

‘More women: more weeping’: the communal lamentation of early modern women in the works of Mary Sidney Herbert and Mary Wroth

Marion Wynne-Davies
University of Surrey
(m.wynne-davies@surrey.ac.uk)

I. Introduction

‘More women: more weeping’, Thomas Playfere reminded his congregation from the open pulpit outside St Mary’s on Bishopsgate on the Tuesday of Easter week in 1595.¹ It would have been a prestigious event; he preached from a newly refurbished podium to the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London, who were gathered with their families in a recently constructed house, as well as to an assembled throng of teachers and pupils from St Christopher’s dressed in their distinctive blue coats and red hats. The ceremony would hardly have unnerved Playfere, since he was an ambitious man who courted publicity and, through a combination of guile, ingratiating behaviour and populist sermons, would go on to win recognition at court and elevation at the University of Cambridge. Indeed, this particular sermon, which he later entitled *The Meane of Mourning*, was so successful that it was immediately released in two pirated editions, subsequently being published in an authorized collection of his most famous addresses. The text combines Playfere’s usual populist tone and rhetorical flourishes in order to address the question of mourning and, in particular, to dwell upon women’s communal and excessive grief. When Christ died on the cross, Playfere informed his listeners, it would have been certain,

both that more women wept then men, and that the women more wept then the men [since] the womens weeping came rather from weaknes in themselues ... Naturally (saith S. *Peter*) the woman is the weaker vessell, soone moued to weepe, and subiect to many, either affectionate passions, or else passionate

¹ Thomas Playfere, *The whole sermons of that eloquent divine of famous memory, Thomas Playfere* (London: Matthew Law, 1623), p. 2.

affections.²

Playfere, in common with other English Protestant theologians, attacked ‘womens weeping’ because it represented what they considered to be the excessive lamentation of Catholic ritual, although by the 1590s such polarized spiritual discourses had already been modified to indicate a more general distinction between men and women. Therefore, while male expressions of grief were expected to be short, rational and contemplative, women’s mourning was considered excessive, emotional and communal.

This essay sets out to explore the impact of this gendered division upon the mourning rituals of female communities, focusing on the writings of Mary Sidney Herbert and her niece, Mary Wroth. The subsequent argument is divided into three stages. The first examines how women’s communal lamentation developed in both spiritual and social terms, in particular reflecting upon the ways in which female companionship was an integral aspect of these necessarily private communities. The second analyzes the way in which Sidney Herbert’s writing demonstrates a conversance with accepted female mourning practices in *A Discourse of Life and Death, Written in French by Ph. Mornay* (1592) and *The Triumph of death translated out of Italian by the Countesse of Pembroke* (transcribed 1600), while challenging convention in ‘The Dolefull Lay’ and *The Tragedy of Antonie* (1592). It looks at how Sidney Herbert reworked her own experience of a female community united in grief over the death of Philip Sidney, setting this against her evocation of intense personal loss. The third section comments upon Wroth’s further exploration of female communal lamentation in her tragicomedy *Love’s Victory* (c.1618) in which she valorises women’s companionship and regard for one another. The essay, therefore, sets out to analyse and compare a range of female communities gathered together to mourn their loved ones, from the historical reality at Wilton, through Sidney Herbert’s poetic rejection of female support in the characters of Clorinda and Cleopatra, to Wroth’s proto-feminist embrace of the power of female networks to assuage grief.

II. Communal Female Lamentation in Early Modern England

The shift from Catholic to Protestant practice had a significant impact upon the ways in which the dead were memorialized that is significant to the concept of communal mourning. In particular, the belief in purgatory and consequently the efficacy of

² Ibid, p. 3.

intercessory prayers for the dead were supplanted by a conviction that the good soul was immediately assumed into heaven. Therefore, if the spirit of the deceased had already been granted eternal salvation, what was the point of praying for their souls or even grieving for them since they had already entered a far higher state of being? Indeed, post-Reformation churches sought to obliterate these rites, just as they defaced wall paintings and smashed statuary. As Katharine Goodland notes:

In late medieval England, tears and prayers offered for the dead were efficacious: they assisted the soul in the afterlife ... [but] Protestant preachers denounced grieving for the dead as excessive and sinful.³

For example, the Protestant church attempted to curtail what it circumscribed as excessive expressions of grief, such as wailing and tearing of hair; instead, they pointed out that death should be interpreted as a joyous occasion when the soul of the beloved was given its rightful place in heaven. For women the post-Reformation changes in mourning practice had a particular and complex impact, since the ideal Protestant commemoration of a brief, internalized and rational sorrow was identified as masculine, whereas feminine grief was considered excessive, communal and immoderate, thereby linking it to the old faith. Such ideological binary oppositions have long since been undercut by feminist criticism and, most recently, several scholars have begun to explore early modern women's communal memorialisation practices in order to challenge earlier critics' dismissals of female subjectivity.

In particular, Patricia Phillippy in her path-breaking account, *Women, Death and Literature in Post-Reformation England* (2002), argues that there was a 'consistent gendering of ... grief in post-Reformation England' but she goes on to suggest that although 'feminine grief is condemned as "immoderately emotional"', excessive outpourings could also be used 'as a means of authorizing and empowering women's speech ... [which] licenses women's writing and publishing of textual works of mourning'.⁴ In addition, she examines the ways in which familial groups - the parents, spouses and children of the departed - were deeply affected by the deaths of their loved ones despite the high levels of mortality.⁵ The regularity of bereavement and the mutuality of mourning within familial groups meant that female communities would have shared grief, offering comfort to one another, perhaps in a manner not

³ Katharine Goodland, *Female Mourning in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2005), p. 4.

⁴ Patricia Phillippy, *Women, Death and Literature in Post-Reformation England*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 3, 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 109-11.

dissimilar to our own twenty-first century supportive gatherings. In exploring communal female lamentation it is, therefore, useful to focus upon a familial group and, building upon my work in *Familial Discourse in the English Renaissance* (2007), this analysis draws upon the Sidney / Herbert family. In the earlier book I noted the influence of Philip Sidney's death upon a wider range of genres and themes, but here I want to examine its impact upon those women who mourned him, focussing specifically upon Sidney Herbert and Wroth. At the same time, these textual comparisons may usefully be set against the actual memorialisation of the two women. This essay concludes, therefore, by asking why two women who shared a close family relationship and who had shared female companionship in times of grief developed distinct literary evocations of women's communal mourning.

III. 'We do weep and waile, and wear our eies': Mary Sidney Herbert

Mary Sidney Herbert demonstrates an adept wielding of the ideological framework of female lamentation, yet the question of why she chose to use text as her primary form of mourning remains. A major factor must be the cultured milieu of the Sidney family: both her brothers wrote, as did her niece and son, and her own development of Wilton as a supportive centre for writers and artists demonstrates her commitment to the power of textual expression. Nevertheless, the distinctions evident in the family's responses to death were governed by gender. The male members of the Sidney / Herbert family did not perceive their identities as confined within the literary sphere; they were key figures within the political and militaristic arenas. For them, as for other male members of the nobility, mourning meant formal processions, a place within the cortège that signified status and a reaffirmation of the Protestant / Catholic divide that still exerted an influence over Elizabeth's court.

