EMWJ 2013, vol. 8
Book Reviews

Approval of and responsibility for atrocities committed in her name in England’s nearest colony, thus providing a salutary counterpoise to her regal glamour and proto-feminist appeal. For Carey Elizabeth is a war criminal and perhaps even a perpetrator of genocide.

Essays by Linda Shenk and Donald Stump remind us how integral religion was to all areas of Elizabethan culture. Shenk provides a revelatory new reading of Lyly’s *Endymion* as much more than just courtly dream-vision: rather, it is full of allusions to St. Paul that assert Elizabeth’s role as creator of religious harmony and conformity. Stump explores more comprehensively than any previous scholar why the Old Testament heroines prominent in early Elizabethan panegyric fade from view in the later years of the reign to be displaced by pagan classical goddesses as personae for Elizabeth. He finds some answers in Elizabeth’s gradual detachment from polemically minded radical Protestantism and in the fact that biblical heroines were used in the first two decades of the reign in propaganda against Catholic France, a relationship that altered dramatically as Elizabeth embarked on the Anjou courtship and as Spain became England’s main enemy.

Overall, then, this is an essay collection replete with many kinds of riches. It could perhaps have been enhanced even further by the use of illustrations. However, its essays speak to one another productively, offering many fresh insights and opening up further avenues for enquiry. It certainly earns its place on the ever-growing shelf of studies of Elizabeth I.

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Mary Sidney Wroth: The Woman Who Challenged Shakespeare

Written in Japanese, Akiko Kusunoki’s slim and elegant volume provides a succinct but richly textured introduction to the life and writings of Mary Sidney Wroth (1586/7–1651/3), whose family combined aristocratic lineage with an extraordinary passion and talent for literature. Daughter to
Robert Sidney, first earl of Leicester, and niece to both Sir Philip Sidney and Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, Wroth is best known today for *Urania*, a massive and rambling prose romance — and thinly veiled roman-à-clef, really — inspired in large part by court gossip and her own affair with her first cousin William Herbert, 3rd earl of Pembroke. When part of *Urania* was published in 1621, it seems to have caused quite a stir.

For Kusunoki, Wroth was not just the first woman to compose and publish imaginative work in her own right but a pioneer who broke with, and broke through, the cultural strictures of her male-dominated society. “Patriarchy” is a term that recurs throughout her discussion. In Wroth, Kusunoki sees a skillful “re-writing” of works by male authors, especially Shakespeare, who was already a popular playwright recognized both at court and on the London stage. Indeed, the book’s subtitle proclaims Wroth “the woman who challenged Shakespeare.” More importantly, Kusunoki argues, Wroth signaled the birth of a woman writer possessed of “shutai-sei” or the capacity to think, judge, and act as an individual.

The body of Kusunoki’s study consists of six compact chapters, each of which is based on material presented or published previously, either in English or Japanese. Below is my summary of these chapters, organized into three thematically linked pairs.

The first two chapters explore the formation of woman’s “shutai-sei” or personal agency. In chapter one (“The woman in love and literary creation — change of heart, marriage, gender”), Kusunoki argues that in contrast to the mocking portrayal of Viola in Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, Wroth delves more subtly into the psychology of Pamphilia, the female protagonist-writer in *Urania*. In particular, Kusunoki describes how Pamphilia, though saddened by the betrayal of her lover Amphilanthus, realizes that her “constancy” to her own feelings for him outweighs his “change of heart,” and how, ultimately, this awareness unlocks her capacity for thinking and creating narrative. In this sense, truth-to-self and self-expression are linked, but, importantly, that self remains existentially and socially bound by the androcentric values of Wroth’s day. Chapter two (“Love’s Victory — Pastoral and women’s intervention in politics”) delves further into the dynamics of that androcentricism, against which Wroth’s
female characters struggle to construct their sense of self. Juxtaposing Shakespeare's *Othello* and *The Winter's Tale* to Wroth's *Love's Victory* (a pastoral-romance play perhaps written to celebrate a wedding in the family), Kusunoki foregrounds the differences in the portrayal of male jealousy. While in Shakespeare the jealousy of Othello and Leontes, even when groundless, renders their wives utterly and tragically helpless, in Wroth's ironic hands male jealousy is revealed as no more than a displaced lack of self-confidence. The center of androcentrism, in short, is revealed to be empty.

