependent on, or subject to, the patronage system of the courts in order to mock that system. The fair male beloved allows Shakespeare to examine subjectivity within both literature and the world in which literature was produced and consumed.

Laura, Stella, and Elizabeth—as traditionally structured beloveds—seem *unfair* in their failure to requite their admirer’s love; however, the poets establish very little doubt

⁶ The “we” whom Will mentions in the first sonnet thereby becomes a male “we”; Shakespeare seems to write to a predominantly male audience.

regarding the fairness, or beauty of the women's physical beings.⁷ As sonnets 10 and 22 (among many others) establish, Will's beloved fair friend is also unfair for not requiting Will's desire (i.e. for being *unWillful*). Despite the change in gender, the beloved remains the conventional "cruel fair." Furthermore, his physical self seems to be fair but also in fact, contains unfair, or foul, elements, as I shall discuss in more detail later. The process of determining the beloved-as-subject's beauty (or fairness) is one which Shakespeare himself addresses as the subject of sonnet 24. To determine the beloved's fairness, we must look through his--the skillful "painter's"--eyes: "through the painter must you see his skill/ To find where your true image pictured be" (5-6).

Shakespeare creates two paintings in this sonnet: Will's eyes (i.e. his sight) replicate the beloved's beautiful "form" on Will's heart, while the poet's words create an image of the beloved on the page. If the beloved looks "through the painter" (24. 5), that is, "through"--both into and out of--Will's eyes (and Shakespeare's words), he will see the image of himself. And, because the beloved's eyes are also "windows to [Will's] breast" (11), gazing upon Will's heart (or self) is to gaze upon the beloved: to look upon the beloved is to look upon Will and vice-versa. The painting which the words create suggests Narcissistic desire. Narcissus "fell in love with an insubstantial hope, mistaking a mere shadow for a real body . . . [H]e desired himself, and was himself the object of his own approval, at once seeking and sought, himself kindling the flame with which he burned" (Ovid 85). Like Narcissus, Will's beloved is a shadow of himself.

⁷ Certainly, Sidney describes Stella as a "tyrant"; however, this is in response to her beauty and disdain which create his despairing reaction

Will again expresses the differences in the apprehension of the beloved by his heart and his eye in sonnets 46 and 47. In sonnet 46, Will's eye and heart are at odds with each other; each claims to *truly* apprehend the beloved. The dispute is settled in the following terms:

mine's eye's due is thy outward part,
And my heart's right thy inward love of heart. (13-4)

Thus, the eye, with its ability to gaze upon the beloved apprehends the beloved's outward appearance while the heart is awarded true love (and therefore, according to Platonic theory), the beloved's true self. Sonnet 47 then describes how love and the beloved's outward appearance work in conjunction with each other (i.e. how the eye and heart work together):

When that mine eye is famished for a look,
Or heart in love with sighs himself doth smother,
With my love's picture then my eye doth feast
And to the painted banquet bids my heart;
Another time mine eye is my heart's guest
And in his thoughts of love doth share a part. (3-8)

The rhyme between "heart" and "part" (lines 6 and 8) emphasizes that both the eye's and the heart's apprehension of the beloved are required--without the eye's contribution, the heart has only *part* of the whole. The beloved's whole self is therefore contained between eye and the heart. These sonnets assert love that is not Narcissistic. That is, while Will contains the beloved within his self, the beloved is, at this point, separate from Will himself.

In his creation of a male beloved, Shakespeare seems to be turning away from or working against while remaining within the sonnet tradition. The various subjects (Will's

desire and self, in addition to the beloved, as well as the traditional amatory “topos”) are subjugated to Shakespeare’s agenda; by using a male beloved who shares the persona’s identity, Shakespeare not only mocks courtly praise (as he states in sonnet 59 “O, sure I am the wits of former days/ To subjects worse have given admiring praise” (13-14)), but, he also exposes and plays upon the Narcissistic and prevaricated nature of the sonneteers’ desire.

Yet the beloved’s “true image” (24. 6) is not necessarily a favourable one. In the final couplet of sonnet 24, Will declares “Yet eyes this cunning want to grace their art:/ They draw but what they see, know not the heart” (13-4). The beloved’s “true image” may lie “within the painter’s “perspective” and “skill,” within the “cunning . . . grace” or enhancement of art. Two interpretations of the couplet exist, depending on the signification accorded to the word “want.” First, the poet’s language embellishes, builds upon, and improves the beloved’s heart or “true image,” a point that the rhyme between “art” and “heart” emphasizes—fair, then, is also foul. Second, if “want cunning” denotes “lack skill,” then Will’s, (i.e. the painter’s) eyes lack the skill required to properly enhance the art (i.e. the image of the beloved which they create). They therefore order only what they see which may or may not reflect what is truly in the heart. Thus, as recorded in sonnets 46 and 47, both the eyes’ and the heart’s apprehension of the beloved is necessary. However, even in this interpretation, fair may be foul: Will has already informed readers that the beloved’s “heart” is a selfish one.

To return to Lorraine’s conception of the self as a process which reconstructs itself in conjunction with reconstructions of the object and its relationship with the object,

Will's way of being subtly shifts in this sonnet (i.e. 24). In the process of making foul what he previously asserted was fair, Will creates a very slight cleft within the identity or self which he once emphatically shared with the fair friend. That is, when he says "Yet eyes this cunning want to grace their art:/ They draw but what they see, know not the heart" (24. 13-4), Will intimates that while *his* heart is open, knowable, and unselfish in its care for the beloved, that of the beloved is not so. Will's position as the older, more experienced man begins to shift and he assumes pitiable attributes while his beloved's way of being shifts towards that of Laura, Stella and Elizabeth, as the absent, cruel, and therefore somewhat foul fair. Indeed, by sonnet 57—one in a series of absence poems following Will's and the beloved's estrangement—Will, like Astrophel, is reduced to the status of slave: "what should I do but tend/ Upon the hours and times of your desire" (57. 1-2). He then chides himself for adapting such a position: "So true a fool is love that in your will,/ Though you do anything, he thinks no ill" (57. 13-4). Booth notes two interpretations of the couplet's grammar:

- (1) "Love thinks there is no ill in your will (i.e. your whim), no matter what you do in your will (i.e. your lust, when you are driven by desire)"; (2) "Love in your William (i.e. William's love, the love felt by William) is so true a fool [or makes William so foolish] that it [or he] thinks no ill, no matter what you do." (233)

Either way, the beloved is *not* portrayed in favourable light. Furthermore, describing love as a fool once again amounts to criticism of courtly writers (like Sidney and Spenser) who allow their selves to be subjected to Love's whims. Unlike Astrophel, who launches into a tirade against the beloved in which he calls her a tyrant and a witch (among other things) following his description of himself as a slave to her, Will merely says: "I am to

wait, though waiting so be hell,/ Not blame your pleasure, be it ill or well" (58. 13-4).

Indeed, in sonnet 120 he describes *himself* as a tyrant because, during his beloved's absence, Will himself took "no leisure . . . / To weigh how once I suffered in your crime" (7-8). Will becomes a tyrannical slave because he failed in the midst of his own suffering to consider how the beloved suffered from Will's unkindness following their "night of woe" (9) (i.e. their earlier estrangement). Ironically, then, by claiming to be a tyrant, Will subjugates himself even further to the fair friend.

Although Shakespeare claims a new poetic (sonnet) space by writing to a male beloved, many of the lover's traits, such as his despair resulting from unrequited desire, remain constant. Thus, in one respect at least, in his invention he bears "The second burden of a former child" (59. 4). The "praise" he bestows upon his mistress echoes the couplet of sonnet 59: "O, sure I am the wits of former days/ To subjects worse have given admiring praise." He accuses writers like Petrarch, Sidney and Spenser of "gracing" their beloveds' selves--subjects even less deserving than *his*--in their verse; he accuses them of making foul fair.

As Ferry expounds, "Modern poets are not only implicated [by Shakespeare] in the venality of present [i.e. contemporary to Shakespeare] society. They are even accused of generating it . . . Poets have created a vicious taste for painted beauty in modern readers of verse" (187). He works against such artifice in sonnet 127:

In the old age black was not counted fair,
Or if it were, it bore not beauty's name;
But now is black beauty's successive heir,
And beauty slandered with a bastard shame.
For since each hand hath put on nature's power,
Fairing the foul with art's false borrowed face,
Sweet beauty hath no name, no holy bower,

But is profaned, if not lives in disgrace,
 Therefore my mistress' eyes are raven black,
 Her brows so suited, and they mourners seem
 At such who, not born fair, no beauty lack
 Sland'ring creation with a false esteem.
 Yet so they mourn, becoming of their woe,
 That every tongue says beauty should look so.

He distinguishes between fairness and beauty; fairness is nothing more than a contrived component of art while beauty is the blackness of his mistress' features. Ferry summarizes sonnet 127 (the poem which many critics argue, begins the series of poems addressed to the mistress) as an implication of readers in the fashion of painted beauty:

The poet invents compliments to their "becoming" appearance which cover insulting truths about her, and hide what is truly in his own heart . . . Readers of this poet's verse are so depraved of taste that they mistake the painted faces for natural fairness, or would prefer fair faces to wear make-up in order to look like mistresses praised as fair in this fashionable modern poem. (188)

Sonnet 130, as an anti- or counter-Petrarchan blazon therefore evolves from an unwillingness to "[fair] the foul with art's false borrowed face" (127. 6). Will establishes his mistress as the opposite of the blond, white-skinned, rosy-cheeked, sparkling-eyed, pearly-teethed conventional mistress. As Booth notes,

this poem is not a "solemn critical statement about conventions . . . [but] mock[s] the thoughtless, mechanical application of the standard Petrarchan metaphors . . . This poem is both a wry reminder that all beloved ladies are something other and something less than they are said to be and, by virtue of the information given in sonnet 127, a comic acknowledgment that *this* beloved lady is to the ladies praised by other poets as those ladies are to heavenly bodies, roses, and goddesses. (454)

Although Will refuses to “paint” her beauty (even though he painted that of the fair friend earlier), she remains, to *his* “dear dotting heart/ . . . the fairest and most precious jewel” (131. 3-4), as capable of “tyrannous” unpitying cruelty as “any she belied with false compare” (130. 14).

It is interesting that while Will is willing, “in private,” to make fair what is conventionally foul, to admit that “in nothing art thou black [i.e. unfair] save in thy deeds” (131. 13) (like other disdaining and therefore cruel mistresses), he refuses to defend her fairness, the “power” of *her* face “to make love groan” (131. 5) in public (even though sonnets 130 and 131, components of a public discourse, do just that). By seeming to subject himself to sonnet conventions the Shakespearean lover creates a means of working against or undoing those same conventions.

The unconventional nature of his mistress’s looks do not prevent Will himself from slipping further into the role of the conventional poet-lover when addressing her than he did when addressing the fair friend; he repeatedly asserts that she is cruel and tyrannous for disdaining him (as in sonnet 131 and 132), equates desire for her with death (sonnet 147), and begs for her pity (sonnets 132 and 140). While he expresses emotions typical of the shunned courtier, he continually reminds both the mistress and the reader: “In faith I do not love thee with mine eyes,/ For they in thee a thousand errors note” (141. 1-2). Indeed, sonnet 129 resembles the tone and content of the despairing Astrophel:

Th’ expense of spirit in a waste of shame
Is lust in action; and, till action, lust
Is perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame,
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust,
Enjoyed no sooner but despised straight,
Past reason hunted, and no sooner had
Past reason hated, as a swallowed bait

On purpose laid to make the taker mad;
 Mad in pursuit, and in possession so;
 Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;
 A bliss in proof, and proved, a very woe;
 Before, a joy proposed; behind, a dream.
 All this the world well knows; yet none knows well
 To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

Will asserts that desire is a “heaven that leads men to . . . [the] hell” (14) which he depicts in this sonnet. By using “men,” the word emphasized by the meter of the last line, Will implies that women are the agents who incite desire (and also, perhaps, that men do not exert the same effect upon women): Lust is “full of flame” (3) and he blames the woman. The line “A bliss in proof, and proved, a very woe” (11) in conjunction with line 14’s assertion of “men” creates a pun on the word “wo[e]man.” Shakespeare, however, incorporates a twist in the poem: men who desire become “lust in action” (2)—lust personified, or Will--and subsequently become “perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame,/ Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust” (3-4). The qualities which other despairing poet-lovers attribute to the woman as the “cruel fair,” Shakespeare attributes to the men (such as poet-lovers) whom women provoke to lust. Furthermore, these traits become pitiable, and as readers, we are to pity and pardon this poet-lover who “writes truly” (or confesses). Shakespeare’s twist does not alleviate the misogyny created in earlier sonnet sequences, it furthers it. Women purposely lay “bait . . . to make the taker mad” (7-8) (or, they lay bait with the *intention* of making “the taker mad”). Sonnet 129 acts to establish the truly foul nature of the so-called *fair* ladies which in turn causes foulness in the men themselves. By creating a persona who suffers (from) the same love-

wounds as other poet lovers but for a conventionally foul mistress (or beloved), Shakespeare indeed mocks the artifice or artificialization inherent in the sonnet mode.

Despite his (conventional) suffering, Will only threatens to speak ill of his mistress. Unlike Astrophel who turns to insults: “unkindness kills delight,/ For rage now rules the reigns, which guided were by pleasure./ I think now of thy faults, who late thought of thy praise” (Sidney Fifth Song. 13, 15-6), Will asserts that he *merely* threatens to insult his mistress (as if his constant reminders regarding the short-comings of her beauty and his establishment of her—as a member of the female sex—as the woe of men are not insults themselves!):

Be wise as thou art cruel; do not press
My tongue-tied patience with too much disdain,
Lest sorrow lend me words, and words express
The manner of my pity-wanting pain. (140. 1-4)

The strong rhyme between “disdain” and “pain” emphasizes their connection in the self of the lover; excessive disdain on the woman’s part automatically results in pain and calculated outbursts such as sonnet 129 and the “Fifth Song” of Astrophel and Stella. Will validates Astrophel’s insults, grounding them in madness: “if I should despair, I should go mad,/ And in my madness might speak ill of thee” (140. 9-10). He then emphasizes the effects of such insults: “Now this ill-wresting world is grown so bad,/ Mad slanderers by mad ears believed be” (140. 11-12). By using the word “slander” he admits that speaking ill of the mistress is an underhanded means of persuading her to requite his desire. He also suggests that people (in particular, one assumes, empathetic men who have experienced similar “madness”) will be more inclined to believe his slanderous insults than they will her denial of them. He is perfectly willing to subjugate

her reputation to his physical needs. Thus, although one poet-lover threatens to insult the woman while the other actually does insult her, their rhetoric amounts to one and the same thing: not only does the mistress bring the insults on herself, but she also must make amends for the pain she causes. Once again, she must “pity” his pain and, he implies, grant him—to use Sidney’s term—grace. Furthermore, despite his assertion of *threatening* to speak ill of her, in his use of pity, he does indeed insult his mistress. Shakespeare therefore makes effective use of the very fine line dividing flattery and slander. According to the OED, to flatter is to praise overmuch or in an insincere manner in order to win favour, while to slander is to utter false statements which may damage a person’s reputation. Will flatters his mistress—describing her as wise—and then threatens her: “do not press/ My tongue-tied patience with too much disdain” (1-2). If she pushes him (i.e. does not pity him and subsequently requite his love), his flattery can easily (and indeed *will*) be turned to slander in the form of “words” which “express . . . [his] pity-wanting pain” (3-4). Unlike Astrophel, the Spenserian lover or even the Petrarchan lover who do slander their beloved, describing her as a tyrant and a witch, Will uses threats and blackmail; he implies that the words which he will use will be worse than “witch” or “tyrant.”