Philip Sidney's funeral was a case in point; there were around seven hundred mourners, including Robert Sidney and William Herbert, who processed with strict adherence to status and protocol. Thomas Lant's famous thirty-plate *Sequitur celebritas & pompa funeris* depicts and lists them with sharp precision, but what is immediately apparent is that amongst the aristocrats, kindred, gentry, servants and even grocers, there is not a single woman. Mary Sidney Herbert played no part in her brother's lavish funeral held on 16 February 1587 because, as a woman, she had no assigned place within the extensive procession. As Phillippy points out, 'College of Arms regulations governing heraldic funerals required that chief mourners be of the same sex as decedents', arguing further that when Sidney Herbert begins her poem, 'The Dolefull Lay', with 'to whom shall I my case complaine', she represents a

historical reality because she was prohibited from ‘complain[ing]’ either through act or word.⁶ Moreover, Sidney Herbert did not contribute to the scholarly collections of elegies and, although ‘The Dolefull Lay’ is now considered to be hers, its inclusion in *Astrophel* was anonymous, an omission of authorial ownership deemed suitable for her sex.⁷ Like other early modern women, Sidney Herbert was excluded from formal and public expressions of mourning, whether processional or textual. It is impossible to know whether or not ‘The Dolefull Lay’ was used without her permission or whether she ‘allowed’ the poem to be published in the manner of many early modern women writers, hoping to escape censure for the publication of their creative works. However, taken alongside her other texts, ‘The Dolefull Lay’ may be identified as compounding a single discourse of memorialisation in which women’s communal lamentation emerges as a disturbing other to the formally allowed male manifestations of grief.

Indeed, Sidney Herbert’s extant canon appears to be almost obsessively focussed upon death and, there can be no question that the death of her brother, Philip Sidney, had a major impact upon her literary output. Hannay, Kinnamon and Brennan note that, ‘she seems to have begun her literary work to honour her brother’ and that, ‘it is easy to exaggerate her poetic mourning’,⁸ rightly warning against a too ready equation of writing about death with personal and / or psychological catharsis. By examining the texts’ affiliation with generic conventions, therefore, it becomes possible to recognise the ways in which Sidney Herbert’s canon closely follows the formal gendered processes of lamentation. The first allowed involvement of women occurred at a woman’s deathbed, as the words and actions of the dying person served to testify to a good life, while within the privacy of the bedchamber her female companions were permitted to lament. Sidney Herbert’s familiarity with these accepted conventions may be seen in her translations, *A Discourse* and *The Triumph*, which provide, respectively, exemplars of a good death and appropriate mourning. The second key feature of early modern lamentation occurred with the writing of elegies, and here ‘Angell Spirit’ and ‘The Dolefull Lay’ need to be considered. Still, while these works tend to conform to the dominant cultural codes, both the *Psalms* and her loose translation of Garnier’s *The Tragedy of Antonie* show that Sidney Herbert was also able to challenge convention. As such, each text needs to be explored for

⁶ Ibid, p. 21.

⁷ Sidney Herbert, Mary. *The Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert Countess of Pembroke*, ed. by Margaret P. Hannay, Noel J. Kinnamon and Michael G. Brennan, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), I, p. 6.

⁸ Ibid, I, pp. 6, 11.

evidence of the ways in which women's mourning and communal lamentation are represented.

Few critics focus upon Sidney Herbert's translation, *A Discourse* primarily because, as Hannay, Kinnamon and Brennan point out in their comprehensive edition of her works, 'she gives a literal word-for-word translation'.⁹ Nevertheless, *A Discourse* is useful in that it evidences Sidney Herbert's familiarity with early modern conventions of mourning and memorialisation, in particular those that governed female conduct as they gathered together to lament. She establishes clear parameters for the manner in which death must be greeted. As in the original, the *Ars Moriendi* is dealt with briefly:

You will say, there is difficultie in the passage...The entraunce is indeede hard, if our selves make it harde, coming thither with a tormented spirite, a troubled minde, a wavering and irresolute thought. But bring wee quietnesse of mind, constancie, and full resolution, wee shall not finde anie daunger or difficultie at all.¹⁰

The advice is a commonplace of the early modern understanding of death: rather than being 'tormented...wavering and irresolute,' the dying should be quiet, constant and strong. This distinction is discussed by Ralph Houlbrooke in *Death, Religion, and the Family in England, 1480-1750* where he explains that,

The deathbed was seen as the supreme trial of faith. A successful Outcome ... was widely interpreted as an indication of the individual's eternal fate [and]...left a good example to survivors.¹¹

The distinction between fear, anguish and distress, and accepting death with patience, faith and a renunciation of worldly affairs thus represents the difference between a bad death / damnation and a good death / salvation. Unsurprisingly, early modern accounts of deathbed scenes often chose to memorialise the deceased with descriptions of stoic humility and stalwart faith.

Moreover, Sidney Herbert's knowledge of 'end[ing] well this life' (I, 252) may be identified in a further translation, *The Triumph*, in which she develops Laura's

⁹ Ibid, I, p. 220.

¹⁰ Ibid, I, p. 247. Further references to *The Discourse* and *The Triumph* are taken from this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

¹¹ Ralph Houlbrooke, *Death, religion, and the family in England, 1480-1750* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), p. 183.

reception of death from the Petrarchan original. Laura becomes a strong individual who is patient, 'with joye she sate retired silentlie', so pious that where her soul 'past [it] did make the heavens cleare', and rejects the worldly qualities of 'beawtie...[and] curtesie' (I, pp. 275-6, ll. 123, 153, and 145-6). Although the scene demonstrates a good death within Protestant conventions, what is particularly interesting about *The Triumph* is that Sidney Herbert adds a description of the mourners. As in all translations, divergence must be examined carefully and it is significant that the addition shows a community of women lamenting the death of another woman.

While the dying person was expected to behave with remarkable stoicism, their family and close friends were required both to express grief and to offer a testimony that a good death had occurred with the consequential assumption to heaven of the pious soul. In *The Triumph* 'Ladies' who 'quake' at the thought of death surround Laura, providing a sharp contrast to her fortitude and serenity; they weep ('How manie dropps did flow from brynne spring'), 'moane', 'cryde' and as she dies bewail, 'And now, what shall we do?' (I, pp. 275-6, ll. 107, 105, 118, 121, 124, and 147). Their purpose is not simply to grieve, but also to stress Laura's virtue, as they indicate her 'grace ... sweet spright ... never-changing ... [and] pure' (I, p. 277, ll. 148, 162, 165, and 166). As close translations, *A Discourse* and *The Triumph* need not be interrogated exhaustively to excavate Sidney Herbert's wider participation in early modern discourses of lamentation, but they serve to demonstrate her awareness of the accepted processes. Significantly, however, *The Triumph* goes on to describe the role of female communities in the practice of mourning. Appropriately, no men attend Laura at her death and the lamentations of her women are secluded within the home. Within this private space the female mourners give vent to a profound grief that serves to provide a testament for Laura's good death while simultaneously acknowledging the painful separation of the living from the dead.

