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Lies, Evasions, and Friendly Networks in Mary Wroth's *Urania*

JONATHAN SHELLEY

When Pamphilia, the principal heroine of Mary Wroth's *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, and Antissia, the “uncontrolled, passionate, self-destructive” antiheroine of Wroth's romance, find themselves covertly competing with one another for the love of Amphilanthus, they appear as both the unlikeliest of friendly candidates and persons perfectly suited to become friends.¹ On the one hand, Pamphilia's “[o]ft” wishing Antissia “dead, or her beauty marr'd” and Antissia becoming “perfectly jealous” over Pamphilia's perceived “perfections” amount to a textbook example of René Girard's theory of mimetic rivalry and thus a notable demonstration of how similitude, the long-held core tenet of friendship, can actually disrupt the social connection it is believed to inspire (91.40 and 93.34–5).² On the other hand, it is this very conflict that sets the two women up to proceed as so many exemplary friends in early English literature have before. Chaucer's Palamon and Arcite in *The Canterbury Tales*, Spenser's Cambel and Triamond in *The Faerie Queene*, and, to cite an all-female example, Shakespeare's Hermia and Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* all go through a phase of likeness-based antagonism over shared romantic desire—and come to physical blows on account of it—before achieving a more harmonious coexistence.³ In this sense, Pamphilia and Antissia pose as yet another example of an established social formula, if not outright literary tradition, for

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how alike friendly candidates could, should, and will proceed if they wish to take their friendship to the next level: duke it out until you are able to differentiate yourselves and finally get along.

Yet rather than engage in the all-out antagonism that seems to be the necessary and perhaps even virtuous next step for friendship, Pamphilia and Antissia take pains to avoid such conflict through a canny deployment of lies and verbal evasions. When Antissia ultimately sidles up to a lovelorn Pamphilia to inquire about the "grievous complaints" of her "friend," Pamphilia responds by criticizing the zealotry of Antissia's inquiry in an attempt to avoid admitting her love for Amphilanthus and thus rivalry with Antissia (94.13 and 94.16). When Antissia presses the issue and suggests that, given her own love for Amphilanthus, she may have to "be a rivall with the rarest Princesse Pamphilia," Pamphilia chooses to lie outright and denies having any romantic feeling for Amphilanthus at all before encouraging Antissia to pursue Amphilanthus on the grounds that "she did resemble him" and was thus "like to true vertue" (96.35 and 97.9–10). The praise is as dubious as Antissia's initial identification of Pamphilia as a friend, but it is nevertheless successful in realizing an immediate and more permanent sense of social harmony as the two leave the scene "holding each other by the arme, with as much love, as love in them could joyne," become increasingly close as the romance progresses, and, as I will detail later, even come to advocate for one another in both social and romantic matters (97.13–4).

Critics have tended to read such lies and deceptions in *Urania* as an implicit critique of friendship that casts suspicion on the very relationship itself. As Sheila T. Cavanagh has argued, the friends in *Urania* typically feature the oft-valORIZED "radical likeness of sex and station" that Laurie Shannon describes in her book *Sovereign Amity*; however, *Urania* also "exposes the limitations of reliance on similitude" as characters often "choose lies or betrayal when their lives become uncomfortably complicated, so that the tenets of friendship are often compromised, with long-term and widespread consequences."⁴ Tom MacFaul has similarly described early modern friendship as a "will o' the wisp" that initially compels persons to seek out the Humanist ideal of absolute semblance with another but subsequently forces persons to recognize the "importance of difference in friendship and the impermanence of any individual friendship" when such likeness proves unsustainable.⁵ Generally speaking, the lies in *Urania* at best pose as a temporary means to deny a necessary differentiation or at worst reveal friendship to be an empty category entirely,

a rhetoric used to promote a superficial civility that masks a very real antagonism between persons.

But in light of the rather positive, long-term developments that Pamphilia and Antissia's perfidy engenders, I want to argue that lies do not signal a "compromised" faltering of friendship so much as a deliberate attempt to assume an entirely different social ethic, one that challenges the primacy of heterosexual romantic desire, the exclusive dyadic coupling it encourages, and the inevitable antagonism such configurations supposedly produce. In other words, when Pamphilia lies, she certainly does commit a betrayal in that she temporarily suppresses her passion for Amphilanthus, but she does so in the interest of establishing a social congeniality with the woman before her. Lies like Pamphilia's thus might function as a suspicious deferral of truth in a particular moment, but their continuous deployment over the course of Wroth's romance constitutes a more radical refusal to engage in the existing social paradigm's competitive structure and a determination to create a more expansive amicability that can exist alongside, rather than clash with, an existing heterosexual romantic desire.

In this way, *Urania* is less the story of friendship's inevitable breakdown and more one about friendship's ability to subsume and transform a complex variety of feelings—even ugly sentiments and actions like lying—into positive social relations. To put it another way, Pamphilia's lie allows or, in a sense, makes room for a congeniality that might coexist alongside her hostility toward Antissia and disappointment with Amphilanthus. Such a lie may look like a realist compromise, a willingness to forgo what one truly wants in the interest of promoting a larger civility in a crowded and complex social world. But the key to these moments is the way in which they establish an ever-present social harmony through a practice of self-modification that can court a larger variety of emotional landscapes.

