

FEMALE AGENCY IN THE EARLY MODERN ROMANCE
IN BRITISH AND ITALIAN CONTEXT:
LADY MARY WROTH, ANNA WEAMYS,
MODERATA FONTE AND GIULIA BIGOLINA

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ABSTRACT

FEMALE AGENCY IN THE EARLY MODERN ROMANCE
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This study explores female agency in the early modern British and Italian context in Lady Mary Wroth's *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, Anna Weamys' *A Continuation of Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia*, Moderata Fonte's *Thirteen Songs of Floridoro* and Giulia Bigolina's *Urania: The Story of a Young Woman's Love* by concentrating on female empowerment in their romances on a historicist basis. New Historicism and Cultural Materialism scrutinise literary texts within their historical context. In this sense, the theoretical framework the study employs is the amalgam of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism. Regarding the historical context, it adopts a New Historicist approach based upon the analysis of each romance within its own period of production. Nonetheless, the focus is on Cultural Materialism since, although each approach hinges upon similar basic precepts in regard to contextual readings of literary texts, Cultural Materialism, built upon the principle of dissidence and polyphony in culture, takes into consideration the fissures in the dominant ideology to amplify the silenced and marginalised voices of the system. Within this framework, considering the early modern patriarchal social order which mutes female voice and forbids romances, the study seeks to recover the subordinate constituent of the early modern culture. It argues that the female romance as a dissident genre, female romance authors owing to act of writing and the female characters in each romance via various adventures defying

the patriarchal prescriptions challenge the gendered hierarchical structure, the patriarchal discourse, the patriarchal construction of femininity and the biased patriarchal institutions of the early modern period in order to foreground female agency, to amplify female voice and to accentuate female experience.

Keywords: Renaissance, Mary Wroth, Anna Weamys, Moderata Fonte, Giulia Bigolina

ÖZ

İNGİLTERE VE İTALYA ERKEN DÖNEM ROMANSINDA KADIN EYLEMİ:
LADY MARY WROTH, ANNA WEAMYS,
MODERATA FONTE VE GIULIA BIGOLINA

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Bu çalışma İngiliz ve İtalyan erken modern dönem yazarlarından Lady Mary Wroth'un *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, Anna Weamys'in *A Continuation of Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia*, Moderata Fonte'nin *Thirteen Songs of Floridoro* ve Giulia Bigolina'nın *Urania: The Story of a Young Woman's Love* başlıklı eserlerinde kadının güçlenmesine odaklanarak kadın eylemini tarihsel bir bağlamda inceler. Yeni Tarihselcilik ve Kültürel Materyalizm edebi eserleri yazıldıkları dönem çerçevesinde irdeler. Bu sebeple, bu çalışmanın benimsediği kuramsal dayanak Yeni Tarihselcilik ve Kültürel Materyalizmin bileşimidir. Bu çalışma, tarihsel bağlam kapsamında her bir eseri yazıldığı dönem çerçevesinde ele alması bakımından Yeni Tarihselcilik kuramını temel almakla birlikte, esas dayanağı Kültürel Materyalizmdir çünkü her iki yaklaşım da edebi eserlerin bağlamsal değerlendirilmesini vurgulamasına rağmen, muhalefet prensibi ve kültürdeki çoksesliliğe dayanan Kültürel Materyalizm, sistemdeki susturulmuş ve ötekileştirilmiş sesleri kuvvetlendirmek amacıyla baskın ideolojideki çatlamları dikkate almaktadır. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma kadını sessizleştiren ve romans türünü yasaklayan erken dönem ataerkil toplum düzenini dikkate alarak bu kültürün ikincil unsurunu ön plana çıkarmayı amaçlar. Muhalif bir tür olarak romansın, yazma eylemleri sayesinde kadın yazarların ve eserlerindeki ataerkil öğretileri çeşitli maceralarla reddeden kadın karakterlerin eylemlerini ortaya koymak, kadının sesini yükseltmek

ve kadın deneyimini vurgulamak hedefiyle cinsiyetçi hiyerarşik yapıya, ataerkil söyleme, ataerkil kadınlık kurgusuna ve erken dönemin tarafı ataerkil kurumlara meydan okuduğunu savunur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Rönesans, Mary Wroth, Anna Weamys, Moderata Fonte, Giulia Bigolina

To my dearest grandmother and mother

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Aim of the Study and Methodology

This dissertation studies female agency in female romances written during the early modern age. For this purpose, it adopts Cultural Materialism since it hinges on the contextual reading of literary texts with the purpose of identifying and amplifying the female voice muted by the dominant culture. Within the early modern context, romance enables women to be visible in the society and helps question the discourse of femininity constructed by the patriarchal culture. In this sense, the four romances by four female authors, namely Lady Mary Wroth's *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania* (1621), Anna Weamys' *A Continuation of Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia* (1651), Moderata Fonte's *Thirteen Songs of Floridoro* (1581) and Giulia Bigolina's *Urania: The Story of a Young Woman's Love* (1552) serve for the empowerment of women. Based upon Cultural Materialist analysis to recover the subordinate voices, the study argues that the female romance as a genre, female romance authors thanks to their act of writing and the female characters within their romances through their myriad experiences that defy patriarchal assumptions and dictates challenge the gender hierarchy, the patriarchal construction of femininity, the dominant culture and the patriarchal institutions of the Renaissance society with the aim of foregrounding female agency, female voice and female experience.

The late 1970s and 1980s witness a shift in paradigm in the discussion of literary works with the introduction of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism in the United States and in Britain respectively, the two similar approaches which emphasise the relationship between history and literature. The analysis, which presupposes the literary works as the material and organic productions of their historical context, marks "a return of history in literary criticism" (Wilson 1) since

the earlier criticism isolates literary works from their socio-historical milieu and regards them representatives of a harmonious cosmological order. The critical practice of the 1980s is characterised by "a shift from an essential or immanent to an historical, contextual, and conjectural model of signification; and a general suspicion of closed systems, totalities, and universals" (Montrose, "New" 393).

The New Historicist and Cultural Materialist points of view interpret literary texts within their historical context. The theoretical framework of the dissertation, in this sense, is the amalgam of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism. In so far as historical context is concerned, the dissertation adopts a New Historicist approach as the discussion of romances is based upon their own period of production. Nevertheless, the focus is on Cultural Materialism because, although these approaches share basic tenets as regards to contextual readings of texts with an emphasis on the intricate relationship between literature and history, New Historicism is built upon the principle of power as flawlessly monolithic in which apparently subversive action results in the consolidation of dominant power while Cultural Materialism, based on the principle of dissidence, takes into consideration the cracks in the dominant ideology in order to bring to light the silenced or the repressed voices of the system. It works through faultlines -contradictions within the dominant mode of thought- which enable dissident readings of literary texts. This dissertation seeks to illustrate, in spite of ideological restraints, how Renaissance romance authors achieve to conceive a dissident perspective. The ambivalent understanding of romance has been the faultline that has driven this study further: on one hand, it was forbidden by educationalists since romances were supposed to influence young and/or married women negatively in the sense that they might be sexually aroused and bring dishonour to their families; on the other hand, there was a huge market of male romance writers who dedicated their works to female readers. The faultline as to the consideration of romance together with the substantial female silence under the patriarchal ideology of the Renaissance have resulted in the composition of this study.

Literature might provide women with role models structured on the patriarchal ideology and it might reinforce the cherished value patterns expected of them and the prevailing understanding of femininity. It would be acceptable that some texts mediate the belief system of certain ideological formation. It would, however, be wrong to think that literature conveys only the dominant voice of its age. Just as

there are stories that reinforce the dominant ideology, there are others that contest it; and, Cultural Materialism cherishes the plurality of different cultures in a given age in order to challenge the validity of its dominant culture. As Sinfield states, "a project for cultural materialism is to discover ways taking the opposite direction: of working with subcultures to reinforce and extend the potential of people who inhabit them" (*Faultlines* 291). Focus on female stories and characters, which constitute the subordinate group of Renaissance patriarchal culture, whose potential has been neglected under false representations, proves resistant against the prevailing patriarchal social order because romance provides representations of women in the context of institutional restrictions and how they have been challenged. Romance is an appropriate genre for women because it enables the production of an alternative perspective to invert the esteemed values of patriarchy¹ and to refashion their identity in accordance with their own will independent of male influence. It befits female authors to relay female voice since "[t]he wish for women for power over their lives cannot be expressed plausibly within dominant discourses [but] only as fantasy" (Sinfield, *Postwar* 25).

The Cultural Materialist analysis "looks for ways in which defiance, subversion, dissidence, resistance, all forms of political oppression, are articulated, represented and performed" (Branningan 108). Even though there are critics who have adopted the method, they have particularly examined Elizabethan drama while other genres have remained untouched. This literary and critical gap for the Renaissance age and the basic tenet of Cultural Materialism based upon contextual reading culminate in the scrutiny of romance genre both because it is highly popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and because female writing and writing within an expurgatory genre challenging the dominant culture render the theoretical practice more suitable for the subject matter. To fulfil the aim, four romances from European literature, namely Lady Mary Wroth's *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, Anna Weamys' *A Continuation of Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia*, Moderata Fonte's *Thirteen Songs of Floridoro* and Giulia Bigolina's *Urania: The Story of a Young Woman's Love*, are selected because they are the earliest examples of their kind and contain examples which are explicable in the light of the term *dissidence* the prominent Cultural Materialist Alan Sinfield employs referring to "challenging of

¹ The study adopts the definition of patriarchy as the "manifestation and institutionalisation of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general" (Lerner 239).

authority in the early modern period, considering especially the ideologies and institutions of gender, ethnicity, state, religion and writing" (*Faultlines* x). Cultural Materialism seeks instances of dissidence in a literary text which would be incompatible with the dominant culture of its age. In the same vein, the study shows that even if the ideology of the age is patriarchalism and female writing activity is substantially limited, it serves as a dissident act against the patriarchal ideology. The predominance of the texts which preach the patriarchal orthodoxy notwithstanding, there are literary efforts which efface the myth that there is a harmonious monolithic world order shared by each member of the society. The female voice disregarded as minority is foregrounded in romances; the textual space operates as a site in which conflicting ideologies are discussed and dominant cultural notions of the time are questioned. In this sense, romance is useful because it "often accommodates ideologically incompatible elements within a single text [which] can be read as traces of ideological struggle" (Howard, *Struggle* 7). Cultural Materialism lays bare the relationship between the dominant and subordinate culture, it identifies dissident elements and illustrates how women assert themselves within the scope of romance. It is applicable to the analysis of romances since it aims at "the recovery of subordinate voices" and is "alert to oppressive representations in terms of class, gender . . . and sexual orientation" (Sinfield, *Shakespeare* 25).

There are three aspects which make this study suitable for a Cultural Materialist analysis: first, romance itself as a genre is emblematic of dissidence; second, women writing romances are dissenting from the tradition; and third, female characters in each romance assert their individuality and agency -the ability to think and act independent of external interference- distinct from the patriarchal pattern. Romance stands against the dominant ideological stance and functions as a space where female voice stands out. It contests the dominant ideology as regards to women. It addresses how culturally defined feminine values are challenged. It embodies the possibility for emergent thought within the dominant culture. Cultural Materialism is instrumental because it helps identify instances of dissidence in a romance text enabling to "set out to judge" whether it is "complicit with the powers of the state" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 9) or subverting it.

Love, marriage and gender relations, the three pillars of romance, have always been recurrent themes in literature. It is through various genres and institutions

that “people were talking to each other about an aspect of their life that they found hard to handle” because “when a part of our world view threatens disruption by manifestly failing to cohere with the rest, then we recognise and retell its story, trying to get it . . . into new shape if we are more adventurous” (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 46). The four female authors in question chose to be more adventurous and retold the old stories through their reinterpretation of myths and the criticism of the institution of marriage and patriarchy, through the valorisation of female voice and experience, through their own stories populated with women seeking individuality and agency in which there are no damsels in distress but helpless knights. Within this context, this dissertation traces the intellectual contribution of female authors to the literary circle in the early modern period. The genre chosen to be studied is romance because both female romance writing has not been solely focused upon either in England or Italy and even though there are studies on medieval romance, the works on Renaissance romance are restricted and even if there are, they are only limited to male authors such as Ludovico Ariosto, Torquato Tasso, Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser and Robert Greene, or they constitute the small part of the studies on Renaissance prose fiction. Few romances written by women are less studied compared to the ones written by men.² The study is supposed to fill the gap in terms of gender and romance studies thanks to its focus on the early modern British and Italian female authors’ contribution to their respective literary fields so as to raise awareness in terms of the female oppression and the various strategies they employ to trigger female emancipation.

If one “glimpses subordinate cultures resisting or contesting the dominant, these are dismissed as unworthy of study because unrepresentative” (Dollimore, “Materialism” 6). The fact that these works are not included in the canon does not, however, mean that they are absent or not worth examining. Even though the female voice might remain unacknowledged in the shade of the English and Italian masterpieces by male authors, the female romance offers a wider perspective as regards to gender conflicts in the early modern literary sphere. The patriarchal

² Sue Stark in *The Heroines of English Pastoral Romance* examines the heroines in the works of Sidney, Spenser, Fletcher, Milton, Marvell and Wroth within the pastoral context focusing on their maturation process; Gary Waller in *The Sidney Family Romance* focuses on the extramarital relationship between the cousins Mary Wroth and William Herbert; Natasha Simonova in *Early Modern Authorship and Prose Continuations* evaluates Anna Weamys in terms of authorship and originality in relation to her sequel to Sidney’s *Arcadia*; Helen Hackett in *Women and Romance Fiction in the English Renaissance* traces the shifting attitudes to romance by women; Christopher Nissen in *Kissing the Wild Woman* concentrates on Bigolina within the framework of the concepts of art and beauty.

ideology as a monolithic worldview by which each sex is encoded to behave and the social rules privileging men must be critically analysed within the framework of romance so that the silenced female voice is made apparent because circulation of dissident discourses strengthens the dissident power such as that of female power when literature serves as a crossover for the silenced.

1.2. Renaissance: Rebirth of Humanism

If we are to call any age golden, it is beyond doubt that [it is the] age which brings forth golden talents in different places. That such is true of this our age [no one] will hardly doubt. For this century, like a golden age, has restored to light the liberal arts . . . joined wisdom with eloquence, prudence with the military art. (Ficino qtd. in DeNicola 240)

To define what Renaissance means or how it should be understood is not an easy task. Marsilio Ficino's 1492 letter to his friend Paul of Middelburg, nevertheless, clearly records that people of the age were conscious of passing through a period which would serve as a bridge to enlighten the ancient world, their own time and decades to follow. Ficino was aware that the age they lived in was historically unprecedented and Florence -and Italy- would be a torchbearer for the most important cultural movement of the European civilisation. He was confident that their century deserved to be called the golden age with the flourish of liberal arts, printing press and military skills. It was in the Renaissance that the development of the individual gained importance and the individuals -both male and female- started to be aware of their unique existence.

It was roughly between the fourteenth and the seventeenth centuries that the European civilisation witnesses an array of developments in the fields of politics, arts, religion and literature but the period waits for more than a century to acquire its name. It was the Italian art historian Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) to apply the term Renaissance [Rinascimento, rinascita] for the first time in his 1550 work *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters* to picture the artists of the time whom he believes to have refreshed the art of the time after its long stasis (Keenan 1). Although the term was first used for the revival in the visual arts, it was later employed to cover advancements in every sphere of life from the fourteenth century onwards. The

Renaissance,³ in this sense, could be conceptualised as a movement, rather than a timespan, when the idea of individual identity as opposed to collectivism started to flourish in which man shifted focus from the after world and divine to the mundane and humane.

Jacob Burckhardt (1818-1897) in his seminal work *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860) lays bare the cultural foundations of Renaissance civilisation and in the chapter "The Development of the Individual" traces the intellectual development of the Italian man. Burckhardt deems him "the firstborn among the sons of modern Europe" (81) due to his self-conscious and self-willed act of individualisation. He draws attention to the sociocultural paradigms which enabled man to develop his individuality. The continuous political shifts, the system based on the separation between the Church and the State, the accumulation of wealth and culture, and interestingly enough, despotism were effective in paving the way for the gradual development of individuality not only for the tyrants and the condottieri (mercenaries) but also for the common man (82-83) during the Renaissance Italy. The socio-political milieu created a private space for the would-be "all-sided man" [l'uomo universale] who was not interested in politics and labels imposed from without (84) but who was a conscious person being on a quest toward himself to gain insight into his true nature. These people, or dilettantes, who were solely interested in culture and arts, were to be the forerunners of the universal man who "had mastered all the elements of the culture of the age" (83). Burckhardt aptly portrays the condition of the Renaissance man who was stripped of his concern to belong to a certain category:

In the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness -that which was turned within as that which was turned without- lay dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil. The veil was woven of faith, illusion, and childish prepossession, through which the world and history were seen clad in strange hues. Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family, or corporation -only through some general

³ Throughout the study, the terms *Renaissance* and *early modern* will be used interchangeably. The period roughly covers the timespan from 1300 to 1700. Some scholars prefer to use the term "early modern" instead of "Renaissance" since they are of the opinion that Renaissance is more of a temporal term rather than qualifying the shifting consciousness of man whose seeds of individuality would make the modern man. Some, however, deny early modern as a term since they claim that it overemphasises the disconnection with the earlier period underestimating the value of knowledge accumulated during the Middle Ages (Keenan 2). Renaissance indicates the connection with the ancient Greece and Rome and refers to the earlier period. Early modern, connected with the foundation of modern individual and culture, emphasises the link with the future.

category. In Italy this veil first melted into air; an objective treatment and consideration of the State and of all the things of this world became possible. The subjective side at the same time asserted itself with corresponding emphasis; man became a spiritual individual, recognised himself as such . . . It will not be difficult to show that this result was due above all to the political circumstances of Italy. (81)⁴

The age, then, could be seen as a transition period from man's anxiety to attach to a certain group to his struggle for the discovery of his spiritual self with an emphasis on his individual consciousness. It is a spiritual and intellectual quest enabling man to break his psychic barriers. The term Renaissance, figuratively rebirth, becomes emblematic since it denotes not only the revival of the works of the antiquity but it is also connotative of the self-centred accomplishments of the individual man. The revival of the works of ancient Greek and Latin world and extensive study of them by the humanist scholars were the milestones for the development of the Renaissance man. Undoubtedly, it was humanism which situated man at the centre of the universe and promoted his cultivation. Since the humanists were of the opinion that humanist thinking and education were *sine qua non* of culture and civilisation, and crucial for the ever-growing man, humanism was also the celebration of the potential power of man. Individual genius, self-cultivation and creativity reached its peak with the Renaissance humanists and philosophers who believed that man was unmatched and superior to all among God's creations due to his intellect helping him advance himself through learning and individual endeavour. L'uomo universale or the Renaissance man was the sum of the basic tenets of humanism which put man at the centre of the universe based on the strong belief in his unlimited capacity to perfect himself through knowledge.⁵ Leon Battista Alberti's (1404-1472) dictum "a man can do all things if he but wills them" (Esposito 343) underpins the core of humanism predicated on humankind himself. The prominent Neoplatonist philosophers⁶ of the age Marsilio

⁴ For the New Historicists and Cultural Materialists, individual identity man seeks to discover is non-existent because man is a socially constituted being. Since this part is allotted to provide a general understanding as to what Renaissance is, there will be no critical interpretation of the information given.

⁵ Leonardo da Vinci's famous sketch The Vitruvian Man [L'Uomo Vitruviano] was the iconic image of the humanist thought that situated man at the centre of the universe and celebrated his perfection and it was the pictorial representation of the Renaissance spirit that combined the study of the ancients, science and art.

⁶ Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), who lived a century later than them, was the embodiment of free-thinking man. Due to his ground-breaking ideas on religious matters and cosmology of universe, however, he was accused of heresy by the Church and burned at the stake.

Ficino (1433-1499) and Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) with their works, *The Soul of Man* (1474) and *The Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486) respectively, emphasise man's potency to succeed in his individual endeavours as well since both suggest that man is created in the image of God and is bestowed free will to act and flourish himself via his acts. Ficino⁷ celebrates man as the "vicar of God" (Burroughs 234) on earth with a steadfast faith that he is capable of being the ruler and the teacher of all animals; the inventor of rules for his own benefit; the administrator of himself and of people (234-35). He regards man the embodiment of God on earth having faith in him as "a great miracle, a living creature worthy of reverence and adoration" (235). Ficino seems to position man on equal terms with God as regard to his capabilities on earth. He promotes his competence to rule and regulate his environment.

Pico della Mirandola in his oration only a decade later focuses on the importance of human potential for development and man's free will in his doings in a similar vein. He emphasises the Great Chain of Being -which proposes that each creature is situated on a different level in which God holds the supreme place while the beasts are the lowest- and states that man thanks to his free will and intellectual capacity to individually pursue knowledge can ascend the chain of being.⁸ According to Mirandola, what makes man a dignified creature is his ability to shape himself into a better form through his free will and intellect. He regards man the maker and molder of himself. While other elements in nature are bound to deterministic rules, he profoundly believes in man's potential to change himself with his individual endeavour.⁹ Both Ficino and Mirandola locate man into a superior place and focus on the importance of self-cultivation. They provide manuals on how to be the precursors of the modern individual as Burckhardt aptly qualifies centuries later.

⁷ The fact that he rehearses the Biblical idea that man is created in the image of God makes him surely a patriarchal figure since he deems man potent to rule each segment of life from the family to the state while there is no mention of woman. One should be prudent to celebrate Ficino so much in this sense but he is a non-negligible figure in the Renaissance.

⁸ "The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which [God] ha[s] laid down . . . We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer. It will be in your power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; you will be able, through your own decision, to rise again to the superior orders whose life is divine" (7-8).

⁹ However, his oration is also a subtle warning of man against himself: only if he accomplishes good deeds and quests for knowledge can he fulfil his role as *emanating from* the divine and ascend the chain of being.

Even though neither of the philosophers openly defends individuality, their instructive orations lead man to realise his full potential to evince his creation in the image of God. They encourage men to be aware of their capabilities.

Much as all the afore-mentioned philosophers express their strong belief in man and his creative potential, none mentions the female sex. Although what is left to the modern reader is to hope that they use *man* as a collective term to cover both sexes, the patriarchal discourse employed by the Renaissance philosophers leads one of the feminist historians, Joan Kelly-Gadol, to question if there was really a Renaissance for women. It is crucial at this point to relate some argumentative points of her article in detail since it is the starting point for the rest of this study and the title of her article is the same question that we should ask ourselves to deepen our argument.

Kelly-Gadol starts her essay with the discomfort she feels due to "the widely held notion of the equality of Renaissance women with men" (176) launched by Burckhardt who claims that there was equality between sexes because women had the same educational opportunities as men in the upper classes¹⁰ during the Renaissance Italy, that such an education enabled "the individuality of women . . . in the same way as that of men" and that "women stood on a footing of perfect equality with men" (240). Kelly-Gadol, on the other hand, argues that women experienced Renaissance quite differently than men because they were not provided with the same social and political circumstances. Although Renaissance humanism enabled man to develop himself, its political and cultural effects were unseen on women since most of the female population were unable to read and write restricted to domestic sphere with contemporary humanist knowledge unavailable to them. She makes a distinction between the medieval age and the Renaissance arguing that due to the feudal structure of the former, women were less passive and they used to have political position within the system of vassalage reflected in the poetry of courtly love. She states that courtly love tradition provided the medieval lady with certain sexual freedom to express her love (178) and women actively took part in the development of courtly love either by writing such kind of poetry or by promoting its ideals through patronage system. For instance, Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughter Marie of Champagne were the

¹⁰ Equal education for both sexes was exceptional to the influential families such as the House of Este, Gonzaga and Medici.

aristocratic women who provided patronage and thus greatly contributed to the running of the cult of courtly love. Kelly-Gadol draws attention to an important point stating that these women, both as patrons and political partners of their husbands' sovereignty, were influential in shaping the courtly love culture since they used to have certain political power and independence that stemmed from the exercise of that political power. That is, at the core of the courtly love poetry that gave women certain amount of agency was the fact that the feudal system necessitated "actual vassal homage to be paid to women" (183-84). There was, then, a slightly liberal context in which women could shape and direct the tradition.

Kelly-Gadol, however, suggests that such a space allotted to noblewomen was tightened as the feudal social structure transformed into city-states. Whereas in the medieval society women somehow managed to respond to the cultural and literary shifts within their social milieu, and since "medieval courtesy" (188) was produced also to please the lady which situated her on an equal position with the courtly man -thereby proved her existence within the social system- from the fourteenth century onwards, due to the patriarchal conduct books, women started to be "determined by men" as to how they should behave (Kelly-Gadol 189). What is more, although the former social relationship between the courtly couple was based on "mutuality and interaction" the Renaissance lover merely employed the lady to voice his own "narcissistic experience" (190). The Renaissance lady turned into a voiceless other, an angelic beauty on pedestal who functioned as an instrument to direct man to God or as the object of male desire by which the male poet meditated on. It was the Sicilian *stilnovisti* poets Giacomo da Lentini, Guido Guinizelli, Guido Cavalcanti, Dante Alighieri and Francesco Petrarca who founded and developed poetry in sweet new style [dolce stil novo] in the thirteenth century, and Guinizelli's poem "Love and Nobility"

Love always repairs to the noble heart
 Like a bird winging back into its grove:

 I'll tell him then: "She had an angel look--
 A heavenly face.
 What harm occurred if my love in her was placed?" (1-2; 58-60)¹¹

¹¹ Al cor gentil reppaira sempre amore / come l'ausello in selva a la verdura; / . . . / Dir Li porò: "Tenne d'angel sembianza / che fosse del Tuo regno; / non me fu fallo, s'in lei posi amanza" (Carrai 54).

was emblematic of the theme of angelic lady [donna angelica] in the vernacular Italian and Western poetry in this regard. The lady was no more a woman in the flesh but a sun, a star, an angel -any symbol of guiding light. She was no longer "loved for herself . . . [but] merely mediate[d] the courtier's safe transcendence of an otherwise demeaning necessity" (192). In other words, Kelly-Gadol is not as optimistic as Burckhardt concerning the gradual female development but protests that it was indeed only in the medieval age there was space for women to cultivate themselves. Medieval courtly love as the reflection of the feudal system of lord and vassal with mutual duties towards each other provided women with agency either as poets or patrons of poets and gave them a place in the society. The Renaissance male economy, on the other hand, with its production of literary works and conduct books, muted women and changed them into ornamental objects. As opposed to Mirandola's oration, which would be the manifesto of the Renaissance movement in Italy, that man is the maker and molder of himself, Kelly-Gadol finishes her article with a rather pessimistic tone that "all the advances of Renaissance Italy, its protocapitalist economy, its states, and humanistic culture, worked mold the noblewomen into an aesthetic object: decorous, chaste, and doubly dependent -on her husband as well as the prince" (197). Her conclusion that women did not have a Renaissance might be an overstatement yet she is partially right in her claim. Still, it should be asserted that, considering the literary works they produced, women had a Renaissance too while it was not enough to save them from subordination within the early modern social context. It is one of the aims of the dissertation to prove that women made themselves visible through romance authorship.

