Naomi J. Miller. *Changing the Subject: Mary Wroth and Figurations of Gender in Early Modern England*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996. Pp. xi, 279.

To feminist scholars engaged in the painstaking recovery of early modern women's writing, Lady Mary Wroth offers an embarrassment of riches. A gifted and prodigious author born just when Shakespeare was beginning to write, Wroth composed a 590,000 word prose romance, *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania* (1621), a complete sonnet cycle, *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, as well as a pastoral play, *Love's Victory*. As the niece of Mary Sidney Herbert and Philip Sidney, Wroth was the heir to literary and cultural privilege; as the mistress of her first cousin and mother to two illegitimate children, she was at the centre of a scandal which ended in her bitter exile from the court; as a woman writer, she was labelled an "Hermaphrodite" by an irate contemporary. Her work offers critics a unique opportunity to observe the impact of gender on genre, since her romance is clearly indebted to her uncle's *Arcadia*, and her sonnets recall others by her father, her uncle, and Shakespeare himself. Since the 1995 publication of the first modern edition of the first part of the *Urania* (Binghamton: Medieval Renaissance Texts and Studies; the second part exists only in manuscript), the academic world has been ready and waiting for a book like this one, which promises to read Wroth not merely as absorbed in a "family romance" (Gary Waller, Detroit, 1993), but also as fully engaged in and by "the complex and sometimes conflicting figurations of gender in early modern culture at large" (p. 217). This book, however, only partly lives up to its large promises.

Initially, Miller seems acutely aware of the dangers of the politics of sexual difference which could turn Wroth into simply an oppositional figure. She attempts to resist those dangers by invoking Luce Irigaray's formulation of the feminine as multiple and other in itself ("this sex which is not one"); and her most convincing readings are of Wroth's female characters, especially in *Urania*, occupying and negotiating a range of positions in relation not to men but to one another. Yet the oppositional mode which Miller appears to resist rapidly reasserts itself. Early modern notions of femininity which are initially (and promisingly) described as "disjunctions" (p. 52) soon become "cultural discourses that have constructed women's selves as dual, duplicitous and ever other" (p. 36), while all male authors see women as "objectified" (p. 35). Not only does this view replicate the gender politics it opposes, it is necessarily based on reductive readings. For example, Miller's eager attempt to assimilate Shakespeare to this monolithic patriarchy leads her to assert that, in *The Winter's Tale*, "the restoration of the mother-daughter bond comes literally second . . . to Leontes's own reunion with his daughter" (p. 91) — even though the latter is not represented on stage. Despite the complex interplay of Petrarchism and anti-Petrarchism in male sonneteers like Sidney and Shakespeare (illuminated in Heather Dubrow's nuanced study *Echoes of Desire: English Petrarchism and its Counterdiscourses* [Ithaca, 1995]), Miller dismisses all Wroth's

male precursors as Petrarchan (p. 38). Moreover, in order to argue that Wroth changes the subject, Miller feels compelled to argue not only that men have never done so, but that only women can do so. She thus finds herself in the precarious position of situating Wroth in a distinct female literary tradition, "writing out of a tenuous 'subculture' of women's voices in early modern England" (p. 169). Given the tiny percentage of published writing by women during the period, this is a risky claim indeed.