Furthermore, it is precisely this emotional expansion that defies the mandate of dyadic social union and facilitates the creation of larger friendly groups and networks. To be sure, the emergence of such plural social configurations in *Urania* is, in part, a matter of course. In the case of Pamphilia and Antissia, only one can ultimately be coupled with Amphilanthus, meaning that at least one or even both will have to forgo the investment in an exclusive union with Amphilanthus and engage with a larger social world if she is to find a replacement for her romantic affections. *Urania* thus routinely deconstructs the dyadic model of social life—be it a reliance on the harmony of similar pairs of

friends or the singular pursuit of a specific romantic partner—and embraces the cultivation of more diverse and varied forms of social organization as a means to hedge against the contingency of any singular relationship. But rather than render this all-too-familiar situation a zero-sum game in which persons either win or lose, attain or relinquish that which they predominantly desire, Wroth's romance depicts the varied emotional positions and practices that persons use in order to manage multiple social connections with multiple people at once.

These friendly networks that emerge in Wroth's romance ultimately reflect something like the "wider frame" that Alan Bray has encouraged critics to pursue in the study of friendship. As Bray notes in *The Friend*, the traditional impulse to treat friendship as an "essentially private" relationship that primarily serves the interests and pleasures of friends themselves has led to an overemphasis on sexual eroticism within friendship as well as an obfuscation of the ways in which friends were part of "a larger frame of reference that lay *outside* the good of the individual for whom the friendship was made."⁶ For Bray, this pursuit, methodologically speaking, still relies on the structure of the pair: it was the centrality of the pair that allowed for a precipitation of bonds between those who were associated with, rather than contained within, a given friendship. But Wroth explodes this concept by exploring how a wider frame is achieved through a removal of reliance on the pair and the prescribed dynamics of erotic love. Rather than showing how the pair is a means to get to the social expansion that Bray has described, friends like Pamphilia and Antissia make decisions that are not purely about their individual interests and the maintenance of exclusive pairs. Quite simply, they look outside themselves and consider the wider frame of their social actions and circumstances in order to create and sustain a collective social network.⁷

It is this recasting of *Urania* as a progressive embracement of friendship's emotionally expansive wider frame that challenges the conception of Wroth's romance or at least friendship's status in the genre. Critics have long appreciated *Urania* for what Josephine A. Roberts calls its "satirical method," a method that "reveals a rupture between the world of high idealism and that of hard, pragmatic circumstance."⁸ Indeed, it is this assessment that underscores Cavanagh's own diagnosis of *Urania* as a romance about how "seemingly contradictory qualities of true friendship and 'reality' intersect and collide."⁹ But the very fact that a friendship like Pamphilia and Antissia's gets better as things go on in

Urania transforms romance into a far more constructive genre, one that shows that the qualities of “true” friendship and “reality” are capable of being one and the same. With an emphasis on the relinquishment of exclusive dyads as the fundamental organizing structure of social life, *Urania*’s satirical moments become steps in a larger process of social improvement.

It is also the genre of romance and its attendant length specifically that makes this incremental improvement of friendship both possible and visible. As Naomi J. Miller has pointed out, one of Wroth’s “innovations” in *Urania* is the “decision to develop the relationships among her characters not only before but also after marriage,” thereby freeing her romance from the “traditional terminus of romantic couplings” and “enabling a consideration of the continuity of relationships over time.”¹⁰ Indeed, it is this tracking “over time” that reorients seemingly familiar events and produces a sheer “multiplicity” of other ones: moments, usually romantic, that might otherwise pose as scenes of social fortune and finality become mere prefaces to more complex social after-lives; supposedly minor events—chance conversation, private rumination—signal fundamental shifts in social consideration.¹¹ As a result, *Urania* offers a social *mélange* or Sidneian “mixed mode” that disallows one from reading friendship through singular romantic episodes and realist disruptions.¹² Instead, one must read friendship through a constant introduction of positive and negative feelings, occurrences that render friendship an emotionally pliable and expansive relationship that is ultimately defined by endurance and growth.¹³

THE LIES THAT BIND

Despite the ultimate emergence and tacit celebration of social networks in *Urania*, the characters in Wroth’s romance do not start out as progressive denizens ready to embrace a variety of pluralist social options. From the beginning, they are overwhelmingly governed by an investment in social, notably romantic, pairing, the so-called “‘Noah’s ark’ convention” that defines so many romances.¹⁴ In fact, the desire for romantic union and its implicit privileging of the couple form is so strong in *Urania* that characters are quick to assert themselves as destined for a particular romantic pairing and take pains to insist on that supposed destiny. Within the first thirty pages of Wroth’s romance, the hero Parselius, after a brief but committed courtship of the titular heroine Urania, “resolve[s], whatsoever she was, to make