Like Astrophel and the speaker of the Amoretti and Epithalamion, (and unlike Petrarch), Will asks his beloveds--the fair friend and the mistress--to pity him. He seeks pity from the fair friend (in sonnets 111 and 112) as a means of alleviating the shame of working as a poet and playwright, while he uses pathos in imagery and conceits to persuade the reader to pity his despair in love. The speakers of Sidney’s, Spenser’s and

Shakespeare's sonnets are much more focused on their immediate desires and the satisfaction of those desires (i.e. they require pity and "grace") than the Petrarchan speaker who overtly seeks pity and pardon. Will seeks pardon (as previously considered) and simultaneously twists the use of pity as a means of gaining satiation of his desire for the mistress. Despite his assertion in sonnet 140 that he was unwilling to insult her, he does indeed insult her in the first two lines of sonnet 142: "Love is my sin, and thy dear virtue hate, / Hate of my sin, grounded on sinful loving." Booth effectively describes the nature of those insults:

The two lines combine in a typically contrary Shakespearean action. They progress from self-pitying self-abuse (*Love is my sin*) to an insult to the beloved--an insult, overt, unmistakable, but largely composed of potentially complementary words (*and thy dear virtue hate*). The insult suddenly becomes genuinely complementary in *Hate of my sin*. Thereupon *grounded on sinful loving* modifies both *sin* and *hate*, thus justifying and explaining the complement . . . and simultaneously developing the briefly abandoned insult (by suggesting that the lady's hate--her "daunger," her primly outraged disdain, her virgin-like standoffishness--actually stems from--and is only a cover for--her illicit sexual activity). (491)

Will then develops a similarity between himself and the mistress--they have both sought (and continue to seek) "sealed false bonds of love" (142. 7). If the woman compares her "own state" with that of Will's (3), she will see that she too requires pity: "Root pity in thy heart, that when it grows/ Thy pity may deserve to pitied be" (142. 11-2). He *might* pity her if she first demonstrates that she pities him: they will requite each other's desires. He requires her to pity him first--then he will deliberate upon her pity (or love) before deciding if her pity is deserving of *his*. Will constantly demands that the "lady" subject

and defer herself to him. However, in sonnet 133 he declares that *he* is subjected to her. He re-uses but modifies the metonym of the heart which he previously employed to depict his love for the fair friend. That is, in sonnet 133, he maintains that she possesses his heart; but, the terms of that possession are much harsher than they were with the fair friend. He describes the mistress as a jailer: "I being pent in thee" (13). And, as important component of that "I" is the fair friend *himself*--she possesses both men. By declaring "I . . . am thine" (13-4) and re-configuring the metonym of the heart, Will suggests an equivocation of all three lovers' identities. But, he does *not* assert that she is his--the possession does not extend in both directions. The woman thereby remains somewhat distant and alien to his (and therefore the fair friend's) self. This distant identification allows Shakespeare to instill some traits of the conventional lover in Will and thereby further his examination of fair and foul.

Thus, when she speaks in sonnet 145 ("I hate . . . not you" (13-4)), she does indeed respond with pity. As he recollects the moment when she speaks, Will is fully complimentary, describing her lips as made by "Love's own hand" (1), and her tongue as "ever sweet" (6). As sonnet 142 predicts, she utters the words "I hate" (2). Before she indicates the object of her hatred, Will suggests that upon seeing the "woeful state" of him who "languished for her sake" (2-3),

Straight in her heart did mercy come
Chiding that tongue that ever sweet
Was used in giving gentle doom. (4-6)

By describing her "ever sweet" tongue as "used" in the sounding of "doom," he suggests that the mistress possesses a self which is separate from her physical being. Mercy acts

upon that being to dissuade her hatred of him, thereby “sav[ing] his life” (14). By re-creating the moment when she speaks in iambic tetrameter (instead of iambic pentameter), Shakespeare invokes the breathlessness which Will experienced as he waited upon her words. Furthermore, the meter of the last line emphasizes the last words of the sonnet, “not you.” The reader, like Will, exhales deeply—re-enacting the relief he felt. Pity in the form of Mercy saves Will from dying of despair.

It is interesting that only after the true, foul-containing elements of the fair friend are revealed does the reader learn that Will, like the other normative sonneteers, also has a mistress. The reasons for the erotic triangle in Shakespeare’s sonnets are numerous, working within and outside of the sequence itself. For instance, by falling into the same patterns of despair demonstrated by other sonneteers and embedding both relationships within complex language, Shakespeare makes the homosexual elements of the sonnet sequence questionable—he may indeed be speaking of a homosocial, and therefore non-illicit relationship. The rivalry between the two beloveds and Will in conjunction with the construction of the love for the fair friend as narcissistic can also be examined in Lacanian terms. Lacan describes the pre-mirror stage as narcissistic: “the infant makes no distinction between the self and pleasurable objects that are (in actuality) distinct from himself” (Lorraine 31). The “I” which eventually emerges in the developing infant “carr[ies] with it the fiction of an object (the image [of the total form of the body as previously viewed in a mirror]) absorbed into itself on the basis of the subjective criterion of pleasure” (Lorraine 32). Until this point, the self which develops in Shakespeare’s sonnets and establishes the beloved, or pleasure object, as an integral part of self,

resembles the Lacanian conceptualization of the developing self. The shift between Will's development and Lacanian theory occurs with the introduction of the mistress.

According to Lorraine,

On Lacan's account, the dialectic between self and other is founded on the assumption of an image in the form of a totality that belies the fragmented movements and responses the infant actually assumes himself to be. Thus, at the irreducible core of the self (if one could call it a core) lies a fiction of totality assumed from the outside that is later elaborated layer by layer in the dialectic of identification with the other.

The gap in the primordial me initiates the rivalry between these two "selves" (the inner sense of fragmentation versus the whole image of the human form) and the aggressivity of the me who defends against the feeling of disintegration by identifying with an alien object . . . drive takes the form of desire . . . [which] in its primary form is the desire to be desired by the (m)Other. (33)

The faults which Will identifies in the fair friend create a division between Will's self and that of the beloved. A shift away from direct narcissism, then, occurs in Will's desire and he establishes identification with "an alien object"—the (m)other in Lacanian theory, but the mistress in the sonnets. Her pity satisfies his desire to be desired and thereby "saves" him from "dying" of despair; it allows for the necessary identification with an alien object and thereby prevents a break-down of the self. By equivocating his and the fair friend's identities, Will makes the narcissism more explicit than it is in other sonnet sequences such as those written by Sidney and Spenser. Furthermore, understanding the mistress as an "alien object" clarifies the nature of the rivalry between the three lovers.

Sedgwick writes that in "any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved" (21). The

bond between the two rivals is explicit in Shakespeare's sonnets--Will's mistress also becomes the fair friend's mistress, as sonnets 40, 41, and 42 make clear. But, Will claims not to mind the fact that the fair friend "hast her" (42. 1)--his chief concern is that "she hath thee [the fair friend]" (42. 3). Furthermore, when he declares "Thou dost love her because thou know'st I love her" (42. 6) he indicates that he does indeed mind the bond between his two lovers. He then mitigates the loss of his mistress by declaring "But here's the joy: my friend and I are one./ Sweet flattery! Then *she* loves but me alone" (42. 13-4, emphasis added). Despite her love for the fair friend, Will is again saved from destabilization of the self by virtue of the fact that he and the fair friend share an identity; the mistress, or "alien object" returns the desire of the friend and therefore returns that of Will. The rivalry between the three loosens the rigid structure inherent, until this point, to the genre of sonnet writing: the man's expression and confession of love of and to a silent, usually unmoved (and therefore cruel) mistress (with that expression constructing both the speaker's self and that of the woman as subject).

By using an erotic triangle as the framing device of the sequence, Shakespeare also changes the use of the confessional mode within the sonnets. As considered earlier, Petrarch, Sidney and Spenser each use the confession of desire for a woman as means by which to create a space in which to speak and construct a self. The lyrics perform desire ostensibly for a woman, but in actuality, for readers who then act as the interlocutor or authority who hears the confession. The power relations inscribed by confession shift in Shakespeare's sonnets because Will predominantly "speaks to himself . . . [he] struggles with his desire in the solitude of verse" (Smith 232). Instead of creating a dramatic

monologue, like other sonnet writers, Shakespeare produces a type of extended soliloquy. Thus, he constructs Will as both the confessor and interlocutor and thereby attempts to save the speaking subject from the examination and judgment which Foucault prescribes. However, Shakespeare's rewriting of the traditional Amatory topos forces the reader to juxtapose this sonnet sequence against others and in so doing, the reader must judge Will's nature—a process which Shakespeare would have anticipated and capitalized upon. He uses Will's confessions, such as that contained in sonnet 144, to construct Will's self while he attempts to "write truly" about fair and foul. The two loves Will has "of comfort and despair,/ Which . . . suggest [Will] still" (1-2) reflect Will's self. That is, the word "suggest" simultaneously signifies "urge" or "tempt" (Bevington 1646) as well as "to show indirectly" (OED). The "man right fair" (3) and the "woman coloured ill" (4) share Will's identity. Will—as the speaker and as a synonym for desire—is both fair (possessing qualities like "purity" (8)) and foul (possessing qualities like "foul pride" (8)). Despite Will's efforts to estrange the woman (or womanly qualities) in his intimations that his "angel may be turned fiend" (9) (i.e. he and his male beloved struggle against the woman's persuasions to foulness), she (or foulness) remains a part of both his self and that of the fair friend.

The triangle of lovers in Shakespeare's sonnets creates a new poetic space in which Shakespeare re-creates the idea(l) of the beloved and the self. His sequence, which evolves from the amatory topic of desire, praise, and despair which earlier sonneteers establish, questions some elements of those sonneteers' discourses while it validates others. That is, Shakespeare confirms and elaborates upon the despair incited by desire

while he asserts that in *their* sequences, other sonneteers, like Petrarch, Sidney and Spenser, do not write truly and/or may not even love truly. In his examinations of fair and foul, Shakespeare complicates those two qualities: the fair friend is also foul, the foul mistress possesses some fair qualities, and even the lover himself (as a consequence of his desire for a woman) becomes foul. Indeed, as an individual who shares his beloveds' identities, Will also becomes fair and foul. In his examination of how "beauty should look" (127. 14), Shakespeare builds upon past literary constructions and conventions; the erotic triangle serves to elaborate upon the selves developed in other sonnet sequences. As a vessel of foul and fair, Will reflects Shakespeare's attempts to "write truly" and re-establish just *how* beauty should not only look, but also, how it should be.

Chapter Three

“I ame thy subject, conquer’d”: Pamphilia to Amphilanthus as Mary Wroth’s Response to Gender Constructions and Subjectivity

Sometimes I feel an underground river
forcing its way between deformed cliffs
an acute angle of understanding
moving itself like the locus of the sun
into this condemned scenery.
-Adrienne Rich. “Trying to Talk with a Man”

In their introduction to Tullia d’Aragona’s Dialogue on the Infinity of Love, Margaret King and Albert Rabil, Jr. assert that “From the fourteenth to seventeenth century, a huge body of literature accumulated [in Europe] that responded to the dominant tradition” (10). Lady Mary Wroth’s collection of sonnets, Pamphilia to Amphilanthus (published in 1613 well after the sonnet vogue of the sixteenth-century, and twelve years after Shakespeare’s sonnets are believed to have been written), belongs within that body as a work which challenges cultural assumptions in general, and which challenges those assumptions contained within literary works such as sonnets written by men (including Petrarch, Sidney, and Spenser).

Constance Jordan ascertains in Renaissance Feminism that “the Renaissance debate on women is to a degree conventional . . . characterized by the repetition of themes, figures, tropes, motifs, and allusions to various authorities” (2). These conventions contribute to the generation of what Jeff Masten describes in “‘Shall I turn blabb?: Circulation, Gender and Subjectivity in Mary Wroth’s Sonnets” as “the traffic in both women and words” (82). That is, a patriarchal system maintains control over women, in part, by trading them as “conduits of but not participants in patriarchal power”

(Masten 78). In a specifically literary context, such control can be formulated in terms of authority and authorship: “the author [is] a male who is primary and the female [is] his passive creation—a secondary object lacking autonomy, endowed with often contradictory meaning but denied intentionality” (Gubar 247). By claiming the authority of invention, a form of agency denied to women, men maintain the traffic and resulting subjugation of women.¹ Margaret Whitford elaborates upon this relationship between male and female agency in her discussion of Luce Irigaray’s considerations of sexual difference: “Woman has always been for man his space, or rather his *place*, but has no place of her own. This deprives her of identity for-herself” (157). As I considered in chapters 1 and 2, male-authored collections of sonnets tend to utilize and perpetuate conventional descriptions of women and thereby effectively contribute to the subjugation of the woman as an individual to the poet-lover’s needs. The patriarchal system suppresses and denies her individuality in order to provide the space in which the man articulates his own individuality. Poetic devices and techniques such as the blazon (which constructs and fetishizes scattered physical attributes), emphasis on the male lover’s despair and need for pity (which establishes the woman’s cold, cruel, and mutable nature), and the beloved’s absence (the sonnets simply could not be written in the beloved’s presence) contribute to the creation of both an Elizabethan courtly ideology,² and the lover’s sense of subjectivity and self.

¹ In the seventeenth-century, the word “author” was intimately connected to “authority.” The creation, advocacy and didacticism traditionally associated with writing and authorship were all firmly rooted in authority. Because such an authority was typically unavailable to women, their bodies were available to men for appropriation and subjugation.

² Although Wroth lived and wrote during the seventeenth-century, after Elizabeth’s reign, she still maintained a nostalgia for the Elizabethan court.

In Art as Technique, Victor Shklovsky describes a process of (what he terms)

“habitualization.” He writes:

If we start to examine the general laws of perception, we see that as perception becomes habitual, it becomes automatic . . . we apprehend objects only as shapes with imprecise extensions, we do not see them in their entirety but neither recognize them by their main characteristics. . . . The object fades and does not leave even a final impression; ultimately even the essence of what it was is forgotten. (20)

Such is usually the fate of the male sonneteer’s beloved. Certainly, Laura, Elizabeth, and Stella possess somewhat varied traits, but each beloved’s “main characteristics” result from (and simultaneously perpetuate) the same ideological mold. The reader receives the woman as a limited impression of parts and traits which are conventional or ideological: golden hair, pearl-like teeth, rosy cheeks, porcelain skin, and silence. Gary Waller’s contention in The Sidney Family Romance that “From thousands of poems, a composite beloved can be readily constructed” (134) is reflected in the painting “La Belle Charite” by M. van Lochem, and in the illustration from John Davies’ The Extravagant Shepherd.³ These visual representations of the trope-defined woman suggests that the beloved exists as little more than the over-used metaphors which describe her. By fragmenting the woman, the poet-lover presents a distanced image within his poems and thereby controls the presentation of the (beloved) woman’s subjectivity to the reading audience. Even Shakespeare creates only an anti-impression; his beloved’s eyes are “nothing like the sun,” “black wires grow on her head,” and there are no “roses, damasked, red and white .

³ Stephen Booth includes a copy of The Extravagant Shepherd from 1654 in his edition of Shakespeare’s Sonnets (see page 453), and Leonard Forster includes “La Belle Charite” in his book The Icy Fire: Five Studies in Petrarchism (between pages 56 and 57).

. . in her cheeks" (130. 1, 4-6). As Clark asserts, "Language is a patriarchal code--the sonnet tradition is a patriarchal code--Shakespeare works against it but maintains the specularly of the beloved as the means of attributing a self to the speaker" (13).