Renaissance was not solely a male flourish. Although the Renaissance society was patriarchal like its antecedent, and the literary activities -just as every issue from law and politics to religion- were at the hands of the male, it would be naïve to think that there was no space for women to make themselves heard in the early modern environment. Woolf had to invent a Judith Shakespeare to imagine what would become of a gifted female writer once she intends to write in the early modern period. The result would apparently be failure according to her:

Reviewing the story of Shakespeare's sister . . . any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at. (55)

Woolf was critical of the social system that denied women the literary opportunities available to men because they seemed to have been pushed out of the literary circle. However, it is thanks to the arduous researches by the scholars interested in early modern women's writing in the recent decades that many works yet undiscovered when she penned *A Room of One's Own* have come to the surface. Indeed, recent feminist research has suggested that there were many women in Europe who were able to write and publish their work in the strictly patriarchal context. It was women's responsibility to raise their voice against the centuries-old derogations and contempt. Women had to protest against the two-thousand-year misrepresentation constituted by the core of the European civilisation. The Greek, Roman and Christian cultures created a deformed image of woman which influenced the social, cultural, political, legal, intellectual and literary consciousness of Europe for centuries. To understand the importance of our authors in particular and the female authors of Europe in general, the misogynist understanding whose foundation goes as far back as the fifth century BC should be laid first.

1.3. The Woman Question till the Fifteenth Century

Aristotle¹² shapes the image of the woman in the Greek civilisation. He regards women to be subservient to their male head because they are inferior even in terms of their biological composition. Upon the detailed examination of the genealogy of an offspring, Aristotle reaches the conclusion that "the female is . . . a mutilated male" (*Generation of Animals*, Book II 737a28) -a failure in reproduction- and therefore, innately imperfect. He considers the female offspring a deviation from what is natural: "for even he who does not resemble his parents

¹² Although Aristotle is Plato's student, it is interesting that they have different opinions on the woman question. Plato suggests that women should be given the same social roles as their male counterparts thinking that if they are provided with opportunities and education, women have the capacity to be as successful as men. Athenian on behalf of Plato states, "we are not going to withdraw our recommendation that so far as possible, in education and everything else, the female sex should be on the same footing as the male" (*Laws*, Book VII 805c). Plato repeats his egalitarian worldview in ideal republic too: "And ruling women, too, Glaucon, for you mustn't think that what I've said applies any more to men than it does to women who are born with the appropriate natures" (*Republic*, Book VII 540c). Socrates tells his audience that there may be female philosopher-kings implying the idea that women could have mental and governmental capacities as well as their male peers. Plato's ideal republic erases gender differences but it remains to be a piece of fiction.

is already in a certain sense a monstrosity; for in these cases nature has in a way departed from the type. The first departure indeed is that the offspring should become female instead of male" (*Generation of Animals*, Book IV 767a43-46). It should not come as a surprise that such a biological inferiority would have repercussions in socio-political milieu. Aristotle further states that it should only be natural for women to be submissive since as regards the sexes "the male is by nature superior and the female inferior; and the one rules and the other ruled"¹³ (*Politics*, Book I 1254a46-48). In the dyadic structure he establishes, he quite naturally puts the woman, who needs to be governed, into the secondary position. He associates reason, mind, administrative skills and active energy with men whereas women are associated with emotive and bodily response. What is more, prescribing that "a good wife should be the mistress of her home . . . let it be her aim to obey her husband; giving no heed to public affairs" (*Economics*, Book III 1353b20-23) he pushes women into the domestic sphere. Women's bodily complexion reinforces such confinement: in line with his thought which makes man the ruler of the house and woman his subject, he makes a further distinction between mind and body as regards to the procreative function of sexes. Aristotle thinks that "every instrument is best made when intended for one and not for many uses" (*Politics*, Book I 1252b3-4) and now that the female sex has already been endowed with childbearing and household chores, it turns out to be the masculine duty to deal with politics, labour and non-domestic responsibilities. Aristotle's opinion is based on the binary oppositions of culture-nature, mind-body, non-domestic-domestic and ruler-subject. Men's biological composition situates them onto a higher position whose reflection is observable in the political and social status of women.

Just as Aristotle shaped the mode of thought of the European man, the Roman law was as influential as the Greek culture on the subsequent generations with regards to the legal status of women in the society and according to the law. Grubbs notes that even though there was no one-to-one correspondence between the Latin word *familia* and the English *family*, *familia* was roughly used to denote the

¹³ Aristotle's dictum was not completely valid for the Renaissance nobility since, as the following passages show, there were some literarily, religiously, politically powerful women. Since it was generally the monetary power that defined one's position in the society, it should be noted that these women were exceptional and the Renaissance society was still patriarchal based upon the binary opposition of the obedient wife and the controlling husband. Aristotle's sentence keeps its validity considering the common folk and it cannot be disregarded. As the cultural materialists state, culture is never homogenous.

household in the Roman social life and the Roman *familia* was predominantly constituted under the control of the male head [paterfamilias] based on his legal power [potestas] (17). *Patria potestas* as the oldest male descendant was the head of *paterfamilias* who used to have legal authority over his children, both male and female, and his sons' children. It was impossible for a woman to become *paterfamilias* herself because she was not allowed to exercise *potestas* over anybody, and even though her authority over her children was legally recognised, she could not be their guardian after the husband's death (20-21). Basically, women had to live under either one of the three legal authorities; *patria potestas* (paternal power), *manus* (subordination to one's husband's legal authority) and *tutela* (guardianship) (20). They were supposed to live under the authority of *patria potestas* until marriage. Once married, they had to accept their husband's power [manus] which would include some legal sanctions that would hinder women's personal property rights (21). The final institution women would undergo was *tutela mulierum* (the guardianship of women). It was compulsorily imposed when a woman's *paterfamilias* was dead unless she was under her husband's *manus* (23). Although guardians were necessary also for the male under twelve, it was required for all the female both under and over the age of twelve due to their legal illiteracy and supposed weakness of their sex (Grubbs 29). Since women were stereotypically seen to be incapable of carrying out legal transactions themselves, it was believed that "women should receive assistance in legal matters and their ignorance of the law could be excused" (47). Furthermore, because they were considered to be half-wits unable to decide on their own "the consent of the guardian was necessary to validate certain legal and financial activities to which women were parties" (35). In sum, the Roman law did not give women any agency: they could not take decisions without their fathers', husbands' or guardians' consent nor could they initiate action.

Greek and Roman cultures had established the core of female perception yet the Christian doctrine further reinforced the silencing of women. Since, according to the creation myth, Eve is created out of Adam's rib, and therefore second in rank (Gen. 2.21-23), women are considered to be men's inferior. It lays the foundation of their hierarchical relationship. It is, in fact, the irrevocable mistake Eve commits dooms her descendants into the wretched place from which womenfolk try to escape. When Eve is tempted by the serpent to eat from the Tree of Knowledge so as to *know* more and she *tempts* Adam to eat from it (Gen. 3.6) she is labelled the

eternal seductress. The tree is forbidden, "for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3.5). It is emblematic of woman's first struggle to *learn more* in which she is the initiator of an action. Her failure in obedience to God -the supreme patriarchal figure- ends up with the subjection of women to menfolk. "He shall rule over thee" (Gen. 3.16) would be the hallmark of female subjection since the Original Sin. While Adam and Eve are banished from the Garden of Eden, their daughters are eternally punished with subjection, silence and obedience¹⁴ as a consequence. Therefore, the Epistles of Paul to Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Timothy and Colossians articulate female submission several times. The Scripture dictates a hierarchical structure on earth similar to the one in Paradise. Such formation deems men the reflection of God on earth and demands from women absolute subjection. The following verses such as "but I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman *is* the man; and the head of Christ *is* God" (1 Cor. 11.3), "wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church" (Eph. 5.22-23), "wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord" (Col. 3.18) or "likewise, ye wives, *be* in subjection to your husband" (1 Pet. 3.1) illustrate the understanding that woman should obey man as if he were God, which reinstates the perception that the flawless man is the embodiment of God on earth as opposed to the doomed female sex. In the same vein, since Eve cannot manage to learn by herself in line with how God permits, women are allowed to be educated under a male's command. In 1 Tim. 2.11-13 women are permitted to learn in silence and with total subjection to a man both because Adam is created earlier than Eve and because if women learn by themselves, they might usurp male authority. Paul's epistles underline the fact that women as the weaker vessel should naturally submit to men and accept whatever is instructed to them in silence. What is more, their space is constricted when it is preached that "she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety" (1 Tim. 2.15) which leaves no means but motherhood for salvation. Aristotle, the Roman law and the Christian doctrine share a negative view as to woman, her place in the society and how she should be taught and treated. John Milton's

¹⁴ In Gal. 3.28, Paul the Apostle adopts an egalitarian worldview: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female."

treatment of Eve in the Book 11 of *Paradise Lost* poetically summarises what has been stated so far regarding the female condition. After the Original Sin, the angel Michael takes Adam to a higher point in Paradise to show what will happen to their descendants till the Flood:

Ere thou from hence depart, know I am sent
To thee and to thy offspring, good with bad
Expect to hear, supernal grace contending
With sinfulness of men; thereby to learn
True patience, and to temper joy with fear
And pious sorrow, equally inured
By moderation either state to bare,
Prosperous or adverse: so shalt thou lead
Safest thy life, and best prepared endure
Thy mortal passage when it comes. Ascend
This hill; let Eve (for I have drenched her eyes)
Here sleep below while thou to foresight wak'st,
As once thou slept'st while she to life was formed. (356-69)

Eve's absence in the scene illustrates her secondary position since Michael does not directly show her the future of mankind, which also obliquely amounts to the fact that she (or a woman) needs a male mediator in order to better understand the word of God. Eve is prevented from direct contact with knowledge as she is held responsible for the Fall due to her unmediated relationship with Satan in pursuit of knowledge. Miltonic understanding of Biblical history coincides with the historical data as it is always men who supposedly have intellectual predominance over women and who are required to educate them to inhibit their misconduct.

1.4. *Querelle des femmes* in the Renaissance

Although the condition framed so far seems to have represented women as the weaker vessel, the centuries particularly concerned in this study were not devoid of politically, socially, religiously and literarily able women. There used to be certain female literary figures whose presence constituted and contributed to the core of feminism in the Renaissance. The Renaissance idea of the individual man who was devoted to cultivating himself regardless of his collective identity was not effective only for men. Leon Battista Alberti's maxim "a man can do all things if he but wills them" would also be perfectly functioning for women to trigger them in their

struggle to save themselves from male hegemony. The humanist thought, which was centred on human evaluation, provided new opportunities for the re-evaluation of female nature with an attempt to save women from cultural bias. Literature was instrumental in conveying women's concerns. Starting from the last quarter of the fourteenth century with Christine de Pisan (1363-1430) there was an on-going literary activity among female writers who might be called the pioneers of feminist awakening because they penned their ideas/defences regarding female issues such as female nature, female education and female intelligence. If it was Christine de Pisan who inaugurated the *querelle des femmes* [debate on women, querelle feminine] tradition to correct the distorted image of women imposed by men at the dawn of the fifteenth century as an attempt to gain the female voice suppressed under male hegemony for centuries, it was Eleanor of Aquitaine, Marie de France, Marguerite de Navarre, Hélienne de Crenne, Louise Labé, Marie de Gournay and Madeleine and Catherine des Roches in France; Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, Isabella Whitney, Esther Sowerham, Aemilia Lanyer, Rachel Speght, Lady Mary Wroth, Anna Weamys, Jane Anger and Queen Elizabeth I in England; Isotta Nogarola, Laura Cereta, Cassandra Fedele, Moderata Fonte, Giulia Bigolina, Lucrezia Marinella, Arcangelo Tarabotti, Isabella d'Este, Gaspara Stampa, Elisabetta Gonzaga, Veronica Franco, Catherine de Medici, Sarra Copia Sulam,¹⁵ Saint Catherine of Siena¹⁶ and Vittoria Colonna¹⁷ in Italy between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries who contributed to the rehabilitation of public female image by re-presenting themselves, by forming a female voice against masculine assumptions of femininity and by constituting a textual

¹⁵ Sarra Copia Sulam (1592-1641) as a Jewish poet living in the seventeenth century Venice was an interesting figure. In a Christian context in which women were marginalised by the patriarchal and ecclesiastical rules, she managed to make herself heard both as a Jewess and as a female author. She did not remain silent but opened her household to the Jewish and Christian people with whom she exchanged ideas on poetry and philosophy. She wrote philosophical works and some poems (Harrán, Introduction 3).

¹⁶ Saint Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) was canonised in 1461, declared doctor of the Church in 1970 and Patron Saint of Europe in 1999. Through her letters and a *Dialogue* in which she is so brave as to claim to speak through the voice of God, and with her Dantean enthusiasm for united Italy, she is among the founding mothers of Italian literature (Tylus 70-71).

¹⁷ Apart from being a poet, together with Michelangelo and Cardinal Reginald Pole, Colonna was part of an Evangelical religious movement who called themselves The Spirituals [Gli Spirituali]. Colonna hosted its meetings and was influential in the movement's mission to promote the "faith alone" [sola fide] which is the sole link between a human being and God. She made reforms within the Church (Dunn 3).

sisterhood against the misogynist approach with their works.¹⁸ Even though it is undeniable that the restricting patriarchal medieval and early modern social milieu deemed an ideal woman chaste, silent and obedient, the medieval and the early modern age were not devoid of assertive women who contradicted with the ideal behaviour patterns expected of them. The aforesaid figures were among the prominent women of the Renaissance known for their powerful standing who defy the centuries. Having the chance to get their questioning voice heard, these women were equipped with literary, artistic and political skills; actively took part in politics; emphasised the importance of female education; wrote literature and patronised the artists who contributed greatly to the blooming of arts¹⁹ and holistic development of culture in Europe.

Being aware of their inferiority in the society, the first protofeminists had to raise their voice both to respond to misogynist representation of women and to question the patriarchy with which they were discontent. They had to defy the legacy of Eve, the biblical references and other texts against women in which feminine weakness, inferiority, fragility, lack of reason, vice and intellectual shortcomings were foregrounded. Their voice had to be a voice of protest against the centuries-old constructions of their gender roles. In other words, women had to re-define themselves against the backdrop of a heavily masculine social and literary milieu. To challenge negative assumptions launched by men, women had to champion themselves. Given the situation, the texts had to function as a space through which women could defend themselves, their worth and their rights, and question the prescribed gender roles. As Wilcox states, a female author "could indeed play the part of a protofeminist simply by virtue of her decision to write" and, fortunately, the early modern period was the time in which "continuing constraints as well as new freedoms provoked an outburst of writing by women" (31). What women produced was various, and what was crucial was the fact that they went against the grain. As Clare states,

¹⁸ The history of feminism or femininity in the Renaissance is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Thus, the aforementioned historical figures will not be presented.

¹⁹ To give an example, Elisabetta Gonzaga was such an important figure among the courtly circles that her dominance was commemorated by Baldassare Castiglione in *Il libro del Cortegiano* [The Book of the Courtier] (1528) in which she mediates the literary and political conversations in her saloon.

The writings of women, whether religious, popular, humanist or courtly, had in the mid-sixteenth to early seventeenth century at least one common aspect: women writers represented in their work an alternative culture which ran alongside the dominant culture and in writing as some did with a view to publication, they were transgressing boundaries. (37)

In this context, remembering Kelly-Gadol's oft-quoted question once more whether women had a Renaissance, one cannot but answer in the affirmative considering the assertive female voice engaged in writing in the mentioned era.

Women first found the chance to speak against their misrepresentation in the society and in literature by contributing to *querelle des femmes*.²⁰ It was a hotly debated issue against the misogynist understanding that women were sexually and morally weak, prone to vice and therefore had to be under the command of a man in case they went astray. Women were trying to change such an understanding asserting that women also had moral virtue and intellectual capacity to make them men's equal in the social system if they were given the chance to improve themselves through education and equal treatment. The medieval *querelle* was still based on the dichotomy between the temptress Eve and the pure and virtuous Mary (Benson 307) -two iconic representations of womanhood none relating to real woman. It was in Boccaccio's (1313-1375) 1374 work *De mulieribus claris* (On Famous Women) solely devoted to biographies of women for the first time that individual women and their achievements came to the fore. Boccaccio's work, however, was problematic because according to his interpretation women could achieve heroic deeds under tough circumstances thanks to the "miraculous infusion of male spirit" (Benson 308). That is, his discourse was still masculine; rather than celebrating female achievements, he interpreted it as a supernatural occasion coming true by the hand of God. Boccaccio's great work, *Decameron*, nonetheless, is an important one within the *querelle des femmes* tradition due to its protofeminist content in which chastity is not presented as the sole option for women and sexual freedom sometimes goes unpunished. Indeed, Boccaccio acknowledges the oppression women have to endure and dedicates his work to those ladies who suffer from love and who are constrained indoors without having any means to enjoy themselves under the yoke of their family members:

²⁰ It is a French term since the dispute was discovered by the study of French texts but it would soon turn out to be a European phenomenon and over one hundred works would be produced contributing to the tradition (Benson 307).

these [women] within their tender bosoms, fearful and shamefast, hold hid the fires of love . . . and constrained by the wishes, the pleasures, the commandments of fathers, mothers, brothers and husbands, abide most time enmewed in the narrow compass of their chambers and sitting in a manner idle, willing and willing not in one breath, revolve in themselves various thoughts which it is not possible should still be merry . . . Wherefore . . . I purpose, for the succour and solace of ladies in love (unto others the needle and the spindle and the reel suffice) to recount an hundred stories or fables or parables or histories or whatever you like to style them . . . In these stories will be found love-chances, both gladsome and grievous . . . whereof the ladies aforesaid, who shall read them, may at once take solace from the delectable things therein shown forth and useful counsel. (1)²¹

Boccaccio's ambivalence makes *Decameron* even more interesting since the seemingly misogynistic stories might be read as anti-misogynistic and, extraordinarily virtuous women, as in the example of patient Griselda in the tenth story of the tenth day, might either be taken as the representative of how an ideal woman should be or be analysed as his subtle criticism of the patriarchal ideology.

Christine de Pisan, the first woman to speak against the misogynist attacks launched by men, on the other hand, protests male authority and discourse. She does not accept Boccaccio's interpretation in *De mulieribus claris* and, in her 1405 work *Le livre de la cité des dames* [The Book of the City of Ladies], by employing a similar biographical material against him, she argues that provided with the same opportunities of education and freedom to think and act, any women can be as successful as and equal to men: "if it were the custom to send little girls to school and teach them all sorts of different subjects there, as one does with little boys, they would grasp and learn the difficulties of all the arts and sciences just as easily as the boys do" (57). Pisan points to the cultural double standard that pushes women to the secondary place. She avers that it is not because of their natural

²¹ "Esse dentro a' dilicati petti, temendo e vergognando, tengono l'amorose fiamme nascose, le quali quanto più di forza abbian che le palesi coloro il sanno che l'hanno provate: e oltre a ciò, ristrette da' voleri, da' piaceri, da' comandamenti de' padri, delle madri, de' fratelli e de' mariti, il più del tempo nel piccolo circuito delle loro camere racchiuse dimorano e quasi oziose sedendosi, volendo e non volendo in una medesima ora, seco rivolgendo diversi pensieri, li quali non è possibile che sempre sieno allegri . . . Adunque, acciò che in parte per me s'amendi il peccato della fortuna, la quale dove meno era di forza, sì come noi nelle dilicate donne veggiamo, quivi più avara fu di sostegno, in soccorso e rifugio di quelle che amano, per ciò che all'altre è assai l'ago e 'l fuso e l'arcolajo, intendo di raccontare cento novelle, o favole o parabole o istorie che dire le vogliamo . . . Nelle quali novelle piacevoli e aspri casi d'amore e altri fortunati avvenimenti si vederanno così ne' moderni tempi avvenuti come negli antichi; delle quali le già dette donne, che queste leggeranno, parimente diletto delle sollazzevoli cose in quelle mostrate e utile consiglio potranno pigliare" (*Decameron* 5-6).

limitation but due to the social restrictions women have to suffer derogation. While Boccaccio's reading is based on essentialism figuring out women with the same stereotypical attributes, Pisan asserts that it is not biological but sociocultural differences that cause social discrimination and prejudice. Pisan's work is partially an answer to the medieval representations of womanhood in which women are represented either as reincarnations of Virgin Mary with their extraordinary endurance to suffering as pillars of virtue or as bearers of traditionally imposed feminine vices such as greed, vanity and lust, the qualities embodied in the various medieval texts such as in Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun's *Le Roman de la Rose*.²² Much as feminism as an organised political philosophy advocating for female rights had to wait till Mary Wollstonecraft's (1759-1797) *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (1792) Christine de Pisan's work²³ is considered to be a milestone in feminist studies since it is "the first example of what we now call 'women's studies'"; it "reorganised knowledge from a feminist point of view" (Willard 43) and it initiated a body of literary works constitutive of what is called Renaissance feminism. Female authors from various parts of Europe contributed to *querelle des femmes* so as to defend female agency, dignity, intellectual capacity and equality with men. True it is that with their letters, dialogues, poems, dramas, diaries, biographies, tracts and treatises women created a dissident voice. Still, given the cultural context of the early modern age, it should be noted that:

Only a few women wrote anything²⁴ before the dawn of the modern era, for three reasons. First, they rarely received the education that would enable them to write. Second, they were not admitted to the public roles -as administrator, bureaucrat, lawyer or notary, or university professor- in which they might gain knowledge of the kinds of the things the literate public thought worth writing about. Third, the culture imposed silence on

²² In the work, "women are greedy and manipulative, marriage is miserable, beautiful women are lustful, ugly ones cease to please, and a chaste woman is as rare as a black swan" (King and Rabil, Introduction xvii).

²³ Christine de Pisan is an important figure for the rise of protofeminist thought but it should also be noted that Marie de France (late 12th c.) is as important as Pisan as she is "the first woman writer in French" (Lawall et al. 1169) in the twelfth century. Similar to the Arthurian romances in theme but shorter and less popular than these narratives of love and adventure, Marie de France is credited with being the author of the Breton *lais* as a literary form as early as 1165. She is influential in initiating awareness against female repression through her several *lais* such as *Laüstic* in which she criticises the custom of arranged marriage (Lawall et al. 1169-70).

²⁴ It should be noted that not only women but also men were illiterate in the Middle Ages and only the privileged nobility could reach books and were literate.

women, considering speaking out a form of unchastity. (King and Rabil, Introduction xxiv)

Nevertheless, considering such a restraining social context that prescribes women silence and deems educated women prone to promiscuity, the fact that women could write and their work could survive centuries is crucial to better understand the European civilisation. What is more remarkable is the fact that for the first time women from different social strata -not only nuns isolated in a convent- wrote apart from religious themes or sometimes even against the doctrines of the Church. Thanks to the first protofeminists *aka* the contributors to *querelle des femmes*, the modern age witnesses female achievement in any of the genres under the male monopoly. And one of those genres is romance.

1.5. Romance: Towards a Working Definition

Though what romance refers to in the contemporary era is simple pulp-fiction, it has not always been out of favour. It originated as a genre in the twelfth century; it became prominent during the Middle Ages and, from the sixteenth century to the twenty-first, it has survived through mutations infiltrating into different genres. Its all-pervasive and slippery nature renders it nearly impossible to clearly define it since it extends from the ancient Greek stories,²⁵ Anglo-Norman and Arthurian romances in the Middle Ages to Shakespeare,²⁶ Gothic and Victorian novels, Romantic poetry and even to the science/fantasy fiction of the twentieth century.

²⁵ Although stories of the ancient world are not defined as romances by critics, those of five Greek authors (Chariton, Xenophon, Achilles Tattius, Longus and Heliodorus) have mutual motifs such as love, adventure, quests, defeated obstacles, ordeals and travels (Archibald 10) evidencing that the history of romance goes centuries earlier than generally accepted.

²⁶ Much as Shakespeare never entitles his late plays *Pericles* (1607), *Cymbeline* (1609), *The Winter's Tale* (1610) and *The Tempest* (1613) as romances, they are called as such by later critics (Coleridge in lecture on *The Tempest* in 1818 categorises them as romances along with his tragedies, comedies and histories and Edward Dowden in 1875 elaborates on the fourth category in *Shakespeare: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art*). It is true that Shakespeare takes his material from the Elizabethan romances such as Robert Greene's *Pandosto* for *The Winter's Tale* and Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* for *Pericles* (Beer 37) but it is due to the improbable events they contain and the episodic structure peculiar to romance (Quinn 369) as well as his authentic reemployment of "organic patterns celebrated in romances [such as] the patterns of suffering and survival, or regeneration . . . of wish fulfilment which can create a new world in its own image [and] the intricate harmony of change and time" (Beer 38) that Shakespeare's plays are qualified as romances.

As Davenport states, it is "notoriously difficult to define, largely because there is so much of it that spills over and needs subcategories" (130). In this regard, the aim of this part is manifold: to identify its themes, motifs and generic characteristics, to briefly discuss shifting approaches to the term and to clarify what romance means in this study.