[Urania] his Wife" (26.19–20). Shortly after being rescued by Amphilanthus, Antissia has the "fortune" to "marke (with so yeelding a heart) the lovelinesse, sweetnes, braverie, and strength of the famous Amphilanthus," and both are "content to think they loved, and so to know those paines" (60.39–40 and 61.6–7). And when Pamphilia condemns Amphilanthus's first praise of Antissia, Amphilanthus, fully aware of Pamphila's devotion to him, observes that he "had never seene ... so much prettie envie in her" (61.42–62.1). With such strong convictions, characters are already wedded to the organization of romantic coupling and have little interest in, to use John S. Garrison's phrase, "rethink[ing] the model of dyadic sociality itself."¹⁵

However, more astute characters like Pamphilia do find themselves lamenting the fact that they are bound to such a rigid social paradigm. Upon hearing Amphilanthus's praise for Antissia, Pamphilia is perturbed that the man to whom she has only shown love could so easily change his affection. She is also perturbed by the torment she inflicts on herself by continuing to love him. "Alas," she proclaims, "what have I deserved to bee thus tyrannically tortured by love? and in his most violent course, to whom I have ever been a most true servant? Had I wrong'd his name, scornd his power, or his might, then I had been justly censured to punishment: but ill Kings, the more they see obedience, tread the more upon their subjects; so doth this all conquering King. O love, look but on me, my heart is thy prey, my self thy slave, then take some pity on me" (62.7–13).

Pamphilia's lament crystalizes the relation between the two prevalent "motifs" that Barbara Kiefer Lewalski has identified in Wroth's romance: "the tyranny of love, and the ubiquity of male inconstancy."¹⁶ As Pamphilia observes, she has not "wrong'd" love by being unfaithful to Amphilanthus, thus there is no good reason for Amphilanthus to forsake her. However, her own unwillingness to stop loving Amphilanthus only licenses more "tyrannical[]" abuse or the ability for "ill Kings" to "tread the more upon their subjects." Pamphilia, we could say, should just get over Amphilanthus and stop loving him. But Pamphilia's ideological vision of her love relationship with Amphilanthus as nothing less than a two-way master-subject monarchy leaves her unable to conceive of herself as anything other than a "slave" bound to a "King." Accordingly, she resigns herself to being "tyrannically tortured by love" or essentially bound to a narrative that only sees a future in the dyadic union with this supposedly intended partner.

Yet in having Pamphilia describe her experience with love as specifically “tyrannical,” Wroth cannily introduces the specter of friendship into her romance. As Shannon notes, “Writers commonly employed the trope of a virtuous friendship between equals as a contrast to the conditions of engagement with a political tyrant.” As a result, “The unsubordinating relation of friendly equals represents an alternative to the subordination without limits attempted by the tyrannical rulers.”¹⁷ Here, Wroth does not explicitly evoke the anti-tyranny of friendship, but she approaches the notion in a kind of reverse. By aligning the conception of tyranny with romantic love and its commitment to dyadic relations, friendship poses as an expressly anti-tyrannical alternative to the romantically based organization of social life. If Pamphilia could embrace the ethic of friendship, that is to say, she would be able to exist in far more independent and thus equitable circumstances with someone like Amphilanthus.¹⁸

The implicit struggle of *Urania*, then, is to escape the devotion to dyadic union—something that inspires characters to see almost any other social connection as a threat—and to assume an anti-tyrannical friendliness that might be able to humor a larger variety of social possibilities with multiple persons. However, the assumption of such a social ethic proves to be particularly difficult precisely because the reigning social tenets are only prepared to foster relationships between close dyadic pairs. As scholars have long pointed out, Wroth’s romance is preoccupied with its female characters practicing a “heroics of constancy” that stands in opposition to the whims of fickle male lovers.¹⁹ In this way, the women in *Urania* stand as models of “Stoic virtue” that prove most able to sustain social order.²⁰ But, as more recent critics have observed, it is this same hard-lined constancy that produces the “competition between women for a man” which “leads regularly to a mimetic and eristic response by the individual women involved.”²¹ With no willingness to modify or change, “absolute constancy,” as Chanmi Ko points out, risks being “associated with pertinacity,” little more than “obstinacy in negative terms.”²²

Such obstinacy is what Pamphilia exhibits when she is approached by Antissia and first identified as a “friend.” In her unwillingness to betray a previously determined constancy—or even allow Antissia to downplay her own love for Amphilanthus—Pamphilia’s initial reaction to Antissia’s goading questions about her “sighes and teares” is to call her companion’s bluff and demand a more honest approach (95.1). “[M]ee thinks you grow too neere me;” Pamphilia tells Antissia, “bare friendship not being

able so cunningly to sift one, therefore it makes me thinke some other cause moves this care in you; if so, freely speake it, and I will as freely satisfie" (95.5–8). The subtext, of course, is that Pamphilia does not find Antissia's concern about her well-being credible; or that Antissia, through an errant claim to friendship, is merely trying to gauge the field with the ultimate goal of winning Amphilanthus for herself. To "freely speake" or tell the truth, it seems, would rid the moment of this deception and usher their alleged friendship into a state of genuine honesty about their intentions, romantic or otherwise.²³ The irony of this request lies in the fact that such honesty would lead the two back into an eristic paradigm that is founded on the vision of self-interested dyadic union. For all its intention of elevating the relationship between her and Antissia, Pamphilia's response seems poised only to lead the two women back into a pursuit of heterosexual dyadic union, or at least an admission of devotion to that system and the inevitable conflict that it produces.