The three works in which Sidney Herbert specifically addressed the death of her brother, 'Even now that Care', 'To the Angell Spirit' and 'The Dolefull Lay of Clorinda', initially appear to conform to convention in much the same manner as *A Discourse* and *The Triumph*.¹² The former two poems prefaced her completion of the psalm translations begun by Philip Sidney (the first is addressed to Elizabeth I, the second acts as an elegiac eulogy on her brother as initiator of the enterprise), and the third was published as a companion piece to Edmund Spenser's 'Astrophel' (1595), in a compilation of seven elegies that celebrate Sidney's skill as a poet. What becomes immediately apparent is that in each instance Sidney Herbert categorically claims a

¹² Ibid, I, pp. 92-135. All references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

good death for her brother, envisaging him as a spiritual ideal, already safely ensconced in heaven: he is the 'richer reft away' (I, p. 102, l. 22); 'Heav'nly adorn'd' with an 'Aneglls soul' (I, p. 111, ll. 39 and 59); and an 'immortall spirit, which was deckt / With all the dowries of celestiaall grace' (I, p. 134, ll. 61-2) who lives in 'Paradise ... in everlasting blis' (I, p. 135, ll. 68 and 85). Moreover, she links this mourning to the condoned rites, burial and commemoration processes of early modern England. 'Angell Spirit' describes the 'precious rites', 'Hymnes ... [and] obsequies' and entombment, images that are prefigured by the metaphor of the owl's 'seal'd' eyes and materialised in the 'Immortall Monuments of thy faire fame', whereby text is elided with edifice (I, p. 111, ll. 53, 85, and 56; and p. 112, l. 71). These representations of grief initially appear to conform to the dictates of the Protestant church, with an idealised soul ascending into heaven and the funeral rites comprising of publically acceptable 'hymnes' rather than cries of personal grief. However, Sidney Herbert's writing often reveals an intriguing lack of conformity that undercuts the dominant cultural codes determining female subjectivity.

If we return to *The Triumph*, therefore, it becomes possible to reread the actions of those women who mourn Laura not only for their representation of her as a spiritual ideal, but also as participating in the act of communal grieving supposedly outlawed by the Protestant church. As such, we need to question whether or not the communal 'quak[ing] ... moan[ing and] ... cry[ing]' exceeds the prescribed boundaries of female grief, serving to undermine the regulations that sought to contain women's mourning practices. Since *The Triumph* is a reasonably close translation, the answer cannot be definite; however, if we look at the replication of a community of female mourners in one of the original poems, 'The Dolefull Lay', a parallel-conscious evocation of excess becomes apparent. In this poem the poetic voice enjoins other shepherdesses to,

Breake now your gyrlonds, O ye shepherds lasses,
Sith the faire flower, which them adornd, is gon. (I, p. 134, ll. 37-8)

Clorinda continues, abjuring them never to 'sing the love-layes which he made', and never 'read the riddles, which he sayd', for 'Death' has 'robbed you and reft fro me my joy' (I, p. 134, ll. 43, 45, and 49-50).

This mutuality of grief is compounded at the end of the poem:

Whilest we here wretches waile his private lack,
And with vaine vowes do often call him back.

But live thou there [heaven] still happie, happie spirit,
And give us leave thee here thus to lament:
Not thee that doest thy heavens joy inherit,
But our owne selves that here in dole are drent.

Thus we do weep and waile, and wear our eies,
Mourning in others, our own miseries. (I, p. 135, ll. 89-96)

The shepherdesses form a community of female mourners who gather to lament the death of Philip Sidney. The male subject of the poem is treated in a conventional fashion being imagined as in 'heaven', but the women who remain are excessive in their grief. Their 'wailes' are, appropriately enough, made in 'private,' but their 'vaine vowes' are in direct contradiction to Protestant doctrine as well as to their own stated recognition of his 'happie, happie spirit', since they wish to 'call him back' from spiritual bliss. Subsequently, in an image of excess, they depict themselves drowned ('drent') in a sea of 'dole,' with 'eies' that have been worn out or made sightless by repeated 'weep[ing] and waile[ing]'. Indeed, they appear to conform closely to Playfere's castigated weeping women; even the Biblical source of the sermon - Luke 23:28, 'weep not for me, but weep for yourselves'¹³ - is replicated by Sidney Herbert in the last line of her poem as the women mourn their 'own miseries.' This does not mean that the sermon is a source text for the poem, rather that in 1595, the year Playfere spoke on Bishopsgate and Sidney Herbert allowed her elegy to be published, there was an overwhelming concern that women's grief was excessive and communal.¹⁴ Moreover, it was precisely this demonstration of 'affectionate passions, or else passionate affections' that threatened to destabilize the socially acceptable mourning practices.¹⁵ However, while she was able to destabilize the boundaries in her poem, Sidney Herbert's role within the material mourning processes that occurred after Philip Sidney's funeral were circumscribed. The relationship of text to experience needs, therefore, to be investigated.

On one level, just as Sidney Herbert imagines herself as the shepherdess Clorinda, so too the Countess' female relatives and companions might well be interpreted as fictional characters within the pastoral world of a bereft Arcadia, since early modern pastoral is deeply embedded in contemporaneous material allusion. In a parallel equation, therefore, just as Clorinda may be identified with Sidney Herbert, it is also

¹³ *The King James Bible*, Luke 23: 28.

¹⁴ Playfere, p. 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

important to consider which group of women would have recalled those telling ‘love-layes...[and] riddles’ (I, p. 134, ll. 43 and 45). The answer certainly lies at Wilton.

After her marriage in 1577 to the Earl of Pembroke, Sidney Herbert repeatedly entertained her extended family and friends at her country residence, and Julie Crawford argues persuasively that this group constituted a ‘coterie of women’ that included Mary Sidney Herbert, Barbara Gamage, Lettys Knollys and Penelope Devereux / Rich.¹⁶ Again at Wilton, Philip Sidney partially composed and read out poems from *Astrophil and Stella*, acts that would certainly confirm the reference to ‘love-layes’. In addition, sonnet 37 employs a ‘riddle’ that uses the word ‘Rich’¹⁷ in order to reveal Stella’s identity as Penelope Rich, a device that is replicated in Mary Wroth’s *Love’s Victory*.¹⁸ As such, the group of shepherdesses in ‘The Dolefull Lay’ represent a community of women who, most probably, did meet at Wilton to mourn the silencing of Astrophil and the actual death of Philip Sidney. Indeed, after his death, Sidney Herbert retired for two years to Wilton, where she was joined by her sister-in-law, Barbara Gamage, and her young niece, Mary Wroth.