In terms of its etymological usage, romance means the vernacular languages derived from Latin after the fall of the Roman Empire. Romance originally refers to the vernacular language of medieval France as opposed to Latin and in its later uses it means any of various Romance languages. The terms *enromancier*, *romançar*, *romanz* used to mean to compose books in the vernacular. Thus, the heroic material written in this language came to be known as romances; *romant* or *roman* meant courtly romance in verse in ancient French (Beer 4). There is no consensus among critics as to what romance is. Some consider it a genre; some claim it is a mode²⁷ since its various themes are also found in other literary genres. A very basic definition would call it a narrative of love and chivalry even though it is essentially inadequate to show what it denotes. Although there are different opinions concerning romance, it is taken as a "historical genre" (Fowler 56) in this study. Within this framework, listing some of its generic markers would help us reach a working definition. One of the distinguishing qualities of these medieval narratives is that they are centred on the theme of quest which is intricately knitted with the theme of courtly love, a grand theme of romance, since the knight goes on adventures in pursuit of an object such as a grail that would be a token of his love to his beloved which would function to honour them both. Love and adventures for love's sake are the main themes of romance. Even though there are myriad of adventures, they are connected to the theme of quest which serves as an organising element. Therefore, the quest is not only for a material object but the spiritual journey the hero undergoes during his adventures and his aspirations

²⁷ Northrop Frye considers romance as a mode. He states that "the mode, with its selection of constituents, is less dependent on external forms" (*Anatomy* 167) and can create new alliances with different genres as it is not bounded by the literary rules of a given age. That Frye qualifies romance as "a wish fulfilment dream" (186) working for the betterment of mundane reality justifies his accepting the term as a mode since the theme of wish fulfilment might be available in all fiction. He states that romance is not a genre but a "generic plot" ascertainable in various literary genres (162). The "wish fulfilment" drive contributes to its "sequential and processional entity" (186). Depending upon how it is understood, romance turns out to be both a finite and an infinite form. As a genre, it becomes end-determined as, regardless of the number of adventures the characters experience, the circular plot structure ends with a happy ending. As a mode, it is sequential.

to unite with the beloved also point to the theme of quest.²⁸ Courtly love, “the vital relationship between man and society and man and God” extends into the relationship “between two lovers: the lady and her man” (Beer 22) in romances. It is that quality of romance that prioritises women and love that differentiates it from *chanson de geste* -song of heroic deeds or the French heroic epic- even though both terms used to be interchangeably employed before the rise of romance in the twelfth century. *Chanson de geste* is “active, martial, and peopled by men and heroes” while romance “tends to be contemplative and to give a major role to women and to affairs of love” (24). A shift from “preoccupation with feats of arms and honour” (22) to “the increased role of women and the emphasis on sexual love” (25) is observable between *chanson de geste* and romances.

Another feature of romance is the employment of the supernatural incidents. Encounters with mysterious people or creatures, fight against dragons, participation in extraordinary tournaments and supernatural confrontations create individual stories under the theme of quest. Through the usage of the marvellous, “we are plunged into a world whose laws are totally different from what they are in our own and in consequence that the supernatural events that occur are in no way disturbing” (Todorov 171-72). The use of the marvellous and the supernatural as its “hallmark” (Beer 10) make romance appealing to the imaginative and idealised world remote from the mundane affairs and associated with the mystique and the unusual. Moreover, due to its focus on supernatural happenings, Lewis describes romance as a “polyphonic narrative” in which “nothing is subordinated” (20) to each other. Bakhtin, borrowing the term *polyphony* from music in which several simultaneous melodies organise a harmonious whole, basically defines it as “multi-voicedness” (279) when multiplicity of voices and points of view are present in a text without any one dominating the other. In the same vein, according to Beer, polyphony is “an apt metaphor for romance narration where varied characters and

²⁸ The quest might derive from political reasons as well. The quest as “the challenge to the court, which is a standard feature of Arthurian romances, results in the hero’s undertaking adventures for at least partially socio-political reasons” (Whetter 61). In accordance with their subject matter, medieval romances are studied under four categories: the Matter of Rome covers the stories and legends of the Greco-Roman world such as the Trojan War and mythological figures; the Matter of Britain contains the stories of Celtic origin, especially King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table including the Breton *lais*; the Matter of England includes adventures based on national heroes such as Guy of Warwick, Havelok the Dane and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight; the Matter of France is about stories based on Charlemagne and Roland including the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, Hartmann von Aue, Gottfried von Strassburg and Wolfram von Eschenbach.

episodes move freely while at the same time being interwoven to compose a congruent whole" (20). The harmonious union of independent narrative layers produces the polyphonic narrative in romances.

On the other hand, the fact that they "pile adventure upon adventure, and include fights, love-affairs, disasters and other things" (Fowler 70) might seem as one of their downsides yet it turns out to be their unique distinguishing characteristic. There are several simultaneous interlacing stories in a romance in which the discontinuities are attached to each other through the technique of entanglement or entrelacement (70). The connection of multiple episodes by means of entrelacement is an important structural device of romance since it both creates an organised whole out of episodic stories and "offers a potential commentary on the characters, episodes, or narrative segments juxtaposed and woven together" (Bruckner 25). What seems like digression is indeed the unique complexion of romances. In spite of its composition out of interlacing stories, however, Kermode describes romance as "end-determined fiction" (6) because, no matter how long it takes, there is always shift from disorder to order: all dangers and chaotic events are resolved, wanderers return home (Mentz 43) and happy ending is imperative in the end despite the "complex maze of adventure" (Beer 29) all throughout.

The romance narrative follows a circular plot structure: the hero starts his quest on an important day such as a holy one, undergoes several adventures and returns home having fulfilled his mission. Its extended scope makes romance an all-inclusive genre because it unites suffering and comedy. Still, being a highly poetic genre dealing with the extraordinary events, even the description of the "everyday paraphernalia of the world . . . gives body to its ideal world" which is "never equivalent to our own" (Beer 3). The romance world which "oversteps the limits by which life is normally bounded" represents an ideal world "which frees us from our inhibitions and preoccupations" (3). Thus, that the reader should succumb into the romance world is of crucial importance, because -despite seemingly unrelated with reality- romance tells us a lot about the world we inhabit. Because of the engagement of the ideal and the real in romance world, the characters are instrumental. Romance is populated with aristocratic characters such as kings and queens who are not real people but the representatives of our wishful dreams. The hero, for instance, is supposed to be the embodiment of bravery, kindness and goodness, the bearer of divine features with his purity and infallibility while his

antagonist bears all the devilish characteristics. Given that romance is "always concerned with the fulfilment of desires" (Beer 12) it is not surprising that the reader takes pleasure out of the successful deeds of romance hero or heroines who represent the human beings or how they idealise themselves.

The most outstanding features of romance have been put forward so far. As Fowler remarks however, when a work is categorised under a certain generic type, it does not necessarily mean that its entire generic cluster would be shared by other members of the same genre (38). In this sense, given that new works contribute to the development and transformation of a genre, it is impossible to define romance with clear-cut traits. On the other hand, there are some generic markers that would help distinguish romance from other kinds. A body of topoi found in most of romances are as follows:

the theme of love and adventure, a certain withdrawal from their own societies on the part of both reader and romance hero, profuse sensuous detail, simplified characters (often with a suggestion of allegorical significance), a serene intermingling of the unexpected and the everyday, a complex and prolonged succession of incidents usually without a single climax, a happy ending, amplitude of proportions, a strong enforced code of conduct to which all characters must comply. (Beer 10)

One final remark is necessary for the sake of clarification, though. Romance was the production of the vernacular literature of the twelfth century; it was still influential in the Renaissance society; and it did not disappear when the age of chivalry passed. Such a persistent quality of romance is its downside rendering it rather problematic to limit its boundaries, since, for instance, love as its *sine qua non*, exists in myriad literary pieces. Is it proper, in that case, to call all these works romance? Now that "all fiction has a way of looking like romance . . . since all fiction frees us into an imaginative world" and since romances deal with the socially remote, one should ask if "realistic" works of an age can be "romances in another setting." Answering the question in the negative and limiting the definition "to works which were commonly described by other writers of the same period or by the author himself as a romance" (Beer 5) would be another useful solution to denominate what romance as a genre is.

In the light of the features so far stated, this study accepts romance as a genre²⁹ within the framework of four works since they all carry most of the generic characteristics discussed above. The working definition employed in this study for the texts chosen and how romance should be understood when the term is used is as follows: romance is a literary work of fiction situated in a historically and geographically unfamiliar setting written either in prose or verse with a cyclical narrative pattern arising from a conflict constituted by interlacing stories with myriad adventures, tasks, supernatural happenings and creatures, and characters in pursuit of a quest and/or love ending in triumph, in which, overstepping the mundane reality, natural law is violated in favour of entertainment and instruction, and in which, narrative postponements and detours both serve as catalysts for narrative expansion and constitute the backbone of its polyphonic texture.

²⁹ There are some critics who evaluate romance as a post-structuralist phenomenon. For instance, Patricia Parker in her study *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (1979) disavows romance as a genre but she is interested in how romance functions in a work. She emphasises the fact that romance is not immune to social changes and cannot be restrained to a certain age because it is under the influence of the time it goes through. She points to the ability of romance to adapt to shifting circumstances in order to maintain its existence. The romance strategies such as "idealisation, narrative delays, multiple obstacles to teleological drives, spectacular reversals of fortune, constant use of the marvellous, a more pronounced role for eros" (Fuchs 58) available in a variety of genres indicate its ubiquitous nature. Considering romance as a literary device, she defines it as "a form which simultaneously quests for and postpones a particular end, objective, or object" (Parker 4). What she highlights is its never-ending quality in which there is recurring complication and solution of narratives. Her thought problematises Kermode's description of romance because, interestingly enough, entrelacement as the most distinguishing characteristic of romance as a genre approximates it to post-structuralism which considers it as a mode: as long as interlacing stories expand the narrative scope, the conclusion is postponed for the sake of new events. Barbara Fuchs, in line with Frye and Parker, suggests that romance is "a literary and textual strategy . . . including idealisation, the marvellous, narrative delay and wandering" (9). She qualifies romances as narratives composed of quest and "the constant delays or detours" (19) from it.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK & FEMALE ROMANCE WRITING

2.1. Theoretical Framework

This section proffers the methodological framework with which the texts will be explored. Even though the critical approach employed is Cultural Materialism, the fundamentals of Marxism and New Historicism are also briefly included since the postulates of Marxist philosophers constitute the origin of Cultural Materialism and New Historicism, which is thought to be its British counterpart, has commonalities with Cultural Materialism. The final section is allotted to the discussion of Cultural Materialism because the dissertation is based on the contextual reading of literary pieces with an emphasis on their dissident nature.

2.1.1. Marxism, Ideology & Hegemony: The Roots of Cultural Materialism

Analysis of literature as indistinguishable from its cultural and political context hinges upon the Marxist thought, a philosophical understanding which states that societal relationships are determined by the modes of production in a society. It does not take for granted either the existence of an essential truth shared by all individuals in the society or the idea of history as monolithic and universal. Considering that history has witnessed class struggles, that the interests of the dominant class have been presented as those of the whole society and that the working class has not been properly represented (Branningan 23) it premediates the material conditions as the first and foremost force in shaping individuals rather than accepting the idealist stance which endows human beings with an essence. The famous excerpt by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* (1845) reads that the psyche is determined by the cultural media of its existence:

[Men] have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their actual world, also their thinking and the products of their thinking. It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness. (36-37)

Consciousness has a social dimension since there is a constant interaction between man and his material surrounding. The ideas of the individual are characterised by the material conditions of production and the particular historical situation of a given age. Known as the base-superstructure model, the economic condition of a period is the sole determining element in the society, and the beliefs, values and cultural norms -the superstructure- is contingent upon the economic base. In such a system, since the means of production are at the hands of the privileged few, they are also the controllers of the superstructure: "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas" (Marx and Engels 59). What is more, "the class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production" (59) and, it is the reason why there have always been stories written by the dominant group on behalf of the subordinate who "cannot represent themselves [but] must be represented" (Elster 254). The mental manipulation through social institutions -and literature is one of the most powerful media- enables the ruling class to keep the subordinate under control. Those who hold the economic base in check control the superstructure so that the perception of a person is shaped. In addition to its economic basis, Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser also claim that the material practices of a society influence its individuals and they define the concepts of hegemony and ideology as imported by Cultural Materialism.

The Italian Marxist critic Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) does not accept the essentialist notion of human nature either. He instead asserts that human beings are the sum of their material circumstances. Gramsci's statement that "there is no abstract human nature, fixed and immutable . . . human nature is the totality of historically determined social relations" (331) situates the individual in the matrix of historico-social affairs vulnerable to shifts in the base-superstructure model. Furthermore, his notion of hegemony as "the predominance of one social class over another by means of coercion" (Parvini 60) demystifies the maintenance of the social order. Being an internalised system of self-control which naturalises the

particular system of thought in the service of the ruling people, hegemony is considered "to depend for its hold not only on its expression of the interests of a ruling class but also on its acceptance as 'normal reality' or 'commonsense' by those in practice subordinated to it" (Williams, *Keywords* 100). Once hegemony becomes "commonsense," it means the subordinate people willingly accept manipulation by the ruling class. That is, hegemony functions in accordance with the interests of the rulers because people consent. Gramsci, on the other hand, problematises its continuity. He believes that hegemony predominates only up to a certain point because it is not immune to contest from various social forces, and the masses are not completely deprived of power. Although the society is governed by one social group who achieves dominance over others, its position is vulnerable to attacks from the subordinate groups. Once the ruled no longer acquiesce to be controlled by the rulers, the possibility for rebellion emerges.

The French Marxist critic Louis Althusser likewise demystifies how ideology works in a given culture. He has made a great contribution to Cultural Materialism with his redefinition of ideology. Contrary to Gramsci who believes that the subordinate/working class people will revolt against the ruling class at some point, Althusser dismally opines that since ideology creates an illusion through its institutions that individuals are free in their actions, such an awakening will never occur. In Althusser's view, ideology does not have an abstract complexion but it exists in the society functioning through its institutions in concrete form. It "has a material existence" (1500) since it operates through two kinds of material state apparatuses. Ideology is disseminated and the perception is veiled by means of Repressive and Ideological State Apparatuses. While Repressive State Apparatuses such as the police, the army and the justice system can physically enforce individuals to behave in accordance with the dictates of the dominant class, Ideological State Apparatuses such as schools, religion, the family, the legal system, arts and politics (1488-89) are the social institutions which deliberately reproduce the rules and the values of those in power. These institutions participate in the creation of ideology. The given social order is made obvious and naturalised through the ideological institutions thereby acculturating individuals in accordance with its dictates (willing contribution) to maintain the functioning of the system. It, however, creates false consciousness in the sense that the world, which is thought to be true, can be known only as it is represented by these institutions. In other words, even the choices a person believes to make autonomously are ideologically-

infused in accordance with the role he/she has to perform in order to fulfil his/her social function. Ideology is "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser 1498) which they internalise and willingly reproduce. It is constitutive of individuals who unquestioningly confirm it through their everyday practices and who are acculturated into certain attitudes in order to maintain the prevalent system under the control of the dominant group. Ideology thereby hinders any form of rebellion by the subordinate group who is unconsciously but voluntarily subscribed to its prescriptions. It "'recruits' subjects among the individuals . . . or 'transforms' [them] into subjects" (1504). In the same vein, Sinfield's³⁰ conceptualisation of ideology as which "produces, makes plausible, concepts and systems to explain who we are, who the others are, how the world works" (*Faultlines* 32) converges with Althusser's analysis of ideology as a constructed yet legitimate system of thought embedded in the fabric of life. Nevertheless, Althusser's formulation of ideology, which starts to shape the individuals as soon as they are born, is criticised by Sinfield as it allots virtually no agency to the individual:

if our subjectivities are constituted within a language and social system that is already imbued with oppressive constructs of class, race, gender, and sexuality, then how can we expect to see past that, to the idea of a fairer society, let alone struggle to achieve it? How, indeed, could Althusser see what he did? (*Queer* 24)

Althusserian definition of ideology is based on the impossibility of social transformation since it operates so efficiently and invisibly through the cultural institutions that any form of resistance is already precluded now that the individual believes in his/her decisions to be autonomously taken. He believes that the individual has no consciousness but only fulfils his/her role for the maintenance of the social order as a passive subject. Sinfield, on the other hand, problematises his stance as to how individual resistance might be possible. Althusser's understanding leads the discussion to New Historicism in the sense that both emphasise the indestructibility of the dominant power within the society while Sinfield builds on their views only to prove the penetrable nature of power and ideology which he criticises under the heading of the "entrapment model" (*Faultlines* 24).

³⁰ The Cultural Materialist Catherine Belsey provides a similar definition: "Ideology is both a real and an imaginary relation to the world -real in that it is the way in which people really live their relationship to the social relations which govern their conditions of existence, but imaginary in that it discourages a full understanding of these conditions of existence and the ways in which the people are socially constituted within them" (*Critical* 109).

2.1.2. New Historicism: The American Counterpart of Cultural Materialism

The year 1980 marks the beginning of a new critical approach to literary studies with the publication of Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* and Louis Montrose's essay "Eliza, Queene of Shepheardes." Greenblatt coins the term in *The Power of Forms in the Renaissance*:

Many of the present essays give voice . . . to what we may call the New Historicism, set apart from both the dominant historical scholarship of the past and the formalist criticism . . . [It] erodes the firm ground of both criticism and literature. (6)

For New Historicism, a literary text is a product of the circumstances of the time and place it is created in contrary to the two critical approaches, Russian Formalism and New Criticism, which interpret the text as an isolated production disregarding its socio-historical, economic, political or psychological context. New Historicism evaluates the text at the intersection of several contexts concentrating on "the historical and cultural conditions of its production, its meanings, its effects, and also of its later critical interpretations and evaluations" (Abrams 182-83). It emphasises the importance of contextual criticism since texts gain meaning in relation to their context and it gives equal value to all kinds of texts as the fabric of culture.³¹ As Montrose points out, it is distinctive "in its refusal of traditional distinctions between literature and history, between text and context" ("Elizabethan" 304). In this sense, it rehearses the literary text as the product of its time, its geographical location and the circumstances of its production rather than the representation of the eternal truth of human existence. Owing to the reciprocal relationship between culture and text in which the latter "interacts as both a product and a producer of cultural energies and codes" (Abrams 183) New Historicism rejects the concept of human essence and emphasises the individual and the text as bounded by the network of social and material practices of its

³¹ The intricacy of text and context marks New Historicism's difference from old historicism. Old historicism, broadly presented by E. M. W. Tillyard's 1943 work *The Elizabethan World Picture*, in which he claims that the Elizabethan perception of the world -which was collectively based on a rigid hierarchical order or the Great Chain of Being- presupposes certain beliefs and conventions which shape the society and are shared by all its members thereby reflecting a homogeneous view of their culture, *a world picture*. In this sense, old historicism tends to be "monological" since "it is concerned with discovering a single political vision, usually identical to that said to be held by the entire literate class or indeed the entire population" (Greenblatt, *Forms* 5).

particular age and institutions. The emphasis on the materiality of culture has its roots in the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz who in "The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man" regards human beings the cultural artefact and a product of their time:

without men, no culture, certainly; but equally, and more significantly, without culture, no men . . . [o]ur ideas, our values, our acts, even our emotions, are, like our nervous system itself, cultural products -products manufactured, indeed, out of tendencies, capacities, and dispositions with which we were born, but manufactured nonetheless. (7-8)

Geertz highlights the importance of culture for human beings whose biological essence is cultivated by the cultural components of the society. Each individual is the summation of his/her particular culture; his/her production is the particular production of his/her culture. The intricate relationship between the individual and culture renders it impossible to separate human beings from their cultural milieu. Geertz's proposal, which regards human beings the scriptors of their culture who are under its influence as well, constitutes the fundamentals of New Historicism since its practitioners are keen on analysing how a certain period of time shapes its individuals based on its peculiarities. Likewise, Greenblatt puts forth how the individuals of the Renaissance culture fashion themselves based on its particularities. An individual, who constructs himself/herself in accordance with certain norms, is thought to be the sum of and vulnerable to the ideological (social, political, religious) discourses of his/her context. As he states,

Whenever I focused sharply upon a moment of apparently autonomous self-fashioning, I found not an epiphany of identity freely chosen but a cultural artefact. If there remained traces of free choice, the choice was among possibilities whose range was strictly delineated by the social and ideological system in force. (*Self-Fashioning* 256)

The fact that culture is a construct and the individual is subject to cultural practices also underline that self-fashioning is a continuous process and identity is not based on essence but is always produced through the power relations one is exposed to. Similarly, neither the authors nor the texts are autonomous, and a textual work is a product of "negotiation between a creator or class of creators, equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions, and the institutions and practices of society" (Greenblatt, "Towards" 12). In other words, both the authors and the texts are time-bounded artefacts and are always politically charged.

New Historicism is interested in power structures³² in a given text because it examines the literary texts with reference to the maxim of containment which terminates resistance. It tends to focus more on power and how it is perpetuated in a given text rather than focusing on any form of resistance. New Historicism, therefore, is considered to be a pessimistic approach to literature since it is inclined to perceive power as unbreakable and unchallengeable. This stems from the belief that each individual in the society is cultivated in accordance with its ideological and hegemonic constitution which does not leave any form of resistance unfettered. The monolithic understanding of power regards culture devoid of oppositional voices; or, even if there are, they are eventually contained. Greenblatt in his seminal essay "Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and Its Subversion" illustrates how within a society power is constructed through a seemingly strong challenge to the authority. He discusses if genuine subversion is possible and concludes that subversion is eventually contained by the dominant group: "the subversiveness which is genuine and radical . . . is at the same time contained by the power it would appear to threaten. Indeed the subversiveness is the very product of that power and furthers its ends" (23-24). In other words, Greenblatt believes that the powerful group deliberately produces its subversion with the aim of containing that subversion. In this respect, literary texts are perceived as instruments for consolidation of power because they are thought to reproduce ideas in favour of the dominant and any alternative force against it is represented as threatening to the social order. Power is always recuperated, and dissidence is unlikely to be achieved. Though the order seems to be challenged, it is eventually contained. Subversion serves as a prerequisite for power to legitimate its existence; it naturalises power to keep the society under control. What is only created is the similitude of subversion to police subversion because the latter is "the very condition of power" (45). Cultural Materialism reacts against the New Historicist approach which solely focuses on containment. Sinfield calls it "the entrapment model of ideology" (*Faultlines* 24) since it ignores any challenge to the dominant system. The entrapment model indicates that even though there are attempts to challenge the system, they end up helping it maintain its power. As Sinfield aptly summarises,

³² New Historicism has been influenced by the post-structuralist critic Foucault's ideas on power and discourse, the reason why the New Historicists are more concerned with power and how it is contained within texts. It is interested in how status quo is consolidated within a text rather than being interested in the dissident potential of minor voices embedded in it.

Greenblatt looks for "subversion," but finds, often brilliantly, that it is constructed within the discourse of power . . . [For him] subversion is regarded . . . a strategic manoeuvre by which power is perpetuated . . . Thus the power/subversion dialectic develops the structure of a circle labelled "containment" and any prospect of significant dissent and change is not just headed off but strategically placed before it can even be thought. ("Power" 260)

In other words, according to New Historicism, dissidence always results in containment; power self-validates through futile subversion. It cannot create change in terms of history (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 49) since it focuses on the dominating structures such as the court and the aristocracy rather than the subversive or silenced elements. It "allows no space for dissent" but "minor revolts simply offer occasions for extending social control" (Belsey, *Culture* 29) and it "discloses a world strangely drained of dynamism, in which every effort to enact change issues in a reaffirmation of the status quo" (Patterson 93). New Historicism emphasises the force of containment in which individuals are devoid of agency so that the so-called homogeneous dominant ideological system maintains its status. Interestingly enough, Greenblatt thinks that his work has been misinterpreted and in "Resonance and Wonder" he negates the criticism he has been exposed to. As he believes, that New Historicism denies individuals the agency to change their present condition for the better, who are represented helpless under the yoke of historical conditions, is a crucial misrepresentation.

Agency is virtually inescapable. Inescapable but not simple: new historicism, as I understand it, does not posit historical processes as unalterable and inexorable, but it does tend to discover limits or constraints upon individual intervention . . . the apparently isolated power of the individual genius turns out to be bound up with collective, social energy . . . while an attempt to stabilise the order of things may turn out to subvert it. (221)

In other words, he denies that resistance is always contained but believes the possibility for subversion and the moderate degree of agency. New Historicism, in this sense, creates the predicament as to the nature of subversion: it always seems probable yet how one can really achieve it since the power structures always reproduce the dominant ideology and intentionally use machinations despite seemingly subverting it remains unanswered. If authentic resistance is impossible, how would subversion be possible? Cultural Materialism detects the aporia New Historicism poses and offers a refreshed reading built upon almost the same tenets but with the potential on *dissidence* rather than *subversion*.

2.1.3. Cultural Materialism & Dissidence: An Optimistic Approach to Literature

Cultural Materialism rises in Britain in the 1980s as a critical method whose root goes back to Marxist critic Raymond Williams' (1921-1988) publication of *Culture and Society 1870 to 1950* in 1958. Cultural Materialism as a term is employed for the first time in 1977 in *Marxism and Literature*, though. Williams defines it as

a theory of the specificities of material cultural and literary production within historical materialism . . . It is, in my view, a Marxist theory, and indeed that in its specific fields it is, in spite of and even because of the relative unfamiliarity of some of its elements, part of what I at least see as the central thinking of Marxism. (5-6)

Williams considers Cultural Materialism a Marxist theory yet he rejects the view which explains societal relations only in terms of a base-superstructure model as he believes that culture cannot be seen as the direct reflection of economic forces. He emphasises "the function of cultural representation" (Branningan 24) rather than economic factors which cannot be the essence of a given society. The base-superstructure model ignores the material presence of culture. There is, however, a reciprocal relationship between culture and society and it is unlikely to "separate literature and art from other kinds of social practice in such a way as to make them subject to quite special and distinct laws" (Williams, "Base" 44). Williams focuses on the influence of culture and material relations on literature and arts. In this sense, the central tenet of his understanding is that the texts are the material products of their specific historical conditions. He thus refuses the traditional interpretation which promotes the validity of literature as an expression of universal and transcendent human values.³³ Williams is interested in the production of literature within the framework of its immediate surroundings, because, being aware that "[no] expression . . . is 'natural' or 'straightforward,'" and "language is not a pure medium through which the reality of . . . an event or an experience . . . can 'flow'" (*Marxism* 166) he argues that each literary act is laden with certain ideology contrary to the assumption that literature and language are the tools for natural human expression. Thus, Williams' Cultural Materialism rejects formalist criticism which isolates the text from its context similar to its

³³ "We have to break from the common procedure of isolating the object . . . On the contrary we have to discover the nature of a practice and then its conditions" ("Base" 47).