Thus, when Antissia actually tries to steer the conversation toward the frank honesty that Pamphilia had encouraged by asserting that her love for Amphilanthus would make her a "rivall with the rarest Princesse Pamphilia"—a hypothetical claim that very much describes the reality of the moment—Pamphilia actually doubles down on the conversation's duplicity in an attempt to avoid any actual strife (96.35). First, she denies loving Amphilanthus and claims that her affection for him is based on his "never enough praised merits, but not for love otherwise" (96.38–9). Second, she actually encourages Antissia to pursue Amphilanthus by assuring Antissia that "she did resemble him" and was thus "like to true vertue" (97.9–10). Not only does this keep the two women from going at one another, it actually yields the most halcyon image of the two to date: upon hearing this answer, Antissia embraces Pamphilia and the two leave "holding each other by the arme, with as much love, as love in them could joyne" (97.13–4).

Of course, Pamphilia's lie can be considered a last-ditch attempt at keeping things peaceable in an otherwise contentious moment, a phenomenon that Cavanagh seems to identify when she describes the propensity of Wroth's characters to "choose lies or betrayal when their lives become uncomfortably complicated."²⁴ However, in a social world that before this has so implicitly prioritized the pursuit of dyadic love bonds, this lie stands as a novel departure from the paradigm of private affection in pairs and the social antagonism that it inspires. In fact, Pamphilia and Antis-

sia openly acknowledge how the moves within their conversation are deliberate attempts to withdraw from the dyadic assumption of social life that assumes union with Amphilanthus is the only satisfactory social option. Right after Pamphilia claims to love Amphilanthus only for “his never enough praised merits,” Antissia, in a nod to friendship’s counter-tyrannical efforts, thanks Pamphilia for “this royall freedome she had found in her” (96.38 and 97.2–3). Similarly, Pamphilia, right before embracing Antissia, points out that the love for Amphilanthus and “his dependances doe so vex us, as they take away all other societie” (97.11). It is a remarkably self-aware statement that recognizes the ways in which the overzealous allegiance to dyadic union and all its attendant responses—jealousy, rivalry, competition—stifles a larger friendly “societie” that could otherwise exist between them and others. If Pamphilia and Antissia could free themselves from an exclusive devotion to a singular person, they would open themselves up to interactions or friendships with other potential love interests and no longer have to engage in their rivalry with each other. The lie thus does not totally abandon the animus the characters have for one another. Instead, it allows the characters to live with those feelings by placing them alongside a larger set of sympathies and social interests.

What then appears to be an episode of extended lying that is patently antithetical to friendship instead becomes a way to model an alternative vision of social organization that would make cooperative living possible. In the beginning of this scene, Pamphilia and Antissia are chiefly interested in asserting a private confidence in their individual love for Amphilanthus. However, once Pamphilia recognizes that such exclusivity is a deeply uncertain prospect, she feigns “favour” for Antissia in an attempt to coexist, rather than compete, with her rival (97.3). To be clear, such an utterance is a disingenuous nicety. Both still possess the love for Amphilanthus and thus the likeness that makes them rivals. But it is for this reason that the lie does not mark a relinquishment of romantic feeling in an effort to assume an unproblematic differentiation. Rather, the lie serves as an expansion of the self, a testing of affective boundaries, that makes for a larger and potentially better social union. Pamphilia can love Amphilanthus and be less perturbed by his inconstancy so long as she removes herself from the vision of dyadic exclusivity. That same removal also allows her to see Antissia as a sympathetic figure—and thus friend—who is involved in a similarly frustrating romantic quest rather than a winner-take-all competition.

LIVING "IN SECOND CHOICE"

Pamphilia's suppression of her singular desire for Amphilanthus, along with the larger "societie" that it humors, recasts *Urania's* narrative from one about the inevitable disappointment of heterosexual love to one about the exploration of various social and romantic options. Pamphilia herself entertains this exploration by also lying to—or being less than forthright with—several male characters in an effort to maintain a private constancy to Amphilanthus while also never openly dashing the hopes of the men around her. For example, she first dismisses the prince Steriamus's professions of love with a cold "countenance" that shows a "dislike of [his] speeches," and after lamenting the "dependances" that her love for Amphilanthus engenders, she avoids responding to Leandrus's request for marriage by fictitiously claiming that she requires her father's and friends' "consent" to marry (68.32, 97.11, and 214.21).