Shakespeare negates the physical traits themselves in his creation of a love triangle (as opposed to the bipolar relationship usually associated with sonnet discourses) and in so doing creates what Shklovsky describes as an "unfamiliar object" (21). Such an object prolongs the process of perception through its difference and thereby encourages dehabitualization of the reader because it forces him or her to focus on the object and its qualities. Ironically, however, the effect of Shakespeare's "creation" is ultimately the same: he maintains the woman's status as a predominantly silent, fragmented, distanced, and metaphor-defined shape in a discourse which "mock[s] the thoughtless, mechanical application of the standard Petrarchan metaphors" (Booth 454). Indeed, she is even more distanced by virtue of the poet-lover's assertions that his male beloved is his true love. As considered earlier, the dark lady's subjectivity is as limited and lover-serving as that of Laura, Stella, and Elizabeth.

Thus, each of these sonnet women is "expected to wait for male-authored discourses to construct them into fitting receptacles of male desire" (Miller Subject 35). In the sonnets, these receptacles typically enforce female chastity which leads the lover to an elevated understanding of heavenly love (Petrarch), leaves him in despair (Sidney), or allows him to consummate his desire in marriage (Spenser). The not-so-chaste (and therefore criticized) woman of Shakespeare's sonnets authorizes Will's exploration of and self-fashioning through homosocial/sexual desire: although the woman is not the

receptacle of his “true” desire, she allows him to contemplate the *male* beloved as the receptacle of his desire. Consequently, because he can not negotiate the male receptacle without her “presence,” she becomes a negative receptacle or foil for the male beloved.

The sonnets’ role as the means by which a given poet-lover fashions and/or examines his self dictates the beloved woman’s fate as a faded shape, because, while she is a necessary component of this process, too much emphasis on the beloved, or too detailed an analysis of her traits and characteristics, would distract the reader from the lover’s primary desire and intention. As Waller considers in The Sidney Family Romance, the lover must depict the woman as a collection of parts: “he cannot bear the full presence of the beloved because her claims on him are so overwhelming and he knows that he must reject her if he is to assert his male autonomy” (149). Tullia d’Aragona, a woman writing in sixteenth-century Florence, understands both the beloved’s function within a discourse such as the sonnets, and the inherent weakness in the male lover’s autonomy. In response to the quotation from Petrarch’s Rime sparse which asserts that “the state of love/ Lasts but a short time in a woman’s heart” (183. 13-14), she asks: “Just what would have happened if Madonna Laura had gotten around to writing as much about Petrarch as he wrote about her: you’d have seen things turn out quite differently then!” (69).

Tullia d’Aragona identifies a specific deficiency in the Petrarchan discourse: its one-sidedness. In 1552, an Italian poet, Stefano Colonna, wrote I sonnetti. le canzoni et i Triomphi de M. Laura in risposta de M. Franceso Petrarca. Roche describes Colonna’s sonnets as a “rewriting” of Petrarch’s poems: “Laura’s rational and discouraging replies

to Petrarch's amorous outpourings" (94). Tullia d'Aragona and Colonna's concern regarding Laura's (the beloved's) silence illustrates and historicizes the issues which modern critics consider. However, while Colonna's work responds to a large gap in the Petrarchan discourse, it simultaneously re-affirms components of the patriarchal system. That is, the specifically male author-ization of "Laura's" response limits the threat which the female voice within a popular genre poses to the patriarchal establishment; that threat is further reduced by virtue of the fact that Colonna appropriates the female voice to affirm Laura's chastity. Miller's discussion of (male conceptions of) female desire suggests how Colonna's poems function as a component of the sonnet tradition. She asserts that in its culturally approved form, desire consists of a desiring male subject and desired female object: "The other side of (male) desire is understood to be (female) chastity" (Subject 22). Even a woman's desire, then, is defined in terms of absence and lack. Colonna reaffirms this patriarchal dynamic of desire: in his conceptualization, Laura desires chastity and in so doing validates the self which the Petrarchan lover fashions through (the space of) her.

Wroth's sonnets respond to and thereby work against such absence and lack in both social and literary contexts (Waller describes them as powerful because they record "her struggles against the constraints of being a woman" (192-3)). Indeed, her own life was unique in that, unlike the majority of women living during the sixteenth- and seventeenth- centuries, Wroth claimed agency and her own sense of self. In her introduction to The First Part of the Countess of Montgomery's Urania (Urania), Josephine Roberts asserts that

Wroth's own life served as a rich reservoir for her fiction. Her multiple self-portraits within the work--most prominently Pamphilia, Bellamira, and Lindamira--suggest a continuing struggle of self-representation in which the author seeks to assert and justify her behavior in the face of a disapproving public. (lxxii)

Following the deaths of her husband (Robert Wroth) and then their son, Wroth struggled to pay her husband's debts; on several occasions she was forced to request warrants for protection. She also became the mistress of her first cousin, William Herbert, third Earl of Pembroke (eventually bearing two children by him).

Wroth's own literary achievements (the prose romance Urania, and several dramatic pieces, most notably the pastoral play, Love's Victory) reflect both her personal strength and her acquaintance with several literary figures of the time. Like her father, Sir Robert Sidney, her uncle, Sir Philip Sidney, and her aunt, Mary Countess of Pembroke, Wroth was both a poet and a patron. Such a rich literary environment must have compelled (or in Waller's words "provoked" (194)) her writing.⁴

The sonnets themselves were first published in 1621, appended to Urania. While that particular version contains one-hundred and three poems, eighteen more exist which were excluded from any published version of Pamphilia to Amphilanthus. Waller describes her sonnet collection as Petrarchan in that

even as it was being written it was being rewritten by its author . . . Pamphilia to Amphilanthus might be seen as a continuous text, unravelling as it is put together, never resting in a final form, in which a variety of discoveries, demands, and changing occasions clash and contradict. (194)

⁴ It is my intention to provide only the most basic of biographical outlines. For a more comprehensive examination of Wroth's life, see Roberts' Introduction to the poems and Waller's discussion in The Sidney Family Romance.

When a woman (such as Wroth) asserts her own presence and autonomy in a poetic form which typically condones and enforces the passive presence expected of women (in society and literature), the reader is forced to reconsider the power relations traditionally contained within the sonnet genre. Jordan suggests that an ideology is predicated upon a set of opinions or assumptions which “no longer bear their suppositious character, but appear to be true reflections of the world as it is actually constituted” (6). In her adoption and adaptation of the poet-lover’s authority and voice, Wroth disrupts the power relations and subjective positions traditionally associated with and perpetuated by the sonnets; she thereby brings the opinions and assumptions which inform the traditional sonnet “ideology” (and which also tend to reflect the dominant seventeenth-century cultural ideology) back into focus. Indeed, while Colonna’s work maintains the traditional hierarchy in that the woman’s voice remains that of the beloved, Wroth’s sonnets reverse the hierarchy--the woman assumes the lover’s role while the man becomes the beloved. Wroth was fully aware of the threat which a “woo-ing” woman posed, as lines from Love’s Victorie demonstrate: “Fy, I doe blush for you, a woman woo,/ the most unfittest, shamefullest thing to doo” (in McLaren 290).⁵

The “full presence” (Waller 149) which Wroth creates in her sonnets certainly threatens the conceptualization of male autonomy within sonnets which Waller identifies; the woman is no longer a passive creation, but an active creator who asserts (in the very

⁵ The juxtaposition also resonates with the tradition in which woman was equated with woe-man (i.e. the woe of man). Her creation of a woman who woos a man works against that association; “woe” becomes “woo” a more positive construction of the woman’s position and relationship with the man.

act of writing within such a genre, regardless of the actual *content* of her writing)⁶ autonomy, place, and an identity *for herself*. However, Wroth alleviates the threatening nature of Pamphilia's self fashioning by abiding by certain other rules of the sonnet "game." Her treatment of her sonnets as a contribution to an ongoing dialogue, as well as her somewhat ambiguous consideration of subjectivity, mutability, and pity, for instance, result in a collection of sonnets which effectively works within the genre in order to work against, and perhaps to undermine that same genre. Furthermore, while the collection's title is somewhat similar to that of Sidney's collection in its naming of the two people involved and therefore aligns itself within the sonnet tradition, the word "to" suggests a letter (or perhaps a series of spoken sonnets) directed to a *specific* recipient. Indeed, Pamphilia even signs her name after the first section. While women of seventeenth-century England were discouraged from writing lyric poetry, letter writing was a more acceptable mode of expression for them. Wroth creates a love letter consisting of sonnets in order to reduce the antagonistic nature of her work.

In her most recent work, Changing the Subject: Mary Wroth and Figurations of Gender in Early Modern England, Naomi Miller attempts to shift away from the conceptualization of female sexuality and subjectivity on the basis of male defined parameters. She argues that situating Wroth's writing relative to other texts authored by women provides more comprehensive insight into the cultural power relations which

⁶ There is much debate regarding the worth of Wroth's poems—are they worthwhile based on their poetic merit alone, or do they only contain value in that they were written by a woman at a time when female authorship was all but forbidden? For a comprehensive and theoretical consideration of this issue, see Dale Spender's book, The Writing or the Sex?: or Why You Don't Have to Read Women's Writing to Know It's No Good.

Wroth addresses in her sonnets. Miller desires a break from the persistent critical perspective in which Wroth is seen as imitative, a mere mirror or foil to male writers (especially the male writers to whom she was related). Such simplification of Wroth's discourse, she argues, denies its attempts to "interrogate rather than simply mirror the canon, thus exposing some of the fissures of gender ideology within the discourses of her culture" (Miller, Subject 8). Her line of thinking reflects Catharine Stimpson's assertion that

arguments about sex and gender difference . . . edge towards an error in which failures of logic, perception and behavior can compound together. This error is clinging to binary oppositions. At their most benign, binary oppositions oversimplify . . . At their most malign . . . [they] damage the interests of survival itself. (xvi)

Although Miller effectively demonstrates that perceiving Wroth as a mirror to writers like Philip Sidney denies Wroth the status which she attempts to claim by writing ("the woman . . . ceases to be the subject, and in losing the status of a subject in her own right, becomes, most often, merely a foil for the male figure after all" (9)), every attempt Miller makes to move away from the male-authored texts fails. Pamphilia to Amphilanthus cannot be removed from the sonnet tradition in which it is fundamentally grounded. Understanding the issues inherent in Wroth's writing requires consideration of her as both a complex subject (and not a mere foil to the male writer), and also as a unique component of the (sonnet-writing) tradition in which she struggles to create a voice which opposes those of the male writers. Indeed the process of "interrogation" which Miller identifies implies Wroth's intimate engagement with works like the Rime sparse, Astrophel and Stella, Amoretti and Epithalamion, and Shakespeare's Sonnets. The

sonnets written before Wroth's function as the "catalyst for [the] production" (Wall 33) of Wroth's text and therefore possess and generate an authority which Wroth appropriates. Consequently, Pamphilia to Amphilanthus can not be extricated from the male defined parameters of the tradition.

Wroth's position within the Sidney family would have ensured her awareness of the "participatory" nature of sonnet poetics (Wall 33). Like Sidney's, Spenser's, and Shakespeare's sonnets, Pamphilia to Amphilanthus seems to exist as what Germaine Warkentin identifies as "an individual variation on a set theme" (18). Astrophel, for instance, claims that he is not so "ambitious . . . as to frame/ A nest for my young praise in Laurel tree" and then says: "I wish not there should be/ Graved in my epitaph a poet's name" (90. 5-8).⁷ Sidney was not only aware of the participatory nature of the genre, but actually incorporated it into his poems. Following Shakespeare's example of instilling an "unfamiliar object" into the sonnet tradition, Wroth borrows from, amends, and takes excerpts from the "individual variations" which precede hers in order to explore and assert her version of subjectivity (which, in keeping with the sonnet tradition, is then available to subsequent writers).

Wroth's own references to her own sonnets and their role(s) within the sonnet tradition tend to be much more subtle than Sidney's, but do exist nonetheless. For instance, P9 begins:

Led by the powre of griefe, to waylings brought
By faulce consiete of change fall'ne on my part,

⁷ This clever metatextual reference again exemplifies Sidney's attempts to both subtly connect and disassociate himself from Astrophel. *Astrophel's* epitaph will indeed contain a poet's (i.e. *Philip* Sidney's) name both physically and metaphorically, for if Astrophel does die (from despair), his death will have been penned by Sidney.

I seeke for some smale ease by lines, which bought
Increase the pain; grieve is not cur'd by art. (1-4)

Pamphilia despairs because she has been (wrongly) accused of loving inconstantly. To ease her pain she turns to "lines" (3). Through the ambiguity of the word "bought," Pamphilia suggests both her own lines and those of other poets (such as, say, Sidney). Her use of "my part" (2) also contributes to this reading. At a superficial level, "my part" signifies "on my behalf." Taking her awareness of sonnets' "'public' circulatory nature . . . [in forming] *part* of a dialogue" (Miller Subject 12, emphasis added), "my part" also signifies Wroth's *participation* in the ongoing sonnet dialogue. Her use of "lines" and "my part" also suggests a dramatic production in which different characters converse and interact; dramatic terminology within a sonnet also reinforces the sonnets' role as performances of desire. Pamphilia fails to find consolation in her part (whether it be dramatic or poetic): "grieve is not cur'd by art" (4). She also includes a reference to the participatory nature of sonnets in P103. That is, she concludes the sequence with an incitation to other potential writers and lovers:

My muse now happy, lay thy self to rest,
Sleepe in the quiett of a faithfull love,
Write you noe more, butt lett thes phant'sies move
Some other harts . . .
Leave the discourse of Venus, and her sunn
To young beeginers, and thyr brains inspire
With story's of great love, and from that fire
Gett heat to write the fortunes they have wunn. (P103. 1-4, 9-12)

She encourages responses, or perhaps reactions, to her work. One cannot help but perceive the "beeginers" whom she encourages both as women who desire to write, and as lovers in the early stages of their relationship. She thereby effectively uses the dialogic

nature of the sonnet discourse to promote women's expression in traditionally male genres.

Wroth herself capitalizes upon the manuscript culture and the "half coded," "amorous Topic" (Barthes 5) which it ascribes in order to work covertly against the subjectivity which those sonnet sequences written by men encode. Although her poems did not enjoy public longevity, and therefore failed to reach an extended readership—a fact which Masten, Roberts and Waller all note—Wroth's use of the sonnet genre, and importantly, the sonnet tradition itself, as the means of becoming a speaking subject, does allow her to reconsider and respond to the subjectivity inherent in the sonnet tradition. Masten claims that the manuscript of Pamphilia to Amphilanthus was "notably at odds" with the "larger cultural practice" in which texts were "mobile and permeable . . . in an open, collaborative setting" (68). While his observations may be true, he also seems somewhat oblivious to Wroth's position as a woman writing at a time when women were barred from literary pursuits: "women in [seventeenth-century] England were not expected to publish their learned work" (Travitsky 21). Wroth chose to write in the sonnet genre and had specific reasons for doing so; consequently, Pamphilia to Amphilanthus becomes a component of the participatory genre in which one text to responds to, appropriates from, and builds upon those texts which precede it (even if it was not as publicly circulated as other collections).

The permeable nature of the genre served Wroth's purposes well in providing her with a space in which (and therefore the means by which) she could address and begin

reworking male constructions of women. Indeed, Wroth's writing within and against the sonnet tradition reflects Tamsin Lorraine's conceptualization of gender and subjectivity:

Gender identity is one way of representing ourselves. By labeling myself a "man" or a "woman" I am also conjuring up a range of possibilities presented to me in my culture and language. If I stay within the bounds I will create a self on the basis of what is offered me. If I am more adventurous, I will push beyond conventional bounds, thus adding to my culture or language new possibilities of what a man or woman could be. (17)

Wroth herself breaks the bounds of the roles traditionally assigned to women in the seventeenth-century; the self which she creates for Pamphilia within the sonnets works against the selves traditionally prescribed for women. Thus, once again her sonnets should not be read in opposition to, or as a foil for male-authored texts. She desires to create (or perhaps, to extend Shakespeare's creation of) an "unfamiliar object."