American counterpart. Williams' focus on the *dominant, residual* and *emergent* aspects within culture and his concept of *structures of feeling* are influential in the formation of his Cultural Materialist philosophy, because, according to him, culture cannot be totalised mainly based on its dominant characteristics. Still he accepts the presence of the dominant since in each period of history there is a system of meanings, values and practices more effective than the others yet the society also includes residual and emergent practices. He defines residual culture as one which is created in the past but still has an influence in the functioning of contemporary cultural practices; thus, the residual "is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present" (*Marxism* 122). There might be residual elements in any culture, which do not necessarily reflect the dominant culture but which "are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue -cultural as well as social- of some previous social and cultural institution of formation" (122). The residual may be oppositional, or it might be "wholly or largely incorporated into the dominant culture" (122). On the other hand, emergent culture, the focal point of Cultural Materialism, amounts to "new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationships [that] are continually being created" (123). It refers to a cluster of dissident ideas which are developing with the ultimate aim of substituting the dominant culture. The dominant, residual and emergent elements³⁴ within culture reveal its complex nature. Since they are in constant struggle with each other, they illustrate its heterogeneous and unstable complexion which is always in the making. The omnipotence of any force is a myth.

What has really to be said, as a way of understanding the character of the dominant, is that *no mode of production and therefore no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention*. This is not merely a negative proposition, allowing us to account for significant things which happen outside or against the dominant mode. On the contrary it is a fact about the modes of domination, that they select from and consequently exclude the full range of human practice. (Williams, *Marxism* 125) [emphasis in the original]

³⁴ Frank Parkin mentions three divisions of power in the Western society which bear resemblances to Williams' formulation. The dominant, the subordinate and the radical formations constitute culture. The dominant "claims normative status" (Sinfield, *Postwar* 34) which has the most authority and has been exceedingly represented by the cultural means; the subordinate system can never totally oppose the dominant system but is always "accommodative" in search of negotiation with the dominant system, and the radical system formulates an opposite interpretation of cultural order (34).

In the same vein, Williams' coinage of the notion *structures of feeling* refers to the oppositional ideas within the system that cannot be explained depending upon the dominant ideological stance. In this sense, the term amounts to the meanings in the making definable

as social experiences *in solution*, as distinct from other social semantic formations which have *precipitated* and are more evidently and more immediately available . . . The effective formations of most actual art relate to already manifest social formations, dominant or residual, and it is primarily to emergent formations . . . that the structure of feeling, *as solution*, relates. (133-34) [emphasis in the original]

Structures of feeling are inimical to the dominant cultural formation whose values and practices are made broadly acceptable. The emergent culture serves as a solution against the dominant culture. As Williams elaborates on the term,

To relate a work of art to any part of that observed totality may, in varying degrees, be useful; but it is a common practice, in analysis, to realise that when one has measured the work against the separable part, there yet remains some element for which there is no external counterpart. This element . . . is what I have named *the structure of feeling* of a period and it is only realisable through experience of the work of art itself, as a whole. (qtd. in Higgins 41)

Structure of feeling does not denote the dominant culture of a period but it foreshadows changes in culture. It stands against the dominant culture as a counter-hegemonic newly-constituted formation. Besides, as structure of feeling cannot be expressed through dominant semantic formations and is oppositional to the maintenance of status quo, it is suggestive of the kaleidoscopic nature of culture. That is, there are always cultural forces antagonistic to the dominant in any culture. Thus, in order to maintain its position, dominant cultural ideology "must be seen as being actively made: actively and continuously" as it "may quite quickly break down" (Williams, *Culture* 201) otherwise. Williams warns that the dominant must be prudent against the oppositional forces which might threaten its omnipotence as it is always under pressure to maintain its status.

Raymond Williams insists on cultural constitution as made up of several competing elements. Culture is never static but a dynamic process of change; it always includes dominant, residual and emergent elements of different strengths; there is always multiplicity of voices; there is a constant struggle between different factions of the society. His formulation of the co-existence of the dominant, residual and

emergent cultural forces creates a heterogeneous system of resistance, consolidation and negotiation within culture. The never-ending contest and negation between these concepts and the maxims of opposition and marginalisation result in materialist criticism which is based on the analysis of these cultural elements. The assumption that ideology has a material existence through its religious, social, educational and juridical institutions makes culture "a field of much ideological contest and contradiction" (Branningan 12). In this sense, the recognition of the co-existing conflictual elements in culture and the attempt to analyse them have been the starting point for Cultural Materialist criticism.³⁵ Indeed, its prominent practitioners, Alan Sinfield and Jonathan Dollimore, acknowledge their debt to Williams since

when Althusser and Foucault were being read . . . establishing ideology and/or power in a necessarily unbreakable continuum, Williams argued the co-occurrence of subordinate, residual, emergent, alternative, and oppositional cultural forces alongside the dominant, in varying relations of incorporation, negotiation, and resistance. (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 9)

Cultural Materialism focuses on the material function of literary texts within culture and evaluates them as cultural productions which actively participate in its making. Each cultural act is enclosed by its socio-political milieu. Dollimore and Sinfield, by referring to Shakespeare, in the "Foreword to the first edition" of *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism* (1985) aver that the creation of literary texts does not occur in a vacuum but their meaning is contingent upon the moment of their production which should also be evaluated with respect to its specific economic, political and social circumstances:

"Materialism" is opposed to "idealism": it insists that culture does not (cannot) transcend the material forces and relations of production. Culture is not simply a reflection of the economic and political system, but nor can it be independent of it. Cultural materialism therefore studies the implication of literary texts in history. A play by Shakespeare is related to the context of its production -to the economic and political system of Elizabethan and Jacobean England and to the particular institutions of cultural production . . . What the plays signify depends on the cultural field in which they are situated. (Foreword viii)

Cultural situatedness of a text is crucial for its meaning since it is subject to historico-material structures of its age and, accordingly, as the period changes, it

³⁵ It develops in the post-war period in 1980s when Britain is governed by conservative right-wing politician Margaret Thatcher.

earns different significances. The literary texts elucidate the cultural forces in practice. Raymond Williams coins the term in 1977 but the year 1985 reinforces Cultural Materialism within the field of literary analysis upon the publication of *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism* edited by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, a collection of essays written by several critics within the framework of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism, in which Dollimore and Sinfield outline the basic tenets of Cultural Materialism as "a combination of historical context, theoretical method, political commitment and textual analysis" (Foreword vii). The first item of their quadruple formulation -a combination of historical context- "the key proposition of cultural materialism" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 49) underscores the cultural context of a literary text. Dollimore and Sinfield negate "the transcendent significance traditionally accorded to the literary text and allow [one] to recover its histories" (Foreword vii). Such an approach effaces the timeless and autonomous status of a work of art immune to sociocultural shifts in its milieu. It also differs from the former formalist approaches which evaluate literary texts in isolation as a "discrete, apolitical and transcendent form of artistic expression" (Branningan 4). Historical context is a must for analysis of a literary work since "nothing can be intrinsically or essentially subversive in the sense that prior to the event subversiveness can be more than potential;" that is to say, "it cannot be guaranteed a priori, independent of articulation, context and reception" (Dollimore, "Materialism" 13). As the meaning of a text is dependent upon the time it is created, it might lose its subversive potential depending upon the changing beliefs in the society or it might gain subversive identity based on its milieu of values. "Formal textual analysis cannot determine whether a text is subversive or contained" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 49) on its own and the text as "a site of cultural context" which is "never self-sufficient" (49) achieves its particular significance in consideration of the cultural institutions of its age. The Cultural Materialist approach, like New Historicism, renders the literary text inseparable from its wider cultural context.

The second item of their quadruple system is theoretical method which "detaches the text from immanent criticism³⁶ which seeks only to reproduce it in its own

³⁶ Immanent criticism, according to Sinfield and Dollimore, is what "draws main themes and ideas from the text and arranges them in a hierarchical structure according to the set of moral values and beliefs of the critic" (Wilson 7). For instance, an immanent criticism of *The Tempest* renders Prospero wise and Caliban the bestial, thereby reproducing the dominant ideology without taking into consideration the subordinate culture.

terms" (Dollimore and Sinfield, Foreword vii). Essentialist humanism, based upon the recognition of universal human values and innate human traits, is rejected as it neglects the cultural implications the texts are exposed to. As Dollimore argues, Cultural Materialism seeks "beyond idealist literary criticism -that preoccupied with supposedly universal truths . . . the criticism in which history . . . is seen as inessential or a constraint transcended in the affirmation of a transhistorical human condition" ("Materialism" 4). He contrasts their stance with Tillyard's who takes for granted "the collective mind of the people" (5) since theirs does not look for eternal truth or "a single political vision" (4) as Greenblatt names it. Contrarily, considering the dominant, residual and emergent elements constitutive of culture, materialist critics aim to find instances of conflict and contradiction in a given text. Due to the fact that Cultural Materialism is in pursuit of oppositional voices to the dominant system, political commitment, the third item of its basic characteristics, is apparent in its critical orientation. The method considers each cultural act politically significant; it does not pretend to seem neutral, nor does it attempt to provide the reader with the correct interpretation of a given text (Dollimore and Sinfield, Foreword viii). What gives Cultural Materialism a political dimension is "its commitment to the transformation of a social order which exploits people on the grounds of race, gender and class" (viii). The literary texts are politically committed since they convey the social values of the dominant institutions which should be questioned by the subordinate. Williams is aware of the fact that there always remains an excluded social being whose "alternative perception" is neglected (*Marxism* 126). Cultural Materialism tries to see the world through a fresh perspective so that the underrepresented and disempowered could find voice. The final principle Cultural Materialism rests on is textual analysis which locates the critique of traditional approaches where it cannot be ignored (Dollimore and Sinfield, Foreword vii). It concretises the theoretical method and applies it to the literary texts whereby their dissident potential emerges. Textual analysis and historical context are inseparable since the former is crucial to find instances of dissidence that "operates, necessarily, with reference to dominant structures" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 47).

Literature, one of the ideological state apparatuses which *recruits* individuals in accordance with the dictates of the dominant group so as to reproduce the status quo, is culturally bounded and lies at the intersection of ideological struggles participating in the consolidation of power in favour of the dominant culture.

Cultural Materialism shares with New Historicism such a negative outlook in which subversion of the dominant system seems impossible yet where New Historicism professes that subversion results in containment and perpetuation of the dominant power, Cultural Materialism presumes that no matter how effective any ideology might be, it always produces cracks and contradictions within itself struggling to strengthen its dominance. Sinfield calls these instances of conflict within the ideology faultlines: "the social order *cannot but produce* faultlines through which its own criteria of plausibility fall into contest and disarray" (*Faultlines* 45) [emphasis in the original]. He explains the concept of faultline with an example: in Shakespeare's *Othello*, Desdemona is obliged to her father, the male head of the family, and should marry whom her father chooses but, on the other hand, in the early modern period there is an emphasis on marriage as a spiritually personal relationship (42-43). This contradiction, "an insecure moment in patriarchy" (43) as regards to the ideology of marriage is a faultline and there arises dissidence when Desdemona follows her own will and marry someone she is incompatible with. Even if her act does not make Desdemona an autonomous individual, dissidence takes place considering the social order she belongs to. The lengthy quotation from Sinfield clarifies what dissidence is and how it functions:

My argument is that dissident potential derives ultimately not from essential qualities in individuals (though they have qualities) but from conflict and contradiction that the social order inevitably produces within itself, even as it attempts to sustain itself. Despite their power, dominant ideological formations are always, in practice, under pressure, striving to substantiate their claim to superior plausibility in the face of diverse disturbances . . . Conflict and contradiction stem from the very strategies through which ideologies strive to contain the expectations that they need to generate. This is where failure -inability or refusal- to identify one's interests with the dominant may occur, and hence where dissidence may arise. (*Faultlines* 41-42)

Faultlines are embedded in cultures because culture is not regarded "as a static totality . . . but as diverse and changing, the site of profound contradictions" (Sinfield, "Power" 265). Thus, it comes as no surprise that they will appear in literary texts. By focusing on these ideological discrepancies the contexts contain, Cultural Materialist readings enable the socially marginalised to be visible, the stance which constitutes its substantial difference from New Historicism because Cultural Materialism is "imbued with the urgency of a political manifesto and this heightened engagement with the politics of culture characterises [it] as distinct from the more neutral pretence of New Historicism" (Branningan 109).

Dissidence is inevitable as there will always be conflicting and competing discourses in any dominant ideological formation. Contrary to the New Historicist understanding of power as seamless and efficiently operating, Sinfield proposes an analysis of power that lays bare the conflicts and contradictions through which dissident perspectives emerge. Detecting faultlines within the context and focusing on the dissident elements in a given text enable the discovery of lost identities, values and silenced voices of culture. Indeed, even the fact that the dominant is anxious to create discourse in order to keep the subordinate under control illustrates their visibility and the substantial power they have against the dominant: now that resistance is achievable since the "structure is enabling as much as constraining" and "affords resources for both acquiescence and revolt" (Sinfield, *Postwar* 31) the aim of Cultural Materialism is to identify instances of dissidence which "lie dormant in any textual manifestation of ideology" (Branningan 28). There is perpetual power struggle between the dominant and dissident voices in any text. It is important to unearth dissidence because "a dominant discourse cannot prevent 'abuse' of its resources . . . and . . . there can be no guarantee that the subordinate will stay safely in its prescribed place (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 48).

Oppositional elements develop alongside the dominant culture. In the struggle between power and its subversion, the possibility to spoil the machinations of power emerges. The potential for change is foregrounded and the suppressed voices could be heard. Literature challenges the principles from which the ideological power stems. No matter how unbreakable power and ideology seem in a given text in appearance, there is always room for alternative culture and marginalised characters. This stance negates the entrapment model of New Historicism because, according to Cultural Materialism, the subculture can create resistance against the impositions of the dominant. It creates chance to assert its own potential; the alternative consciousness might question the conventions:

Subcultures constitute consciousness, in principle in the same way that dominant ideologies do, but in partly dissident forms. In that bit of the world where the subculture runs, you can feel confident, as we used to say, that Black is beautiful, gay is good: there, those stories work, they build their own kinds of interactive plausibility. (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 38)

Cultural Materialism, in this sense, rejects monolithic view of culture and warrants individual dissidence. On the other hand, it should be emphasised that Sinfield is careful to employ the term dissidence rather than transgression or subversion

(*Faultlines* x) "since the latter may seem to imply achievement -that something was subverted- and hence (since mostly the government did not fall, patriarchy did not crumble) that containment must have occurred" (49). He regards dissidence as "refusal of an aspect of the dominant, without prejudging an outcome" (49). In other words, dissidence amounts to challenging the dominant culture regardless of its successful achievement. It is more interested in taking action rather than subordination. While it refers to the instance of noncompliance with the dominant culture, subversion refers to overthrow of ideology. Subversion is the ultimate aim of Cultural Materialism even though it is almost impossible to achieve. In sum, while New Historicists decide upon the all-pervasive and monolithic power, Cultural Materialists defend that the dominant culture cannot represent the whole culture. Culture is the sum of conflicting elements through which new meanings are constituted. The dissident reading of literary texts within their context creates a dynamic process of critical method in which ever suppressed voices could gain chance to make themselves visible. New Historicism analyses "the very means by which power achieves its aims" while Cultural Materialism looks for "instability which can be its undoing" (Dollimore, "Materialism" 14). Thus, Cultural Materialism is a positive theoretical method which effaces the monopoly of immanent criticism on literary texts and creates space for the silenced -women oppressed under the yoke of the early modern patriarchal culture within the scope of this dissertation.

2.2. Female Romance Writing

Frye characterises romances as stories of wish fulfilment, the theme that connects the topic to the profeminist matter since romance is a medium for female authors to realise their "wish fulfilment dream" (*Anatomy* 186) of visibility and agency in the society by means of the characters who "revive [their] sense of [their] own omnipotence" (Beer 3). Even though romance nostalgically evokes the socially remote time and location saving the reader from "the anxieties of reality" the fact that it "will still contain that reality" (Frye, *Anatomy* 193) and "the genre's ability to articulate pervasive social commentary" (Boro 188) are instrumental for female romancers to envision a better world in which their power and capability stand out and their aspirations are achieved. Romance has a social function "as a catalyst of change, projecting from what is or has been to what might some day be" (Barron

81). In this context, this dissertation adopts Cultural Materialism because romance proves to be a dissident genre which gives voice to the subordinate half of the society within the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and because female romance writing embodies dissidence as the "refusal of an aspect of the dominant" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 49). The characterisation of romance as a tool of dissidence stems from its contextual reading because the context of its creation qualifies a work of art either conformist or subversive. As Dollimore states,

the mere thinking of a radical idea is not what makes it subversive: typically it is the context of its articulation: to whom, how many and in what circumstances; one might go further and suggest that not only does the idea have to be conveyed, it has also actually to be used to refuse authority *or* be seen by authority as capable and likely of being used. ("Materialism" 13) [emphasis in the original]

Considering the patriarchal system the romances were produced and the fact that the genre was deliberately employed to challenging ends render romance a transgressive work of art for the female readership and authorship based on its context in the aforesaid time span. The social function of romance writing for women in order to assert their agency is crucial considering the early modern cultural attitudes to romance and womanhood. In this sense, a brief introduction of the cultural panorama of the concerned centuries to illustrate the dominant culture would underscore the dissident nature of the genre, its sociocultural position and female achievement better because romance demonstrates that while "the process of education and the process of much wider social training within institutions like the family" participate in the "continual making and remaking of an effective dominant culture" (Williams, "Base" 38) the female romancers in question desire to escape such hegemonic process which tries to shape them into a form approved by the dominant. In this sense, both in order to provide a contextual framework and given that conduct literature lays bare the dominant culture of the sixteenth century dictating women the rules they are supposed to comply with, the following sections relate the cultural understanding of femininity and the treatment of women within their cultures. It should be noted that the incessant insistence on female submission and the struggle to demarcate woman's place within the household indicate masculine fear regarding women's violation of the patriarchal prescriptions.

2.2.1. The Woman Question in British Context

In the sixteenth century England, there was a burst of conduct literature whose sole subject matter was the regulation of female behaviour. How women should get education, what they could read, what they were allowed to do, and when or where they could speak were under strict surveillance by the moralists and educationalists; how women should behave at home and in public was also decided by the patriarchs and conveyed through conduct manuals, theological pamphlets, sermons, advice and educational books and exhortations to women. As the institutionalised Church increased the power of man and his public presence, femininity was depicted within the boundaries of domesticity. What wives could read, for instance, was limited to their developing feminine skills in order to please their husbands; they were preached to pursue proper behaviour such as keeping their feelings under control, being useful to their husbands and being affectionate to them without excessive sexual desire. Conduct literature was an instrument for fortifying the patriarchal ideology. The sexual regulation of female behaviour was emblematic of the patriarchal power and it was of utmost importance for the *healthy* maintenance of the institution of family because a woman's honour was metonymic for the family's honour and chastity was requisite for its spotlessness. Chastity inevitably meant obedience, which was, in effect, the natural result of silence. Speech was readily associated with sexual impurity; the more a woman spoke, the more she was thought to be lascivious. There were countless examples that preach silence and a selection is provided below. One of the most renowned Renaissance humanists Juan Luis Vives (1493-1540) in *Instruction of A Christian Woman* (1523), in which he rehearses the principles of ideal womanhood, discourages women to express their opinion in public. According to Vives, women do not need eloquence since they will never need it. What he preaches instead is "the study of wisdom, which forms morals in the way of virtue . . . which teaches the best and holiest way of life" (71). Thomas More (1478-1535), who is known to have supported his daughter's education,³⁷ similarly warns her against seeking public acknowledgement: be "content with the profit and the pleasure of your conscience" and "do not seek for the praise of public, nor value it overmuch even if you receive it . . . you regard us -your husband and myself- as a sufficiently large

³⁷ S. G. Ross in *The Birth of Feminism Woman as Intellect in Renaissance Italy and England* discusses the relationship between Thomas More and Margaret More as to her education.

circle of readers" (Guy 74). Thomas Becon (1512-1567) in *Catechism* (1564) records the same idea: "[honest maids] be not full of tongue, and of much babbling, nor use many words, but as few as they may . . . ever remembering this common proverb: a maid should be seen and not heard" (Aughterson 26). He considers it "a shame for women to speak in the congregation" (171). Richard Brathwait (1588-1673) in *The English Gentlewoman* (1631) likewise states that "what is spoken of Maids may be properly applied to all women: they should be seene and not heard" (Krontiris, *Oppositional* 7) and Nicholas Breton (1542-1626) complains of a talkative wife: "An unquiet woman is the misery of man . . . her voice is the screeching of an owl, her eye the poison of a cockatrice . . . she is the grief of nature, the wound of wit . . . the seed of trouble . . . and the digestion of death" (12). Although Vives and More support female education, their understanding is limited to the teaching of religious matters and female chores. Both prevent women from expressing their opinion in public or writing for the public as it would mean being the object of male gaze, which is incompatible with the widespread idea of a virtuous and religious woman who should supposedly be in pursuit of heavenly issues for her moral development. Becon's and Brathwait's preclusion of women from any connection with the public illustrates the underlying solicitude they have: a woman should silently exist to fulfil what man commands but she should not deviate from what is instructed to her. Breton demands total silence and Becon preaches women to perform their roles in the way their male head desires, which means "to be sober-minded; to love their husbands; to love their children; to be discreet, chaste, housewifely, good, obedient to their husbands" (Aughterson 171). The moralists indicate the close connection between religious devotion, virtue and silence.³⁸ The afore-mentioned authors reflect the cultural stereotypes of the age concerning the identification of religious devotion with invisibility in public. A virtuous woman is the one who reads religious works

³⁸ Wayne speaks of five conduct manuals written and published in England from 1604 to 1624 in which mothers speak as figures of authority to their daughters (56) disseminating the patriarchal ideals. For instance, Dorothy Leigh (d. 1616), whose understanding of education and silence agrees with the male conduct literature authors, emblematises the internalisation and the reproduction of the patriarchal discourse in *Mothers Blessing* (1616). According to Leigh, who establishes a tripartite structure of chastity, virtue and piety, her daughter should be chaste because "whoso is truly chaste, is free from idleness and from all vaine delights, full of humilitie, and all good Christian vertues: whoso is chaste, is not given to pride in apparell, nor any vanity, but is alwayes either reading, mediating, or practising some good thing which shee hath learned in the Scripture" (Wayne 66-67). The mother, who addresses to her children, creates a paradoxical situation in that she, while preaching silence to the daughter, gains voice.

and silently meditates in her chamber unavailable to the public eye; seeking fame and being visible in public amount to disobedience to the Scripture and to the male authority. If a woman disobeys the male head, she is thought to be unchaste; if she is unchaste, she lacks the Christian virtues and feminine ideals. Trill summarises the ideal pattern expected of women in conduct literature during the Renaissance:

The key aspects of her life and character that are highlighted are her wisdom, piety, humility, meekness, love, constancy, charity, good household government and godly devotion. Above all, these qualities fit the woman for her role as "wife," "mother" and "mistress" of the household. This woman never engages in idle gossiping; instead, great success is laid upon the wholesomeness of her speech, which is usually compromised of biblical citation . . . Corporately, these texts indicate that the delineation of the exemplary Christian woman, [between] 1500-1700, did not alter significantly. (33)

The ideal Renaissance woman (except for some aristocratic women who even overshadowed men in nobility) was the one who devoted herself to her family and to God as the supreme patriarch without interfering in public affairs or being absorbed in idle thoughts but only reading the Gospels so as to gain wisdom. The following proverbs from John Ray's (1627-1705) *A Compleat Collection of Proverbs* (1670) "many women, many words; many geese, many turds" and "free of her lips, free of her hips" (Aughterson 224) conclude the attitude that associates female speech with idleness and promiscuity in the period.