In the succeeding pair of chapters, Kusunoki turns her attention to dimensions of cultural marginality, an issue that figures importantly in the second part of *Urania* (which remained in manuscript at Penshurst, the Sidney family seat, until its publication in 1999). In these two chapters Wroth's idealizing impulse comes particularly to the fore. Chapter three ("The representation of 'blackness' and the perception of alien culture — focusing on *Urania* and *Othello*") takes up the marriage of Pamphilia to Rodomandro, the dark-skinned king of Tartaria. Unlike Shakespeare's Othello, who is exposed to nasty and continuous race-baiting, Wroth's Rodomandro emerges in Kusunoki's reading as an exemplar of a kind of multicultural political sensitivity. He is chivalrous, courteous, and, most of all, respectful of Pamphilia's "private space" — her autonomy, sense of self, and, ironically, her "constancy" to the true love of her life, Amphilanthus. For Kusunoki, the whole episode suggests that Rodomandro's "blackness" stands for precisely what is lacking in Wroth's own "white" society, i.e., men respecting women's *shutai-sei* or independent sense of selfhood. Here, Kusunoki claims, one can catch a glimpse of Wroth's conscious challenge to Shakespeare.

In a change of gear, chapter four ("Fair Design, the elegant and courageous youth — positioning the illegitimate child") addresses the matter of illegitimacy as embodied by the character of Fair Design — commonly taken to be the out-of-wedlock child of Pamphilia and Amphilanthus. The issue would have been of importance to Wroth herself, since after the death of her husband, she had borne two children sired by her lover Pembroke. Unlike Shakespeare's villainous bastards, such as Edmund in *Lear* or Don John in *Much Ado*, Wroth's Fair Design, as his name implies,
is a sterling human being acting always in pursuit of some lofty goal. He is, Kusunoki observes, modeled on Shakespeare's Philip the "good" bastard (in *King John*) who, with his political discernment and military prowess, is able to exercise leadership in a world where the word "legitimacy" has lost any meaning.

The last two chapters treat the symbolics of the "cabinet," which in Wroth's time could have meant anything from a little box to a chest of drawers to a private room where important objects were kept. In chapter five ("The 'Cabinet' and woman's 'private domain'"), Kusunoki notes that both Shakespeare and Wroth speak of the "cabinet" as pertaining, especially, to woman's private possessions, but that for Wroth's Pamphilia and other female characters who write, it is more than that. For them, the cabinet functions as a protective container for their thoughts, their self-sovereignty, against the overweening and at times destructive force of male authority. Keeping their thoughts hidden, in other words, is a survival strategy. Kusunoki's final chapter (chapter six: "Transformation of the role of the 'cabinet' — from woman's 'private domain' to 'public domain'")) ventures into a discussion of what she regards as the larger political intention driving Wroth's creative activity. The publication of *Urania* in 1621, Kusunoki argues, was meant to prod James I into a more resolute stance in favor of his Protestant son-in-law, Frederick the Elector Palatine, in his conflict with the Catholic Habsburgs. By coming out of the "cabinet," so to speak, Wroth made herself a harbinger of a group of women writers from the Civil War onward who inserted themselves into the public realm. In this way, the meaning and symbol of "cabinet" was transformed from a private and protective container to a launching pad for women's self-actualization.

Overall, Kusunoki has succeeded in making the life and work of Mary Wroth come alive for a Japanese readership that in all likelihood was unfamiliar with her. Part of this success is doubtless due to her skillful use of Shakespeare as foil. In part, also, it is because Kusunoki, immersed in the recent scholarship on Wroth, writes engagingly and insightfully. In places, though, her argument falls short. She falters a bit, for example, when she tries to discuss Wroth's larger political design — not so much because of what she says but because of what she does not. James I's religious and
diplomatic stances as a Protestant monarch and the broader context in which he operated seem to me far more complex than Kusunoki describes. But this is a small quibble, which does nothing to detract from what one might call the moral attractiveness of Kusunoki’s leitmotif of shutai-sei or self-sovereignty. For Japanese readers, especially for Japanese women readers, the notion of self-actualization remains a value to uphold and fight for. I cannot help but think that when Kusunoki invokes the “patriarchy” of Wroth’s England, she also has in mind that of Japan itself.

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