Shklovsky asserts that "The purpose of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged" (20). By creating a female lover who vocalizes her desire for her male beloved, Wroth complicates the process of perception. Like Astrophel, Wroth hopes that the pleasure of her poetry might cause men to read, and, through that process of reading, know (that is, reconsider their understanding and treatment of woman and female subjectivity within their society). She desires reconsideration in order to achieve a political (not just an aesthetic) end. That is, she hopes to contribute to the dehabitualization of women from silent, chaste, and obedient objects (in a specifically literary context and in a broader cultural context), as well as to the reconfiguration of them as active, assertive subjects.

Wroth makes her concern regarding subjectivity clear early in the sequence. In the first sonnet Pamphilia asserts that her love and therefore her poems are inspired during sleep: “In sleepe, a Chariot drawne and by wing’d desire/ I sawe” (5-6). It was commonly believed in the seventeenth-century that a person’s senses were not governed by Reason during sleep. Milton articulates this belief in Book V of Paradise Lost:

Reason . . . frames
 All what we affirm or what deny, and call
 Our knowledge or opinion; then retires
 Into her private Cell when Nature rests.
 Oft in her absence mimic Fancy wakes
 To Imitate her; but misjoining shapes,
 Wild work produces oft, and most in dreams,
 Ill matching words, and deeds by past or late. (106-13)

Wroth seems to suggest the same idea in the first poem of her sequence (and in particular, in the first quatrain):

When nights black mantle could most darknes prove,
 And sleepe deaths Image did my senceses hiere
 From knowledg of my self, then thoughts did move
 Swifter then those most swiftnes need require:

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 not hold above,

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

Hee 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.

At the outset of Pamphilia to Amphilanthus, Pamphilia suggests that Fancy engenders her love and her poems. Similarly, she concludes the collection with a description of the love

contained within her sonnets as “phant’sies” (103. 3). By describing the tale of her love and the inversion of gender roles which it contains as a fantasy, Wroth displaces the agency and authority which she simultaneously claims by writing. Because subjectivity “involves the precondition of the individual’s having a choice to become a subject of something” (Rushdy 37), and Pamphilia clearly denies such choice, she remains more of an object than an active subject. She is subjected to and subjugated by Love. By claiming objectivity, Pamphilia aligns her self with figures like Laura, Stella and Elizabeth who lack agency and function within the male defined parameters of female existence. And, although the lack of choice in becoming a subject of love is a trope, a position which the male poets also claim, Wroth inscribes difference into that position. The male lovers tend to blame love for blindly assaulting them and then displace their anger and frustration onto the beloved. In Pamphilia’s dream, Venus and Cupid work together to instill the burning heart into her body and self; Pamphilia never rails against the beloved in frustration as the men do. Instead, she alternates between frustration (displaced and directed towards Love) and respect for Love—a respect which climaxes in her *corona*. In her constructions of desire, Wroth problematizes the binary oppositions such as lover/beloved and subject/object in order to “represent female subjectivity in multiple terms” (Miller Subject 4).

In her problematization of those oppositions typically inherent in discourses of desire (such as collections of sonnets), Wroth’s persona admits a well-established sense of agency and subjectivity—a position usually adopted by the (male) lover. This is illustrated in Pamphilia’s assertion that “sleepe deaths Image did my senceses’ hiere/

From knowledge of my self” (P1. 2-3). She exploits the ambiguity associated with the word “hiere.” If “hiere” means to remove, then Pamphilia is a mere object who lacks agency and is acted upon by influential external forces. If “hiere” indicates “to engage,” then Pamphilia’s sleep is no longer state of suspended reason: her senses engage or employ “deaths Image” from Pamphilia’s “knowledg of [her] self.” This reading suggests not just a strong sense of self and individuality, but also, a reasonable, self-possessed mind. Wroth’s employment of the ambiguity inherent in language allows her to obscure subjectivity under the guise of subjection and to defer (mens’) spontaneous (negative) reactions to her writing which in turn permits her to continue her exploration of female experiences of love within the sonnet genre.

Wroth’s concern with subjectivity is also contained in her use of the Venus and Cupid figures in P1. Venus is depicted as the Queen of Love while Cupid (conventionally the King of Love and Love personified) is subordinate to her: he sits at Venus’s feet (7) and obeys her (12). As McLaren notes in her consideration of Wroth’s play Love’s Victory, “Venus serves Lady Wroth as an analogue of female power” (285). Wroth extends Venus’s power into the collection’s final sonnet where she describes Pamphilia to Amphilanthus as “the discourse of Venus” (despite the large number of Cupid poems which it contains). Because Venus has power over Love, she provides women like Pamphilia (and Wroth) with the means by which they can accede to Love: they are not subordinating their selves to the demands of a man.

The importance of subjectivity is again considered in P8, an address to Love which incorporates the standard Petrarchan trope of the captivated lover. After detailing

Love's hold on her in the first quatrain, Pamphilia expounds: "I ame thy [Love's] subject, conquer'd, bound to stand,/ Never thy foe" (6-7). Her remark expresses her own position as a woman who loves and (actively) "woos," as well as Wroth's position as a woman who writes in seventeenth-century England. In the second sonnet of Astrophel and Stella, Astrophel declares:

Love gave the wound which, while I breathe, will bleed,
Till, by degrees I, forc'd, agreed,
Yet with repining at so partial lot
Now even that last footstep of lost liberty
Is gone; and now . . .
I call it praise to suffer tyranny. (2-11)

Compared to Astrophel's subjugation to love, which is exaggerated by his use of conceit (and consequently acquires an air of insincerity), Pamphilia's subjugation seems sincere. In Pamphilia's quiet acceptance of her position and obeisance to Love through Venus (against the background of Astrophel's loud complaints), Wroth subtly communicates differences in men's and women's experiences of love and life. While "women were chattels in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England" who were expected to obey a male authority (usually their father and then their husband), men were predominantly accustomed to exercising their own authority (while remaining subject to social and religious authority) (Hull 47). As Waller states, "a woman's place in the early modern family is overwhelmingly determined by her relations to the relative autonomy and power of men" (95). Although Astrophel clearly objects to Love's authority over his self, Pamphilia is more accepting of it. Thus, Pamphilia is more than a negative reflection of a male lover like Astrophel--a fact which is also made apparent by comparing Pamphilia's expressions of love to those of the Spenserian lover.

Unlike Astrophel and Pamphilia, the Spenserian lover addresses the “Unrighteous Lord of love” later in his collection after first deliberating upon his beloved’s virtues and the predominantly—or ostensibly—chaste nature of his love for her. His deferred tirade instills an element of surprise into the sequence:

Unrighteous Lord of love what law is this,
That me thou makest thus tormented be:
the whiles she lordeth in licentious blisse
of her freewill, scorning both thee and me.
See how the Tyrannesse doth joy to see
the huge massacres which her eyes do make:
and humbled harts brings captives unto thee. (X. 1-7)

Until this point, he seems content enough (“nought dismayd” (VI.1)) to deliberate upon “chast desires on heavenly beauty bound” (VIII. 8). He suddenly turns and rails against his beloved, constructing both himself and Love as *her* unwilling subjects. The woman’s “freewill” becomes a weapon which she wields as a “Tyrannesse,” inverting the natural (read normalized) hierarchy.⁸

The female lover whom Wroth creates is neither a mindless, construct-reflecting chattel, nor a “Tyrannesse.” Instead, she functions to “represent female subjectivity in multiple terms . . . to interrogate rather than simply to mirror the canon, thus exposing some of the fissures of gender ideology within the discourses of her culture” (Miller 4, 8). P8 furthers the expression of multiply conceived subjectivity:

Love leave to urge, thou know’st thou hast the hand;
‘T’is cowardise, to strive wher none resist:
Pray thee leave off, I yeeld unto thy band;
Doe nott thus, still, in thine own powre persist,

⁸ It is also important to note that Spenser wrote the *Amoretti and Epithalamion* during Queen Elizabeth I’s reign, and, given that his beloved has the same name as the reigning monarch, Spenser’s sonnets also contain and contend with many political constructs and issues which are beyond the scope of the present discussion.

Beehold I yeeld: lett forces bee dismist;
 I ame thy subject, conquer'd, bound to stand,
 Never thy foe, butt did thy claime assist
 Seeking thy due of those who did withstand;

Butt now, itt seemes, thou would'st I should thee love;
 I doe confess, t'was thy will made mee chuse;
 And thy faire showes made me a lover prove
 When I my freedome did, for paine refuse.

Yett this Sir God, you boyship I dispise;
 Your charmes I obey, butt love nott want of eyes.

Pamphilia confesses choice; unlike Astrophel and the Petrarchan and Spenserian lovers (but *like* Spenser's beloved Elizabeth), she willingly surrenders her freedom to the bands of love. Indeed, this poem is almost a direct response to Spenser's LXVII in which the woman finally submits to the lover. By constructing the woman as Love's *willing* subject who confesses her choice to become a lover (10), Wroth effectively dispels the cultural belief that women are spaces which conform without resistance to male imposed forms. The woman's choice and agency are also suggested in the pun on the word "will" in line 10. While "will" most certainly denotes (Love's) desire, it is also, as critics like Roberts, Miller and Waller note, a biographical notation which suggests William Pemberton. Thus, she chooses Will (who, as the word "thy" suggests, is already subject to and a subject of Love) over freedom. Waller describes the explicitly female desire which this choice suggests as the desire for "bonding, not bonds; of mutuality, not the self-destructive hope that by abandoning herself to the will of another she will be given her 'true' self" (124). When she declares "I ame thy subject, conquer'd, bound to stand," and "twas thy will made me chuse," then, Pamphilia asserts that she chose to be love's subject

in order to explore and assert her self through her experiences of love. She repeats the assertion of her choice at the end of the first section of the sequence (i.e. after P55). As Roberts notes “The first section ends with the persona’s determination to love as an individual choice, rather than as an edict imposed by the gods” (44).

The assertion “I ame thy subject, conquer’d” also frames Wroth’s position as a female writer who reverses the gendering of the lover and beloved in a discourse of desire. That is, the woman is only an ostensible subject of male-authored sonnets. Rime sparse, Astrophel and Stella, and Amoretti and Epithalamion create subjection which “involves the precondition of the subject’s already being subject to something” (Rushdy 37). In Pamphilia to Amphilanthus, although the woman and her process of self-fashioning most certainly form the main subject of the discourse, the beloved is not subjugated to that process in the same way that the beloved (woman) is in the male-authored collections of sonnets. He never speaks, nor is he described (apart from his inconstancy in love which is also suggested by his name which means “lover of two”). He is never fetishized, fragmented, or emblazoned by the lover. Because the woman desires him and his love, he functions as an inspiration of her voice. Because she seeks mutuality in desire, she does not subject him to her desires but subjugates herself to love and is therefore “bound to stand.”

Given the slippery nature of the poetic space in which Wroth writes, the phrase “bound to stand” suggests several readings. For instance, the word “bound” denotes inevitability which leads to an understanding of Wroth’s position as a woman who has read of (and indeed experienced) male conceptualizations of female sexuality. Attempts

to control women (or conquer them as subjects) by defining female agency and voice *inevitably* give rise to that same voice, or give that voice reason to stand (albeit as marginal to the dominant canon and culture). “Bound” also suggests captivity.

Pamphilia is conquered, or arrested, and bound to stand Love’s trial. She asserts her willingness to undergo love’s test of (for instance) her constancy. Furthermore, that she is “bound” and will inevitably “stand” and stand up for their love suggests both that she is constant or immutable in love, and that she is a text. That is, her assertion is reminiscent of Astrophel’s entreaty in sonnet 45 that the beloved/ reader “pity the tale of me” (14). Both lovers become texts: Astrophel a wretched, pitiful one, and Pamphilia (at this point in the sequence) an assertive, confident one.

Pamphilia’s confidence in her love and its immutable nature frames the collection of poems, although she also experiences despair. Petrarch, Sidney and Spenser all assert that women are fickle. Indeed, Spenser dedicates two cantos of The Faerie Queene to Mutability (or Change) who “doth play/ Her cruel sports to many mens decay” (VI. I. 4-5). His declaration that “we [men] all are subject to that curse [of Mutability]” (VI. VI. 8) summarizes the sonnet tradition: women’s allegedly fickle nature usurps male authority and subsequently allows women to reign over them (and Love) in a tyrannous way. In asserting Pamphilia’s constancy and immutability, Wroth struggles against a deeply entrenched tradition and “male-authored figuration of gender” (Miller, Subject 36).

From the earliest stages of Pamphilia to Amphilanthus, Wroth makes it clear that constancy in love, like subjectivity, is crucial to her understanding of love and gender constructions. She ends the first sonnet with Pamphilia’s declaration that ever since she

dreamt of Venus and Cupid, “a lover I have been” (14). The flames of love which engender or at least contribute to the engendering of male-authored sequences are usually the burnings of unchaste desire which Spenser describes in An Hymn in Honour of Love: “Kindled flame . . . / Which suckes the blood and drinketh up the lyfe/ Of carefull wretches with consumming grief” (124-6). The association of love and desire with fire invokes images of love (and desire in particular) as a burning yet short-lived intensity—or, in other words, as a form of mutability. Wroth navigates through and beyond the metonymic association of love with fire in order to reconfigure women’s experience of love. In P3 Pamphilia claims that *she* deserves Love’s pity (i.e. the requital of her love) because “flames . . . in mine [breast] burne in truest smart/ Exiling thoughts that touch inconstancie,/ or those which waste nott in the constant art” (6-9). Her love is “true” and not transient, perpetuated by feeding off both any “untrue” feelings or thoughts which she may have, and any thoughts which exist independently of her feelings of love. In other words, she lives to love. In P80 she even differentiates between the types of fire, elevating a constantly glowing flame over the sparkling (and therefore inconstant and changeable) flame (of desire): “Maintain the fires of love still burning bright; Nott slightly sparkling butt light flaming bee” (3-4). The flame of love which she describes is somewhat similar to the Petrarchan lover’s conceptualization of the relationship between love and fire—except for the fact that he is only able to experience a constantly glowing flame (after Laura’s death) when his earthly (cupidinous) desires are replaced by heavenly love or *caritas*. This type of flame is the “Kindly Flame” which Spenser describes through Book III (“The Legend of Chastity”) of the Faerie Queene. It is

Most sacred fire, that burnest mightily

In liuing brests, ykindled first aboue,
 Emongst th'eternall spheres and lamping sky,
 And thence poured into men, which men call Loue;
 Not that same, which doth base affections moue
 In brutish minds, and filthy lust inflame,
 But that sweet fit, that doth true beautie loue. (III. III. 1. 1-7)

In the couplet of P80, Pamphilia declares: "Such as although itt pierce your tender heart/ And burne, yet burning you will love the smart" (13-4). Her understanding of the condition of love exceeds that of the male poet-lover's because she moves beyond extremes and binary oppositions to incorporate a full range of experiences and feelings (none of which hijacks her sense of self) within her discourse. An image which--by virtue of being so extreme--portrays inconstancy in Astrophel and Stella, for example (one expects that Astrophel will eventually burn up in his self-kindled flames of desire), denotes desire, constancy and true love in Pamphilia to Amphilanthus. Indeed, Astrophel finds himself trapped by an inability to deal with the "Icy Flame" which characterizes chaste love. Forster describes the "Icy Flame" as a state of being characterized by "the interpenetration of pleasure and pain, and the satisfaction which could be derived from holding these two opposites in an uneasy balance" (13). Because Astrophel cannot achieve that balance, he perpetually burns with desire. Pamphilia, on the other hand, finds affirmation in her (balanced) love; by the end of the sequence, she coaxes her muse to "lay thy self to rest,/ [and] Sleepe in the quiett of a faithfull love" (P103. 1-2).