This period of secluded mourning concurs with early modern expectations of female location within a private rather than a public sphere, yet the presence of other women from the Sidney / Herbert family also demonstrates the function of female communities at times of grief. During this period, Barbara’s husband, Robert Sidney, was serving at Tilbury and Sidney Herbert’s husband, the Earl of Pembroke, was in Wales securing coastal defences, as they prepared for a Spanish invasion. The textual representations in *The Triumph* and ‘The Dolefull Lay’ of a female community of mourners thus represents a material experience in which mutual grief could be expressed in a manner that counterbalanced the formal restraints advocated by the Protestant church, supplanting ‘hymnes’ with ‘moan[ing]’ and ‘wail[ing],’ and ‘rites’ with the ‘manie drops’ of tears and ‘break[ing] ... gyrlands’ (I, p. 111, l. 53; p. 276, l. 121; p. 135, l. 89; p. 111, l. 53; p. 118, l. 275; and p. 134, l. 37).

The gendering of grief becomes more complex – and disturbing – in Sidney Herbert’s *The Tragedy of Antonie* (1592), a translation from Robert Garnier’s *Marc Antoine* (1578). The English play’s depiction of mourning extends over four hundred and

¹⁶ Julie Crawford, ‘Sidney’s Sapphics and the Role of the Interpretative Reader’, *ELH* 69 (2002), 979-1007 (pp. 983 and 988).

¹⁷ Philip Sidney, *Sir Philip Sidney: The Major Works* ed. by Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 167.

¹⁸ Mary Wroth, *Love’s Victory in Renaissance Drama by Women: Texts and Documents*, ed. by S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 91-126 (pp. 116-17).

eighty one lines and depicts a set of three responses to death: that of the Egyptian people, that of the Romans and finally that of Cleopatra and her women. Although this essay focuses upon the communal lamentation of women, Sidney Herbert's paralleling of the three distinct practices makes a comparison essential. The first response is rendered in the form of an account of Antonie's death made by Dircetus to the triumphant Octavius Caesar. He explains how, after Antonie berates her, Cleopatra

Got to the tomb's dark-horror's dwelling place,
Made lock the doors, and pull the hearses down ... [and]
... sent him word: she was no more alive,
But lay enclosed, dead within her tomb.¹⁹

Believing her to be dead, Antonie stabs himself, but remains barely alive as he is brought to 'the monument' and is raised 'life-dead' by Cleopatra and 'her women' up into the 'tomb' (38). Dircetus then proceeds with a graphic portrayal of the people's response to Antonie's death:

The city all to tears and sighs is turned,
To plaints and outcries horrible to hear;
Men, women, children, hoary-headed age,
Do all pell-mell in house and street lament;
Scratching their faces, tearing of their hair,
Wringing their hands, and martyring their breasts. (38)

The lamentation is 'extreme' or excessive, the 'city[']s' populace 'lament[ing]' loudly, not only in the private confines of the 'house', but also in the public space of the 'street'. Moreover, their cries are disordered or 'pell-mell', their faces are 'scratch[ed]', their hair torn and their breasts 'martyr[ed]'.²⁰ Sidney Herbert's choice of vocabulary follows Garnier's French closely with, for example, 'pesle-mesle' and 'deschirent le front'; however, there are two telling alterations.²¹ First, the people in the French tragedy remain resolutely outside, 'aux places et aux rues',²² which Sidney Herbert alters to 'in house and street' (38), thereby emphasising both the private grief suitable for 'women' and the public mourning undertaken by 'men'.

¹⁹ Mary Sidney, *The Tragedie of Antonie* in Cerasano and Wynne-Davies, pp. 13-42 (p. 37). All subsequent references are taken from this edition.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Robert Garnier, *Les Tragedies* (Toulouse, 1588), p. 205.

²² Ibid.

This gendering of grief is underscored by the second divergence; Garnier describes how the people ‘l’estomach se défront’,²³ which Sidney Herbert alters to ‘martyr...their breasts’ (38). The images run parallel: Garnier’s depiction of distraught fingers tearing at the chest is echoed by Sidney Herbert’s picture of the ‘breast’ being torn at by similarly grief-stricken hands. However, the combination of sounds and acts – lamentation and tearing at face, hair and breasts – suggests the excessive grieving rituals performed by early modern women, so that ‘martyring’ may be interpreted as the customary beating of breasts. This alignment of the ‘extreme’ mourning of the Egyptians with that of communities of women is affirmed towards the end of the play where Cleopatra commands her female servants: ‘Weep my companions, weep’, causing them to ‘Martyr ... [their] breasts with multiplied blows / ... [with] violent hands tear off ... [their] hanging hair ... [and] / Outrage ... [their] faces’ (42). The reiteration of acts serves to confirm that the extreme grief of the Egyptians is, in Sidney Herbert’s translation, gendered as female. Moreover, in addition to the location of accepted cultural codes demarcating women’s communal weeping, the conflation with the Egyptian populace serves to reinforce the patriarchal hierarchy by coupling the ‘other’ of race with that of gender. This is particularly important because the excess of the subjugated Egyptian people contrasts sharply with the response of the Roman conquerors.

On hearing of Antonie’s death, Caesar immediately locates the deceased within the compass of male status; he ‘bemoan[s]’ the death because the two men have won so many ‘wars’ together, because they are ‘brothers...cousins’ and, most tellingly, because they are ‘equals in estate’ (39). Not so different, perhaps, from the way that Robert Sidney and William Herbert mourned for Philip Sidney who had indeed fought in the same wars, was a brother to one, cousin to the other and whose ‘equal ... estate’ was attested to by their roles in the funeral procession. Given this socially acceptable response, Agrippa’s blunt retort is all the more revealing: ‘Why trouble you yourself with bootless grief?’ (39). Garnier describes that grief as ‘inutiles’ or useless,²⁴ but Sidney Herbert’s translation is more complex since ‘bootless’ is such an effective word, sliding effortlessly between fruitless and without booty. Shakespeare also uses this term in Sonnet 29, in which ‘bootless cries’ refers both to unrequited

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 206.

love and the lack of funding from a patron.²⁵ As John Barrell comments in *Poetry, Language, Politics*,

It is the nature of that discourse that it represents the economic relations of patron and petitioner in terms that must be indistinguishable from other kinds of purer, more ideal relationships of love.²⁶

If Caesar's discourse of status, kinship and military exploits represents his grief for Antonie in terms of accepted masculine social codes, Agrippa proceeds with a detailed explanation that focuses upon the 'economic relations' of conquest. He advises that the Romans should break into the 'tomb' in order to procure the 'rich treasure' and 'jewel[s]' that Cleopatra might otherwise destroy and use 'her funeral to grace', thereby 'defraud[ing]' them of their spoils. The immediate shift in Caesar's response is telling; he realises that Cleopatra and 'her treasure' must be saved in order to grace the 'glorious triumph Rome prepares for me' (39). 'Bootless,' thus serves to undercut the formal processes of male lamentation with a brusque reminder of the economic value of a worldly, as opposed to a spiritual, reward. Indeed, Caesar's last word, 'me,' is a timely reminder of the way in which early modern memorialisation discourse had been secularised into a form of self-fashioning; as Nigel Llewellyn notes in *Funeral Monuments in Post-Reformation England*, the 'rituals of death' must be linked to 'a particular ideological, social and economic system'.²⁷ For Caesar and Agrippa that social structure is both patriarchal and monetary, so that Sidney Herbert is able to set the excessive grief of the Egyptians against the self-serving response of the Romans and the 'feminine' lamentation of the conquered 'other' against the rational reaction of the two men. Both representations serve to establish commonly accepted social codes, but there is one last response to Antonie's death – that of Cleopatra and her women.