However, when Leandrus unexpectedly dies, Pamphilia begins to take these circumstances more seriously by wondering if Leandrus (or even Steriamus) may have been a more suitable partner. Reflecting on the repeated callousness of Amphilanthus, she asks, "was judgement given me, to make the worthiest choice," or "[d]id I reject the firme, and spotles love of that excellent Prince Steriamus, the humble suites of all the greatest subjects, and neighbour Princes, slighted the earnestnesse of the noble Prince Leandrus, refused all, and made my selfe a Vassell in affection to him, that weighes neither mee, nor these expressions of love?" (464.18–24). Indeed, when Pamphilia receives Leandrus's ring, a gift that he bequeathed to her on his deathbed, she becomes equally self-conscious about whether or not her conduct toward this suitor was most appropriate given the apparent "faith" he had for her (466.35). She briefly celebrates the fact that she did not "dissemble" with Leandrus and thus did not "deceive" him (466.34–5). But in the same breath, she also recognizes that such honesty may have been unnecessarily "cruell" and acknowledges that her exclusive love for Amphilanthus spawns a "crueltie" that hopelessly "governe[s]" her (466.33 and 466.39). In this way, she expresses a certain shame for disdaining the company of male suitors via an unwavering devotion to an intended heterosexual union much in the same way she had disdained the "societie" of her female rival. Or thought another way, perhaps she should have dissembled more in the interest of fostering a friendly co-existence—and potentially preferable union—with Leandrus or another man.

What Pamphilia ultimately explores, and what I think Wroth's text is more broadly delineating, is a disposition that gives the power of "choice" in social relations and thereby the ability to consider something like a romantic "second" (331.42–332.1). It is the titular heroine Urania who gives the most explicit voice to these ideas by openly declaring it "fortunate" that she is "not [Love's] slave" and a "pittie ... that ever that fruitlesse thing Constancy was taught you as a vertue" (469.40 and 470.29–30). But as she details elsewhere, this less constant process of social exploration is not defined by absolute change—that is, switching from one romantic partner to another—but a kind of ongoing modification and retention. Reflecting on her decision to subdue her affection for Parselius, her first romantic interest in Wroth's romance, Urania expresses pleasure in being "freed from [her] first love, and [having] a power to choose againe" before explaining that this change did not mean that her feelings for Parselius disappeared entirely (331.38–9). "[Y]et was I not so amply cured from memorie," she continues, "but that I did resemble one newly come out of a vision, distracted, scarce able to tell, whether it were a fixion, or the truth; yet I resolved, and so by force of heavenly providence lost the first, and live in second choice" (331.39–332.1). As Urania acknowledges, choosing a romantic "second" was not easy and required conscious commitment. In fact, she wonders if Steriamus, her "second choice," would accept or "despise [her] second love, not having given him [her] first" (332.3–4). But in admitting as much, she registers how such changes are part of a more complex emotional expansion that has "memorie" for previous first loves while also entertaining the friendship-like "freedom" to adjudicate a variety of relationships with other people.

It is living with such "second choice," along with the more varied relationships that it can engender, that Antissia perhaps demonstrates best when she is forced to marry Dolorindus, a man that she unsuccessfully plots to have kill Amphilanthus over his romantic slights and promises to love in return; in fact, it is Amphilanthus who, upon discovery of this plot, orders the two to marry. When Amphilanthus visits the newlywed couple in Negropont where he is "by Dolorindus and Antissia infinitely welcom'd and feasted," it is revealed that Antissia remains "not well-pleased," for "although she had directly lost the love she most prized, yet so much she lov'd [Amphilanthus] still, as she was sorry he should do amisse, which she did confes he did in leaving Pamphilia for Musalina" (496.32–6). Much like Urania, Antissia here is revealed to still possess the retentive "memorie" of "first

love.” Despite now being married to Dolorindus, Amphilanthus remains a “love ... most prized,” one that “so much she lov’d ... still.” In this way, she has not fully moved on from Amphilanthus or effectively switched her affections. But while this familiar dynamic of destined romantic coupling still exists, it does not actually govern her displeasure at the moment. What angers Antissia is that Amphilanthus has left Pamphilia for another woman and gone “amisse” in doing so. In other words, Antissia’s anger is not rooted in her own romantic life and experience. She is angry because his behavior affects someone she knows. She is angry because it affects Pamphilia.

It is a somewhat surprising position given that it very well may not exist. With Antissia still in love with Amphilanthus, the ingredients for rivalry with Pamphilia are all still there. But the fact that Antissia recognizes those feelings and does not act on them signifies how the interest in a larger friendly “societie” has supplanted the previous affective priorities and structural imaginations. Antissia is very much a woman who no longer stands a chance with Amphilanthus and has thus missed out on her first romantic choice. But she accepts this outcome and uses it as a means to cultivate a social congeniality broader than one friend or one lover. No longer bound to the singular vision of union with Amphilanthus, she is able think not about what would be good for herself and Amphilanthus but about what is good for herself, Amphilanthus, Pamphilia, and Dolorindus.

Indeed, such group concern and the conduct it elicits is a remarkable departure from the verbal sparring that had defined Pamphilia and Antissia’s initial interactions. It is also a development that is emblematic of *Urania*’s larger social vision. *Urania* is full of circumstances that could so easily descend into the eristic paradigm that dominates less-crowded stories of friends and lovers. Leandrus and Steriamus could engage in a bitter rivalry over Pamphilia. Pamphilia and Urania could fight over the love of Steriamus. And yet, Wroth’s romance is rather devoid of these bald-faced dynamics. Thanks in large part to the lengthy narrative, the characters in Wroth’s romance manage to interweave themselves into larger group configurations through a process of emotional expansion, one that embraces the full range of feelings they have for one another in order to realize a heightened sense of altruistic care.