Thus, Wroth effectively appropriates the site of the metonym (of the flames of love) to inscribe it with a *woman's* experience of love and thereby highlight the differences between the woman's suffering (in love) and both the men's claims of her cold, cruel nature, and the nature of his own love. Pamphilia's sense of *true* love as fire

is somewhat akin to that of the Petrarchan lover's following Laura's death. He experiences the "blind ardor that flames here among foolish mortals" (366. 20-1) as poem 113 indicates: "my kindled desire sends forth sparks that ought to set on fire even the souls of the dead" (3-4). Instead of the burning heat of desire, he learns to experience and accept the heat of heavenly light: "so much light shines within my heart all the way from Heaven" (357. 6-7). True but *heavenly* love replaces burning cupidinous desire. He learns that Laura's cruelty was necessary:

one is now dust and makes my soul grieve who kept it,
while alive, in weeping and of my thousand sufferings did not
know one; and though she had known them, what happened
would still have happened, for any other desire in her would
have been death to me and dishonour to her. (366. 92-97)

Had Laura given in to his implorations to love, he never would have apprehended "true" love (*caritas*).

Astrophel's knowledge of love never progresses beyond burning desire, and even the Spenserian lover experiences love as conflicting emotions. He feels "unquiet thought" and then blames and decries the woman for tormenting him before he is reconciled to her in wedlock. However, marriage may or may not actually be reconciliatory to Elizabeth: we have only Spenser's word and version of the story (even when Elizabeth allegedly authors a sonnet of her own--within Spenser's sequence, of course). The subtle differences between each of these male poet-lover's use of flames and heat to express his experiences of love and Wroth's use of the metonym reveal that Pamphilia is bound to suffer. Miller argues that "Pamphilia speaks not solely as a lover focused upon the beloved but as a woman cognizant of the shared female experience of

suffering for love” (Subject 40). While none of the lovers, male or female, focuses on the beloved but instead uses her or him as the means to focus on his/her self, Pamphilia certainly expresses the suffering which Miller identifies. That is, because none of the male lovers—least of all Amphilanthus—experiences the same kind of true, constant, earthly love, the mutuality or bonding which Pamphilia ultimately desires can never occur.

It is interesting that Wroth chooses the *corona* as the means to elaborate upon constancy in love: few of her predecessors attempted to write “A Crowne of Sonnets.” She dedicates the *corona* to Love, after introducing it in P76—an apology to love which immediately precedes the corona. She declares that she will “give a crowne unto thy endless prayse/ Which shall thy glory, and thy greatness raise/ More than thes poore things could thy honor spite” (12-4). “Thes poor things” refers to the poems of the previous section of Pamphilia to Amphilanthus in which she examines the pain that often accompanies passion and effectively demonstrates that a woman in love, like a man, is also susceptible to doubt, jealousy, and despair. Roberts asserts that “Pamphilia expresses her frustration in love by denigrating Cupid as the representative of infantile, self-centered feelings” (Poems 45). By reporting her feelings of frustration and dedicating a “Crowne of Sonnets” framed by constancy to Love, Pamphilia demonstrates her consciousness of the “struggle between passionate surrender and self-affirmation” (Roberts Poems 44)—an awareness which the Spenserian lover shows, but which Astrophel certainly does not. Unlike the Spenserian lover, however, Pamphilia limits her disparagements of the “paines which absence makes [her] now indure” (20. 12). This is

an effective technique in that she truly mediates upon the effects of (unrequited “true”) love on her self and does so without aggrandizing conceits such as accusing Amphilanthus of tyranny—even though she *knows* that he is fickle. The gentle nature of her expression is more effective than, say, Astrophel’s tiresome complaints regarding the beloved’s cruel nature. Indeed, because women’s agency was so limited in seventeenth-century English society, a role such as that of a tyrant was completely unavailable model to them and therefore was not accessible as a suitable means of (even metaphoric) expression. By choosing to express her love and the pain it inspires without perpetual exaggeration, Wroth re-works the “slippages between . . . powerful and powerless” which typically occur in sonnet sequences (Dubrow 12). That is, Pamphilia, who experiences pain inspired by the dark side of passion but never loses sight of her self, *chooses* to love.

Unlike the poet-lovers who precede her, then, Pamphilia can exalt Love, and in that exaltation, explore and stress the effects of love on her self. She acknowledges the mixture of emotions which love incites, but nevertheless elevates love to the highest state she possibly can. That is, she bestows a crown upon love which metonymically suggests kingship and just rule, an association which she makes explicit within the corona itself: “To thee then lord commander of all harts,/ Ruller of owr affections kinde, and just/Great King of Love” (P89. 9-11). Because she praises the means by which, or space in which she fashions her self, she can pursue a more sincere process of self-fashioning than that which those poet-lovers who deny love can do. Similarly, the corona gives love, as the space in which she fashions her self, real presence: love is a whole (that is, not fragmented or fetishized) presence. In this manner, Pamphilia again reiterates her desire

for mutuality in love. Mutual love can not be achieved when one of the people involved exists as a fragmented or absent presence.

Despite her desire for mutual love and her strong assertion of self through that desire, Pamphilia, like each of Petrarch's, Sidney's, Spenser's and Shakespeare's lovers, also desires pity. In the couplet of P8, Pamphilia says to love: "Your charmes I obay, butt love not want of eyes" (14). By P48, that "want of eyes" becomes a reason to pity the poet-lover. In line 5 she begs: "looke on me," and in the sestet elaborates upon the link between her "want of eyes" and her need for pity:

Non ever felt the truth of loves great miss
Of eyes, till I deprived was of bliss;
For had hee seene, hee must have pittie show'd;

I should nott have bin made this stage of woe
Wher sad disasters have thyr open showe
O noe, more pittie hee had sure bestow'd. (9-14)

The subject of "looke" (5) is ambiguous: it could refer to Love, Amphilanthus, or the reader. Either way, Pamphilia transcribes herself into a text, an assertion which she re-enforces by describing herself as a "stage of woe" (12). Looking upon her, or "reading" her as a text or image which presents true, constant love but is nonetheless "by love, and grieffe, oprest" (8), should provoke feelings of pity in the reader and in her beloved. We are again reminded of Astrophel's pleas to "pity the tale of me" (56. 14).

It is interesting that Astrophel uses the word "sight" to describe *his* desire in the same sonnet in which he articulates that plea: "But now that I, alas, do want her sight" (56. 9). He could be suggesting that *he* wishes to be the subject of her eyes, that he, like Pamphilia, "love[s] nott want of eyes" (P8. 14). Or, he could be suggesting that he

desires to *see* Stella, in which case, he uses her (image) to fashion his self. Indeed, he gains her audience (and therefore her sight) in *Astrophel and Stella*, “the tale of [Astrophel],” (56.14) for she will (as he asserts in the first sonnet of the sequence) read and therefore know (and shape him).

Unlike Astrophel, Pamphilia invites the reader (and therefore her beloved) to look upon her, to take her sight. As Nona Fienberg observes, “her poetry, like her body, becomes an object of his speculation” (180): in Pamphilia’s words, “I ame thy subject” (P8. 6). However, immediately following her invitation and plea (i.e. within the same quatrain), Pamphilia clearly asserts a strong sense of self:

I ame to thes adrest,
I, ame the soule that feeles the greatest smart;
I, ame that hartles trunk of harts depart
 And *I*, that one, by love, and grieffe oprest.
 (P48. 5-9, emphasis added)

She tells whoever looks upon her what he (or she) will see—not the broken, silent pieces of sonnet ladies of the past, but a whole and assertive person. Here she certainly is not a “subject, conquer’d.” She makes this clear by placing a comma after “I”—the reader must place emphasis on the “I” and is thereby forced to note her assertions of subjectivity.

When she says “*looke* on me,” (P48. 5) she, like Shklovsky, asks for the dehabitualization of the reader. She asks the reader to look *on her self*, not the appropriated, fragmented, and distant body which male poet-lovers use. In so doing, she “insists on interior or superlative feeling; . . . the speaker claims . . . that she is its [interiority’s] embodiment” (Masten 74) and “finds the words that Petrarch’s Laura, Sidney’s Stella, and Shakespeare’s Dark Lady had been denied” (Fienberg 183).

Pamphilia then reverses the request for pity; as the one who has been denied interiority, feeling, and subjectivity, but who also suffers in love, she is the one who deserves pity. Wroth effectively uses the convention of pity to force the reader to focus on Pamphilia's subjectivity. Furthermore, in the assertions of her self, Pamphilia does not transcend her beloved (as the lovers of Petrarch's, Sidney's, Spenser's, and Shakespeare's sonnet sequences do); by inviting him to examine her and his effects on her (and thereby affirming *his* agency), he becomes an important component of the process of self-fashioning which she undergoes, and of the self which she displays.

Wroth also reworks the use of confession within the process of self-fashioning inherent to the sonnet discourse. Pamphilia confesses her choice and her agency—not just her susceptibility to love and desire. For instance, in P8 she says: “I doe confess, t’was thy will made mee chuse” (10), and in P16, a deliberation of her self as either conquered or free she states: “O my hurt, makes my lost hart confess/ I love, and must: So farwell liberty” (13–4). Thus, Wroth uses the space of confession to contribute to the process of dehabitualization, for the interlocutor who judges the confession (probably Amphilanthus, but also any reader of the collection) focuses his or her attention specifically on the woman and what she perceives to be her transgression. One such transgression is choice; thus, the subject position is once again reversed to instill agency into the previously empty body of the woman. Because that choice is articulated as a transgression, Wroth indicates her awareness that women (as subjects to discourses of desire) were not supposed to even formulate a choice, never mind verbalize it.

By reclaiming and, in some cases, reappropriating spaces within the male-authored sonnet sequences--predominantly, the woman's body and voice--and instilling a high degree of ambiguity into the binary oppositions which typically shape and direct sonnet sequences, Wroth effectively responds to male-defined parameters of female subjectivity. In giving a sonnet mistress a voice which serves to complicate tropes such as mutability and pity, she questions and even challenges both the selves which men author at the expense of (a) woman's individuality, and the assumptions upon which sonnet discourses are traditionally built. Wroth creates a response to traditional sonnet collections and in so doing recasts the woman from a (passive) suitable receptacle for male desire, to an active presence capable of articulating her own desire.

Chapter Four

“‘He loved her’—while of me what will they say?”: Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s and Christina Rossetti’s Sonnets as Responses to Literary and Social Pasts

Their origin and their history patriarchal poetry their origin
and their history patriarchal poetry their origin and their history.
Patriarchal Poetry.
Their origin and their history.
-Gertrude Stein “Patriarchal Poetry”

One face looks out from all his canvasses,
One selfsame figure sits or walks or leans;
We found her hidden just behind those screens,
That mirror gave back all her loveliness.
A queen in opal or in ruby dress,
A nameless girl in freshest summer greens,
A saint, an angel;—every canvass means
The same one meaning, neither more nor less.
He feeds upon her face by day and night,
And she with true kind eyes looks back on him
Fair as the moon and joyful as the light:
Not wan with waiting, nor with sorrow dim;
Nor as she is, but was when hope shon bright;
Not as she is, but as she fills his dream.
-Christina Rossetti “In An Artist’s Studio”

Although it is not a poem from the sequence Monna Innominata, Christina Rossetti's sonnet entitled "In An Artist's Studio" demonstrates her concern with women's "traditional" roles in art—roles which, in their selflessness and lack of agency, reflect the social roles and constructions of women in the nineteenth-century. Rossetti's use of "An" in the title instead of "The" suggests universality: this woman can be found in any and every artist's studio. Her use of the word "selfsame" (2) indicates not just monotony within each of the artist's paintings, it also indicates the artist's use of the woman as an outside reference which allows him to create and affirm his own self through his art; he “feeds upon her face” (9) and she becomes a “mirror” which “[gives] back all her

loveliness" (4). Like Petrarch's Laura, Sidney's Stella, Spenser's Elizabeth, and Shakespeare's dark lady (and fair friend), this woman/"selfsame figure" (2) exists as nothing more than a space which a male artist utilizes in order to fashion his self. In art as in nineteenth-century society, a woman is "Not as she is, but as she fills [a man's] dream" (13-4).

In his book The Troubadours, written in 1878, Frances Hueffer expresses what Jan Marsh describes as "a very Victorian notion of sexual difference" (473) when he declares: "poetry was not an employment but an inward necessity [for women]. They poured forth their mirth or their grief and after that relapsed into silence" (in Marsh 473).

In the span of two brief sentences, Hueffer undermines and dismisses as redundant poetry produced by women. His attribution of women's poetry to a purely emotional "muse" of mirth and grief (i.e. the personal and autobiographical) infers a lack of intellectual engagement. Women, he claims, write as a form of emotional release, as an emotional outburst before returning or "relapsing" into (proper) silence. They do not (and should not try to) write in order to contribute to the universality of experience and didacticism contained within the traditions and canon of poetry written by men.

Certainly, Barrett Browning and Rossetti write out of a necessity, and an emotional one at that. However, their necessity is not exclusively emotional. Like the male poets preceding them, they use the sonnet genre to express the "self as desiring entity" (Spiller 125); they are compelled by necessity to address the inequality and dishonesty with which women are depicted in art and literature (and by extension, then, to address the roles allowed and assigned to women within nineteenth-century society).

They write sonnet collections in order to respond to the dominant tradition and thereby create a space in which a woman can fashion her own self and subjectivity.

In their creation of sonnet collections which respond to the dominant tradition, women—including Lady Mary Wroth, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Christina Rossetti—write parodies. Parody, in this sense, means more than ridiculing imitation—as it is now commonly defined. As Linda Hutcheon details in her book A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms, parody “is a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text . . . [It is also] repetition with critical distance which marks difference rather than similarity” (6).¹ The inversion of the poet-lover’s/speaker’s sex is accompanied by an inversion within one of the key conventions of the sonnet tradition: the (predominantly) silent, malleable love object is replaced by an assertive subject. The space in which male subjects previously wrote their selves, then, is no longer empty and pregnable to their authority and desires.

Perceiving the sonnet collections authored by Barrett Browning and Rossetti as parodic texts helps to explain why the women chose to write within this particular genre. As Cosslett asserts, the use of parody “is another way of attributing subversive agency to these poets—they are not . . . the victims of a male tradition, but subtly undermine it from within” (8). Travitsky declares that we should not expect “highly innovative, genre-

¹In this respect, Shakespeare’s sonnets are also a form of parody; his disruption of the conventional bipolar relationship, for instance, forces readers to re-examine their understanding of the relationship and dynamics between the subject/object and lover/beloved relationships in traditional sequences, and simultaneously creates a text which “calls into question not only its relation to other art but its own identity” (Hutcheon 10). That is, both the poet-lover and the text itself express themselves as subjects which, as “intersections of inter-related cultural systems” (Lorraine 14) evolve from and inscribe difference into the sonnet tradition.

shattering forms of writing” from women because of the constraints placed on them (26).