The last scene of the play moves into the tomb itself, where Cleopatra, her women, Charmion and Eras, her children and their tutor, Euphron, have incarcerated themselves along with Antonie's corpse. The setting is private and predominantly female, particularly so since Euphron and the children leave after eighty-one lines and immediately after he has reminded Cleopatra that she should 'live for your children's sake' (40). She, however, refuses to be constrained by the reiterations of motherhood

²⁵ William Shakespeare, *The Sonnets and a Lover's Complaint*, ed. by John Kerrigan (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 91.

²⁶ John Barrell, *Poetry, Language, Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 30.

²⁷ Nigel Llewellyn, *Funeral Monuments in post-Reformation England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 36.

that were usually used to describe women in lamentation rituals, instead confessing that her 'heart is closed / With pity and pain' and that she is 'with death enclosed' (40). Garnier uses 'm'enferre' to suggest Cleopatra is 'trapped' with death,²⁸ but Sidney Herbert's alteration is apposite: the Egyptian Queen is, in a very real way, 'enclosed' in the tomb with 'death' since, in the imaginary space of closet drama, Antonie's corpse takes centre stage. The excessive lamentation of the Egyptian populace and the rational self-interest of the Romans, both of which occur outside the tomb, are, therefore, reworked within the inner chamber of death.

Women's communal grieving is represented by Eras and Charmion, who join their mistress as she mourns, serving as a chorus to emphasise the importance of due ritual. They admonish their mistress, 'let not / His body be without due rites entombed' and 'let us weep, lest sudden death / From him our tears and those last duties take, / Unto his tomb we owe' (41). Their tears are described as 'duties' and 'sacred obsequies', a connotation repeated by Cleopatra when she offers 'due' rites with 'sobs' and 'plaints', using her hair for the 'oblations', her tears as 'effusions', while her eyes provide the 'fire' to ignite the imagined pyre (41-2). The patriarchal response is provided by Euphron who reminds Cleopatra of her role as mother, thereby locating her identity within an appropriate social role. Yet, as Cleopatra rejects Euphron's advice in order to be entombed with Antonie, so she asks her women to weep in her place because,

I spent in tears, not able more to spend,
But kiss him now, what rests me more to do? (42)

The key here is Cleopatra's repetition of the verb 'spent ... to spend' Garnier uses 'pouvoir' and 'arroser,' so that his Cleopatra is unable to rouse any more tears,²⁹ whereas Sidney Herbert uses 'spent' and 'spend': to depict the Queen as having no more tears left to shed, as well as to echo Agrippa's earlier use of the word 'bootless', whereby mourning is inextricably linked to the economics of the society in which it is located. Read back into the text, the binding of mourning to money is unmistakable: for example, the 'dues' and 'duties' 'owed' to Antonie, and Cleopatra's description of Antonie's corpse as 'the booty of a tomb' (41).

²⁸ Garnier, p. 212.

²⁹ Garnier, p. 216.

The association of economic exchange with grieving may be explicated by looking at Sidney Herbert's translation of psalm 49 where she warns all 'World-dwellers' against 'fickle wealth' and 'vaine confidence':

For deere the price that a sowle must paie:
And death his prisoner never will forgoe
Naie tell mee whome but longer time hee leaves
Respited from the tombe for treasures meed?
Sure at his summons, wise and fooles appeare,
And others spend the riches theie did hoord.³⁰

As the poem indicates, the offer of a monetary reward ('treasures meed') will not result in Death's rejecting ('respited') the soul and so allowing it to avoid the 'tombe'. Put more simply, wealth cannot prevent you dying. Although the moral message is conventional enough, even today, the image incurred by the words within the context of early modern memorialisation is of one of the resplendent tombs designed, erected and paid for by noble families as the dead were used to claim status for the living. As Sidney Herbert sharply points out, it is 'others [who] spend the riches'. Llewellyn has written persuasively in *The Art of Death* about the way in which early modern discourses of death were harnessed in order both to grieve for the deceased and to self-fashion their heirs, since tombs were seen to be 'expensive objects of display and culture'.³¹ While the poem appears, therefore, to be a perfectly conventional critique of worldly goods, read alongside the material expressions of how the early modern male nobility used death to 'self-fashion', the poem begins to look more like a sharp critique of the Elizabethan court than a pious abjuring of wealth. Moreover, when set alongside her evocations of the mutuality of women's lamentation, the critique becomes distinctly gendered setting the self-serving individualism of male mourners against the supportive communities of their female counterparts.

Until recently, the most common evaluation of Sidney Herbert's evocation of contemporary polemic in her writing placed her as an echoing presence, rehearsing the ideological beliefs of her dead brother.³² But if her poetry is re-read through the lens of early modern gendered lamentation, another very different form of memorialisation may be discerned. Together, the similarity between Caesar's speculation of the booty he might acquire in order to augment his status and the

³⁰ Sidney Herbert, II, pp. 44-5, ll. 14-18.

³¹ Nigel Llewellyn, *The Art of Death: Visual Culture in the English Death Ritual c.1500 - c.1800* (London: Reaktion Books, 1991), p. 115.

³² Sidney Herbert, I, p. 11.

reference to the 'meed' that 'others [will] spend' on worldly show, represent an attack not only upon the folly of humankind, but upon the men who are 'fooles' for believing that the pomp of their memorials, funeral processions and tombs will have any lasting impact. But when there is nothing left 'to spend', when the lamentations are made by women with no economic or political power, what is left?

Returning to Playfere's sermon, the answer would surely be excessive lamentation, since 'women' have no form of expressing overwhelming grief other than their 'weeping'.³³ But, set against Sidney Herbert's tragic presentation of the women's mourning for Antonie, Playfere's populist dismissal begins to look inadequate, for the words and actions of the Egyptian women cannot be contained within socially regulated boundaries, instead spilling over into an evocation of liminality. After Eras and Charmion have called for tears, Cleopatra proceeds to demand, 'Weep my companions, weep' (41-2). The community of women in the tomb thus re-enact the private lamentations depicted in *The Triumph* and 'The Dolefull Lay', but here the likeness ends abruptly. Antonie's soul has not been rewarded with 'heavens joy', instead being condemned to wander as a 'ghost', and the women's grief finds violent expression as they 'martyr ... [their] breasts with multiplied blows', with 'violent hands tear off ... [their] hanging hair' and 'outrage ... [their] faces' (42). These excessive forms of lamentation inevitably draw upon Garnier's original and replicate the classic funeral discourse appropriate to the play's historical and Senecan contexts. At the same time, Sidney Herbert relocates the women's grief into a liminal space that cannot be explained by translation or allusion.