That is not to say that these networks are perfectly harmonious and do not often have an undercurrent of jealousy, disdain, or even murderousness. Antissia’s marriage, for one, is a forced

one. It is also the result of her trying to have her first love killed. With the exception of Amphilanthus, Pamphilia remains fairly cool about, albeit open to, her other romantic prospects. These factors make for an overall ambivalent set of relationships, one that fits Wroth's general irony. But what is interesting is the way in which this suspicion turns out to facilitate more relationships than it harms. A set of strong, unyielding romantic devotions would only yield rivalry after rivalry between the characters. The persistent set of negative feelings throughout *Urania*, by contrast, proves strangely productive. Such animosities are a way for characters to detach themselves from each other but also more thoroughly identify with one another. The harmonious groups that emerge, then, are a kind of inadvertent ideal, but they are nevertheless a manifestation of social freedom that only friendship, and not love, can corral.

FRIENDSHIP'S NEW RANGE

Recent scholarship on early modern friendship has been eager to explore the ways in which the period was challenging forms of exclusive, paired relations and embracing more nondyadic group configurations. Garrison's *Friendship and Queer Theory in the Renaissance*, most notably, argues that the "dyadic, un-self-interested friendship model" fails to "meet the needs of participants in the expanding early modern economy" and even goes so far as to suggest that such group configurations were a new "ideal" for the period.²⁵ "Put simply," Garrison writes, "there was much money to be made and new ways to make that money."²⁶ In this sense, persons were eager to connect with as many economically beneficial actors or friends as they could in the interest of cultivating a larger and larger materially beneficial social network.

Yet while Garrison's economic emphasis helpfully yields a conception of social life defined not by a steady march toward the exclusive pair—be it heterosexual marriage or some same-sex bond—it risks erasing the affective range that Wroth shows informs such group configurations. After all, the characters in Wroth's romance are not motivated by the prospect of material gain like Garrison's early modern agents: already "monarchs or others with high political status," they do not stand to gain anything (material) by forgoing their first romantic choice.²⁷ They also do not stand to gain anything by maintaining a congenial relationship with their rivals and those that seem like forgone romantic possibilities. Instead, Wroth continuously explores how friendship

allows for a full exploration of feelings within a relationship and thereby inspires an increasing number of social configurations and possibilities. Not bound to a particular emotional consistency or personal criteria, they achieve the “freedom” that was previously unavailable in the rigid emphasis on social dyads.

It is as if persons in *Urania* cannot help but accrue as many friends as possible even when such a process is not necessarily natural. The tenet of likeness offers a potent basis for friendship, but such a tenet is also limited both in its ability to sustain relationships with a single other as well as a larger community of people. Fully aware of these limits, Wroth offers a vision of friendship that is armed with a new, more adaptive infrastructure: the ability to change in response to factors—namely shared desire and likeness—that are the source of antagonism, as well as the ability to use that momentary change as an opportunity to try out alternative arrangements that in turn become larger social networks. This is not so much a redefinition of friendship as an attempt to articulate the ways in which friendship is capable of living up to its original ideal of social harmony between individuals while also extending beyond such an exclusive scope.

There is, then, almost no limit to both the kinds and depth of connection that are possible in friendship. Wroth's romance in particular demonstrates friendship's ability to break limits: the limits of a vision of life as organized around a dyadic union, the notion of likeness as the most effective criteria for connection, and the belief that friendship was only appreciable in an individualistic context. Friendship offered the means to imagine and enact a far more interconnected existence, an ever-expanding relation with and in a far more multitudinous world. Romance offered the vantage by which such expansions could be fully appreciated and notably ideal.

NOTES

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¹ Josephine A. Roberts, critical introduction to *The First Part of the Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, by Lady Mary Wroth, ed. Roberts, *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* 140 (Binghamton NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1995), pp. xv–civ, xxxiv. Subsequent references to Mary Wroth's *Urania* are from this edition and will appear parenthetically in the text by page and line number.

²As René Girard cogently reasons, “words like *sameness* and *similarity* evoke an image of harmony. If we have the same tastes and like the same things, surely we are bound to get along”; however, “[t]wo desires converging on the same object are bound to clash. Thus, mimesis coupled with desire leads automatically to conflict” (*Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory [Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1977], p. 146). For classical celebrations of similitude in friendship or articulations of the friend as “another himself” or “alter idem,” see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin, 2d edn. (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1999), p. 142, 1166a31–2; Marcus Tullius Cicero, “*De amicitia*,” in *De senectute, De amicitia, De divinatione*, trans. W. A. Falconer, Loeb Classical Library 154 (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard Univ. Press, 1923), pp. 188–9, xxi.80. For a thorough history of likeness in friendship from classical antiquity to the early modern period, see Laurie Shannon, *Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 17–53.