Instead, she asserts, we should look for differences within their uses of a given genre:

the difference between their writings and those of their male compatriots are thematic rather than formal. It is primarily in the point of view of the writers, the expression of a different frame of reference, a different dimension of experience . . . or a twist on a familiar theme, rather than [in] a feminine development of new forms, that the distinctive contribution of these women lies. (26)

While Travitsky’s comments are relevant to a general consideration of nineteenth-century female writers (in addition to the sixteenth-century women to whom she specifically refers, Dorothy Mermin’s assertion in “The Female Poet and the Embarrassed Reader: Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Sonnets from the Portuguese” that Barrett Browning’s “female speaker produces painful dislocations in the conventions of amatory poetry” (352) extends and challenges Travitsky’s assertion. In creating “dislocations” Barrett Browning instills thematic and formal differences into her writing. Just as women originally provided male poets and poet-lovers with a space in which to write and thereby fashion their selves, those poems subsequently become the occasion prompting women to write. As the repetition and resonation of “history” and “origin” within the epigraph from Stein’s “Patriarchal Poetry” indicates, while the patriarchal poetic tradition authors (and therefore authorizes) constructs of (and for) women, an inherently female voice *can* originate from within that dominant tradition. Thus, to Barrett Browning and Rossetti, conventions within the tradition—in particular that of the unspeaking female beloved—become “catalyst[s] for the production” (Wall 33) of their own texts. Indeed, Rossetti makes this catalyst explicit in her use of passages from Petrarch’s Rime sparse and Dante’s Beatrice to contextualize each of her sonnets. For example, she introduces

sonnet 2 with: “It was already the hour which turns back the desire” and “I recur to the time when I first saw thee” from Beatrice and the Rime sparse respectively. Within her own sonnet, the *monna innominata* laments the fact that she *cannot* recall that first meeting:

I wish I could remember that first day,
 First hour, first moment of your meeting me,
 If bright or dim the season, it might be
 Summer or Winter for aught I can say;
 So unrecorded did it slip away. (1-5)

She uses an element common to the male-authored sequences to provide the setting or thematic direction of her own poem, and then inscribes that convention with her own, feminine twist. Her laments in sonnet 2 more effectively prove the strength of her love than a diarization of the moment itself would. Unlike the male poet-lovers, she did not experience love at first sight, but grew to cherish her beloved; consequently, her love seems more sincere. The tradition provides a tangible frame to each sonnet of Monna Innominata.

Rossetti also makes her use of the tradition (or the silences therein) as a catalyst for her sonnets explicit in her introduction to the sequence: “Had such a lady [as Beatrice or Laura] spoken for herself, the portrait left us might have appeared more tender, if less dignified, than any drawn even by a devoted friend” (86). The Sonnet Lady, she contends, has not been fairly represented. Barrett Browning’s and Rossetti’s sonnet collections can each be seen as a particular response in the ongoing, sonnet-driven dialogue, and therefore as an extension of the sixteenth-century “participatory poetics” which Wall identifies (33). Indeed, the very nature of parody—with a parodic text’s

germination embedded within preceding texts and tradition(s)—is suggestive of dialogue (participation in which itself suggests agency).

The OED defines dialogue—from the Greek *dia-* (meaning through) and *-logue* (from *logos*, meaning the word)—as a literary work in conversational form, or as a conversation between two or more people. In his glossary to Bakhtin's The Dialogic Imagination, editor Michael Holquist (working through Bakhtin) defines dialogism:

“Everything means, is understood, as part of a greater whole—there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of contradicting others”

(426). An important element of dialogism is what Bakhtin terms “heteroglossia”:

the base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance . . . At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions--social, historical, meteorological, psychological--that will insure that a word uttered in that place in that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions. (428)

According to Bakhtin, multiplicity—as the organizing principle of dialogue—challenges power structures which arrange themselves around the principle of the monologic:

One may, like a primitive tribe that knows only its own limits, be deluded into thinking there is one language, or one may, as grammarians, certain political figures and normative framers of ‘literary languages’ do, seek in a sophisticated way to achieve a unitary language. (426)

To protect the authority of the monologue, such power structures attempt to conceal the dialogic underpinnings of language, privileging the singular over the plural, the unitary over the multiple. Bakhtin asserts that poetic genres tend to privilege unity over multiplicity because poetic expression “presupposes on the one hand a unity of language

(in the sense of a system of general normative forms) and on the other hand the unity of an individual person realizing himself in this language” (254). In comparison to poetry, the novel creates conditions which allow

differing individual voices [to] flourish. Authorial speech, the speech of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely the fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized). (263)

By examining the history of the sonnet genre, one sees that multiplicity is in fact predominantly contained within the tradition itself (not within an individual work) when poets like Shakespeare, Wroth, Barrett Browning and Rossetti diverge from the standards and conventions which poets like Petrarch, Sidney, and Spenser both create and maintain.² However, within that history, attempts to maintain the sonnet genre as a monologic “literary language” (Bakhtin 426) also exist. By including male writers—such as Petrarch, Sidney and Spenser—within the literary canon, and excluding female writers—such as Wroth and Anne Lok (a little known sixteenth-century (sonnet) writer)—“differing individual voices” are lost: “women, however famous in their day, get left out when literary history comes to be written” (Cosslett 1). Barrett Browning was not aware of

² To a limited degree, a poet *can* include “differing individual voices” within his or her work—the debate surrounding Sidney’s relationship to Astrophel illustrates this point. By incorporating what various critics interpret as demarcations which instill critical difference between the poet himself and the poet-lover whom he creates, Sidney generates a poetic work which contains more than a single “unified” person who uses the poetry to realize his self. However, for the most part, an individual poetic work (such as a collection of sonnets) does indeed privilege a specific individual’s expression by blocking or even appropriating other voices (also techniques which Sidney employs). In sonnets, that voice is most often, of course, that of the beloved (woman).

Wroth (or any other female writer for that matter) who gave voice and subjectivity to the beloved object in sonnet--indeed, in lyric--form:

and yet where were the poetesses? The divine breath which seemed to come and go, and, ere it went, filled the land with that crowd of true poets whom we call the old dramatists--why did it never pass, even in the lyrical form, over the lips of a woman? How strange! And can we deny that it was so? I look everywhere for grandmothers and see none. (in Stephenson 4)

Rossetti, aware of Barrett Browning's sonnets, puzzles over the fact that she is seemingly and surprisingly the only one to write a *response* to the tradition:

I rather wonder that no one (*so far as I know*) ever hit on my semi-historical argument before for such a treatment--it seems to me so full of poetic suggestiveness . . . had the Great Poetess of our own day and nation [Barrett Browning] only been unhappy instead of happy, her circumstances would have invited her to bequeath to us, in lieu of the "Portuguese Sonnets," an inimitable "donna innominata" drawn not from fancy but from feeling, and worthy to occupy a niche beside Beatrice and Laura. (in Marsh 473, emphasis added)

Rossetti's musings illustrate a key difference between her sonnets and those of Barrett Browning: to her, Barrett Browning's expressions of intimate, requited (i.e. married) and therefore *fanciful* love preclude the sonnets' consideration as a response to the dominant tradition. To Rossetti, the lover of Barrett Browning's sonnets--like the model in the artist's studio--is a "mirror which gives back all her loveliness" (Studio 4) and therefore belongs within the (monologue of the) dominant tradition in which "every canvass means/ The same meaning" (Studio 6-7).

However, Barrett Browning certainly addresses elements of the sonnet tradition, even if she does not make her parodying of and response to the tradition overt (as Rossetti

does). Indeed, as Mermin states, “the speaker in Sonnets from the Portuguese initiates and writes her own poems. She does not choose merely to respond to her lover’s words, to be silent, to be abandoned, to die” (355). While her sonnets’ germination may initially occur within the sonnet tradition as a response, she also instills difference into her poems, at once responding to that tradition moving away from a strict response. In his examination of the poems and their formal structure in “Mapping Sublimity: Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Sonnets from the Portuguese, Jerome Mazzaro concludes that “it seems unrealistic . . . to expect either adherence to conventionalizing measures and closes or exact correspondence to the work’s . . . literary allusions.” (177). In light of such assertions, Rossetti’s contentions become somewhat narrow-minded; as Stephenson asserts in her book Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Poetry of Love, Barrett Browning insists “upon the necessity of releasing women from the passivity and silence imposed on them in life and art by the role of the beloved, and to attempt to provide women with both a functional role and a forceful voice” (51). Barrett Browning and Rossetti incorporate, adapt, appropriate, and rework elements and conventions of the tradition into their sonnet collections. Such elements include the use of fire imagery, the equivocation of the lover’s and beloved’s identities, and pity in a confessional discourse which emphasizes subjectivity and self-fashioning. They create vastly different sequences, but seek similar goals and effects, including the delineation of “a form of love quite different from that which the convention would generally suggest” (Stephenson 70). That is, they both shirk the poetic genres most frequently used by women, “poems *about* love

. . . in which the gender of the narrator is rarely specified and becomes relatively unimportant [in lieu of] poetry of love, the lyrical expression of the emotion and the type of verse which traditionally excluded women from the role of speaking subject” (Stephenson 4) to demonstrate that (a) woman is not self-less, as was (and perhaps still is) commonly believed and projected in Western culture.³ In “‘Syllables of Velvet’: Dickinson, Rossetti and the Rhetoric of Sexuality” Margaret Homans writes: “The ‘I’ of romantic lyric is constitutively masculine, not universal, because in Western poetic and philosophical traditions, self-expressive subjectivity is represented as a male prerogative, and the romantic lyric in particular makes subjectivity itself the subject of poetry” (570). Barrett Browning and Rossetti reclaim the female voice and female subjectivity while they restructure the “subject of poetry.” They thereby contribute to the process of exposing as false the assumption that “women exist only to be acted on by men, both as literary and sensual objects” (Gilbert and Gubar 22).

Many of Barrett Browning’s sonnets function to assert a more honest portrayal of female love; she repeatedly emphasizes the female lover’s self and agency, attempting to prove that “selfless love” was *not* “woman’s destiny” (Rich 47). For instance, in sonnet V the poet-lover compares herself to Electra in a sorrowful expression of (seemingly) unrequited love:

I lift my heavy heart up solemnly,
As once Electra her sepulchral urn,
And, looking in thine eyes, I overturn

³ Gilbert and Gubar go into great detail regarding the etymology of the woman’s (apparent) selflessness. They link it to the foundation of authority in a patriarchal society: “The roots of ‘authority’ tell us, after all, that if woman is man’s property then he must have authored her, just as surely as they tell us that if he authored her she must be his property. As a creation ‘penned’ by man, moreover, woman has been ‘penned up’ or ‘penned in’” (13).

The ashes at thy feet. Behold and see
 What a great heap of grief lay hid in me,
 And how the red wild sparkles dimly burn
 Through the ashen grayness. If thy foot in scorn
 Could tread them out to darkness utterly,
 It might be well perhaps. But if instead
 Thou wait beside me for the wind to blow
 The gray dust up, . . . those laurels on thin head,
 O my beloved, will not shield thee so,
 That none of all the fires shall scorch and shred
 The hair beneath. Stand farther off then! go.

The dimming of the lover's fiery love to ashes suggests unrequited love and death, a negation of her assertion in sonnets I and VII that love does not equal death but in fact saves her from it:

the footsteps of thy soul
 Move still, oh, still, beside me, as they stole
 Betwixt me and . . .
 death, where I, who thought to sink,
 Was caught up into love, and taught the whole
 Of life in a new rhythm. (VII . 2-7)

However, her use of the Electra myth in sonnet V creates subtle tension in the poem which undercuts a simplified reading. According to the myth, Electra's urn contains what she believes to be the ashes of the deceased Orestes. Disguised as a messenger announcing Orestes' death, Orestes himself hands the urn to Electra but fails to inform her that the ashes are a decoy for his enemies: "Electra, believing him to be really dead, takes the urn and, embracing it, pours forth her grief in language full of tenderness and despair" (Gramercy 235).

In Barrett Browning's poem, the poet-lover's expression of grief becomes a decoy intended to provoke her beloved--whom she suspects may indeed requite her love. He can "in scorn" tread upon the "red wild sparkles [which] dimly burn/ Through the ashen

grayness" (6-7), thereby confirming what she does not really fear--that her love for him must die. Alternatively, he can "wait beside" her (10), in which case he may (and probably will) be affected (i.e. scorched (13)) by the fire of her love. Or, he can leave her: "Stand farther off then! go" (14). Because the "ashes" in the urn (i.e. the poet-lover's grief and despair) are only a decoy, the reader and the poet-lover alike suspect that the beloved will not choose this last alternative.

In this single sonnet Barrett Browning effectively parodies several key elements of the (patriarchal) tradition. The (obvious) fact that the woman is no longer a mute(d) object indicates agency and self awareness--inaccessible traits to passive love-objects. The presence of ashes, dying embers and grief instead of fire suggests constancy in love. Contrary to repeated expressions through literary and social history of woman as an inconstant creature, this woman is brought to grief by her constant but unrequited love (usually the claim of men who nevertheless tend to languish in the throes of passionate fire). For instance, in Sonnet 25, Astrophel describes virtuous love:

vertue, if it once met with our eyes,
Strange flames of Love it in our soules would raise;
But for that man with paine this truth descries,
While he each thing in sense's ballance wayes. (1-4)

This seems to be the charitable love or "Kindly flame" which Spenser describes in Book III of The Faerie Queene. Astrophel, however, fails to find the correct balance inherent in such chaste love: "Vertue's great beautie in that face I prove,/ And find th'effect, for I do burne in love" (13-4). Astrophel constantly burns with desire. In Sonnet VI, the Spenserian lover describes chaste love: a flame which is difficult to kindle, but which, "when it once doth burne, it doth divide/ great heat, and makes his flames to heaven

aspire" (7-8). Constant love is depicted in both of these sonnets as a flame. Barrett Browning's use of ashes instead of flames suggests constant love which dies because it is not understood as constant and true. The beloved can either requite her love, rekindling the flame from the "dimly burning sparkles" (6), or he can tread upon those sparkles and permanently staunch the flame of her love.

Barrett Browning's conception of the woman's love as an urn-full of ashes and "red wild sparkles [which] dimly burn" (6) combined with her association of the woman with Electra *within the sonnet genre* also indicate that male constructions of female love throughout sonnet history are unfair and inaccurate. That is, the ashes which cause Electra's outpourings of grief are not in fact the ashes of Orestes (because he was still alive). Similarly, the ashes of love which the female poet-lover pours out at her beloved's feet are *not* the ashes of *her love*, but are the ashes of female love as it is and has been (mis)construed by men and male poets. These *constructions* of female love and female beloveds make *this* poet-lover's heart "heavy" (1) and cause her grief. Thus, she asks him to take responsibility for creating falsities regarding women and love: "It might be well perhaps" (9) if he were to tread "the red wild sparkles . . . to darkness utterly . . . in scorn" (6-9). For, if he does not deny the validity of male conceptions of female love, he will be scorched by those very ashes which he created:

But if instead
 Thou wait beside me for the wind to blow
 The grey dust up, . . . those laurels on thine head,
 . . . will not shield thee so,
 That none of the fires should scorch and shred
 The hair beneath. (11-14)

The male poet-lover, she contends, will be harmed by the falsity of his own work if he dares to “wait beside” (10) her as the truth is made known (by her). In a poem which seems to describe the pain and grief caused by unrequited love (such as that which the poet-lovers of Petrarch’s, Sidney’s, Spenser’s, and even Shakespeare’s sequences typically claim to experience), Barrett Browning subtly articulates her challenge to the dominant tradition. Indeed, that challenge is held, for instance, within her use of the “wind” and “laurels.” Throughout the Rime sparse, Petrarch plays upon Laura’s name, using it to compare her to a breeze (*l’aura*). In this poem, *l’aura* as wind becomes becomes a threat to the fame which the poet achieved through (and at the expense of) it/her. Furthermore, his fame and the constructions of Laura which he articulated (now contained within the word “laurels”) will not protect him when the wind, *l’aura*--the female poet--disturbs the ashes (i.e. his false constructions of female love). As Angela Leighton describes in “Stirring a Dust of Figures: Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Love,” “these are moments when the static iconography of courtly love is playfully disrupted, and the once immovable lady is caught up in quite a lively drama” (17).