Exploring once again Dircetus' description of Antonie, an intriguing mistranslation is apparent, for Sidney Herbert substitutes, 'life-dead' (38) for Garnier's 'demy mort' to describe the mortally wounded man.³⁴ Half-dead would have served as a more literal and realistic translation, whereas 'life-dead' sets up an irreconcilable duality in which Antonie must be seen simultaneously as both alive and dead. Moreover, this allusion to an uncanny presence suffuses the final lines of the play, where the most evocative sequence occurs as Cleopatra expresses her desire,

To die with thee [Antonie], and dying thee embrace;
My body joined with thine, my mouth with thine,
My mouth, whose moisture burning sighs have dried,
To be in one self tomb, and one self chest,

³³ Playfere, p. 2.

³⁴ Garnier, p. 205.

And wrapped with thee in one self sheet to rest. (42)

This graphic representation demands that Cleopatra's living form is envisaged as embracing and kissing Antonie's corpse and, in a further eroticisation of the image, her body is 'joined' with her lover's as they are 'wrapped' in a single 'sheet' and placed together in the same 'tomb'. Further, the image is replicated by her words as she addresses the lines to Antonie, almost as if he were able to hear them. This breaching of the divide between life and death is echoed by Cleopatra's fainting which leads Charmion to describe her mistress as 'half dead' and the ambiguity of the final line, 'Fainting on you, and forth my soul may flow', makes it impossible to know if the Queen swoons or dies (41-2). Dircetus' phrase 'life-dead' finds its material form in the play's last scene in which the women's grief becomes so excessive that it envisages a moment when the boundaries between the living and the dead, as well as between the material and the spiritual, might collapse. Of course, Antonie and Cleopatra have always been cast as archetypes of passionate love and, as such, Cleopatra's overwhelming misery may be explained as a very human response. Yet, given Sidney Herbert's other evocations of profound grief, particularly in 'The Dolefull Lay', as well as the paralleling of male and female discourses of death within the play, the gap between what is reasonable and what excessive is exposed, thereby exposing the boundaries between male grief and female lamentation as artificial constructs intended to regulate female subjectivity. As such, the scene also exposes the limitations of condoned female communal mourning, since Cleopatra abjures the comfort offered by her maidservants, turning instead to embrace the corpse of her male lover. The textual evidence, therefore, does not suggest a quiet acceptance of mutual female support, but breaks the boundaries of socially acceptable gender roles by asserting a woman's right to grieve for a man with excessive passion.

Mary Sidney Herbert was perfectly conversant with the acceptable mourning rituals of late sixteenth-century England: what was deemed an appropriate expression of grief and what was considered by the Protestant church to be excessive; the difference between public processions and private weeping; and the distinct roles of men and women as they sought to praise the material status and spiritual worth of the deceased. At the same time, she demonstrates a more incisive knowledge of the way that early modern men's memorialisation practices were often about 'meed' and 'booty,' about the utilization of death to enhance social status through the building of elaborate tombs, and economic advancement – that securing of the departed's 'riches'. She also explored the roles of women in the mourning process, describing imaginative female communities that serve as allegorical representations of the actual coterie at Wilton. With Cleopatra and her women, however, she extends the boundaries of lamentation

beyond appropriate condoned female mourning in order to locate a grief so profound that it could not be contained by convention.

IV. 'Makes us all lament': Mary Wroth

If Mary Sidney Herbert's writings are replete with images of death, mourning and burial, Mary Wroth's canon appears to avoid any suggestion of permanent mortality, an absence that can hardly be explained by lack of experience. As has already been noted, she had personal experience of communal female mourning since she was at Wilton following the death of Philip Sidney with her mother, Barbara, and her aunt, Mary Sidney Herbert.³⁵ Yet, while the impetus for Sidney Herbert's focus on lamentation seems to have been rejected by her niece, in some ways Wroth harnesses the unconventionality of her aunt's drama and reworks the gendering of mourning in her own play, *Love's Victory* (1615-18). The association between Sidney Herbert and Wroth is evidenced not only through their familial relationship, but also textually; for example, since Josephine Roberts' path-breaking edition of *Urania*, it has become a critical commonplace to identify Sidney Herbert with the widowed Queen of Naples in Wroth's prose romance.³⁶ The Queen of Naples is represented 'as perfect in Poetry...as any woman that ever liv'd' and has a female coterie who tell 'stories of themselves, and others, mixed many times with pretty fine fictions'.³⁷ Roberts goes on to hypothesise that a poem ascribed to the Queen 'may well be based on an original text by the Countess of Pembroke', although Margaret Hannay in her biography, *Mary Sidney, Mary Wroth*, notes that 'the manuscript evidence is ambiguous'.³⁸ The so-called 'Nightingale poem' may certainly represent Wroth's reworking of one of her aunt's verses, although the desire for oblivion, 'O That I might now as senseless be', alludes here to the more usual theme of lost love.³⁹

A closer and more likely reworking of the Sidneian discourse occurs in the romance's first poem in which the shepherdess, Urania, bewails her lack of identity, 'Not to know myself' (sig. B1r), which clearly draws upon Sidney Herbert's 'The Dolefull

³⁵ Sidney Herbert, I, p. 6.

³⁶ Josephine A. Roberts (ed.), *Lady Mary Wroth, The First Part of the Countess of Montgomery's Urania* (Binghampton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995), p. lxxxiv.

³⁷ Mary Wroth, *Urania* (London, 1621), pp. 371 and 489. Subsequent references are taken from this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

³⁸ Roberts, p. lxxxv; Margaret P. Hannay, *Mary Sidney, Mary Wroth* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p. 207.

³⁹ Hannay, p. 207.

Lay'. Both female characters 'complaine': Urania saying that she is 'alone' and Clorinda rejecting the company of 'heavens' and 'men' (sig. B1r; Sidney Herbert I, p. 133, ll. 1, 7, and 6). Finally, Urania's words are 'Echo[ed]' back and 'Doubly resounded' by 'Rocks...Hill...Meadowes, and...Springs' (sig. B1r), just as Clorinda's 'plaints' are 'retourne[d]' and 'doubled' by 'Woods, hills and rivers' (I, p. 133, ll. 21-2, and 25).