³How exactly these literary examples find the sense of difference that countervails their rivalry differs. Palamon and Arcite engage in a tournament to win the love of Emily before Palamon is wounded by one of Arcite’s men and then advises Emily to marry Palamon before dying. In that case, a rival is fully removed so that the harmony of a heterosexual union can be realized. Cambel and Triamond similarly engage in a tournament for the love of Canacee, Cambel’s sister, before Cambina, Triamond’s sister magically shows up to stop the two men’s strife. With Cambina’s entrance, Cambel essentially switches his affection to Cambina so that “*Triamond had Canacee to wife, / ... / And Cambel tooke Cambina*” (Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, Hiroshi Yamashita, and Toshiyuki Suzuki, rev. 2d edn. [Harlow UK: Pearson Longman, 2007], p. 435, book 4, canto 3, stanza 52, lines 4–6). Hermia notably goes for Helena’s eyes out of a suspicion that Helena has stolen Lysander from her (Shakespeare, “*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*,” in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus, 2d edn. [New York: W. W. Norton, 2008], pp. 849–896, III.ii.298–9); it is Puck’s magic that ultimately reverts Lysander back to loving Hermia and keeps Demetrius loving Helena, thereby providing the rivals with unique suitors.

⁴Shannon, p. 2; Sheila T. Cavanagh, “‘My foule, faulce brest’: Friendship and Betrayal in Lady Mary Wroth’s *Urania*,” in *Discourses and Representations of Friendship in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1700*, ed. Daniel T. Lochman, Maritere López, and Lorna Hutson (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 149–64, 150–1. Cavanagh deems friends so deceptive and “unreliable” on account of this failed similitude that she goes so far as to wonder if friendship has any real criteria left. It is unclear in *Urania* “whether ‘friendship’ simply includes anyone who is not an obvious enemy,” she writes, “or whether it should carry stricter qualifications. Lovers, former suitors, and relatives can all be friends, but they also regularly betray each other” (p. 149).

⁵Tom MacFaul, *Male Friendship in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), pp. 1–2.

⁶Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 2 and 6.

⁷ John S. Garrison has similarly challenged the “model of dyadic sociality” in friendship by arguing that “friendship within groups” was becoming a preferable alternative to exclusive paired forms of friendly equality on account of the group’s literal value and production (*Friendship and Queer Theory in the Renaissance: Gender and Sexuality in Early Modern England*, Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture [New York: Routledge, 2014], pp. xiii–xiv).

⁸ Roberts, p. xxiii.

⁹ Cavanagh, p. 151.

¹⁰ Naomi J. Miller, “‘Not Much to Be Marked’: Narrative of the Woman’s Part in Lady Mary Wroth’s *Urania*,” *SEL* 29, 1 (Winter 1989): 121–37, 124. Miller’s point echoes Patricia A. Parker’s larger argument that “‘romance’ is the liminal space before” the “terminus of a fixed object” (Parker, *Inescapable Romance: Studies in Poetics of a Mode* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1979], p. 4).

¹¹ As Barbara Fuchs points out, romance has been theorized as “a literary strategy of pleasurable multiplicity” that “challenges” the “single-mindedness” of epic (*Romance, New Critical Idiom* [New York and London: Routledge, 2004], p. 66). Similarly, romance does not feature the “fulfilling of one virtue” but “dissolves into endless deferral and multiplicity” (p. 76).

¹² Greenblatt, “Sidney’s *Arcadia* and the Mixed Mode,” *SP* 70, 3 (July 1973): 269–78. As Greenblatt writes, “Sidney seemed instinctively to feel that for the world he wished to portray, there could be no unified, pure form with a single style, a uniform set of characters, and a fixed perspective” (p. 271). Similarly, Wroth defies a “fixed perspective” on the issue of friendship in *Urania* through a constant compiling of social events.

¹³ Finally, the fact that such an outward looking expansion comes from the once competitive female-centric relationships in Wroth’s text adds a considerable layer to discussions about the nature of female friendship in particular. In *Female Alliances: Gender, Identity, and Friendship in Early Modern Britain*, Amanda E. Herbert identifies the late 1960s as a watershed moment for studies of “early modern European women’s communities,” one in which “scholars sought to establish the existence of unified female communities in the past.” Such a “rosy vision” was subsequently challenged in the 1990s when scholars “sought to historicize, dehomogenize, and complicate the idea of early modern women’s culture” by showing that “not all interactions between women were harmonious” (Herbert, *Female Alliances: Gender, Identity, and Friendship in Early Modern Britain* [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2014], pp. 3–4). These assessments comprise a binary that Wroth criticism itself has traversed, but they also represent a conceptual division that Wroth herself collapses. Wroth does not rule out the idea of harmony between women just as she does not shy away from depicting their conflicts. Rather, she uses romance as a means to show how the complicated trials of friendship are an integral part of the eventual cooperation that is possible. To read friendship and friendly relations thus requires keeping in mind the relation’s holistic long game as well as being aware of the ways in which such comprehensive perspectives are made visible by the affordances of particular genres.