2.2.2. The Woman Question in Italian Context

Even though Italy was the cradle of Renaissance humanism which awakened interest in the intellectual capacity of individuals to flourish themselves with education, the humanist rules for personal growth seem invalid regarding the majority of female population as the Italians were inclined to view women as morally, rationally and biologically inferior to men similar to their European counterparts. True it was that the exceptional or learned ladies of the prominent families started to become visible within the society, basically, as of the patriarchal England, compared to the other sex, the social rules for women were more restrictive in Italy too. Although Italy was not politically unified till 1871 but were

composed of city states with their particular regulations, regarding the treatment of women, albeit minor differences based on rank, the destined place of women was the domestic sphere, her lot was silence and obedience and the education she got was limited to what would perfect her feminine duties. Naturally enough, the conduct literature, which aimed to reinforce ideal femininity, also flourished in the Renaissance Italy. The double standard, which Castiglione records in *Il libro del cortegiano*, as to the treatment of women and men, was a life-long experience:

We men have of our own authority arrogated to ourselves a licence, whereby we insist that the same sins are in us very trivial and sometimes praiseworthy, and in women cannot be sufficiently punished, unless by shameful death or perpetual infamy at least. (204)

For the Italian men and women, there used to be two distinctive spheres of life: while men were free to appear in public and interact with others, women were isolated from the society. For example, among the earlier Renaissance authors, the Florentine Paolo da Certaldo (1320-1370) in *Libro dei buoni costumi* (c. 1360) preaches the confinement of women:

Young girls should be taught to sew, and not to read, for it is not good in a woman, knowing how to read, unless you want to make her a nun . . . Teach them all aspects of housework . . . Good women and bad women need masters and the stick. The young and virgin woman should live following the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary . . . She did not stay out of the house . . . but stayed enclosed and locked up in a secluded and decent place. (qtd. in Dean 195-96)

The quotation illustrates the basic tenets of ideal womanhood which are obedience to the male head, silence and abstention from public. Similarly, the Franciscan priest Bernardino of Siena (1380-1444) instructs women to stay indoors and not "to get familiar with men and even with women" (qtd. in Rogers and Tinagli 45). The custom, which confines women within domesticity, also influences the perception regarding their education. While it should be noted that in the northern Italy and especially in the cities such as Verona, Bologna and Venice, the well-established families gave importance to the education of their daughters, which was regarded a source of prestige for the family name, and several women published some literary pieces,³⁹ for the women belonging to the lower rank, the

³⁹ What is more, in the Republic of Venice the literary saloons held a particular importance for the sociocultural role of women who took part in the literary and philosophical debates of their time. There were even women who established their own saloons such as Veronica Franco, Tullia d'Aragona, Gaspara Stampa and Francesca Baffa in Venice (Dialetti no page).

desire to get education became more political and it was seen as a transgressive act (Broad and Green 38-39). Since it was the social status which determined whether a woman would get education, the daughters of the poor or those not belonging to the nobility did not have ample opportunities. Giovanni Michele Bruto (1517-1592) in *Institutione di una fanciulla nata nobilmente* (1555) even audaciously states that “the education of a woman is to consist in limiting her access to education; her consequent ignorance is the highest wisdom” (qtd. in Jordan 146). In such a social context in which only the privileged had access to education, learning Latin was especially more challenging because “women who wrote and read Latin were thought deviant and were seen as a threat to society, whether in public or private domain” (Robin 191). For instance, Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444) in *De studiis et litteris liber* considers the humanist education [studia humanitatis] suitable for women but he omits public rhetoric and disputation (Grendler 87) within the Latin curriculum⁴⁰ as it is unbecoming of women; and, Stefano Guazzo (1530-1593), the founder of the Accademia degli Illustrati in Casale Monferrato, emphasises that the education of a woman should be compatible with the subordinate place she has within the social system (Logan 71). In the same vein, Silvio Antoniano (1540-1603) in *Tre libri dell’educazione cristiana e politica dei figliuoli* (1583) believes that women should not be as educated as men in case they claim authority over them and, although he supports education for the daughters of eminent families on condition that they learn religious works, he states that they should not learn Greek or Latin or writing as they never need them and they are against sexual and religious decorum. As he believes, a father “should be content that his daughter recited the Little Office of Our Lady . . . A girl should attend to . . . female activities, leaving to men what was theirs . . . A girl ought not acquire Latin learning, because she had no public role to play” (qtd. in Grendler 89). Concordantly, women were not given the chance to attend universities but they were generally home-schooled with tutors and they were not allowed to improve their rhetorical skills. Writing in Latin was also frowned upon as it meant “a public advertisement of the self” (Panizza 25). In sum, it is assumable that “with a few celebrated exceptions, the best-educated women of the social elite of

⁴⁰ “A few fifteenth-century girls received excellent Latin educations [such as] Isotta Nagorola (1418-1466), Cassandra Fedele (1465-1558) and Laura Cereta (1469-1499) . . . Born into aristocratic or wealthy professional families, [the learned women] enjoyed very strong support from loving fathers and received private tutoring. They blossomed intellectually in benign circumstances, but found it difficult to exercise their talents beyond paternal home” (Grendler 93).

Renaissance Italy must have been significantly less qualified than the worst-educated men" (Cox "Seen" 388). While women were already living up to the patriarchal prescriptions, it was during and after the Council of Trent (1545-1564) [Concilium Tridentinum] that their lives became stricter in Italy. The Catholic Church issued several regulations in order to rehabilitate the moral, institutional and theological malfunctions in the society.

The Tridentine reforms also constituted the intensification of a process of *disciplinamento* (social disciplining) of the Italian populations through confraternities, the Inquisition, the confessional, preaching, and new catechisms -all of which . . . were aimed to bring the laity under closer spiritual direction by the clerical elites. (Martin 46)

The post-Tridentine period resulted in the harsher control of women regarding their sexuality and the reinforcement of their isolation from the public. In other words, "the possibilities of sexual equality . . . were soon dampened with Trent and ensuing Counter-Reformation propaganda that put women firmly back in the home" (Panizza and Wood 5). Unsurprisingly, most women were either not provided with the means to pursue humanistic studies, or even if they would like to, they were either not allowed or could not find time for intellectual activities under the burden of childrearing⁴¹ and husbandly domination as marriage was basically the only career women could pursue (apart from nunnery; "maritar o monacar" was a common proverb) and, whether married or not, it readily located women within the domestic sphere as Giacomo Lanteri (d. 1560) stated: "consider this house . . . as a little city . . . of which I am the governor who has supreme authority" (qtd. in Shemek 78). To conclude, regardless of regional differences, the ideal woman was faithful, deferential, trustworthy and forbearing even in the case of "sweet violence of moderate force against disobedience" (Kirshner 97). The society was already patriarchal; and, the post-Tridentine discourse reinforced the patriarchal ideals of femininity. The Renaissance Italy was highly "gender-dichotomised" (Cox, *Prodigious* 30) based on a hierarchy between sexes and the roles they were supposed to fulfil.

⁴¹ Women were preached to fulfil their function of childbearing. A Florentine clergyman expresses the imperative as follows: "these women have forgotten that it is their duty to bear the children sired by their husbands and, like little sacks, to hold the natural seed which their husbands implant in them" (qtd. in Kent 30).

2.2.3. Sociocultural Position of Romance & Its Function for Female Authors

According to the Cultural Materialist view, within culture "one human discourse" always insists that "certain kinds of knowledge" are "harmful" to the society (Dollimore, *Radical* xxxi) and what this harmful knowledge is and its prohibition depend on the attitude of the dominant culture the subordinate has to comply with. Romance during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was a kind of "knowledge" thought to be "harmful" and forbidden by the dominant culture. Collectively regarded morally dangerous, it was the genre most attacked by the moralists of the era. Downgrading romance was a common practice among debaters and women were the specific target as supposed readers of romance. In this sense, the scrutiny on the negative appreciation of romance would highlight the female assertiveness conducted through the genre better.

The common conviction that presumes the relationship between sexuality and romance goes back to Dante Alighieri's (1265-1321) *La divina commedia* [The Divine Comedy] (1472) in which romance reading causes libidinal outburst. Francesca da Rimini and his brother-in-law Paolo Malatesta have sexual intercourse upon reading an Arthurian romance in the fifth canto of *Inferno*.⁴² Francesca depicts the scene as follows:

And she to me: "There is no greater pain than to
remember the happy time in wretchedness; and this
your teacher knows.
But if you have so much desire to know the first
root of our love, I will do as one who weeps and speaks.
We were reading one day, for pleasure, of
Lancelot, how Love beset him; we were alone and
Many times that reading drove our eyes
together and turned our faces pale; but one point
alone was the one that overpowered us.
When we read that the yearned-for smile was
kissed by so great a lover, he, who will never be

⁴² E quella a me: "Nessun maggior dolore / che ricordarsi del tempo felice / ne la miseria; e ciò sa 'l tuo dottore. / Ma s'a conoscer la prima radice / del nostro amor tu hai cotanto affetto, / dirò come colui che piange e dice. / Noi leggiavamo un giorno per diletto / di Lancialotto come amor lo strinse; / soli eravamo e senza alcun sospetto. / Per più fiate li occhi ci sospinse / quella lettura, e scolorocci il viso; / ma solo un punto fu quel che ci vinse. / Quando leggemmo il disiato riso / esser basciato da cotanto amante, / questi, che mai da me non fia diviso, / la bocca mi basciò tutto tremante. / Galeotto fu 'l libro e chi lo scrisse: / quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante." (5. 121-38)

separated from me,
kissed my mouth all trembling. Galeotto was the
book and he who wrote it: that day we read there no
further." (5. 121-38)

Following Dante, the fear that women would be enchanted by and imitate the scenes of love was the root of its strong disapproval. As McKeon states, considering romance, "from Dante on, the fear that women's morals [would] be corrupted [was] quite conventional" (52). In a culture which associated *even* speech with promiscuity, it was quite customary to label the genre as a deviation from the norm. Romance and romance reading were considered to be hazardous owing to two reasons: first, it was deprecated for fear that it would trigger concupiscence in women who would soon abandon their feminine propriety and Christian morality; second, the genre was considered to be an idle and trivial endeavour that did not appeal to an intellectual person. Juan Luis Vives, who evaluates the idle and erotic content of the genre together, was severely against its promotion:

A custom has grown up, worse than any pagan usage, that books in the vernacular -written in that tongue so that they may be read by idle men and women- treat no subjects but love and war. Concerning such books, I think nothing more need be said if I am speaking to Christians. How can I describe what a pestilence this is, since it is to place straw and dry kindling wood on the fire? But these books are written for those who have nothing to do, as if idleness itself were not a strong enough aliment of all vices without laying on a torch that will set a person on fire and devour him in its flames. What does a girl have to do with weapons, the very mention of which is unbecoming to her . . . A young woman cannot easily be of chaste mind if her thoughts are occupied with the sword and sinewy muscles and virile strength . . . There are some, who have already lost all mental equilibrium, who give themselves to this reading in order to find pleasant gratification in amorous reveries of this kind . . . How much better would it be for [the girls] to enter into life blind and deaf, as our Lord says in the gospel, rather than to be cast into the fire of hell with both eyes and both ears. (73-74)

Vives does not approve of the vernacular in which romances are written. Since it is not the language of the Church and romances do not tell of the Scripture, it is enough for a pious Christian to reject romances. He allusively considers reading romances equal with abjuration of religion because, according to him, a devotee shall not read them which are, indeed, a gateway to hell kindling lustful thought. Furthermore, romances can solely address idle men and women who do not devote their time to religious meditation. In this sense, only those who are mentally unhealthy read its "venomous allurements and enticements" (74).

Romance, without delivering serious matters, first estranges the reader from religion, and due to its enticing stories of love and bloodshed, leads to sin and Hell. He preaches the prohibition of these “filthy songs” (Vives 74) given that they do not have any instructional value. What is more, romance is against the natural upbringing of maids who should not deal with warriors but the Scripture. Vives even goes so far as to associate romance authorship with writing “books on the art of whoring” (76). That Vives identifies these “pernicious books” (74) with venom and viper also reinforces his association of romance with Hell. The analogy between Hell and romance reading is the strongest when he contemplates that women, who are curious about its erotic content, who read it and who are deceived by its lies, would soon lose innocence and be banished from the path to Heaven just as Eve is cheated by Satan under the guise of a snake and banished from the Garden of Eden. Considering the fact that Adam and Eve become aware of their sexuality after the banishment from Heaven (similar to what Paolo and Francesca experience) the allusion to the Original Sin renders romance and romance reading almost blasphemous and in dire need of prohibition: “therefore, a woman should avoid these books as she would a viper or a scorpion . . . A good woman will not take such books into her hands, nor will she defile her mouth with obscene songs” (78). Vives harshly prohibits any interest in romance and reinforces the analogy in both of which self-willed female action has ghastly consequences. Thus, men should not leave reading choices of women unattended: “a woman must not rashly follow her own judgment, lest with her slight initiation into learning and the study of letters she mistakes false for true” (78). Vives warns fathers and husbands to choose women’s reading material and preaches them to forbid women from reading romances as it would *obviously* allure them to pursue promiscuous entertainment against the religious precepts.⁴³

Similar to Vives, Giovanni Michele Bruto (1517-1592) in *Institutione di una fanciulla nata nobilmente* (1555) warns that women’s reading should not be independent from patriarchal intervention and their access to the literary texts should be limited in case they read romances, which is to be shunned in his view (Shemek 82) and the Veronese bishop Agostino Valerio (1531-1606) shares Vives’ opinion as he exhorts women to read spiritual books (Grendler 89).

⁴³ “I marvel that wise fathers permit [romance] to their daughters, husbands concede it to their wives, and public morals and institutions ignore the fact that women become addicted to vice through reading [it]” (74).

Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575) in *The Christian State of Matrimony* (1541) also warns against reading romances:

Let [women] not read fables of fond and light love . . . Books of Robin Hood, Bevis of Hampton, Troilus and such like fables do but kindle in liars like lies and wanton love, which ought not in youth with their first spittle to be drunken in, least they ever remain in them. (Aughterson 106)

In the same vein, Henry Percy (1564-1632), the 9th Earl of Northumberland, advises his son to forbid his wife to read romances representing it like a threat to her chastity: "an *Arcadia*, or some love discourses, to make [her] able to entertain a stranger upon a hearth in a Privy Chamber" (qtd. in Newcomb, "Gendering" 130). Edward Hake (b. 1579) in *A Touchstone for this time present . . . Whereunto is annexed a perfect rule to be observed of all Parents and Schoolmasters, in the training up of their Scholars and Children in Learning* (1574) also touches upon the regulation of moral education, which otherwise, a young girl would be "so nouseled in amorous bookes, vaine stories and fonde trifeling fancies, that shee smelleth of naughtinesse even all hir life after" (qtd. in Hackett, *Women* 43). Fra Sabba Castiglione (1480-1554) does not approve of women reading the *canzoni* of Petrarch, the *Decameron*, *La Fiammetta* and *Il Filoloco* of Boccaccio as well as similar "lascivious works" either, because he thinks that a woman should not be familiar with the "saucy rimes" and "love letters" but read what is suitable for an "honourable woman" (qtd. in Grendler 88). Bullinger, Percy, Hake and Castiglione regard reading romances a deviation from the truth and religion which would make women sexually ungovernable. Believing in the indispensability of moral propriety, they rigorously defend against romance, a potential threat to contaminate feminine innocence.

Roger Ascham (1515-1568) in *The Schoolmaster* (1570) denounces the Italian romance fiction because the English tradition is under its influence. He reproduces the cultural attitude as to the genre due to its promise of pleasure, its idle content of sheer manslaughter and its sexual appeal that would enchant the young:

bawdie bookes to be translated out of the *Italian* tonge, whereby ouer many yong willes and wittes allured to wantonnes, do now boldly contemne all seure bookes that sounde to honestie and godlines . . . as one for example, *Morte Arthure*: the whole pleasure of which booke standeth in two special poyntes, in open mans slaughter, and bold bawdrye: In which booke those be counted the noblest Knightes, that do kill most men without any quarell, and commit fowlest aduoulteries by

sutlest shiftes . . . They open, not fond and common wayes to vice, but such subtle, cunning, new, and diuerse shiftes, to cary yong willes to vanitie, and yong wittes to mischief . . . And bicause our English men made *Italians*, can not hurt, but certaine persons, and in certaine places, therfore these *Italian* bookes are made English, to bryng mischief enough openly and boldly, to all states great and meane, yong and old, euey where. . . . Suffer these bookes to be read, and they shall soone displace all bookes of godly learnyng. (80-81)

Ascham points to the enthralling feature of the genre which brainwashes young and idle people through its diverse stories. Without having any instructional value, these translated works only cause misdeed. Ascham juxtaposes divine knowledge with romance and his conclusion "inglese Italianato è un diavolo incarnato" (Mentz 129) discloses the fear that the "godly learning" would soon be replaced by the books of vanity and mischief. The devil incarnating within the framework of romance is a powerful imagery he employs to curtail the custom of English translation of Italian romances and the virtual blasphemy it brings forth.

Thomas Underdowne's (1566-1587) preface to his translation of Heliodorus' *Ethiopica* (1577) rehearses Vives' and Ascham's opinion on romance:

If I shall commend the reading of it to any, I might find other better to be commended . . . *Morte Darthur, Arthur of Little Britain, yea, and Amadis of Gaule*, etc. account violent murder, or murder for no cause, manhood: and fornication and all unlawful lust, friendly love. (qtd. in Moore 317)

Interestingly enough, even though Underdowne translates the ancient romance, he does not consider it a genre one should spend time on reading. He also emphasises its disconnection from reality underlining its potential to misrepresent aimless violence and murder as indications of manhood and illicit sexuality as a sign of love. François de la Noue (1531-1591) is also apprehensive in that "reading of the books of *Amadis de Gaule*, and such like is no less hurtful to youth, than the works of Machiavel to age" and, similar to Ascham and Underdowne, he underscores the insignificant reasons for the "cutting one another's throat for frivolous matters" as well as its "dishonest lusts" (qtd. in Moore 319). The four patriarchs regard romance a dangerous genre to be prohibited as it concerns bloodshed and unintelligent themes and leads to unmeasured desire.

Jacques Amyot (1513-1593) also criticises romance due to its disconnection from reality as romance cannot be a product of wisdom but an outcome of a lunatic:

They are usually so dissonant and so removed from any resemblance to truth that they are more similar to the dreams of a sick man who raves in his fits of fever than to the inventions of a man of acumen and judgment . . . [There is] no erudition, no knowledge of antiquity, nor a single thing, in truth, from which one may profit. (qtd. in Mentz 34)

He is against romance because it is not a source of knowledge nor has any instructional or literary value. By the same token, Robert Burton (1577-1640) in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) remarks that romance is read only by "silly Gentlewomen" who are "incensed by reading amorous toyes, *Amadis de Gaul*, *Palmerin de Oliva*, *the Knight of the Sunne*" and thus are "set on fire" (qtd. in Hackett, *Women* 66). In sum, as romances do not deal with philosophical or religious issues, they are considered to be literarily insignificant written by idle, lunatic and unlearnt men who are "the slaves of vice" (Vives 75). Similarly, given that romances do not have any pedagogical value, there is an on-going fear that once the young girls are influenced by its content, they would abandon their moral education. In this context, the threat to patriarchy that women might abandon their filial and matrimonial duties turns out to be one of the reasons why Thomas Salter in *A mirrhor mete for all mothers, Matrones and Maidens* (1578) urges them to take the "Distaffe, and Spindle, Needle and Thimble" (qtd. in Krontiris, *Oppositional* 12) instead of romance. For the same of fear of losing control over their female household, he criticises the fathers who allow their daughters to "learn by heart books, ballads, songes, sonnettes and dities of dalliance, exciting their memories thereby" (15-16). It is thought that women would be sexually aroused and it would threaten the patriarchal conventions in case women reject their socially determined roles. Once women do not pay attention to the patriarchal dictates, the pillar of patriarchy based on the hierarchical relationship between the sexes would be shattered.⁴⁴

On the other hand, there were even some women who considered reading romances a vain activity that disconnects one from the heavenly and philosophical matters. For instance, Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673), who argues "the truth is, the chief study of our Sex is Romances, wherein reading they fall in love with the feign'd Heroes and Carpet Knights, with whom their Thoughts secretly commit

⁴⁴ Pearson summarises the harms of reading romances as represented in the literature of the age: for instance, in Steele's *The Tender Husband* (1705) Biddy Tipkin suffers from reading "idle romances" or in Delarivier Manley's *Secret Memoirs from the New Atlantis* (1709) a young woman makes herself sexually inviting as she has "read Romances" which in the end has been executed after killing her own illegitimate child (92).

Adultery" (qtd. in Eckerle, *Romancing* 133), is critical of her sex for mimicking romance heroines and regards romances a waste of time in opposition to erudite learning. Mary Rich (1625-1678), the Countess of Warwick, likewise confesses to have spent her "precious time in nothing else but reading romances" until her marriage; or, Elizabeth Delaval (1649-1717) accuses her governess of inciting her to read romances that she remembers as "vainly pass[ing] the blossom time of [her] life which should have been spent in laying a good foundation of what is to be learned in such books as teach us heavenly wisdom" (qtd. in Charlton 16). Lastly, Mary Astell (1666-1731) argues that women should turn to "the study of Philosophy" rather than reading romance in order to develop themselves and to evince their intellectual equality with men (Pearson 92).

During the Renaissance, romance and reading romances were always associated with unchastity, factitiousness and impropriety whose imaginative appeal would make women go astray. Regarded a waste of time, romance was downgraded being morally and intellectually weak, leading to idle and lustful thoughts⁴⁵ only read by *less* intelligent women. Men forbade women to read romances since they were afraid that the *healthily* acculturated women under the patriarchal principles would deviate from ideal behavioural patterns taught them. As Pearson states, "in the metaphors of the period, women's reading [apart from the religious material] was routinely supposed to cause illness, blindness, madness, or simply female rebelliousness" (85).⁴⁶ Given the situation, in which romance was almost

⁴⁵ As Becon states in *Catechism*, idleness is dangerous because "so soon as idleness occupieth the mind of any person, vain and evil thoughts brast in straightways, out of the which springeth all mischief, as pride, slothfulness, banqueting, drunkenship, whoredom, adultery, vain communication, betraying of secrets, cursed speaking etc" (Aughterson 26).

⁴⁶ The reason why the themes of madness, rebellion and reading are associated with each other is explicable by the help of an article by Shoshana Felman "Women and Madness: the Critical Fallacy" in which she re-evaluates Honoré de Balzac's short story "Adieu" and its criticism from a refreshed feminist lens. According to the male criticism of the work, the fact that Stéphanie cannot recognise her fiancée is enough to label her as an unhealthy woman in need of the "recovery of her 'reason,' the restoration of her femininity as well as of her identity." Considering the patriarchal assumption that the formation of her identity depends upon the "specular recognition" (148) of the masculine subject, she is represented as an unhealthy woman. As Felman argues, such a (mis)representation stems from the masculine understanding of femininity that considers woman "the exact metaphorical measure of the narcissism of man." According to this masculine assumption, a woman is considered to be woman so long as she provides narcissistic acknowledgement for man. Unless she acts out her role and provides the masculine subject with the image he wants to see himself, she is qualified unhealthy. Once the feminine subject refuses to act as a looking glass for male self-aggrandisement through which he could reflect his omnipresent control over woman, she is considered insane no longer serving for "the narcissism of man" (147).

synonymous with voluptuousness as the producer of sexual desire, reading romances was doubly challenging in that women *were reading* and they were *reading a genre forbidden to them*. The reason behind labelling the women who read as rebellious or insane during the sixteenth century was explicable as follows: the custom made it unquestionable that it was the men who should decide what women could do, read or how their education should be regulated; when women rebelled against the male rule by reading what was forbidden to them -or *even the fear* that they might read the prohibited material- it was a blow to their hegemony over women. Once women refused to reflect the powerful image of the male back to them through compliance, men had to make up an excuse for what they could not control and labelled women as insane. When a woman, who always belonged to men or became commodities for exchange in arranged marriages, wanted to dissent from the conventions she was moulded in, it shook the foundation of the patriarchal culture. Indeed, women were metonymic for the masculine power and the more they got powerful, the more hazardous it became for the male ego because women, who decided for themselves what to read, directly refused male hegemony and, just as the obedient woman was the symbol of male power, her disobedience amounted to a threat to it. As Montrose concerning early modern gender relationships aptly states, "men create women and then create themselves through women" ("New" 392). In this sense, given that "reading and the possession of books⁴⁷ figure power" (Pearson 86) that romance is an emergent cultural force providing women with agency within the dominant culture of the age would not be a mistaken deduction.

Romance and the act of romance reading "as distinct from the dominant . . . active and pressing" (Williams, *Marxism* 126) are the means of female assertiveness independent from patriarchal prescriptions. Providing temporary relief from the patriarchal demands such as the fulfilment of filial and matrimonial roles, romance promises momentary release from patriarchal pressures. Once a woman identifies herself with the romance heroines, she gains a feminised space of liberty in which she declares independence. Even though confined to the domestic place, textual space of romance, enabling transportation to distinct places, produces a virtual realm in which she could question her desires, needs, aspirations and the patriarchal assumptions. Just as Woolf states *a room of one's own* is compulsory

⁴⁷ Margaret Cavendish "identifies 'books' with 'crown,' 'sword' and 'sceptre' as the instruments and symbols of control men are reluctant to share with women" (Pearson 86).

for the productive literary activity and the inner quest, the reading woman's retreat into the world of romance provides her the freedom she does not have in the patriarchal milieu. What is more, it creates a dialogue between the romance-reading-woman and the characters within the text. Therefore, romance valorizes private female experience and functions as a self-assertive tool within the patriarchal discourse that dilutes female existence. Escarpit states that reading "temporarily suppress[ing] the individual's relations with the universe to construct new ones with the universe of the work" is "the supreme solitary occupation" (88) through which a woman is undressed of her daily preoccupations. Having released of her identity markers and suspended the performance of her prescribed duties, she benefits from romance as an instructional tool. The romance heroines function as the projections of what women wish to become: to regain their own voice and to be free enough to follow their aspirations. The achievements of romance heroines would be fulfilling for the reader who is unable to meet her needs and desires within the patriarchal marriage. In this context, the woman, whose dialogue with the community is substantially restricted, starts to inhabit a fruitful psychic space. The text, functioning on the reader to realise her potential, serves as a liminal space between reality and fiction which she knows it to be fictive but still not totally irrelevant to the actual world but only the instructions of social institutions for the female are suspended and the supposedly ideal cultural constructions of femininity through conduct manuals are thwarted. Creating a utopic vision in which women's power is not circumscribed by male hegemony, the successful deeds by romance heroines provide women with self-affirmation that they are not intellectually weak contrary to the impositions of the misogynist tradition. Reading a romance, as a self-contained pleasure, functions as a tool for passive resistance in which a woman's unfulfilled desire can be fulfilled compensating what she lacks under her present social circumstances. In this context, Sir Thomas Overbury's (1581-1613) *Characters* (1615), in which a chambermaid continuously reads several romances, sheds light upon both the cultural fear as to female empowerment and the potential of romance and romance heroines for dissidence: "Shee reads *Greenes* works over and over, but is so carried away with the *Myrroure of Knighthood*, she is many times resolv'd to run out of her selfe, and become a Ladie Errant" (qtd. in Hackett, "Femininity" 41). The fact that the chambermaid -or any women- under the influence of the romance heroines, might "run out of her selfe" and desist from fulfilling her socially

determined role illustrates the reason why the moralists demand its prohibition or are anxious about it. Likewise, Thomas Powell's (1572-1635) conclusion in *Tom of All Trades Or The Plaine Path-way to Preferment* (1631) "I like not a female Poetresse at any hand" (qtd. in Hackett, *Women* 106) voices the repressed disquiet of the age which stems from the belief that reading romances would enable women to realise their own potential and encourage them to write their own romances in the long run.