Yet, where Clorinda turns to the female community of shepherdesses to join her lamentations, Urania remains alone, her sole 'friend' merely an echo (sig. B1r). The poems conclude with Urania 'wayling a state which can no comfort give' (sig. B1r) and Clorinda with the shepherdesses as they 'weep and waile, and wear our eies, / Mourning in others, our owne miseries', endings which echo the respective complaints on loss of self-identity and loss of a beloved other (I, p. 135, ll. 95-6). That said, Hannay, Kinnamon and Brennan point out that 'there are 'striking...parallels among the poems that appear to have been written or revised for *Astrophel*', including 'The Dolefull Lay'. Perhaps, therefore, as an allusion to her Sidneian identity, Wroth chose to parallel her aunt's complaint through the character of Urania.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, what becomes apparent is not an unmediated reworking of Sidney Hebert's poetry or even a compilation of a particularly Sidneian discourse of mourning, but Wroth's ability to produce radical revisions of earlier forms, tropes, images and linguistic referents in order to present a sense of independent subjectivity that challenges convention. This ability to destabilize accepted practice manifests itself in the exploration of the unsettling elements of female communal lamentation, in which closure is evaded. In this sense Wroth freely reworks her aunt's poem, with its associated familial discourse. It is, therefore, Wroth's unfettered approach that aligns the depiction of death and lamentation in her *Love's Victory* with Sidney Herbert's *The Tragedy of Antonie*, even though, initially, the two plays appear to have little in common. For example, tragedy must be set against comedy, translation against an original work and closet drama, which is resistant to public performance, against a text that posits action on a stage. The consanguinity between these texts is located in the sharp contrast between the ways in which men and women expect to be memorialised and in the depiction of the community of female mourners.

In Wroth's play both lovers decide to die together at the Temple of Love and present their deaths in equally idealised terms, with Philisses asserting that, 'hers [Musella's] I lived, hers now I die' and that his 'grave' will be a testament to the power of 'love'

⁴⁰ Sidney Herbert, I, p. 125.

earning him 'fame', while Musella predicts that 'no decay...shall disturb' that 'during state'.⁴¹ There is an immediate conflict in their understanding of death: he, in accordance with early modern male memorialisation discourse, imagines himself in a 'grave' that will have a fitting epitaph ensuring his 'fame'; she, on the other hand, refers specifically to the bodies that lie within the grave and claims that the corpses will not 'decay' (119).

Before turning to Musella's prefiguration of a liminal state, however, I should like to consider Philisses' expectation that his 'fame' will live after him and the actual responses from the shepherds and shepherdesses when they see the supposed corpses. The company arrives at the temple in readiness for Musella's marriage to Rustic, but instead discovers her lying dead upon the altar with Philisses. Their lamentation appears to be fully conventional as they offer superlative praise for Musella: she was 'too rare a prize for earth'; consider themselves 'rich' in having been in her 'sight'; describe her as both 'virtu[ous]' and 'beaut[iful]'; note that her 'love and friendship' was perfect; and, with the usual pun upon Wroth's name, claim that 'no *worth* did live, which in her had not spring' (122, my italics). They then proceed with appropriate testimony since Musella's death, 'makes us all lament', readying themselves to perform the formal 'rites' (123). Through all this, not a single character memorialises Philisses; the 'fame' that he predicted for himself is noticeably absent, the more so since the lamentation for Musella is so effusive. What is even more surprising is that, if read in the context of familial allegory, Philisses represents Philip Sidney.

The autobiographical interpretation of Wroth's oeuvre is now a commonplace and the two lovers in the play may certainly be identified with Wroth and her first cousin William Herbert (Mary Sidney Herbert's son), with whom she had an extended affair and two illegitimate children. However, *Love's Victory* compacts two generations of family history onto the same set of characters, so that Philisses may also be identified as Philip Sidney. Further evidence for this reading may be drawn from Wroth's allusion to Sidney Herbert's 'Dolefull Lay' since in both play and poem the pastimes of the shepherds and shepherdesses are 'riddles' and 'lays' (Wroth, 104-5 and 101-1; Sidney Herbert, I, p. 134, ll. 43 and 45). Thus, in a radical reworking of Sidney Herbert's overwhelming grief for her brother, Wroth alludes to the excessive lamentation for Philip Sidney but, by ignoring Philisses' 'fame', simply deletes it.

⁴¹ Wroth, *Love's Victory*, in Cerasano and Wynne-Davies, p. 121. All subsequent references are taken from this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

While seeming to establish traditional forms of grieving, therefore, Wroth overturns those early modern memorialisation processes that Llewellyn describes as fulfilling the ‘ideological, social and economic’ expectations of a Renaissance nobleman, by simply sidelining any mention of dead men.⁴² Yet, Wroth engages with female communal mourning in a more complex fashion than her aunt. Whereas Sidney Herbert deploys an accurate representation of women weeping together in ‘The Dolefull Lay’ while undercutting those communities sharply through Cleopatra’s eroticised mourning for Antonie, Wroth rejects traditional romantic grief and replaces it with the loving support offered by female companionship.

Indeed, *Love’s Victory* valourises female communities. A number of critics have noted that Wroth’s play is path-breaking in its representation of a mutually supportive female group. Barbara Lewalski argues that Wroth changed the traditional elements of the pastoral tragicomedy in order

to develop an implicit feminist politics which emphasizes a non-hierarchical community, female and cross-gender friendships. And especially female agency in the roles of Venus, Silvesta, Musella, and even Dalina.⁴³

In commenting upon Silvesta’s readiness to die for Musella, Carolyn Ruth Swift notes that,

Wroth creates a situation that may be unique in early English drama: a female friend is willing to sacrifice her own life for another woman who is not her relative or mistress.⁴⁴

While, finally, the powerful bond between women at the end of the play is confirmed, for here, as Naomi J. Miller suggests, there is, ‘a triumph ... [of] the enduring relations between women’.⁴⁵ Even though Musella is mourned by both shepherds and shepherdesses, it is the female community that records her ‘sweet love and friendship’, enables her to escape the unwelcome marriage and, through Venus’

⁴² Llewellyn, *Funeral Monuments*, p. 36.

⁴³ Barbara K. ‘Mary Wroth’s *Love’s Victory* and pastoral Tragicomedy’, in *Reading Mary Wroth. Representing Alternatives in Early modern England*, ed. by Naomi J. Miller and Gary Waller (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), pp. 88-108 (pp. 104-5).

⁴⁴ Carolyn Ruth Swift, ‘Feminine Self-Definition in Lady Mary Wroth’s *Love’s Victory* (c.1621)’, *ELR*, 10 (1989), 171-88 (p. 179).

⁴⁵ Naomi J. Miller, *Changing the Subject: Mary Wroth and Figurations of Gender in Early Modern England* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996), p. 215.

power, restores her to life (122). Death is evaded through the combined actions of women, an ending that contrasts strongly with the mutual grief of *The Tragedy of Antonie*, yet at the same time allows Wroth to mirror Sidney Herbert's gendering of mourning.