¹⁴ Miller, *Changing the Subject: Mary Wroth and Figurations of Gender in Early Modern England*, Studies in the English Renaissance (Lexington:

Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1996), p. 216. Mary Ellen Lamb similarly observes that “[i]f there is a viewpoint emerging as central to the folio, it is a preoccupation with love, be it for spouse or for beloved, as a means of defining the self. The desire of male and female characters alike to find, keep, or lament a love partner controls many of the plots” (*Gender and Authorship in the Sidney Circle* [Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1990], p. 146). Valerie Traub describes such an investment in pairing as a “stubborn assumption[]” of contemporary reading. As she puts it, “[d]espite [the] pedagogical state of the art ... understandings of early modern sex remain circumscribed by a number of stubborn assumptions: that it is almost always heterosexual; that it ultimately tends toward the ‘consummation’ of penis in vagina; ... that, unless it is a matter of violent assault, it is inevitably a prelude to or sign of marriage” (Traub, afterword to *Sex before Sex: Figuring the Act in Early Modern England*, ed. James M. Bromley and Will Stockton [Minneapolis and London: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2013], pp. 291–304, 291). Garrison has subsequently noted that such investment in the couple and the corresponding set of values also holds undue sway over the critical imagination of early modern social life (p. xiii). Wroth makes such an assumption an ideological backdrop of her own romance.

¹⁵ Garrison, p. xiii.

¹⁶ Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, *Writing Women in Jacobean England* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard Univ. Press, 1993), p. 267. Tiffany Jo Werth notes that such dynamics are not confined to protagonists like Pamphilia as Antissia’s falling in love with Amphilanthus is likewise described as a loss of her “libertie” (*The Fabulous Dark Cloister: Romance in England after the Reformation* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2011], p. 137). Such dynamics also have significant play in Sidney’s *Old Arcadia* as the “self-defeating aspect of acquisitive desire ... is paralleled by the notion that cupiditas makes its characteristic subject, the would-be tyrant, into its slave” (Amelia A. Zurcher, *Seventeenth-Century English Romance: Allegory, Ethics, and Politics* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007], p. 22).

¹⁷ Shannon, p. 56.

¹⁸ Thought another way: with dyadic love at the forefront, the relationship that Pamphilia so adamantly envisions for her and Amphilanthus is caught in an inescapable cycle of tyrannical abuse and slavish subordination. Pamphilia is unwilling to go outside this parameter and thereby refuses to end her subjection and disappointment. Furthermore, any disturbance between the two of them can only be read as a breach in love and thus an essentially tragic event.

¹⁹ Lamb, p. 187. For a discussion of “heroic” constancy in *Urania*, see also Gynne Kennedy, *Just Anger: Representing Women’s Anger in Early Modern England* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 2000). In particular, Kennedy notes that female constancy is expressed by “refraining from expressing ... anger directly to the men who leave them” (p. 115).

²⁰ Chanmi Ko, “Mary Wroth’s Critique of Female Constancy: Pamphilia’s Chastity-like Virtue and Constant Will,” *Medieval and Early Modern English Studies* 23, 2 (August 2015): 161–85, 162.

²¹ Nandini Das, *Renaissance Romance: The Transformation of English Prose Fiction, 1570–1620* (Surrey UK: Ashgate, 2011), p. 175.

²² Ko, p. 168.

²³ Pamphilia's exhortation that Antissia "freely speake" also follows a kind of classical script regarding conduct between friends. In *De amicitia*, Cicero declares that "the first law of friendship" is "to give true advice with all frankness" (pp. 155 and 157). Furthermore, "friends frequently must be not only advised, but also rebuked," even though, as Cicero acknowledges, such a mandate of "plain speaking" often leads to "hate" rather than amelioration (p. 197). Pamphilia and Antissia could plainly tell the truth to one another and thus be "friends" in a classical, Ciceronian sense. But such a friendship would be one marked by a perennial animosity that stubbornly insists on the singularity of a particular social experience, in this case uniting with Amphilanthus. In a way, Wroth reveals how such a traditional "law" of classical friendship privileges a certain kind of social interaction and organization. To demand truth from friends is, we might say, gendered masculine, or in this particular case, looks out for patriarchal social interests and structures. Wroth's romance ultimately seeks to articulate an expanded set of strategies that might be able to cultivate a larger number and range of social valences, namely a mandate of friendship that does not serve only a patriarchal structure and interest.

²⁴ Cavanagh, p. 151. Indeed, Wroth's own qualified description of Pamphilia and Antissia leaving with "as much love, as love in them could joyne" acknowledges—maybe even sardonically—the muted feelings the two very likely still have for each other as well as the abundance of deception still at play. Pamphilia after all is still very much in love with Amphilanthus and probably does not believe that Antissia is of equal "vertue" to him; Antissia is not totally convinced that Pamphilia is over Amphilanthus or that there is no longer any rivalry to be had. In that sense, the two, left with no better options, resign themselves to a rhetorical draw.

²⁵ Garrison, p. xi.

²⁶ Garrison, p. xxii. Garrison notes that the pursuit of such novel economic opportunities inevitably welcomed a whole range of new economic actors—particularly women—into a once exclusively homosocial landscape.

²⁷ Cavanagh, p. 149.