Romance and romance reading mean the shattering of the patriarchal discourse based on the hierarchical binary opposition of the outspoken male versus the silent female. Since romance "opens the workings of power and ideology to scrutiny and contest" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 92) it refigures power in feminine terms and questions the patriarchal assumption that persistently associates female speech, reading and textuality⁴⁸ with promiscuity, rebelliousness and madness. Given that romance is regarded to incite uncontrollable sexual desire, it is feared that it would lead women to forge their sexual identity independent of man. The fear that romance might produce desires and meanings other than the patriarchy allows is enough to limit such an independent reading activity. In a society in which reading self-chosen material means challenging the patriarchal social order, romance inevitably indicates the assertion of female agency.

Sinfield states that "the insistence in representations upon unity in a simple hierarchy does not mean that that is how the [system] actually works, only that this is the major parts of the ruling fraction represent it as working" (*Faultlines* 81-82). In the same vein, even though romance is represented as a worthless and sinful genre, the material condition of the age as regards the printing culture demonstrates otherwise. Thus, the appreciation of romance in the early modern age best represents the Cultural Materialist postulate that culture harbours several conflicting elements simultaneously. As Moore states, "throughout this period, the rapture of romance is feared and yet desired, imitated and yet scorned" (324). Apart from its criticism that considers it the source of lust, one of the most prominent literary figures of the age in England, Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586)

⁴⁸ The woman writer was often depicted as a whore because of her intrusion into a public sphere and her control of the pen, a metaphorical penis. Pearson provides many examples from Jacobean city comedies in which the readers of erotic fiction or poetry are represented to be more interested in sexual affairs. For instance, in *Eastward Ho* (1605) by George Chapman, Ben Jonson and John Marston, the dutiful daughter Mildred is contrasted with her rebellious sister Gertrude who is knowledgeable in romance fiction (88).

defends the pedagogical value of romance in *An Apology for Poetry* (1595):

Truely, I have known men, that even with reading *Amadis de Gaule* (which God knoweth wanteth much of a perfect poesie) have found their hearts moved to the exercise of courtesy . . . especially courage. (124)

What is more, he notably contributes to the genre for the benefit of women when he dedicates his romance to his sister Mary Herbert and titles it *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*.⁴⁹ The possessive case not only "bestows a position as subject to woman" (Lamb, *Gender* 22)⁵⁰ but legitimates her readership as well. One should not, however, be so quick as to label Sir Philip Sidney the defender of romance. Although he emphasises the instructional value of romance under the principle of *dulce et utile*, his qualification of the work as a "toy" and "trifle" overlaps with the sixteenth century convention that regards romance a low literary form. Interestingly enough, the deliberate disdain of romance functions as a marketing strategy for male romancers such as him and John Lyly (1554-1606). For instance, in *An Apology for Poetry*, Sidney regards *Arcadia* "this ink-wasting toy of mine" (146) and in a letter to his brother in 18 October 1580, he calls it a "toyfull book" (Newcomb, *Reading* 37). In another letter to his sister Mary Sidney he also seems to understate his own production:

Here now have you (most deare, and most worthy to be most deare Lady) this idle work of mine . . . For my part, in very trueth . . . I could well find in my harte, to cast out in some desert of forgetfulness this child, which I am loath to father . . . For indeede, for severer eyes it is not, being but a trifle, and that triflinglie handled. Read it then at your idle tymes . . . And so, looking for no better stuff then, as in an Haberdashers shoppe, glasses, or feathers, you will continue to love the writer. (37)

Even though his qualification of *Arcadia* as an insignificant product of idleness inconvenient for an intellectual mind converges Sidney with the common assumption of romance and the address to his sister acknowledges her authorised position, the deliberate denigration of the work serves as a marketing strategy which "could help to disguise the writer's reliance on commercial circulation" (Newcomb, *Reading* 39). John Lyly adopts the same strategy when he evaluates his *Eupheus and His England* (1578) as "being but a toy, as Lawne on your heads,

⁴⁹ Edmund Spenser (1552-1599) also dedicates *The Faerie Queene* (1590) to Elizabeth I.

⁵⁰ She also states that her patronage was exempt from "patriarchal control" and it provided power in that she could withdraw her financial support unless she likes the work (28-29).

being but trash" (Lamb, "Inventing" 22). Such rhetorical representations actually hint at the obvious importance of the genre within the literary market for the male romancers since the intentional disdain of the supposedly trivial romances uncovers the "struggles for textual and authorial control" (Newcomb, *Reading* 105). In the same vein, the feminisation of romance or the association of the genre with women functions as a strategical convention which validates male romance writing and guarantees financial profit. As Newcomb suggests, romance was gradually feminised in the sixteenth century through prefaces, narrative frames, asides, addresses to women in titles⁵¹ and dedicatory epistles to gentlewomen readers ("Gendering" 123-24). For example, Lyly employs the strategy successively in his preface to *Eupheus*:

I am content that you Dogges lye in your laps, so *Eupheus* may be in your hands, that when you shall be wearie in reading of the one, you may be ready to sport with the other; or handle him as you doe your Junkets, that when you can eate no more, you tye some in your napkin for children, for if you be filled with the first part, put the second in your pocket for your wayting Maydes: *Eupheus* had rather lye shut in a Ladyes casket, then open in a Schollers studie. (qtd. in Newcomb, *Reading* 45)

Lyly envisions a reading experience shared by the lady and her maid in a chamber.⁵² While his "voyeruristic pleasure" (Hackett, *Women* 11) in imagining the lady and her maid emblematises his urge to have mastery over women regardless of their social class, he strategically makes use of the rhetorical readership of romance to validate the presence of his work. Lyly's penetration into the private space enables him to fantasise about women's banquet-like reading experience to claim "an authorial control" (Newcomb, *Reading* 105) over them while ironically certifying their readership. Thus, the conscious association of romance with women and the creation of a collective identity for romance reading women rendered the genre what Fleming coined as the "ladies' text" (37) through which male romancers strived at maintaining control over female readership and the female

⁵¹ There was a notable shift in titling by the middle of Elizabeth I's rule. Several romances were titled after the female protagonist henceforth such as Robert Greene's (1558-1592) *Mamillia* (1583) and *Penelopes Web* (1587), Thomas Lodge's (1558-1625) *Rosalynde* (1590), Roger Boyle's (1621-1679) *Parthenissa* (1651-69), Sir Percy Herbert's (1598-1667) *The Princess Cloria* (1653), Richard Brathwait's (1588-1673) *Panthalia* (1659) and Sir George Mackenzie's (1636-1691) *Aretina* (1660) ("Gendering" 123).

⁵² Francis Quarles (1592-1644) imagines a similar female reader in the preface to *Argalus and Parthenia* (1629): "Ladies (for in your silken laps I knowe this booke will choose to lye) my suit is, that you would be pleased to give the faire *Parthenia* your noble entertainment" (Newcomb "Gendering" 135).

sex in the sixteenth century. On the other hand, as Smith observes, "in no other genre [was] the matter of identification between characters and readers so prominent in the intention of the author and in the assumptions of readership" (234). In other words, contrary to what male romancers intended, whether voluntarily or not, they provided women a moment of identification with the characters in romances which would trigger their own production. Romance, thus, served for the benefit of women *more than* that of men: although it was written primarily by men, it turned out to be a gendered genre that was principally addressed to women. Such a marketing strategy validated the authorial presence of male romancers within public. Furthermore, while the so-called sophisticated men employed the genre only for profitable means being aware of its trivial entity, they also tried to make use of it as a tool of domination in which female intellectual power was undermined and her individual presence was ignored by voyeuristically envisioning women in chambers who were taken aback by what was written on the page. On the other hand, regardless of its rhetorical purposes, male romancers endowed women with an authorised reader position through which they could entertain themselves and obtain the means for agency afterwards. In other words, while the authority figures struggled to prevent women from reading romances for fear that it would divert them from their culturally sanctioned roles due to its content in contradistinction to the Protestant sexual ethics and the teachings of chastity and silence, there equally took place an on-going constitution of female readership through various textual strategies out of the need for substantial romance readership necessary for commercial gain and textual circulation when "romances . . . fell from the presses like leaves in autumn" (Wright 382) in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

It is observable that romance does not represent a *world picture* shared by all the members of the society to the same end. Calling for the so-called hazardous effects on women, the dominant culture places its prescriptions regarding romance at the centre of society and tries to appropriate it into its own service as an instrument for dominance. Female authors of romance, on the other hand, articulate a different sensibility and disrupt this male supremacy in terms of sexuality and gender through their act of writing. As Sinfield states, the dominant culture seeks to represent the society as a homogenous "unity" to "efface conflict and contradiction" (*Faultlines* 116). However, there inevitably occurs disturbances within the system. Considering romance, its appreciation and how it is employed to

profitable ends, contradiction surfaces as "the dominant order" -the male coterie of authors in this case- "negates what it needs" (116) by perpetually denigrating the genre and any consequences it might bring forth. The afore-mentioned ambivalence over romance is explicable within the term "faultline" the social order breeds when "its own criteria of plausibility falls into contest and disarray" (45). Taking into consideration the prescriptive literature and the cultural positioning of the genre by moralists and male romancers, romance inevitably begets instances of contradiction by which women articulate their "failure -inability or refusal- to identify [their] interests with the dominant" and dissidence arises (41). Thus, romance is representative as to how even the seemingly strict patriarchal culture is challengeable and embodies Dollimore's assertion that culture is not "a unitary phenomenon" but the locus in which dominant and non-dominant elements co-exist and interact with each other whereby the subordinate culture gets the opportunity to challenge the dominant formations (*Radical* 7). In the same vein, despite women's ostensible preclusion from articulating their experiences, they manage to employ writing romances as an oppositional and effective tool against the patriarchal oppression. Romance writing materialises dissidence owing to its ability to "interrogate prevailing beliefs" (li) and offers "a recognisable imaginative space of female agency" (Boro 190).

Just as femininity and female readership were under control by the patriarchs, so was writing during the Renaissance. As the moral education was based on the study of the Scripture that instructed women in accordance with religious morality, there was no objection to female literacy so long as she wrote down the Bible. Female writing amounted to the reinscription of the religious teachings that actually served as the "means of controlling a defective and potentially unruly sex" (Ferguson 154). Writing did not mean the revelation of female assertiveness. On the contrary, the phrase female author was an "oxymoron" in that she could not be someone who produced original work of art but only "a docile user of the pen who follows men's instructions and spends most of her writing time copying men's (or the Bible's) words" (154) or translating religious works. Male understanding of writing was complementary to the patriarchal order that regarded women passive recipients of male rule. Within Cultural Materialist framework, however, considering that both writing and printing were defined as "masculine activities," the "woman writer" (145) would be metonymic for dissidence. Regarding the understanding of female romance writing, Margaret Tyler (c. 1540-c. 1590), "the first woman to

publish a romance in England" (Coad ix), embodies the act of "conflict" which "occurs between opposed interests . . . as an active struggle" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 116). Tyler is an outstanding figure thanks to her success in detecting the faultline as to the ambivalent evaluation of romance that enables her to make herself visible within the system. Hers is an enduring action as it is the initial point of reference for the "popularity and availability of continental romance in England" despite the negative criticism addressed to it (Coad ix). Margaret Tyler's 1578 translation of the Spanish author Diego Ortuñez de Calahorra's *The First Part of the Mirrour of Princely Deedes and Knighthood*⁵³ (1555) is a revolutionary step in the genre for women in terms of romance readership and authorship in which she vindicates the rights of women as readers and authors. Paving the way for "female romance reading and even writing" (Hackett, *Women* 9) the most salient characteristic of Tyler's translation is the Preface she adds to her work which is a bold justification of what she has done and what each women should have the courage to fulfil: by encouraging women to read the material forbidden to them, Tyler challenges the dominant culture of the age. Krontiris evaluates it as "a kind of feminist manifesto" (45) since it has been the most openly courageous criticism of patriarchal ideology up to that time⁵⁴ (24) and one of the few documents written earlier than the eighteenth century that deals with the problem of female writing (*Oppositional* 45). According to Tyler, if romances are substantially addressed to women, they should equally have the right to read, to translate and even to write them. As she asserts,

And if men may and do bestow such of their travails upon gentlewomen, then may we women read such of their works as they dedicate unto us, and if we may read them, why not further wade in them to the search of a truth? And then much more, why not deal by translation in such arguments, especially this kind of exercise, being a matter of more heed than of deep invention or exquisite learning? . . . It mattereth not whether the parties be men or women . . . But to return, whatsoever the truth is -whether that women may not at all discourse in learning (for men lay in their claim to be sole possessioners of knowledge) . . . my persuasion hath been thus: that it is all one for a woman to pen a story, as for a man to address his story to a woman. (229-30)

⁵³ The original title is *Espejo de príncipes y caballeros*. The translation had two more editions in circa 1580 and in 1599 (Salzman 304).

⁵⁴ In *First Feminists*, Moira Ferguson avers that the Preface is "the first explicitly feminist argument published by a woman . . . in English" (52) and Todd celebrates Tyler as "the first true English feminist" (681).

Tyler notices the paradoxical situation given that women constitute a substantial place within the printing market.⁵⁵ On the one hand, reading romances is associated with insanity and rebellion; on the other hand, lots of works by male authors are dedicated to women. Tyler's Preface highlights the ambivalent attitude that lies at the heart of the literary circle because female readership is encouraged through dedicatory epistles and prefaces. Given the situation, she questions the custom that forbids romances and justifies the act of romance writing. Tyler not only questions the imposed social conventions that hierarchically position women as passive consumers and men as active producers but, with her reference to men who claim to be "sole possessioners of knowledge," she also challenges the social and literary authority of male authors who publish conduct literature to regulate female behaviour. In this sense, she instructs the female reader to be more critically engaged; instead of reading simply what they have been offered, she encourages them to find "a truth" (229) rather than *the* truth the patriarchal culture imposes on. Thus, Tyler invites women to collective action to overcome oppression. Romance would always be a genre unsuitable for the delicate ladies either due to its promotion of love or due to its masculine subject matter of war and bloodshed. However, Tyler not only indicates the contradictions embedded in the system but she also questions the so-called feminine decorum. She asserts herself in two ways: first of all, she claims to write -and writing was a male activity on its own- and she chooses to write not in one of the genres commonly thought to be suitable for women such as diaries, letters, autobiographies, or psalms -all having domestic overtones- but decides to translate from a male genre based on military and chivalric deeds. As she states,

Such delivery as I have made I hope thou wilt friendly accept, the rather for that it is a woman's work, though in a story prophane, and a matter more manlike then becometh my sexe. But as for the manliness of the matter, thou knowest that it is not necessary for every trumpeter or drumster in the war to be a good fighter . . . it is no sin to talk of Robin Hood, though you never shot in his bow . . . But amongst all my ill-willers, some I hope are not too straight that they would enforce me necessarily either not to write or to write of divinity. (228-30)

She once more underlines the revolutionary quality of her translation against those who would limit female writing to the copying of the Scripture or to devotional works. Furthermore, despite the deliberate employment of the modesty topos that

⁵⁵ Pearson states the presence of 163 romances particularly addressed to female readers from 1457 to 1640 (89).

she might not be as skilled as a male author, her exposure to the public attention not only betokens her presence within the literary circle but questions the misogynistic understanding as postulated by the prescriptive literature. Tyler is aware of her radical act in which translating a secular work amounts to trespassing into male sphere. In the same vein, she knows that her translation is from a condemned literary genre. Yet she defends her choice of a secular work and its pedagogical value quite similar to what Sir Philip Sidney employs in *An Apology for Poetry*. She opposes the moralists, for whom romance is not a source of wisdom, with an emphasis on the instructional guide romance provides, which is a "profitable reading" in which "the just reward of malice and cowardice, with the good speed of honesty and courage, being able to furnish thee with sufficient store of foreign example to both purposes" (230). What is more, even though translation might not be considered a new production but the replica of a work written in another language for some, the linguistic and cultural competence it requires and its appreciation during the Elizabethan culture underline the intellectual capacity and the prominent literary position Tyler has. Dollimore states that "subjectivity" and "subversive knowledge" arise when the dominant ideology is "under pressure of contradictions" ("Shakespeare" 482). Tyler's will to claim agency over secular writing is the first step that shatters the male hegemony over female readership and authorship which fissures a public place for women. Tyler advises women to surpass the dictum of chaste-silent-obedient and to question the validity of patriarchal teachings.⁵⁶ It is conceivable that translation does not necessarily mean to produce an original work, which might be one of the reasons why men did not object to it. In fact, translation was thought to be a female mode of writing during the Renaissance (Ferguson 158) and it was permissible as "it did not threaten the male establishment as the expression of personal viewpoints might" (Lamb, "Cooke Sisters" 118). On the other hand, Wall states the categorical absence of difference between an original or secondary/imitative work and translation during the Renaissance (337). Given this aspect of the Elizabethan culture that does not differentiate between an original work and its translation, Tyler's gendered stance

⁵⁶ Her Preface is remindful of Cixous' metaphor in her article "The Laugh of the Medusa" in which she explains female speech with the French verb *voler* which means "to steal" and "to fly" (887). According to Cixous, if women ever want to advance their position they first need to steal back from man their right to speak. The acquisition of voice would only be possible once she takes the language back from the "robbers." Tyler's translation is one of those "narrow passageways" or "crossovers" (888) that she steals a male genre and provides a reliable source of encouragement for women to fly higher within the literary circle.

becomes more significant in that she both chooses a common practice to a subversive end and reinforces her authorial position. By strategically employing translation to protect herself from any accusation as to her choice of genre, she tacitly achieves a position of translator-author threatening the dominant culture.

Similar to Tyler's position in England, Laura Terracina (1519-1577) detects the faultline within the dominant culture and expresses her opinion on female writing upon the publication of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (1532) in Italy. Her work is a deliberate attempt to produce in the genre when Matteo Maria Boiardo's *Orlando innamorato* (1494) and Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* were "the first best-sellers ever in Italian literature"⁵⁷ which "handily surpassing those of the Bible" (Finucci, Introduction 16) while, ironically enough, female romance writing was unacceptable and even the books of chivalry were among the Index of Forbidden Books (18). Thus, Terracina in her *Discorso sopra il principio di tutti i canti d'Orlando furioso* (1551) -an epic of 46 cantos- includes a poem to the art critic Ludovico Dolce in which she demonstrates an awareness of her dissidence due to writing in a masculine genre, for which she apologises: "E se la lingua mia fu si virile / Perdon vi chieggo." One of the most important aspects of Terracina's work is her profeminism as she instructs women to abandon feminine duties and pursue intellectual study to break the barriers of domestic confinement. Terracina is also ahead of her time in advising the female readers of her work "to follow her own example and take up the pen as a means of expression and retaliation against the male-dominated literary sphere" (Plastina 285). That she is aware of her trespass into a male genre and commands women to break out the idealised feminine roles in favour of scholarly endeavour prove her dissidence and precursory stance as she encourages her successors and questions the dominant precepts of her context. It should be noted at this point that while there were only Wroth and Weamys to pen romances in England, the number was more in Italy -reaching up to five female authors apart from Terracina, namely Tullia d'Aragona, Margherita Sarrocchi, Lucrezia Marinella, Barbara Albizzi-Tagliamochi and Moderata Fonte. Nevertheless,

⁵⁷ "The *Innamorato* had an initial printing of 228, but the *Furioso* was printed right away in an edition of 2.000, and the book went through 120 editions in the years between 1540 and 1580" (Finucci, Introduction 16). Moreover, there used to be no less than 500.000 copies of chivalric romances circulating in Italy between 1470 to 1600 (Finucci, "Cavalleresco" xiv) ["C'erano non meno di 500.000 copie di romanzi cavallereschi in circolazione in Italia tra il 1470 e il 1600"].

the fact that there were only five authors⁵⁸ producing within the genre in the eighty-year-period from 1560 to 1640 was indicative of their "decidedly marginal position" as "writers of chivalric fiction" (Cox, "Women" 134). It is assumable that the appreciation of romance was similar to that of England regarding women:

Genres such as the comedy, romance, and novella, as they had been practiced in the early Cinquecento, were problematic for "decent" women in their frank celebration of extramarital sexual pleasure. While there is much evidence of women ignoring the carping of moralists and enjoying this literature as readers, it is difficult to imagine a respectable woman writer in this period -at least in Italian context- putting her name publicly with impunity to a work of such a "lascivious" nature. (Cox, *Women's* 136)

In other words, notwithstanding the popular position of male-authored texts, romance readership and authorship by women were not approved by the patriarchal authorities owing to its harmful content rendering the genre also dissident within the Italian dominant culture.

As Lentricchia contends, "ruling culture does not define the whole of culture" (15). Culture as an active process of negotiation contains emergent elements that contest any forms of oppression. The Renaissance culture is also heterogeneous in the sense that the dominant culture that restricts the female voice also provides the cultural freedom -though to a very limited number of women- to criticise those who restrain them. That writing was a male privilege was a commonly-held belief during the Renaissance. This agreement upon male writing was problematised though and the importance of female romancers increased since they "chose to write in courtly genres that were traditionally the preserve of male writers" (Walker 170). Even though writing was based on the system of excluding women (and female experience) female romance authors pioneered in the achievement of a shared goal since -despite writing in isolation- they created textual camaraderie among women who read romances in their struggle to reject to live up to feminine ideals of silence and obedience. Making use of romance as a tool "where veiled

⁵⁸ The second female-authored chivalric romance was Tullia d'Aragona's *Il Meschino detto il Guerrino* posthumously published in 1560 and 1594. Even though the work was by a woman, it does not challenge the patriarchal prescriptions and any female transgression is strictly hindered. It even reinforces the patriarchal understanding as to the negative appreciation of romance because d'Aragona claims to create a chaste, Christian romance in which women, either they are widow, nun or maiden, can safely read (Cox, "Fiction" 53). Sarrocchi's *Scanderbeide* (1606) and Marinella's *L'Enrico overo Bisantio* (1635) are the historical epic poems in the Tassoese fashion and Albizzi-Tagliamochi's *Ascantio errante* (1640) is based on Virgilian subject matter (Finucci, Introduction 20-21).

battles between the dominant discourse of power and subversive aspirations of marginalised social groups [women] have been fought" (Lešić 217) and contrary to patriarchal discourse that molded women in accordance with the model of silence in order to confirm male supremacy, romance provided women and the female characters within the texts "with greater options for independent speech and action than traditional sixteenth century definitions of chastity allowed" (Relihan and Stanivukovic 2). Women participated in literature in which they no longer acted as muses for men but claimed an assertive speaking voice from a position of power. "The tendency of the romance genre to ascribe power to female utterances and experiences" (Boro 188) was instrumental for female resistance to the dominant maxim of chaste-silent-obedient.⁵⁹ Despite the deliberate denigration and gendering of romance as a tool of dominance, the intervention of female authors into the genre hitherto counted on for consumption changed their position from being "receptacles for European men's words [to] authoritative wielders of the pen" (Ferguson 153). Embodying the resilience of female voice which positioned them as speaking subjects, romance appealed to women both as readers and writers due to "the opportunities it afforded them through action and especially through speech" (Lamb and Wayne 13). Romance anticipated that society is not "the dead husk which limits social and individual fulfilment" but in which "individual wills" (Williams, *Marxism* 87) are also realised through the contestation and renewal of old structures. In this sense, it functioned as "a kind of staging area where new ideas can be experimented" (Teskey 7) and displayed how early modern women observed themselves and their social context. Due to its focus on female voice, its boldness in dealing with female sexuality and its female protagonists, romance turned out to be an "oppositional genre" for women:

First, by its portrayal of daring heroines the romance often encouraged women to ignore social restrictions . . . Secondly, by its construction of an ideal world, the romance . . . could make the female reader critical of her position in the real world. Thirdly, romances tended to provide experiences unattainable for women in actual life. (Krontiris, "Breaking" 26-27)

⁵⁹ More importantly and interestingly enough, according to Finucci, the chivalric poetry enabled women to write on love without being identified with the amorous travails of feminine creations, and thereby legitimising the other "I" without her sexuality inappropriately called into question ("Cavalleresco" xiv) [La poesia cavalleresca . . . offrì invece alle donne un'alternativa interessante: la possibilità di scrivere d'amore senza sentirsi identificare con i travagli amorosi delle varie creazioni femminili, di legittimare, per così dire, un io "altro" senza avere la propria sessualità inopportuna chiamata in causa].

Women silenced by the religious and social teachings found a chance to be visible in romances. The focus on female experience and the powerful representation of female agency legitimised dissidence and “offer[ed] women a version of themselves as far more independent, powerful and significant than they would have experienced themselves in any other area of their lives” (Hackett, *Women* 2). The dissident stance of female authors was represented through several female characters who expressed their opinion. Romance provided for “reflecting on gender constraints” and enabled “subversive reading experiences” (Newcomb, “Gendering” 129) that served as an invaluable “venue for evaluating women’s worth” (Boro 189). Given that the emergent culture is antagonistic to the dominant culture, “scripting from below by lower-order characters immediately appears subversive” (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 33) which disturb the social order. In the same vein, female authors created their own feminised space to resist patriarchal domination. The ever-growing active participation⁶⁰ against suppression by women shattered the powerful position men had against their female counterparts. While fantasising about female reading experiences created a voyeuristic experience for male authors rendering female readers passive consumers, when women began to pen stories, they rejected being conceived as women-as-objects: romance asserted a strongly positioned female voice by positing “the power of literature to convey dissident ideas, desires and knowledges” (Dollimore, *Radical* xxvi).