However, the friendship between the female characters is foregrounded throughout the play and features as a central element in the death recovery sequence: it is Silvesta who gives the two lovers the poison to drink and who, consequently, must be executed. Josephine Roberts points out that in changing the conventional ending of the pastoral where the deaths are fake, Wroth drew upon Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* but 'instead of a fearful, bumbling friar...supplies the courageous figure of Silvesta'.⁴⁶ Roberts and Swift agree on the seriousness of Silvesta's situation, interpreting the threat to her life as a real possibility, an interpretation that reinforces Wroth's radical reworking of the false death sequence into a statement of mortality and miraculous recovery. Moreover, if placed within the context of execution, Silvesta's fate recalls the discourse of martyrdom as Forrester's prophetic vision summons images from Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*:

I saw Silvesta's hands tied
Fast to a stake, where fire burned in all pride,
To kiss with heat those most unmatched limbs. (124)

Similarly, her ready welcoming of death reiterates the pious fortitude of female martyrs, such as Jane Grey and Mary Stuart:

Thus, by death a-new I live!
My name by this will win eternity
For no true heart will let my merit die. (124)

And, unlike Philisses' vain hope for 'glory', Venus herself appears at the end of the play to revive the lovers, right all wrongs and praise Silvesta: 'sh'hath gained immortal fame' (125).

The foregrounding of female communities and the insistence upon their exceptional friendship is, therefore, set against the absence of male 'glory' and a belittling of patriarchal cultural codes. This gendering of memorialisation is achieved partly through the omission of lamentation for Philisses but is underscored through the

⁴⁶ Roberts, p. 170.

dismissive treatment of the other male characters in the play. Forrester's heroic offer to take Silvesta's place at the stake is greeted by Venus' condescending, 'Poor Forrester, thy love deserveth more', Rustic, having been thwarted of a union with Musella, hastily accepts Dalina since he would 'rather die than' accept his role as a spurned lover; and Arcas, who has plotted to discredit Musella, is condemned by Venus to a 'dying life' of 'shame' (124-6). In terms of cultural codes, Wroth re-genders lamentation so that women are praised and men are ignored, patronised, ridiculed or remembered for their 'error[s] foul and ill' (125). This suggests a basic inversion, but such a simplistic reading, while certainly revealing Wroth's proto-feminist politics, does not explain why Musella must be presented on the imagined stage as dead and why she earlier refuses to see her death in terms of material 'fame' (121).

In Sidney Herbert's play *Dircetus* uses that telling phrase 'life-dead' when referring to Antonie and the term is echoed by Charmion when she describes Cleopatra as 'half-dead', yet this evocation of a liminal space is as applicable to the doomed Antonie and Cleopatra as it is to the magically recovered Philisses and Musella. As a tragicomedy, the plot of *Love's Victory*, like *The Tragedy of Antonie*, incorporates thwarted love; Musella has been promised in wedlock to Rustic so that the two lovers take a 'sweet potion' provided by their friend, Silvesta, in order to evade that matrimonial fate (121). However, although the genre allows the reader / audience to predict a happy ending, when the characters on stage see Musella and Philisses' bodies, they believe them to be dead. Even the clownish Rustic claims that his bride is 'dead and buried' (122). Therefore, when Wroth follows lamentation practice closely in the following scenes, she reiterates the conventions already established and questioned by Sidney Herbert. Like the women who grieve for Laura and the pastoral figures who weep for Philip Sidney, the shepherds and shepherdesses in *Love's Victory* begin by praising Musella's 'virtue ... [and] worth' (123). Subsequently, they go to the 'temple' to perform the funeral 'rites', together sing a hymn which claims that the 'souls ... will to heavenly bliss aspire' and acknowledge that the sight of the dead bodies 'makes us all lament' (123-4). It is at this point that Venus interrupts the rites, ('be not amazed'), revives the lovers, proclaims that Silvesta has simply been her 'instrument', and requests that 'all rejoice' (124-5). In the concluding lines of the play the pastoral lovers are united, Musella's mother asks for pardon, the villainous Arcas confesses and Venus announces that she is 'crowned with victory' (125-6).

Yet, as I have argued elsewhere, because the play demands both mourning rites and a tragicomic conclusion, 'the lovers' bodies must encode both mortality and decay,

existing on a cusp between life and death and, as such, ‘adopt a liminal space’.⁴⁷ As such, Wroth undercuts convention by destabilising patriarchal boundaries, thereby aligning her play with that of Sidney Herbert, whose parallel location of Cleopatra as ‘life-dead’ evades the conventional discourse of early modern gendered lamentation. However, unlike her aunt, Wroth edges still further beyond accepted social codes. In *Love’s Victory* female companionship is shown to be more lasting, more *worthwhile*, than male self-fashioning, and the community of female mourners are free to access a public space in which their voices are no longer contained within a private space, neither the walls of Wilton nor those of an Egyptian tomb.

V. Conclusion

When the young Mary Wroth joined her aunt, Mary Sidney Herbert, at Wilton she did so in order to participate in the communal lamentation of the women from the extended Sidney / Herbert family who congregated in order to provide mutual support as they mourned the death of Philip Sidney. Indeed, that event must have been important to both women since they replicate it in their texts, Sidney Herbert in ‘Angell Spirit’, where she describes the grieving shepherdesses, and Wroth in *Love’s Victory*, where the pastoral community commemorates the supposedly dead couple, Philisses and Musella. Although, of course, in a radical rewriting of Philip Sidney’s splendid funeral, Wroth sidelines Philisses and refocuses our attention upon female bonds of friendship and the communal lamentation for Musella. Yet, while the two women joined in the material and textual lamentation for Sidney, their own memorialisations could hardly vary more. Mary Sidney Herbert died in 1621, her funeral was held at St Paul’s Cathedral and her corpse was carried in a torch-lit procession to Wilton where she was buried next to the Earl under the steps leading to the choir stalls in Salisbury Cathedral. Mary Wroth died in 1651 and, since she lived at Loughton Hall, it is most likely that she was buried in the old church of St Nicholas that stood next to the manor. However, in 1836 Loughton Hall was consumed in a fire and some time later St Nicholas was demolished, so no records of Mary Wroth’s burial or stones from her tomb remain. These ends represent acute differences in terms of wealth and social status, the churches in which they were buried, the extant records of their deaths and, finally, the presence / absence of their tombs. Yet, we should recall the disdain of both women writers for the early modern monumental edifices that commemorated male ‘fame’, acknowledging, like Mary Sidney Herbert,

⁴⁷ Marion Wynne-Davies, ‘The Liminal Woman in Mary Wroth’s *Love’s Victory*’, *Sidney Journal*, 26 (2008), 65-82 (p. 77).

that such memorials were 'bootless' and, like Mary Wroth, that it might be best to ignore them altogether. Instead, perhaps we should remember the two women as they depicted themselves; as the shepherdesses who gathered together in a community of women, not only to lament, but to play at 'riddles' and sing pastoral 'lays.'