Despite the poet-lover’s covert but nonetheless strong assertions in sonnet V, sonnet VI begins: “Go from me. Yet I feel that I shall stand/ Henceforth in thy shadow” (11-2). She seems perpetually caught between captivity and freedom. Sonnet VI functions predominantly as an expression of love and the subjugation which one experiences upon falling in love. The lover surrenders a part of her self to the beloved: “when I sue/ God for myself, He hears that name of thine,/ And sees within my eyes the tears of two” (VI. 12-4). Her appeals to God (and therefore her sins) become the

beloved's also. Following the precedent established by Shakespeare, Barrett Browning complicates subjectivity by collapsing the beloved's identity into that of the lover.

The tension between freedom and captivity also contains resonances of a woman's social position in nineteenth-century England. Before she fell in love, the lover stood "Alone upon the threshold of my door/ Of Individual life" (VI. 3-4).⁴ However, as a woman of the nineteenth-century, such an "Individual life" would be limited by deference and obedience to a male authority (e.g. a father or brother), despite women's struggles throughout the century to gain rights which the patriarchal order had long denied them. Whether she marries or not, her capacity for living an "Individual life" is very limited indeed.

Her declaration that "I feel that I shall stand/ Henceforth in thy shadow" (VI. 1-2) is more than a declaration of love, it is also a continuation of the previous sonnet's sentiments. For, the fact that the poet-lover's declarations of her intention (to give the perpetually silent [female] beloved a voice which will work against the monologue established by the sonnet tradition) are somewhat covert (veiled by the Electra myth and therefore less of a threat to that monologue of patriarchal poetry) suggests that this female poet-lover will remain within the shadows of male poet-lovers and the (silent) beloveds whom they create. Indeed, her prediction turns out to be quite accurate given nineteenth- and twentieth-century critics' (including Christina Rossetti's) determination to view these

⁴ Numerous critics have cited the relevance of doors in Barrett Browning's sonnets and relate them to biographical facts. They perceive them as representations of the captivity imposed upon her by her father. In this respect, her "Individual life" would be one of illness and isolation.

poems as nothing more than Barrett Browning's musings upon her personal life and her relationship with Robert Browning.

While a great deal of critical attention is devoted to Aurora Leigh as a "worthy" piece of literature, the Sonnets from the Portuguese tend to be read disfavouredly because they are perceived as a strictly autobiographical chronology of her courtship with Robert Browning. In an edition of the poems published in 1996 by William Peterson and Julia Markus, "each poem is accompanied on the facing page with *relevant* excerpts from the love letters" (x, emphasis added). By employing this format, the editors intend to impress upon readers that it was "*her* 'life in new rhythm' that she was celebrating and that the idiom of the sequence is inspired mainly by her own experience of awakened love" (x, emphasis added). Similarly, the Variorum edition of her sonnets, published in 1980, uses only Barrett Browning's biography to contextualize the poems. In both the Critical and Textual Introductions, Miroslava Wein Dow contends that the Sonnets from the Portuguese "is the only poetry in which she writes about her own strong and very personal feelings" (vii). Marsh even re-iterates the biographical nature of the sonnets at the expense of one of the sequence's components, its title:

Sonnets from the Portuguese was a decoy title, given to the poems on publication in 1850 and using the grammatical ambivalence to imply that they were translations--such as the 'Portuguese Letters' from Caterina to Camoens, themselves concealed behind a fiction--when in fact they were personal expressions of love to Robert from Elizabeth.
(474)

Marsh joins the large group of critics who tend to dismiss women's writing, as Mermin asserts; "women's writing is all too easily read not just as insincere but, more

damagingly, as artless and spontaneous. When women's poetry (especially love poetry) is powerful, it is assumed to be autobiographical" (357). Her declaration that the Sonnets from the Portuguese presents and autobiographical records of a true romance is, in the words of Angela Leighton, "to miss their literary playfulness, their in-jokes, even, at times, their competitive ingenuity. But above all, it is to miss their sense of the other, remote, difficult language of love, which is inherited from a long-ago of literature" (17).

What these and other critics fail to recall is that alluding to the poet's biography is an important element of the sonnet tradition. Historians and critics still search registries for evidence of Laura's existence. Stella has been linked to Penelope Rich and *Astrophel* to Philip Sidney (indeed, *Astrophel* is often spelt *Astrophil* in order to emphasize the connection). Spenser's wife, mother, and queen were all named Elizabeth--a fact which he makes explicit in sonnet LXXIII. Even Shakespeare alludes to his own biography by naming the lover Will.

Rossetti's sequence has also been scrutinized for autobiographical links. Despite Rossetti's own protests, her younger brother William described them as personal poems written to a "real" male lover, probably Charles Cayley: "William had no doubt. He described the preface as a similar decoy: 'a blind--not an untruthful blind, for it alleges nothing that is not reasonable . . . but still a blind interposed to draw off attention from the writer in her proper person'" (Marsh 474). Although Marsh fails to rescue Barrett Browning's sonnets from a biographical contextualization, she does indeed preserve Monna Innominata from similar treatment, ironically citing the biographical convention inherent to sonnet sequences:

As befits the genre, the beloved person is nowhere identified within the verse, and over the years critics and biographers have hunted for ghosts of supposed lovers who might be hovering between the lines. In the absence of other evidence, most have finally accepted William's statement, with varying degrees of reluctance based on the imperfect fit of the poems to what is known of the relationship. . . . But the sonnets are infinitely more than that. They are the culmination of a literary creation tied not to affection for any particular man, but articulating love in all its aspects—romantic, wistful, steadfast, self-denying, painful, heroic, serene—as it was alive in her heart and her imagination. (474-5)

Like other sonneteers, Barrett Browning and Rossetti each create a persona. While Barrett Browning's sonnets certainly contain biographical elements, they represent more than the plain mirroring or diarizing of Barrett Browning's own life. As Stephenson asserts,

Apparently we have still not quite shaken off the myth that when women write of love it is necessarily instinctive and personal. A knowledge of Barrett Browning's life and letters may illuminate the work, but our appreciation and understanding of [her] as a poet, rather than as a woman, will continue to be restricted as long as there is an insistence on viewing the Sonnets from the Portuguese as the documented story of an actual romance instead of a series of finely crafted poems. (70)

It is interesting that critics deem Barrett Browning's and Rossetti's sonnet collections as *factual* confessions while they perceive those of the male poets as containing only factual elements or allusions. In order to reclaim and subsequently express female subjectivity, Barrett Browning, Rossetti and Wroth *must* write using an intensely personal (i.e. confessional) tone. As Foucault asserts, confession requires "the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but *authority*

who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console and reconcile" (62, emphasis added). While these women write in order to provide other women with new role models (in both a social and literary context), they were aware that they also wrote for male readers--*authorities*. However, unlike the male poet-lovers, the fault which the female poet-lovers confess is more than the transgression or sin of desiring (cupidinously or otherwise). Certainly their desire or love is itself a transgression--women were supposed to be passive objects in love, *but*, the *expression* of such desire, and the appropriation of the masculine subject position in such a traditional poetic genre are greater transgressions. Barrett Browning and Rossetti knew that their expression of love would be judged (disfavourably); however, the attention generated by their transgressions could contribute to liberating both the *idea* of woman and women themselves in men's minds from the strictures imposed on them in a patriarchal order. Their confessions serve (they hope) to promote reconciliation. Thus, insistence on these sequences as (merely) biographical effectively prevents them from functioning as a means of resisting the monologue of the tradition, and has, in the case of Sonnets from the Portuguese, certainly contributed to the decline in the sonnets' popularity over the last fifty years. As a result, the functional role which Barrett Browning attempts to provide has been lost.⁵

The poet-lover of *this* sonnet collection asserts subjectivity and a self in a similar way to that which Miller identifies in Wroth's sonnets. Both female poets strive to

⁵ Indeed, Barrett Browning's sequence has been perceived by male critics as a prescription for the perfect state of female happiness. That is, in their opinion a woman is best married. Despite Barrett Browning's attempts to provide women with a positive role model, worked away from and against patriarchy, the woman is reinstated under the rule of men.

“represent female subjectivity in multiple terms” (Subject 4). Stephenson understands such multiply-conceived subjectivity as a consequence of the female poet’s desire to articulate more than a simple *response* to the (tradition of the) male lover’s impassioned desire:

All the problems that women face in writing lyric become intensified when they turn more specifically to the traditionally male-dominated sonnet sequence and write in the shadow of such poets as Petrarch, Dante, Sidney, and Shakespeare. Instead of simply attempting to speak from a position of the conventionally silent and passive beloved, to speak as a Laura, a Beatrice, [or] a Stella . . . and only *respond* to the lover’s passion, Barrett Browning confounds the traditional roles of lover and beloved . . . and the speaker alternately appears as both active speaking subject and silent passive object. (73)

The poet-lover of Sonnets from the Portuguese is subjected by love. Indeed, such subjection creates the premise for the collection as a whole. In the first sonnet, the poet-lover asserts that Love, as

a mystic Shape did move
Behind me, and drew me backward by the hair,
And a voice said in mastery, while I strove, . . .
“Guess now who holds thee?” (1-4)

Not only is she subjugated to love, but she also subjugates *herself* to love. Sonnet XIV is a plea—asking her beloved to love her not as a physical object with attractive but changeable qualities, but for love’s sake only:

Do not say
‘I love her for her smile . . . her look . . . her way
Of speaking gently. . .’
For these things in themselves, Belovèd, may
Be changed, or change for thee, and love, so wrought,
May be unwrought so. (2-9)

While Shakespeare wrote an anti-blazon which negated Petrarchan stereotypes but maintained the woman's subjugation as the object of the man's gaze (sonnet 130), Barrett Browning creates a counter-blazon in which the woman gently removes herself from that gaze which has for so long objectified and subjugated women like Laura and Stella. Her extrication from the gaze (and therefore from the objective position) is accompanied by the assertion: "If thou must love me, let it be for nought/ Except for love's sake only" (XIV. 1-2). By subjugating herself to *love*, as countless male poet-lovers have done before her, she subtly moves towards the subject position, placing herself and her beloved/male lover into a more balanced relationship. This balance is quietly reinforced throughout the sonnet. For instance, the opening phrase of the sonnet: "If thou must love me" (1) clearly establishes her position as beloved and the man's as lover. Her involvement is passive at this point--she is the object of *his* affection. However, by proceeding to tell him how and why he should love her, she asserts her self: the object is also the subject. As the quatrain continues, she uses an internal rhyme between "only" and "gently" in addition to pauses in the metering to place soft emphasis on the phrase "Of speaking gently":

If thou must love me, let it be for nought
 Except for love's sake only. Do not say
 'I love her for her smile. . . her look. . . her way
 Of speaking gently." (1-4)

Emphasis on feminine speech, so "gentle" perhaps that it went unheard or was overspoken in male-authored sonnet collections, suggests (praised) agency and the possibility that the woman can (and should) be a subject as well as an object.

Barrett Browning further complicates the tension between subjectivity and objectivity in sonnet XVI. The beloved becomes king-like in this poem. He may, she suggests, “conquer” her:

And yet, because thou overcomest so,
 Because thou art more noble and like a king,
 Thou canst prevail against my fears and fling
 Thy purple round me, till my heart shall grow
 Too close against thine heart, henceforth to know
 How it shook when alone. Why, conquering
 May prove as lordly and complete a thing
 In lifting upward, as in crushing low!
 And as a vanquished soldier yields his sword
 To one who lifts him from the bloody earth,—
 Even so, Belovèd, I at last record,
 Here ends my strife. If *thou* invite me forth,
 I rise above abasement at the word.
 Make thy love larger to enlarge my worth.

The word “conquer” combined with the comparison of the poet-lover to a “vanquished soldier” indicate that her subjugation to him has been a difficult accomplishment, but one which she nevertheless accepts. However, in conquering her heart, he does not “crush” her, but lifts her “upward” (8). Her “worth” is “enlarged” when he “flings” his “purple round [her]” (3, 4, 14). The conquered subject does not relinquish her self or agency. Unlike the speakers of Petrarch’s, Sidney’s, Spenser’s or Shakespeare’s sonnets, this poet-lover does not describe the beloved as a tyrant because he conquers her heart. Instead, the lover and the beloved both grow in worth and nobility. By confounding subjectivity and objectivity in her sonnets, Barrett Browning articulates more than a simple response to the passive and silent position created by the male-dominated tradition. She thereby creates an honest and realistic portrayal of love from a woman’s point of view.

Like Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti articulates more than a mere response to the dominant tradition in her sonnet sequence. By the time of Monna Innominata's publication in 1881, sonneteering was back in vogue after an extended lapse throughout the eighteenth-century. Many people (read men) wrote amatory sequences and simultaneously introduced diversity into the genre; according to William Going, "one of the chief contributions of the nineteenth-century sonneteer was the broadening of the possible uses of the genre" (57). Rossetti wrote, then, in an atmosphere in which tradition and experimentation were blended. Indeed, while she was writing Monna Innominata, her brother Dante Gabriel was writing The House of Life, a sequence which, in its explorations of sensual and spiritual love, "suggested the charm of Petrarch's Laura and the mystery of Shakespeare's Dark Lady" (Going 21). The House of Life is a loosely arranged, thematically linked collection, while Monna Innominata--subtitled "A Sonnet of Sonnets"--is strictly structured, with each of the fourteen sonnets "corresponding" to a line of a sonnet (i.e. the first four sonnets comprise the first quatrain, the second four the second quatrain, the ninth sonnet contains the turn and so on).

In her introduction to the sequence, Rossetti makes it clear that several traditions engender her sonnets. Not only do Dante's Beatrice and Petrarch's Laura inspire her poetry, so do "a bevy of unnamed ladies" celebrated in the songs of "a school of less conspicuous poets" (86) who preceded Dante and Petrarch. Her assertion that each of these women "have alike paid the penalty of exceptional honour, and have come down to us resplendent with charms, but scant of attractiveness" (86) is an interesting one. Female honour (as it is patriarchally conceived) makes these women acceptable and even

venerable subjects/objects of male authored poetry. However, such honour is also a penalty because it makes the woman “scant of attractiveness”; because she becomes an absent presence without body or soul she is --from a *woman's* point of view--an unattractive role model. The unnamed lady whom *she* creates is more than an absent presence: “When Rossetti gives the *monna innominata* a voice, she also gives her a *character* rather than the merely idealized ‘charms’ traditionally projected upon such female objects of desire” (Harrison 184).

Thus, the concern which inspired “In An Artist’s Studio” also gave rise to Rossetti’s Monna Innominata, a sonnet sequence which expresses discontent with those roles and constructions, and in such expression actively works against both the tradition which assigns those constructions, and against the roles themselves. As Sharon Leder and Andrea Abbott assert in their book The Language of Exclusion: The Poetry of Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti, “Not only do their [Rossetti’s and Dickinson’s] poetic voices defend the autonomy and strength of women alone, they take responsibility for ‘self’ in an age when conventional literature prescribed exactly the opposite roles for women” (10). Rossetti’s concern is condensed into the first couplet of sonnet 11: “Many in aftertimes will say of you/ “He loved her”--while of me what will they say?” The answer to that question, “Not that I loved you more than just in play,/ For fashion’s sake as idle women do” (3-4), is one which male sonneteers-- in their constructions of the cold, cruel fair--lead readers to formulate. Through the voice of this “Donna Innominata,” the *proper* response is revealed: those who “prate . . . know not what we knew/ Of love and parting in exceeding pain” (5-6). This woman loves her beloved as

much as each man of male-authored sonnet collections claimed to love his beloved: “by my heart of love laid bare to you,/ My love that you can make not void nor vain” (9-10).