When female romancers employ the genre, they do not always achieve total subversion of the patriarchal categories but purposefully make use of them for self-expression by means of the fictionalised voice of the female characters. Likewise, during the analysis of romance in every individual chapter, each text is not considered to be “as *either* conservative or subversive, but as sites of struggle” (Dollimore, *Radical* li) [emphasis in the original] that challenge patriarchal assumptions. Thus, the texts are read in order to “amplify the marginalised voices of the ruled, exploited, oppressed and excluded” (Lentricchia 15). In this context, the particular stages of femininity, namely maidenhood, daughterhood, loverhood, wifehood, widowhood and motherhood are examined in order to show how certain female characters dissent from the precepts and create an emergent culture by

⁶⁰ One should note that, notwithstanding the increasing interest in literature by women during the Renaissance, the total publication by women in the early seventeenth century was 0.5 % of the whole, which rose to 1.2 % after 1640 (Aughterson 224).

strategically manipulating the domestic roles assigned to them. The culturally sanctioned gender roles are employed to subversive ends in which the dictates of normative female activity are challenged. Sinfield states that "political awareness arise . . . from involvement in *a milieu, a subculture*" [emphasis in the original] and it is through interaction "one may learn to inhabit plausible oppositional preoccupations and forms . . . and develop an oppositional selfhood" (*Faultlines* 37). Likewise, although the female authors or characters do not represent a completely subversive image of the prescribed gender categories or reject their ascribed status, through strategies of negotiation with the patriarchal culture such as the repudiation and reinscription of the feminine roles, the critique of the institution of marriage and challenging the patriarchal values, they manage to circumvent restrictions the patriarchal social system imposes and assert their individual desire. Culture accommodates the "violent dialectic between the dominant and the subordinate" (Dollimore, *Radical* xxvii). The female author, cognisant of her subordinate position, becomes "an agent, capable of negotiating her marginal position and of intervening creatively in a masculine discursive system" (Pacheco xv). For this purpose, the afore-mentioned feminine conventions are appropriated both to resist the unilateral representation of femininity and in order not to succumb to the misconception that there are no fissures within the dominant culture. Through refashioning their cultural roles, female authors gradually articulate their thought. In this context, romance functions as "a locus in which they can validate female experience" and they employ it "to eloquently decry the fundamental injustice of the patriarchal society that condemns them" (Boro 195). Romance enables the dismantling of masculine hierarchy by which women "come close to kidnapping a kind of authorial power" (Kinney, "Undoing" 208). It grants women the right to speak thanks to its representation of behavioural patterns different than the patriarchally imposed. It helps solve the tension between cultural inscriptions and individual desire and the unjust diffusion of power between sexes enabling the gradual shift away from the Renaissance ideal of femininity. Romance, which foregrounds female power, experience and independence, is crucial for the representation of dissidence in the patriarchal system of the early modern age owing to its focus on women whose even simple involvement in the site of struggle for power bestows them a fair amount of agency no matter how subordinate they are within the social order.

CHAPTER 3

FEMALE AGENCY IN BRITISH CONTEXT

This section analyses Lady Mary Wroth's *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania* and Anna Weamys' *A Continuation of Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia* so as to demonstrate the female agency the aforesaid authors display and their dissident stance within the context of their literary production. Within the framework of Cultural Materialism, which focuses on the silent voices of the dominant culture, the chapter argues that Lady Mary Wroth and Anna Weamys through their act of writing and the female characters in each text due to their several experiences and speeches which question the patriarchal assumptions and teachings challenge the hierarchical gender structure, the patriarchal construction of womanhood and the dominant culture of the Renaissance society in order to foreground female agency, female voice and female experience. Taken together, their stance refers to the basic concern of our theoretical approach -dissidence- which means "challenging of authority in the early modern period, considering especially the ideologies and institutions of gender . . . and writing" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* x).

Despite the pre-eminence of patriarchalism in the Renaissance culture, there are also emergent voices within the dominant system. Even though the conduct literature and religious and political teachings reflect the impression of a monolithic culture based on the dominant rule immediately acquiesced by the subordinate, Williams states that "*no mode of production and therefore no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention (Marxism 125)* [emphasis in the original] and, basing its argument upon the afore-stated hypothesis, the present chapter focuses on the underrepresented part of the dominant culture. Cultural Materialism does not adopt a homogenous understanding of culture and is alert to the detection of silenced voices because it presupposes that "non-dominant elements interact with the dominant forms, sometimes co-existing with . . . but also challenging, modifying or even displacing them" (Dollimore, *Radical* 7). Since whether a text is subversive or conformist depends upon the context of its production, the analysis takes into consideration the material conditions in which

each text is written. Within this framework, the literary career of Lady Mary Wroth and Anna Weamys is quite important in that even though both authors produce their romances based on the path Philip Sidney sets forward, both "embarrass the dominant by appropriating" (Branningan 48) his work. In other words, Wroth and Weamys are nourished by the Sidneian example but they refashion the romance genre in order to serve for their individual purposes. Throughout the sixteenth century, romance is associated with women but any feminine attempt to produce one is severely forbidden by the dominant culture. On the other hand, as Baycock states, "what is socially peripheral is often symbolically central" (32) and the deliberate suppression of the female voice attests to the anxiety of losing control over women. Interestingly enough, as women are "policed" they are more attracted to "gain subversive leverage" and "their outlaw status" forms "points from which repression may become apparent" and "silences audible" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 299). Wroth and Weamys fulfil their share of the task when they rebel against the patriarchal culture and the sociocultural appreciation of romance through their act of writing. In this sense, their romances function as an emergent cultural practice because emergent culture "depends crucially on finding new forms or adaptation of forms" (Williams, *Marxism* 126) -such as Wroth's "feminist manifesto" (Krontiris, *Oppositional* 45) and Weamys' royal romance- and much as its "pre-emergence" (Williams, *Marxism* 126) does not amount to full articulation of what is demanded, its "particular emphases [on the subordinate voice] and suppressions [of the dominant voice]" become the precursor of "deep starting-points and conclusions" (134) in terms of the recovery of the subordinate voices. Their act is substantially important as it gives voice to the subordinate and disturbs the patriarchal social order.

What is more, the female characters they create pose dissidence against the dominant culture. Urania, Melissea, Pamphilia and the women who are forced into marriages in Wroth's *Urania* and Mopsa, Helena and Urania in Weamys' *A Continuation* realise the Cultural Materialist concern which aims to recover the subordinate voices. Once the aforesaid characters gain their voice, they challenge the patriarchal oppression and the patriarchal discourse which labels women as intellectually insufficient. The amplification of the female voice through their experiences, their relationships with certain male and female characters, their outlook on love and marriage, the stories they tell and their courageous expression of their desires render them agent heroines whose alternative vision is not

overshadowed by the male discourse but who are given the chance to claim their agency and prove their dissidence within the patriarchal social order.

In each romance, through certain "strategies of negotiation" such as the refashioning of dominant ideologies through "(mis)appropriation and their subversion through inversion" (Dollimore, "Dominant" 181-82) several relationships between Urania and Perissus, Urania and Parselius, Selarinus and the enchantress in Wroth's *Urania* and the helpless knight and the witch in Mopsa's tale and Helena and Amphialus in Weamys' *A Continuation* reverse gender roles. The misappropriation of the hierarchical binary opposition of the stronger and capable man versus the weak and helpless woman both reflects the violent dialectic between the dominant and the deviant and demonstrates that so long as the subordinate does not yield to the demands of the dominant culture, there occurs a possibility to transform the oppressive social order. Their episodes, in this sense, promise emergent culture.

The commitment to transform the social order also stands out regarding the institution of marriage. The faultlines, instances of contradiction within the dominant culture as it struggles to increase its influence, enable the emergence of dissidence. Within this framework, both Wroth and Weamys exploit the Protestant marriage ethics which emphasise the spiritual and companionate commitment on the one hand and the submission of women to the husband on the other. The faultline regarding the institution of marriage grants both authors the chance to criticise the patriarchal marriage custom which does not take into consideration the female opinion. While Wroth provides several examples to reflect the harms of arranged marriages, Weamys offers the marriage of the royals as a model to follow because theirs is based upon companionship. It is important that neither Wroth nor Weamys aims at subversion because there is no textual evidence regarding the abolishment of the institution of marriage but their characters fulfil dissidence as "refusal of an aspect of the dominant" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 49).

Sinfield believes that it is only when women come together can they manage to overwhelm the "superior plausibility" the dominant ideological formation strives to "substantiate" and create feminine consciousness in so doing. The female solidarity and dialogue among women enable them to "produce a dissident perspective" (*Faultlines* 38) and to assert their agency against the dominant culture which

creates patriarchal plausibility recruiting women to remain in their subordinate position. In this sense, it is safe to conclude that Urania, Melissea, Pamphilia and several others in Wroth's *Urania*, Helena, Philoclea and the witch, the aunts and the maiden in Mopsa's tale in Weamys' *A Continuation* through their friendship and solidarity "combat" the dominant patriarchal culture and "develop dissident subjectivities" which would "trouble the social order" and "redeploy its most cherished values" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 299) of silence and submission.

In a given culture, the clash between the dominant and emergent cultural elements becomes "a significant site within which older and new interests" are "disseminated" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 46). Romance, for Wroth and Weamys, functions as an important space in which they disseminate their dissident opinion. Both authors examine the validity of the patriarchal culture in order to promote female emancipation. Hegemony legitimates itself and naturalises its power but power is not irresistible. In spite of the dominant culture which posits power "as seamless and all-pervasive" (Belsey, "Towards" 88) Lady Mary Wroth, Anna Weamys and their female characters demonstrate that "agency is virtually inescapable" so long as women devote themselves to "taking up arms" against the patriarchal domination. They prove that as long as "the apparently isolated power of individual genius turns out to be bound up with collective energy" (Greenblatt, "Resonance" 221) there is nothing women cannot overcome.

3.1. Lady Mary Wroth & *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*

Lady Mary Wroth (1587-1651/3) is quite an unconventional literary figure in terms of her personal background and her literary production considering the age she lives in. Her oeuvre includes the first complete sonnet sequence *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* (1621) written by a woman, the first published work of prose fiction *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania* (1621) and one of the first plays *Love's Victory* (c. 1620) by a female dramatist (Miller, "Mary" 150). In view of the pieces she produces, Wroth stands out as an author who prioritises the topics in relation to women. Her lyric sequence functions as a medium for the expression of female experience while the genre traditionally silences the female voice in favour of the male sonneteer; her romance harbours an array of female characters that act

against the maxim of chaste-silent-obedient; her pastoral tragicomedy focuses on the intersexual relationships with an emphasis on female agency. Mary Wroth intends her work for public consumption and employs genres against the feminine decorum. Her determination underscores the dissidence a woman achieves under an apparently irresistible family structure and social formation.

Lady Mary Wroth was born into the renowned Sidney family and literary circle in 1587. Her father was Robert Sidney (1563-1626) who authored several sonnets and her mother was Lady Barbara Gamage (1563-1621); her uncle was Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586) the prominent Elizabethan poet and courtier and her aunt was Mary Sidney Herbert (1561-1621) the patron of literature and the translator of *Psalms*, Philippe de Mornay's *A Discourse of Life and Death*, Robert Garnier's *Antonius* and Petrarch's *Triumph of Death*. Lady Mary got married to Sir Robert Wroth (1576-1614) in September, 1604 and bore him a son a month before his death in 1614. After the husband's death, their estate was taken by Robert Wroth's uncle leaving Mary Wroth in debt. The couple's only son James also died in 1616. Wroth's extramarital relationship with her cousin William Herbert⁶¹ the third Earl of Pembroke might have started before their respective marriages while it is known for certain that they had two illegitimate children after Sir Robert Wroth's death. It is likely that Wroth penned the first volume of her romance and the lyric sequence in the second decade of the seventeenth century⁶² during their affair. Although her extramarital relationship and the birth of illegitimate children ostracised her from the court circles, Wroth could raise her two children by the support of the Sidneys and the Herberts. There is no extant information with regard to the final years of her life except that she died either in 1651 or 1653 (Miller, *Changing* 8). Wroth's affair with William Herbert and out-of-wedlock births⁶³ obviously indicated her free spirit and sexual independence undaunted by the social prescriptions and the death of her husband provided her the relatively autonomous position of

⁶¹ He got married to Lady Mary Talbot also in the autumn of 1604. He is thought to be one of the richest and most powerful courtiers of the Jacobean court excluding James I's male favourites (Waller, *Sidney* 18).

⁶² She must have finished writing the first part by July 13, 1621 as it was recorded in the Stationers' Register (Roberts, *Critical Introduction* xvii).

⁶³ It signifies non-verbal resistance contrary to the imprisoning nature of marriage. Illegitimacy was under strict surveillance by the church and there was even a statute enacted in 1576 that ordered punishment for illegitimacy. In 1610, it was decided that the mothers should be placed in the houses of correction for their crime. The powerful Sidney family was immune to such legislation (Waller, "Sidney" 52).

widowhood in which she incorporated the roles of motherhood, loverhood and authorhood. Situated at the matrix of familial relationships -a daughter to her father, a niece to her uncle, a wife to her husband, a lover to her cousin- Wroth achieved certain amount of independence by repudiating the gender stereotypes the patriarchy assigned her. In this sense, her biography reflects her will to transcend the social boundaries that enclosed her.

Wroth's strong Sidney heritage prepared a solid ground for her literary career. As Hannay states, "when Wroth began to write, she saw herself not merely as a woman, but as a Sidney woman with a clear sense of poetic authority in her lineage" ("Your" 16) which was hinted by the title of her romance:

The Countesse of Montgomeries URANIA. Written by the right honorable the Lady MARY WROATH. Daughter to the right Noble Robert Earle of Leicester. And Neece to the ever famous and renowned Sr. Phillips Sidney knight. And to the most exelent Lady Mary Countesse of Pembroke late deceased.

While she had the option to publish her work anonymously, Wroth preferred to make herself visible on the title page by situating herself within the Sidney legacy. Her aunt Mary Sidney Herbert, the Countess of Pembroke was her "most important model" (Roberts, *Critical Introduction* xxxvii) and, considering Mary Sidney's literary success, "the label 'woman writer' was not an oxymoron" (Hannay, "Your" 16) for Mary Wroth. Moreover, adopting an egalitarian stance, "the Countess no doubt, encouraged Mary, along with her own sons William and Philip Herbert, to write poetry as their uncle had done" (Hannay, "Mary" 550). True it is that Mary Sidney Herbert was considerably influential for Wroth's literary development⁶⁴ but Wroth did not limit her oeuvre to "permitted feminine genres" (Hannay, "Your" 16) or translations as her aunt did but employed the masculine literary genres in order to create a feminine vision. Wroth's identification with the Countess of Pembroke created a new paradigm of intergenerational connection that culminated in the development of female agency. She benefited from her Sidney heritage and employed it "transgressively to replace heroes with heroines at the center of several major genres" (Lewalski, *Writing* 7). Interestingly enough, even when she was a little child, Mary Wroth was given the chance to voice her opinion on the household affairs. Hannay records the anecdote on the choice of a steward for the

⁶⁴ "Wroth also followed her aunt's lead in using an 'S fermé' in her letters; both women thereby emphasised their identity as Sidneys" (Hannay, "Your" 18).

family estate: even though the person Little Mall -as her parents call her- recommends is not suitable for the position, Robert Sidney hires him as he cannot refuse his daughter. While the particulars of the choice are not known, Hannay finds the situation remarkable in that her parents obviously take into consideration the wish of a nine-year-old child (*Mary Sidney* 62). The fact that the Sidney couple valued her opinion, communicated with her and gave her the opportunity to express herself must have given Wroth the self-confidence to fearlessly articulate her ideas outside the familial borders. Nevertheless, Robert Sidney was still under the influence of the patriarchal mores of his age; the double standard as to the education of children was evident from his letter to Barbara Gamage. He gave more importance to the education of his son than his daughter and he was attentive enough not to leave his son's upbringing to the mother:

For the girls I cannot mislike the care yow take them: for the boies yew must resolute to let me haue my wil. For I know better what belongs to a man than yow do . . . I wil haue him ly from his maide for it is time, and now no more to bee in the nurcery among women. (Miller, *Changing* 77)

Robert Sidney wanted to raise his son under the masculine ethos for fear that he adopts feminine behaviour while he left Mary Wroth's education to her mother. Not surprisingly, Mary Wroth's marriage was also based on patriarchal arrangement, which was apparently a failure from the beginning. The letter Robert Sidney wrote to his wife only ten days after the marriage records the mismatch:

There was somewhat that discontent [Sir Robert Wroth]: but the particulars I could not get out of him, onely that hee protests that hee cannot take any exceptions to his wife nor her carriage towards him . . . It were very soon for any unkindness to begin: and therefore whatsoever the matters bee, I pray you let all things bee carried in the best maner til wee all doe meet. For mine ennimies would be very glad for such an occasion to make themselves merry at mee. (Lewalski, *Writing* 245)

The letter reveals not only the discord between the newly-married couple but also Robert Sidney's concern with his prestige within public that leads him even to disregard his daughter's happiness. Ben Jonson also relates to William Drummond that "My Lord Lisle's daughter, my Lady Wroth, is unworthily married on a jealous husband" (*Notes* 24). Wroth's discontent with the custom is echoed in *Urania* via several stories in which the sufferings of women by the patriarchal figures are exposed. Apart from her arranged marriage, the literary value of Wroth's output becomes more significant considering the period of her production that coincides

with the reign of James I (1603-1625). As Lewalski summarises, the Jacobean era was a "regressive period for women" because of James I discrimination against them. During his reign, female education and freedom receded in comparison with the relatively free atmosphere the Elizabethan women experienced and myriad misogynist sermons and tracts were published that contended the biological and intellectual shortcomings of women ("Writing" 794). James I was a misogynist in terms of the woman question and he was an absolutist in politics. The French ambassador Beaumont depicts his derogatory behaviour at the court as follows:

He piques himself on great contempt for women. They are obliged to kneel before him when they are presented, he exhorts them openly to virtue, and scoffs with great levity at men who pay them honour. You may easily conceive that the English ladies do not spare him but hold him in abhorrence and tear him to pieces with their tongues, each according to her humour. (Roberts, Critical Introduction xv-xvi)

In the same vein, James I both in his works *The True Law of Free Monarchies* (1598) and *Basilikon Doron* (1599) and in his several speeches emphasised the divine rights of the kings and inferiority of the female sex. For instance, in his "Speech of 1609" he stated "the State of MONARCHIE" to be "the supremest thing vpon earth" (307) and in "A Speech in the Starre-Chamber" he imported that "Kings sit in the Throne of God, and they themselues are called Gods" (326). His discourse reinforced the patriarchal formation as he compared the hierarchical structure within the household with the governance of the state: "Kings are also Fathers of families: for a King is trewly *Parens patriæ*, the politique of his people (307). In *The True Law of Free Monarchies* he preached that "by the Law of Nature the King becomes a naturall Father to all his Lieges . . . And as the Father of his fatherly duty is bound to care . . . his children, euen so is the bound to care for all his subjects" (55). Likewise, in *Basilikon Doron* he advised his son Prince Henry to expect unquestioned submission from his wife that attested to his patriarchal mind-set: "It is your office to command, and hers to obey; as ye to command; as willing to follow, as ye to go before; your loue being wholly knit vnto her, and all her affections louingly bent to follow your will" (36). James I believed that the king was the representative of God on earth and the father was the substitute of the king within the household. Their authority was absolutely inviolable as it was sanctioned by God. King James I thus legitimated the dominance of the patriarch over the other members of the family rendering the subjection of woman to the male head as natural as the subjection of the folk to a

king. Considering that "the principal strategy of ideology is to legitimate inequality and exploitation by representing the social order . . . as unalterable -as decreed by God or simply natural" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 114) that James I's systematic reinforcement of the patriarchal order through ideological manipulation strengthens the repression of women would be a reasonable deduction.

The story of Pamphilia, the Queen of Pamphilia and her love for Amphilanthus, the King of Naples constituted the backbone of *Urania* together with an array of inset stories that recount various adventures of male and female characters in various spheres. As regards to the woman question, Wroth objected to the gender expectations of her age because she "viewed society as destructive of woman's sense of self" (331) and she aimed at creating "a feminine consciousness in conflict with societal values" (Swift 346). Her work was unquestionably dedicated to "the recovery of subordinate voices" (Sinfield, *Shakespeare* 25) because, notwithstanding the oppressive Jacobean social and political context, she managed to manifest resistance through her romance that functioned as an act of self-assertion thanks to the articulation of female experience through several heroines. In the same vein, "the meticulous care which she devoted to the task [was] one reflection of her determined dedication to authorship" (Roberts, Textual Introduction cxviii) by which she criticised the oppressive culture. In spite of her literary heritage, however, Wroth could not escape condemnation owing to her attempt to trespass her culturally sanctioned place. She was soon assaulted by one of the court members, Sir Edward Denny, the 1st Earl of Norwich who accused her of alluding to the family experience in the Sirelius⁶⁵ episode. Apart from slander, Denny basically accused Wroth of writing a romance, and in a poem "To Pamphilia from the father-in-law of Seralius" he publicised his accusation:

⁶⁵ According to the story narrated by a shepherd, Sirelius -Lord James Hay- becomes jealous of her newly-wedded wife -Honorio, Edward Denny's daughter- and accuses her of adultery upon the discovery of some friendly letters to a young lord. The father tries to kill his daughter but the husband saves her. The narrator describes the father as follows: "her father a phantastical thing, vaine as Courtiers, rash as mad-men, and ignorant as women, would needs (out of folly, ill nature, and waywardnesse, which he cald care of his honour, and his friends quiet) kill his daughter, and so cut off the blame, or spot, this her offence might lay upon his noble bloud, as he termed it, which by any other men must with much curiositie have been sought for, and as rarely found, as Pearles in ordinary Oysters . . . It was a strange sight to behold a father incensed for a husbands sake against an onely child, and that husband to be the shield of her defence, for whom, if at all, the wrong was to rise" (1:516). The story highlights the demonisation of the father by honour that blocks reason.

Hermaphrodite in show, in deed a monster,
As by thy words and works all men may conster
Thy wrathfull spite conceived an Idell book
Brought forth a foole which like the damme doth look.

.....
Thus hast thou made thy self a lying wonder
Fooles and their Bables seldome part asunder
Work o th'Workes leave idle bookes alone
For wise and worthyer women have written none.
(Roberts, *Poems* 32-33)

Identifying Wroth a "hermaphrodite," Denny alludes to the cultural debate over transvestism that burst out with the publication of a pamphlet *Hic Mulier; or The Man-Woman* (1620) in which female cross-dressing is strictly condemned since it is thought to erase the sexual difference between sexes. Denny's employment of the same epithet for Wroth not only reflects the cultural fear in which the erasure of visual difference between man and woman supposedly blurs their hierarchical opposition but his attack renders explicit the challenge Wroth imposes on the patriarchal culture as well. Considering that he commands Wroth to "leave idle books alone" as it is against the feminine decorum that "wise and worthy women" should not be indulged in, Denny points to the disobedience against the societal values Wroth embodies and the unconventionality of her writing. He likens Wroth to a monster because she deviates from the ideal roles she should perform. He advises Wroth to pursue what her aunt has done earlier: "repent you of so many ill spent yeares of so vaine a booke" and "redeeme the tym" by writing "as large a volume of heavenly layes and holy love as you have of lasvicious tales and amorous toyes" so that she might "followe the rare, and pious example of your vertuous and learned Aunt, who translated so many godly books and especially the holly psalmes of David" (Roberts, *Poems* 239). Denny, as the representative of the cultural mind-set of his age, dictates her to produce works only within the province of women. He associates Wroth's writing with monstrosity as her act is unnatural and unwomanly considering the period she produces in. Wroth, on the other hand, quickly responds with an imitative poem "Railing Rimes Returned upon the Author by Mistress Mary Wroth" and she refuses slander and allusion:

Hirmaphrodite in sense in Art a monster
As by your railing rimes the world may conster
Your spitefull words against a harmless booke
Shows that an ass much like the sire doth looke.
.....
When these few lines not thousands writt at least

Mainly thus prove your self the drunken beast

 Thus you have made your self a lying wonder
 Fooles and their pastimes should not part asunder
 Take this then now lett railing rimes alone
 For wise and worthier men have written none.
 (Roberts, *Poems* 34-35)

Wroth rejects the accusation⁶⁶ and blames Denny whose "railing rimes" construe a meaning she does not intend to. His "spitefull words" only make him "a lying wonder" and she contends that the lines might only have been written by a "drunken" person because she states not to "intend one word of that book to his Lordships person or disgrace" (Roberts, *Poems* 237). Furthermore, it is notable that Denny addresses the poem to Pamphilia while Wroth responds back as Mary Wroth. In the further correspondence between them, Wroth reinforces her position as a professional author: "not now with words or submission (which I scorne) goe about to give sattisfaction, but [with] true and loyall faith prove . . . let mee know my accusers; . . . and be assured you shall find mee; what my blood calls mee to be" (240). Wroth does not hide her identity under a pseudonym nor does she shield herself through her fictional character but claims a position of agency as a female author who cannot be silenced by attackers. Her courage to defend her work against a court member is emblematic of her endeavour to underline the inequality prevalent within the social system. One of its members, she believes she

⁶⁶ Nonetheless, she had to write to George Villiers, the first Duke of Buckingham, who was one of James I's most important officials so as to protect herself from further attack stating that the publication of the romance was not her choice and she had already stopped the sale. Wroth stated that they "were solde against my minde I never purposing to have had them published" and she withdrew the copies within a few months after the publication (Roberts, Textual Introduction cv). Hannay tries to correct misconceptions against the literary appreciation of Wroth. Even though Edward Denny severely criticises her, there were also some who praise her. For instance, Thomas Heywood in *Gynaikeion* mentions her as "the ingenious Lady, the late composer of our extant *Urania*" ("Sleuthing" 24-25). Ben Jonson's sonnet about Wroth is also worthy of attention. Jonson dedicates his *Alchemist* to Wroth (Roberts, Critical Introduction xxxii) and commemorates her literary skill with "A Sonnet to the Noble Lady the Lady Mary Wroth": I That have beene a lover, and could shew it, / Though not in these, in rithmes not wholly dumbe, / Since I excribe your Sonnets, am become / A better lover, and much better Poët. / . . . / For in your verse all *Cupids* Armorie, / His flames, his shafts, his Quiver, and his Bow, / His very eyes are yours to overthrow. / But then his Mothers sweets you so apply, / Her joyes, her smiles, her loves, as readers take / For *Venus Ceston*, every line you make (*Poems* 165). Jonson regards himself competent enough to judge Wroth's poetic skills since he experiences love earlier. Wroth is able to educate him to be a "better lover" and she makes him a "much better poet." Thus, he underlines the instructional and intellectual value of her work not simply limited to emotional outburst. What is more, he claims that she has achieved a distinctive female voice by circumventing "*Cupids* Armorie" and by identifying with her mother, Venus. Jonson not only situates Wroth in a higher position than his own owing to her success to instruct him but also eulogises the feminine space she carves within the patriarchal society.

also has the right to criticise the malfunctions in the society as much as men and she portrays the dissatisfaction she feels due to suppression of women under patriarchal practices. The incident both reflects Wroth's determination to write "even in the face of her society's hostile reception" (Roberts, Textual Introduction cxviii) and illustrates the hardships women might face once they transgress their culturally sanctioned place. What is more, given that "for women to speak is to threaten the system of differences which gives meaning to patriarchy" (Belsey, *Subject* 191) -considered together with the "hermaphrodite" metaphor Denny employs to define her- Wroth's work makes her a dissident speaking subject unacceptable for the patriarchal culture. Despite the difficulties she experiences ranging from the withdrawal of her romance from publication and recollection of the manuscripts to her ostracisation from the courtly circles, Wroth continues to defend her right to write in whatever genre she chooses and produces the *Second Part of the Countess of Montgomery's Urania*.⁶⁷ She proves to be a powerful literary figure owing to her struggle to claim an author position as naturally as any male author would do. Hers is an audacious attempt in the field of female empowerment against emasculation. Wroth realises the assumption that "revolutionary change is . . . usually dependent upon a prior build-up of small breaks often [with] great personal costs" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 45).