Miller openly adheres to "the critical practice of reading women's texts to discover the embodiment in writing of a gendered subjectivity" (p. 144); yet she runs the risk of finding exactly what she sets out to look for and ignoring what she does not seek. The unfortunate result is to reduce the complexity of texts by women while purporting to celebrate their multiplicity. For example, Miller reads sonnet P85 in *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* as "a pointed attack upon the falsehood of male sonneteers, who disguise their lust with the name of love" (p. 85); but she does not mention the lines of the sonnet which specifically gender lust *female*: after referring to "Venus follyes," Wroth's Pamphilia goes on to assert: "Oure harts ar subject to her sunn; wher sinn / Never did dwell, or rest one minutes space; / What faults he hath, in her, did still begin, / And from her brest hee suckd his fleeting pace." This equivocal tribute to maternal influence may remind some readers of the Countess of Lincoln, author of a treatise advocating maternal breastfeeding, whom Miller describes ecstatically as "able to 'write her body' in Cixousian terms, using metaphoric mother's milk as her ink" (p. 70). Yet it is the Countess who rails freely against women who "choose their own pleasures" instead of obedience to God's ordinance. Similarly, Miller hails Wroth's Melissea in the *Urania* as "the potential for a female agency specifically unfettered by the oppressive patriarchal authority" (p. 105); yet it is this prophetess who utters the following warning to Pamphilia: "many afflictions you must undergoe, and all by woman kinde, beware of them" (*Urania*, p. 135). Again, while Miller identifies Aemilia Lanyer's Muse as mother to her "Infant Verse" (l. 279), a closer look at the text reveals that this "weakling Muse" (l. 282) is identified, not with a mother, but with Icarus and Phaeton, those male types of overweening ambition. But perhaps the most glaring illustration of Miller's wilful construction of the evidence comes in her reading of Lady Leicester's letters. In a letter to her sister, Lady Leicester offers an unctuous vow of sororal affection; in a letter to her husband, she cattily remarks that her sister "is greater in her owne consaite than ever shee was" (p. 190). For Miller, this is proff positive that close female bonds are dished up as rivalry for masculine consumption; for this sceptical reader, it seems just as likely that Lady Leicester was frank enough with her husband to reveal her feelings about her sister.

Quite apart from these minor distortions, Miller's rose-coloured view of early modern women leads to a troubling double standard in evaluating literary production by men and women. If male-authored texts in Miller's view invariably endorse

patriarchal ideology by erasing or objectifying women, female-authored texts which represent women in negative terms “bear witness to the destructive potential of such an ideology” (p. 103). If male writers are vilified for their “egocentrism” (p. 40) in exalting “their subjective authority as writers,” Wroth is praised for the “authority of her authorship” (p. 157). If male poets misogynistically silence the female voice, Wroth cleverly ignores the male love object so that “no male beloved can finally fracture her authorship” (p. 160). Criticism so rooted in identity politics limits itself to throwing roses or stones. Nor can it account for the playful indeterminacy of early modern texts such as the crossdressing pamphlets or female-authored defenses of women which, Diane Purkiss argues, ventriloquize the female voice in order to recuperate its subversive potential (London, 1992, pp. 69–101). Furthermore, the argument finally results in a radical reduction in the multiple positions Miller herself argues that women occupied. Miller’s commitment to “the potentially liberating force of homosocial bonds” (p. 140) among women, for example, leads her to downplay not only the overt commercial competitiveness among polemicists such as Rachel Speght and Esther Sowernam, but also the vexed relationship between Pamphilia and Antissia in the *Urania* — a relationship which includes *both* bitter rivalry (*Urania* 94–5) and homoeroticism (p. 148). While Miller’s book is a welcome attempt to place Mary Wroth in the larger context of early modern culture, its potentially nuanced insights into this fascinating and prolific author are continually compromised by its rigid political agenda.

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Hélisenne de Crenne. *Les Angoysses douloureuses qui procedent d'amours*, édition critique présentée et annotée par Christine de Buzon. Paris, Honoré Champion, 1997. Pp. 728.

Christine de Buzon’s critical edition of the *Angoysses* by Hélisenne de Crenne (the very successful alias of Marguerite Briet) is complete, accurate and a pleasure to read. There are the usual aids: introduction (pp. 7–41), bibliography (pp. 43–85), critical apparatus, notes (pp. 509–632), glossary (pp. 683–690, but without page references back to the text), and two indexes (pp. 705–728), one for names appearing in the romance itself and the other for names mentioned in the introduction and notes. The notes are replete with citations and discussions of passages, above all from Boccaccio’s *Flammette* and Caviceo’s *Peregrin*, which Hélisenne incorporated into her text. Especially welcome is the presence of a “Dictionnaire mythologique” (pp. 667–681) containing extracts from Dame Hélisenne’s own 1541 translation of the first four books of Virgil’s *Aeneid*. Christine de Buzon has also