Rossetti’s sonnet sequence responds to the sonnet tradition in order to recreate or revise women’s roles; by adding a woman’s perspective to the sonnet tradition, Rossetti hopes to overgo the positions prescribed for women in art (and literature) specifically, and in society generally. She thereby contributes to a kind of palimpsest in which a variety of voices create a richly textured discourse—through the variety in voices change can be initiated. Isobel Armstrong describes Rossetti’s (and indeed Barrett Browning’s and Wroth’s) effects in writing sonnets in “Christina Rossetti—Diary of a Feminist Reading”:

And since poetry does not simply reproduce but creates and becomes the materials of cultural forms themselves, this reciprocity seemed promising for the way out of the impasse which makes women the passive object of a special or marginalized experience. It makes the woman poet an agent. (167)

The poet-lover or “unnamed lady” of Rossetti’s sonnet sequence accuses the male lover: “you construed me/ And loved me for what might or might not be” (4. 6-7) and in the course of the sequence precedes to show him where he went wrong in (mis)construing.

Similarly, as I have already discussed, Rossetti is critical of Barrett Browning’s expression of female love, believing it to confirm the woman’s position as it is established within and by the tradition which created Beatrice, Laura and the “*donne innominate*” who preceded them. In the last sentence of the introduction, Rossetti asserts that Barrett Browning’s poet-lover fails to provide “an inimitable ‘*donna innominata*’ . . . worthy to occupy a niche beside Beatrice and Laura” (86); this sentence combined with

the title of her own sequence suggests that *she* does create such a woman (who is “drawn not from fancy but from feeling” (86)).

The ambiguity contained within the word “of” in the sub-title to Monna Innominata: A Sonnet of Sonnets confirms this assertion. Certainly “of” suggests composition in that Monna Innominata is a single sonnet in which each line is itself a sonnet. “Of” also means about. As a sequence by a woman *about* sonnets (written by men), Monna Innominata addresses the tradition of love lyrics and the constructions of women which they perpetuate. This, combined with the fact that the woman who speaks will be “worthy to occupy a niche beside Beatrice and Laura” results in quite a strong assertion given the “name” of the woman who speaks (i.e. “Nameless Lady”). That is, Rossetti “can imagine many a lady” regardless of when she lived--as “sharing her lover’s poetic aptitude” (86).

Hence Rossetti initiates the inclusion of her voice in the dialogic, participatory poetics of the sonnet tradition. As Antony Harrison notes in “Intertextuality: Dante, Petrarch and Christina Rossetti,” Rossetti “employs parodic reworkings of literary palimpsests, their forms and themes, precisely in order to present a critique of particular deficiencies and false values basic to the reality of Victorian England” (178). While Rossetti’s response and reworkings evolved as a (partial) consequence of a “pervasive Dantean influence” (Packer 14) in addition to a strong Petrarchan influence, her conceptualization of the palimpsests of the sonnet tradition also included English Elizabethan works. The Italian writers’ works structure the sequence (down to its title),

while the English tradition is manifested in subtle references to and reworkings of courtly love and sonnet conventions.

The tension between secular and spiritual love which the unnamed lady experiences--somewhat like that which the Petrarchan poet-lover expresses--has been well documented by other critics. Harrison, for instance, asserts that "The sequence . . . tests the boundaries of literary and religious traditions, especially as these appear to conflict and to intersect with each other" (182). The tension between *cupiditas* and *caritas* firmly plants Rossetti's sequence within the tradition, and simultaneously functions--as it did in Petrarch's Rime sparse, Sidney's Astrophel and Stella, and Spenser's Amoretti and Epithalamion--as a framing device. Within that frame she can then rework, re-express and thereby respond to other conventions of the tradition. Such conventions include the collapsing of the lover's and beloved's identities into each other, and the desire for pity.

As it was in Shakespeare's sonnets, the equivocation of the beloved's identity with the lover's own is given prevalence in Monna Innominata. The first sonnet expresses anguish over the separation of the lover and beloved. As befits the genre, Rossetti begins the sequence proper by establishing the barrier and distance between the lover (the absence of this barrier from the Sonnets from the Portuguese led to Rossetti's criticisms of it).⁶ In establishing the barrier between the lover and the beloved, the poet-lover gives herself a space from which to speak. She uses that space in sonnet 4 to blur the division

⁶ While the barrier in fourteenth- and sixteenth-century sequences was typically the married status of the beloved, it is unknown in Rossetti's sequence. If it was inappropriate for a woman to express love and desire (in poetry), her expression of desire for a *married* man would be a completely unacceptable transgression.

between her identity and that of her beloved. She begins the process by establishing her constancy in love, and his misappropriation of her (self). The sonnet begins with an assertion of agency: "I loved you first" (1). That assertion then extends to a description of the process by which the woman becomes other: "but afterwards your love,/ Outsoaring mine, sang such a loftier song/ As drowning the friendly cooings of my dove" (1-3). Her description of the woman's "cooing" voice as "drowned" by the "outsoaring song" of the man effectively concentrates the process by which women like Laura, Beatrice, Stella, Elizabeth and Shakespeare's Dark Lady came to be the subject of the male voice and consequently became subject to that voice. Despite the over-riding tension between subjectivity and subjection (and many a man's claims that she is/was otherwise), the woman remains constant in her love: "My love was long,/ And yours one moment seemed to wax more strong" (4-5). His desire for eloquent poetry exceeds his desire for her resulting in both an assertion of love for her that is stronger than the love actually is, and in false constructions of her: "you construed me/ And loved me for what might or might not be" (6-7).

Line 8 then initiates the turn: "Nay, weights and measures do us both a wrong." She describes the discrepancies between the lover and beloved in previous sonnet collections in order to prove their false nature. That is, because the beloved's identity becomes that of the lover and vice-versa, they are equals in love:

For verily love knows not "mine" or "thine;"
 With separate "I" and "thou" free love has done,
 For one is both and both are one in love:
 Rich love knows nought of "thine that is not mine;"
 Both of us have the strength and both the length thereof,
 Both of us, of the love which makes us one. (9-14)

While Shakespeare's Will collapses the lover's and beloved's identities into each other in order to allow him to re-subject his beloved(s) to his desire (i.e. to objectify them), the *Monna innominata* uses the device to establish equality between herself and the man, and thereby to validate her own voice (and expressions of love).

She furthers the expression of that equality in sonnet 7. The Petrarchan epigraph to this sonnet clearly contextualizes her intention: "Conversing with me, and I with him." The reciprocity which the epigraph establishes makes it clear that *this* poet-lover, unlike those who precede her, does not intend to create a monologue which silences or perhaps nullifies the beloved as object's subjectivity. Rossetti creates interesting tension in this way, for the sequence itself is indeed a discourse of "an individual realizing himself" (Bakhtin 254), *but* an important component of that discourse is the voice and subjectivity of the beloved. Paradoxically, and *like* poet-lovers such as Astrophel, she then dictates the beloved's response. The pause at the end of the first line seems to provide a space for the beloved's voice--the reader expects that the poet-lover will continue her musings of the dialogue. Instead, she fills in that space, telling her beloved how to respond: "'Love me, for I love you'--and answer me,/ 'Love me, for I love you'" (7. 1-2). Unlike Barrett Browning who destabilizes the subject-object positions by asking her beloved to love her for love's sake, this poet-lover uses the tensions inherent to subjecting another *to* one's love and being subjected *by* another (and another's love or desire) in order to establish the equality between the lover and the beloved. Indeed, by establishing the man and woman "as equals in the flowering land/ Of love" (7. 3-4), in this way, neither of them becomes an other; their relationship is structured in terms of multiplicity.

In considering the *Monna innominata*'s requests that her beloved "Love me, for I love you," one cannot help but recall Astrophel's complaints and pleadings. For instance, in the couplet of sonnet 35, Astrophel declares "praise in thee is raisde:/ It is a praise to praise, when thou art praisde" (13-4). Similarly, in sonnet 57 he states "I hoped her to bring/ To feele my griefes, and she, with face and voice/ So sweets my paines that my paines me rejoyce" (12-4). Like the *Monna innominata*, Astrophel asks the beloved to love him because he loves her. Unlike the *Monna innominata*, his love is associated with "truth [which] . . . must speake like flatterie" (35. 1) and "flames" of desire (35. 5). He seeks the consummation of his (physical) desire, not the mutual confirmation of love which the female poet-lover seeks.

The female poet-lover's musings in sonnet 8 also resonate with images from the English sonnet tradition. Rossetti uses the biblical figure of Esther (instead of the Greek figure of Cupid) to explore the convention of the woman's beauty as a trap set to capture the man:

"I, if I perish, perish"--Esther spake:
 And bride of life or death she made her fair
 In all the lustre of her perfumed hair
 And smiles that kindle longing but to slake.
 She put on pomp of loveliness, to take
 Her husband through his eyes at unaware;
 She spread abroad her beauty for a snare,
 Harmless as doves and subtle as a snake.
 She trapped him with one mesh of silken hair,
 She vanquished him by wisdom of her wit,
 And built her people's house that it should stand:--
 If I might take my life so in my hand,
 And for my love to Love put up my prayer,
 And for love's sake by Love be granted it!

Sonnet 12 of Astrophel and Stella explores the same theme. Astrophel likens her “lockes” to Cupid’s “day-nets” from which “none scapes free” (2). He describes her “lips” as “full” of Cupid (3). But, “her heart is such a Cittadell,/ So fortified with wit, stor’d with disdain,/ That to win it, is all the skill and paine” (12-4).

Images of the woman’s beauty as nets which captivate the lover also resonate throughout Spenser’s sonnets. For instance, in the first quatrain of sonnet XLVII the poet lover describes her beauty as a hook:

Trust not the treason of those smyling lookes,
until ye have theyr guylefull traynes well tryde:
for they are lyke but unto golden hookes,
that from the foolish fish theyr bayts doe hyde. (1-4)

It is interesting that while the male poet-lovers perceive themselves as snared by the beauty of an *indifferent* and disdainful woman, the female poet-lover—using the figure Esther to assert the need for female agency in love—emphasizes beauty as necessary in order to attract love/the beloved. Rossetti confirms the male lovers’ assertions that “her beauty . . . [is] a snare” (7-8); the idea that “she vanquished him by wisdom of her wit” (10) suggests deliberate use of her beauty. However, contrary to Astrophel’s claim that she uses her wit to keep the lover away, the *Monna innominata* claims that she uses her wit (and her beauty) not to disdain love, but to gain love: “If I might take my life so in my hand,/ And for my love to Love put up my prayer,/ And for love’s sake by Love be granted it!” (12-4). This woman sees Esther and the agency which she demonstrates as a role model: not only does she use her beauty to attract love, but in doing so, she proves that women are not selfless. Rossetti introduces a new mythological figure or (female) role-model in order to rework the position of the woman in the tradition of love lyrics.

Unlike the male poet-lovers, the speakers of Barrett Browning's and Rossetti's sonnet collections do not overtly seek pity. Rossetti uses the Petrarchan lover's assertion "I hope to find pity not only pardon" to contextualize the poem in which she admits the woman's use of her beauty to captivate the man. She thereby confirms the woman's position as one worthy of the reader's pity, but does not repeatedly beg for the reader's or the beloved's pity. The absence of this sonnet convention relates to the female poet-lover's requests that the beloved "love for love's sake" and "love me, for I love you." That is, the women seek to remove themselves from the objectivizing male gaze: to beg for pity would reposition them in the passive, helpless, object position while the male would re-occupy the active subject position. In his book The Unbearable Lightness of Being, Milan Kundera explores the relationship between pity and compassion:

All languages that derive from Latin form the word "compassion" by combining the prefix "with" . . . and the root meaning "suffering" . . . compassion means: we cannot look on coolly as others suffer. Another word with approximately the same meaning, "pity" . . . connotes a certain condescension towards the sufferer. "To take pity on a woman" means that we are better off than she, that we stoop to her level, lower ourselves. (20-1)

The female poet-lovers of Rossetti's and Barrett Browning's sonnets do not wish to be subjugated in such a way; hence, they rework the convention of pity, leaving it out in place of forms of love which connote a more balanced and equal relationship. In their creation of loving relationships—one characterized by the requited love of marriage, the other by the distance which typically separate the lover and beloved in more traditional sonnet collections—in a typically male-dominated genre, Barrett Browning and Rossetti—like Wroth before them—respond to and rework the genre, giving voice to female desire

and proving that women are not passive objects, but active agents who, like men, are capable of fashioning a self.

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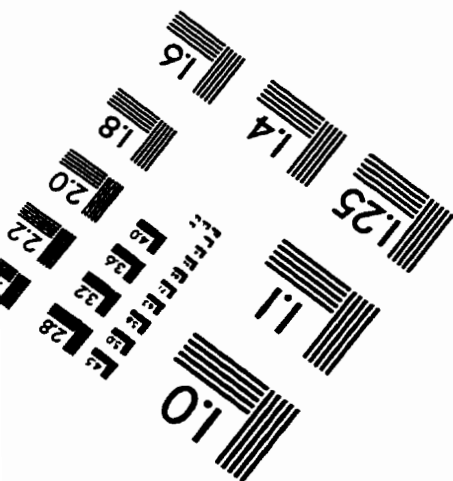
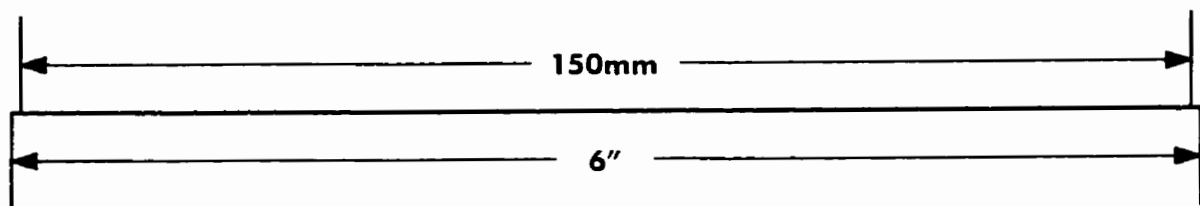
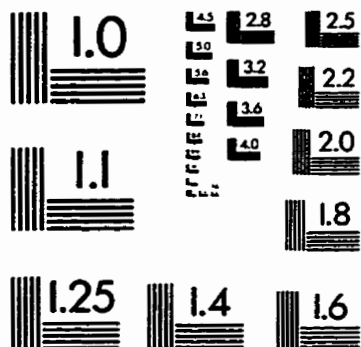
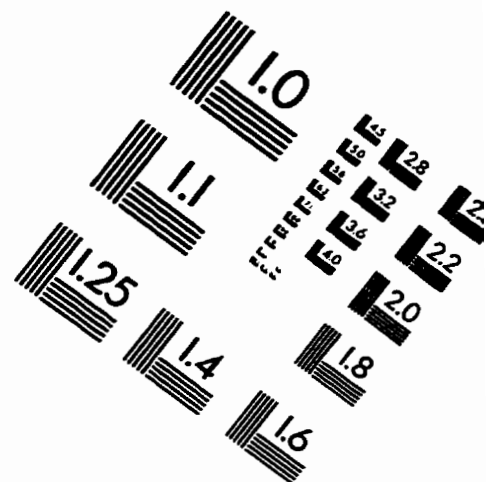
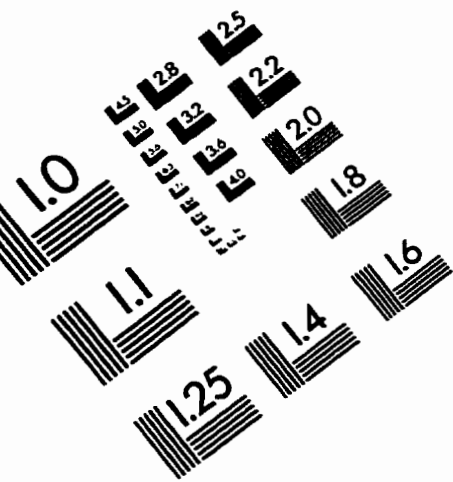
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