Wroth's romance partially serves an answer to Joseph Swetnam's (d. 1621) misogynist tract⁶⁸ *The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Women* (1615). She refutes the accusations Swetnam charges women with such as promiscuity, errantry, contumacy and inconstancy and the cultural belief that women are weak creatures who lack reason and constancy in the several episodes of *Urania*. Wroth reflects the female struggle such as the commodification of women in marriage; she tries to save her female characters from the object position; she explores their physical and psychological quests as individuals; and she refutes the falsifications by the male discourse. The politics of James I

⁶⁷ It was not published until 1999. It is hard to specify how long it took to write the second volume but use of different ink and papers suggests that the period of time allotted to it was much longer than the first volume (Roberts, Critical Introduction xvii).

⁶⁸ Swetnam, who "vowed forever to be an open enemy to women" (1) writes his work to show the "heinous evils of unconstant women" (1) because, according to him, "women are all necessary evils" (1). He advises men "to beware the Scorpion" (2). What a man should do is to "go upon these venomous Adders, Serpents, And Snakes and tread and trample them under [his] feet" (2). Jane Anger, Rachel Speght, Ester Sowerham and Constantia Munda also wrote pamphlets fighting against Swetnam.

together with the misogynist tracts that have accumulated throughout the years reinforce the negative image of women. Mary Wroth does not accept these social constructions nor does she internalise them but mounts strong resistance through her fiction in which women thwart patriarchal social order through their choices, resolutions or solutions. Wroth contests the place allotted to women through the exploration of female experience. She nourishes both from her own experiences and from her keen observation of the society in order to recuperate the female voice via various heroines who undergo several experiences. In other words, she commits *Urania* to "the transformation of a social order which exploits people on the grounds of gender" (Dollimore and Sinfield, Foreword viii). Despite the patriarchal familial context she is born into and the absolutist political regime she is raised in, Wroth manages to "develop an oppositional selfhood" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 37) in terms of her dissident biography, the genre she chooses to write and the feminine matter she focuses on in her romance.

Urania, a huge fiction of 1081 pages in its modern edition, starts in a fictional pastoral setting Pantelaria in which Urania walks alone in the meadow in spring. She appears as an independent character from the very beginning and the fact that the work opens with a single female character immediately foreshadows the significance of the female characters in the narrative. Considering the different representation of Urania than her namesake in Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, Starke comments as follows:

The titular heroine is a minor figure from Sidney's romance who becomes a major character in Wroth's . . . Wroth takes Urania and opens her own romance from the shepherdess's perspective, filling the character with a past and a motivation independent of her previous status as a lost object of desire. (107-08)

While in Sidney's *Arcadia*, Urania is an absent figure who merely serves as a medium for Claius and Strephon to emphasise their unbreakable friendship and platonic love, Wroth immediately recovers the subordinate voice in her text and, contrary to the Sidneian narrative which totally erases her presence, she not only makes Urania an important heroine but she also foregrounds her formerly neglected "alternative perception" (Williams, *Marxism* 126) when she focuses on her lament which stems from her personal background. In *Urania*, Urania is no longer defined in relation to a male figure but behaves on her own in search of her true lineage. The narrative line that starts with the focus on the discovery of true

parentage contrary to a knightly adventure implicates the inner quest she would undergo. Having learnt that her mother and father are not her biological parents, Urania suffers from "not to know [her] selfe" (1:1) but she does not passively mourn over her loss. Instead, she addresses nature in order to calm down:

Unseene, unknowne, I here alone complaine
To Rocks, to Hills, to Meadows, and to Springs,
Which can no helpe returne to ease my paine,
But back my sorrowes the sad Eccho brings.
Thus still encreasing are my woes to me,
Doubly resounded by that monefull voice,
Which seemes to second me in miserie,
And answere gives like friend of mine owne choice.
Thus onely she doth my companion prove. (1:1-2)

The poem introduces her as an upright woman as she does not lament helplessly but makes use of the natural elements in order to convey what she feels so that she could alleviate her sorrow. While the "rocks, hills, meadows and springs" cannot cure, it is only Echo -a friend of her "owne choice"- becomes helpful. That the extension of *her* voice becomes a friend to share her suffering proves Urania's self-sufficient nature who is able to deal with her problems without a male helper. The natural setting is also instrumental in revealing her stout character:

[Urania] went on, till she came to the foote of a great rocke . . . The way was hard . . . Having attained the top, she was under some hollow trees the entrie into the rocke: she fearing nothing but the continuance of her ignorance, went in. (1:2)

Urania does not remain within the domestic place and fearlessly responds to the natural environment by exerting physical effort to ascend as high as possible. She figuratively gets closer to the vault of heaven. In other words, while there is no one at sight, she holds a place closer to God. Her stance tenuously challenges the patriarchal hierarchical construction that places women further down than men.

According to Dollimore, when struggling against the dominant culture, one should not adopt "simple denunciation of dominant ideologies" as it might be "dangerous and counter-productive" for the subordinate. He instead proposes certain "strategies of negotiation" such as the refashioning of dominant ideologies through "(mis)appropriation and their subversion through inversion" ("Dominant" 181-82). In the same vein, in Urania's first encounter with a man, Wroth does not disregard the binary opposition of the strong and the subordinate but reverses the generic

convention of damsel-in-distress into knight-in-distress. In other words, she does not transcend the social structure which categorises each sex based on their stereotypical characteristics but inverts the hierarchical structure. Misappropriating the theme becomes an effective tool to produce counter-argument against female oppression. The romance reverses the traditional gender roles so that it becomes Urania who helps Perissus who laments after the supposed death of his beloved. Urania, who does not helplessly cry over her situation in the previous scene, urges Perissus to avenge his loss instead of suffering desperately. She becomes the initiator of action:

"Sir," said she, "having heard some part of your sorrowes, they have not only made me truly pity you, but wonder at you; since if you have lost so great a treasure, you should not lie thus leaving her and love unrevenged, suffering her murderers to live, while you like here complaining, and if such perfections be dead in her, why make you not the Phoenix of your deeds live againe, as to new life rais'd out of the revenge you should take on them? then were her end satisfied, and you deservedly accounted worthie of her favour." (1:4)

Urania believes that Perissus should not accept the wrong passively but should renew courage and heroism like a phoenix. When Perissus tries to dismiss her,⁶⁹ she does not leave but insists on motivating him:

"If you bee resolv'd," said the *daintie Urania*, "folly it were to offer to perswade you from so resolute a determination . . . Leave these teares, and *woman-like complaints*, no way befitting the *valiant Perissus*, but like a *brave Prince*, if you know shee bee dead, revenge her dead on her murderers . . . so may you gaine perpetuall glorie, and repay the honor to her dead, which could not bee but touched by her untimely end." (1:15) [emphasis added]

In this passage, Urania's employment of the adjectives such as *dainty*, *woman-like*, *valiant* and *brave* serves to a subversive end. Women are stereotypically associated with delicacy and men with valour in the early modern context. Ironically however, it is Urania who bravely encourages Perissus to valiant action while he is the one who daintily cries. The choice of adjectives is compatible with the gender roles the respective sexes are supposed to perform but their contrasting employment both juxtaposes the characteristics Urania and Perissus have and counters the expectations of patriarchal economy. The strategical misappropriation of adjectives disrupts the hierarchical patriarchal structure.

⁶⁹ Perissus states "leave me who am afflicted sufficiently without your companie; or if you will stay, discourse not to me" upon which she states "neither of these will I doe" (1:4).

Perissus' biased comment overlaps with the patriarchal understanding that does not value women or their opinion because, Perissus, upon recognising Urania, states "now I see you are a woman; and therefore not much to be marked" (1:4). While he is the one who humiliates Philargus -Limena's jealous husband who cannot understand her virtue- by resembling him "a Fool, who in a dark Cave . . . having a candle but not the understanding what good it doth him, puts it out" (1:4) it is himself the fool who cannot understand the benefit a woman might provide. The placement of Urania and Perissus in juxtaposing settings also illustrates their mental complexion: Urania "attain[s] the top" (1:2) while Perissus stays in "a dark Cave" (1:4). The respective settings emblemise Perissus' blindness when he evaluates Urania in terms of her gender but Urania achieves a divine status having arrived to resolve his metaphorical blindness. While the former is stuck at a cave, Urania is nourished by God's wisdom reflected through the sunshine in the macrocosm. Perissus is blind to his situation and what he can achieve but Urania helps him like God would do. She communicates well with the forlorn knight *despite* her gender; she pictures a solution for him that would immortalise him and it is thanks to Urania's persuasive speech that Perissus saves Limena in the end. Her exhortation elevates Urania to a powerful position: Perissus' remark changes from the initial discernment "not much to be marked" (1:4) to the "faire" and "incomparable Urania" whose "wisdom" he "reverence[s]" (1:16). Contrary to the immobile Perissus cloistered in a womb-like domestic place, Urania fearlessly wanders around from the highest to the lowest natural places helping him *re-born* in the end. The romance not only gives Urania the ability to move alone the patriarchal culture denies and the right to speech it mutes but it also suggests that it is not the gender that matters but the individual qualities that define one's character. Urania who is described as "having a brave spirit" (1:3) and Perissus who "with teares which distilled from his eyes . . . lie[s] here complaining for [Limena's] death" (1:3) constitute a contrastive image against the patriarchal culture that traditionally endows man with courage and woman with vulnerability. Thus, *Urania* gives the titular heroine an agent position and challenges the cultural assumption that women are the less intelligent sex. The Urania-Perissus episode is crucial for the representation of the "dialectic between the dominant and the subordinate" (Dollimore, *Radical* xxvii) and the means to question her culturally sanctioned place. Even though Perissus initially seems to hold the superior position owing to his sex, once Urania does not consent to his instruction to silence her,

she earns the superior position. In other words, Urania overcomes Perissus' hegemony only when she transcends the patriarchal prescription. In doing so, she negotiates her subordinate position and manages to circumvent the masculine power. In the meantime, their interaction renders possible the appearance of emergent culture because their dialogue constitutes a "new practice" and a "new relationship" (Williams, *Marxism* 123) to follow. Although beyond the borders of the cave the dominant culture has a normative status, the episode makes it possible that emergent culture might surface so long as an individual does not unquestionably accede to the teachings of the dominant.

Wroth once more employs strategical inversion to turn the hierarchical structure upside down. Urania's shrewd character stands out when she feels responsible for her companions' safety. After their ship is stranded at the coast of Cyprus due to a violent storm, she decides to watch over the people on board while they are asleep in case an enemy arrives:

Some were laid down to see if rest would possesse them: others falne asleep, none enduring it like the excellent Urania, which brought comfort (though in sorrow) to the loving and noble Parselius, never shewing feare or trouble: encouraging all. And yet she did feare, but seeing his, she dissembled hers, in care of not further harming him; She, I say, when all were gone to rest, stood as Sentinel, by her owne appointment. (1:46)

Even though when Urania and Parselius first meet the narrator deliberately comments that "men have the stronger and bolder spirits" (1:21) in order to allude to the prejudice prevalent within the culture, the episode proves it false since Urania behaves as competent as a mighty man would do. Her decision to guard the group proves her agency because she does not need male protection but is even capable of protecting her companions. She behaves as strong and bold as Parselius and her responsible action erases the hierarchical structure of the saver/strong and the saved/weak. In the Perissus episode, Urania asserts her mental capacity and the present incident establishes her physical endurance. Similar to the first scene when she watches over the environment from a high place, she keeps an eye on her fellows. The act of watching places Urania in an authoritative position. In this sense, the name *Urania* also becomes meaningful to establish her subject position: in the Greek myths, Urania is one of the Nine Muses and she is the muse of astronomy (Coleman 1062) who is able to understand the universe and its incidents. Just like her namesake, the titular heroine has an

ethereal aspect who has a better understanding of the world around her. Her naming as an allusion to celestial entities and her proximity to the divine evinced by her "having attained the top" (1:2) establish Urania as a woman who cannot be under the yoke of societal rules but who is the agent of her own life.

As evidenced by her hortative speech to Perissus, Urania represents wisdom. She also advises the lovelorn Pamphilia not to submit to the tyranny of the disloyal Amphilanthus. Urania reasons that her suffering is injudicious in that even though constancy is taught as a virtue, it is also subject to change in time just as any other human relationship might do:

"Tis pittie," said Urania, "that ever that fruitlesse thing Constancy was taught you as a virtue, since for vertues sake you will love it, but understand, this virtue hath limits to hold it in, being a vertue, but thus that it is a vice in them that breake it, but those with whom it is broken, are by the breach free to leave or choose againe where more staidnes may be found; besides tis a dangerous thing to hold that opinion, which in time will prove flat heresie." (1:470)

Urania believes that unquestioned addiction to love does not make one virtuous but virtue necessitates adapting to changing circumstances because a wise individual behaves reasonably. The excerpt is suggestive of Urania's questioning nature who does not submissively take for granted what she has been taught. Interestingly enough, her prediction that constancy turns into "heresie" indeed foreshadows Pamphilia's future marriage to a man other than Amphilanthus which would be an adulterous one since she would still be committed to Amphilanthus. The conversation strengthens Urania's authoritative position who even has the ability to control the trajectory of the narrative events. That Urania is the embodiment of reason is further emphasised:

"I am not ungrateful," said Urania, "but fortunate, I am not his slave. I love Love, as he should be loved, and so deare Lady do you, and then you will plainly see, he is not such a Deity, as your Idolatry makes him." (1:469)

Urania warns Pamphilia not to indulge in passion. She acts like the "embodiment of a spiritual principle" (Beilin 216) because she feels Pamphilia is becoming a slave to earthly love. In the meantime, their conversation functions as a discursive space in which Urania and Pamphilia convey their juxtaposing opinions. It provides them with the chance to assert their voice and the absence of male characters in the setting renders female culture as nourishing from each other's ideas based on

healthy communication. The romance not only diverges from the male discourse but even converges opposing female perspectives. In other words, it cherishes individual opinion instead of a stereotypical monolithic approach.

Urania's constative nature comes to the fore when she warns Pamphilia, who suffers from Amphilanthus' continuous betrayals, to follow her governmental duties. She advises her not to forget her responsibility against her subjects and to integrate her public self/duty and private self/desire. She states,

If your people knew this, how can they hope of your government, that can no better governe one poore passion? How can you command others, that cannot master your selfe; or make laws, that cannot counsel, or soveraignise over a poore thought? . . . Where is that judgment, and discreet govern'd spirit? (1:468)

Urania warns Pamphilia against being consumed by love and reminds her to fulfil her responsibilities as astutely as earlier. She believes that Pamphilia should not be consumed by love but should control passion that would be harmful for her success. The incident reinforces Urania's free spirit who does not accept either physical enslavement or self-inflicted one. Urania, as the voice of wisdom and as a counsellor to Pamphilia, acts as a guide for the lovelorn/enslaved women to be aware of their power uncircumscribed by anyone and offers a solution that contributes to female empowerment. The present dialogue also emphasises female solidarity and the comfort women provide for each other in difficulty. Instead of the knightly adventures and fights against beasts, the female experience becomes the focus of attention.

Urania's agency as the embodiment of reason continues in the second volume of *Urania* in which she mediates the relationship between Pamphilia and Amphilanthus. She invites them to wise action whenever they need. For instance, when Amphilanthus is overwhelmed by his error to marry the Princess of Slavonia believing that Pamphilia has already married someone else, he becomes "butt a dying living and a living death" (2:136). The incident helps Urania remind her of her former achievements in comforting other characters such as Perissus, Lord Steriamus and Selarina. She also calms down Amphilanthus and urges him to follow reason rather than being consumed by fury: "You shall see, my fortune wilbee to serve you to all blessednes againe. Did nott I say thus much to Perissus, and did itt nott fall out soe? Did nott I for my everlasting blis redeeme and save

my dearest Lord Steriamus" (2:139). Contrary to the anxious Amphilanthus, who cannot think wisely of his situation but merely blames himself for not "overmastering his passions," Urania counsels him to find out "how to repair this bitter offence" (2:172). Just as she helps Perissus, she helps Amphilanthus find a solution to the problem instead of despair. She acts like a sage to direct Amphilanthus into reasonable action. It is thanks to Urania's discursive power that Amphilanthus resumes reason, abandons "his late extravagante passions" and upon Urania's "all discreet and devine counsel," that he recovers "with the cleere eyes of understanding" (2:173). The episode demonstrates that Urania is both an alert woman and attentive to alert others against unwise behaviour. She proves her agency as someone who invites each sex at a moment of crisis to act logically. The episode is also important within the larger structure of gender roles. According to Fletcher, in the conduct manuals which concentrated on gender roles, the hierarchical gender structure contrasted manhood with effeminacy because manhood was understood as physical and mental strength while womanhood (or effeminacy) meant to be emotionally weak, delicate, uncontrollable and self-indulgent. Unrestrained behaviour was against the gendered hierarchy men should occupy and several appetites such as drink or sex were thought to be destructive for their manhood. Indeed, attending school⁷⁰ was one of the ways for the perpetuation of hierarchical social order as it taught young men "self-mastery" that would prevent them from effeminacy. Interestingly enough, extreme love was also seen dangerous for men as it would devoid them of "manly action" (420-27). Within this framework, when Amphilanthus loses control over his passion and reclaims reason only by the help of Urania, he also loses his masculine power, his gendered identity and the gender role that positions him onto a superior place. Amphilanthus represents the masculine hegemony but hegemony is always "a process" vulnerable to changes: "It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures" (Williams, *Marxism* 113). Since it is Amphilanthus' manhood which supposedly regulates the social system, he has the responsibility against the

⁷⁰ "Augustine Baker, advising readers of his autobiography to send their sons to the Inns of Court rather than the universities in order that they might find a more 'manly' education, recalled the catalogue of sins in which he had indulged with others at Oxford during the 1590s: gluttony, theft, sodomy, fornication and drunkenness. The root cause in each case was the same; all were the fruits of unrestrained appetite; all reduced men, taking them back to childhood weakness or effeminacy prior to their seeking self-mastery through the growth of reason" (Fletcher 423).

society in that he has to defend and reinforce his masculinity against any threat from the subordinate. Urania embodies that threat which limits and alters his masculine identity when she instructs him to act wisely. Their relationship highlights the fluidity of hegemonic structures; the vulnerability of the so-called superior position one has within it and reflects the fluctuating nature of hegemony as a process of consolidation and resistance. In the present episode, Amphilanthus' losing command over rational behaviour and excessive emotional turmoil make him an inept figure. When reason and checked behaviour -the two signifiers of his manhood- become dysfunctional, Amphilanthus loses the upper hand within the hierarchical gender structure and Urania becomes a strong woman who threatens him with subjugation. The romance reflects that both femininity and masculinity are sociocultural constructs employed by the patriarchal discourse to subjugate women. Blurring the gender differences and applying *his* cultural attributes to *her* uncloak female agency and destabilise gendered patriarchal order.

Urania's free-spirited nature does not change from maidenhood to motherhood. When her husband Steriamus rejects to give the title of knighthood to their son Stervanus, she acts without his permission and gives him a horse and a sword so that he becomes a knight (2:363-64). She repudiates the fatherly authority Steriamus has over his son; she denies subjection to her husband; she substitutes the father figure. Even though it is a small incident within the corpus of the work, since for the patriarchy and James I the family is the smallest unit of the system that represents the patriarchal authority in the macrocosm, her act becomes meaningful as she threatens the pillars of the patriarchal system built upon the binary opposition of the submissive wife and the restrictive husband. To conclude, her wisdom, her wise counsel valued by men and women, her understanding better than her peers, her keen eye on various events and her ability to act individually grant Urania an agent position. She has never been an absent object of male desire but Wroth creates her own version of Urania who embarks on several roles from maidenhood to motherhood and who successfully performs each one as a woman of intellect "whose beauty excelled all things but her mind" (1:152).

Steriamus' praise "butt then how did her counsel ravish our eares, more Judiciall, more exquisite then the whole great counsell of the greatest Monarckies" (2:153) summarises her authoritative position within the narrative. Thanks to her several deeds in each sphere of her life, Urania becomes Wroth's spokesperson for her

“commitment to transformation of a social order” (Dollimore and Sinfield, Foreword viii) which hinders female emancipation.

Melissea’s⁷¹ supernatural ability approximates her to Urania because she also gives advice to the heroes and heroines of the romance. Melissea is known for her “skill in the Art of Astrologie” whose “wisdom, modestie, and goodnesse figured in her face” (1:139). Her assertive presence is evinced by her communication with others. For instance, when Amphilanthus wants to learn if he would succeed in love, she replies that he would so long as he is a constant man; she advises Steriamus to reach Saint Maura as soon as possible where he is purged of his love for Pamphilia and falls in love with Urania (1:141-42). The fact that Amphilanthus and Steriamus respect her and want her advice makes Melissea an authoritative figure whose sight/opinion is taken into consideration. She also counsels two heroines Pamphilia and Urania regarding their future. She foresees that Pamphilia would never have the “power to wedd” (1:190) whom she desires and she would face hardships. She suggests Urania to be patient since she heralds the second love which would be better for her than the first one. Melissea has a decisive function in Urania’s maturation when she instructs Amphilanthus to “throw her from the Rocke of St. Maura into the Sea” (1:190).⁷² Thus, Melissea holds a significant place in her metaphorical death or *rebirth into a new self* that guides Pamphilia in love. Her prophecy has a sequential influence: Melissea helps Urania who helps Limena and Pamphilia who helps Candiana. The powerful female bond heals the sufferings of female characters who mature throughout the work. The romance continuously emphasises the comforting effect of same-sex cooperation. In the meantime, Melissea proves to be more important a character when she exhorts Ollarandus on the theme of politics. In other words, her agency is not limited to the so-called feminine themes but she is able to comment on masculine issues too. She

⁷¹ Melissea resembles other female soothsayers in continental romances such as Lady Felicia in Montemayor’s *Diana* and its sequel Gaspar Gil Polo’s *Diana enamorata*. Her character also invokes Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso* who has a female magician Melissa. Wroth’s Melissea, Ariosto’s Melissa and Montemayor’s Felicia have the gift of prophesy regarding the love relationship of the protagonists and, in this respect, they structure the narrative in that what they say turns out to be true (Lamb “Prose Romance, Masque, and Lyric” 246-47).

⁷² “You shall be happy, and enjoy, but first, death in appearance must possesse your dainty bodie” (1:190). After her purgation, Urania’s love for Parselius fades away and what she feels for Steriamus -her future husband- looks like “a booke layd by, new lookt on . . . with greater judgment understood” (1:333). Urania gains a refreshed outlook on love based on spiritual union.

suggests that Ollarandus should follow a "brave King who shall give unto [him] both securitie of life, and [his] only love" (1:142). It soon becomes true when Amphilanthus helps him regain his rightful kingdom and unite with Melasinda.⁷³ Melissea, as a wise character whose exhortation is esteemed by everyone, embodies "a fantasy of female agency exercising beneficial control" (Lewalski, *Writing* 289) and challenges the prescription that women should keep silence. That she is a single woman also offers an alternative for women who do not have to choose marriage as the only option to gain a respectful position in the society.

Contrary to Henry Smith's derogatory remark in *A Preparative to Marriage* (1591) in which he states "as the open vessels were counted unclean; so account that the open mouth hath much uncleanness" (qtd. in Miller, *Changing* 30) Steriamus, Amphilanthus and other male characters appreciate female advice and direct some events upon their word. *Urania*, through the sage heroines Urania and Melissea, refutes the misbelief which associates female speech with sexual desire. More importantly, male characters do not regard it a threat to their masculinity. Havel proposes that the "individuals confirm the system, fulfil the system, make the system, *are* the system" (136) [emphasis in the original] because it is owing to their voluntary participation in the making of ideology without questioning its impositions that the dominant culture strengthens its power. In other words, the patriarchal culture acculturates women into certain behavioural patterns by representing them "as decreed by God or simply natural" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 114) in order to maintain the present order. On the other hand, Urania and Melissea prove dissident figures because they do not subscribe to the operations of patriarchal ideology; they do not let the dominant culture "recruit" and "transform" them "into subjects" (Althusser 1504). Contrariwise, they challenge the dominant culture which preaches female silence and obedience and creates false consciousness regarding the inferior status of women. Melissea and Urania cannot overthrow the dominant culture; they are not subversive heroines but their resistance against the patriarchal system proves their dissidence since they manage to forge/fissure subjectivities and become antagonistic to the dominant culture in an apparently seamless power structure.

⁷³ Since it is thanks to Amphilanthus' military forces that Ollarandus saves his usurped kingdom, the narrative also provides a subtle message that arranged marriages are not the only solution to forge political allegiances.

While *Urania* foregrounds female experience, the issue of marriage has a substantial place in the romance as a barrier to female agency. It discusses the problem of the freedom of choice of the marriage partner. Through several stories, it conveys the female protest against the patriarchal domination in the debate of marriage. Wroth and her female characters embody dissidence by criticising the custom of arranged marriage or by finding solutions to assert agency in love and marriage. Wroth makes the institution of marriage the focus in the bulk of romance so as to reveal its faulty aspects and the sufferings of women. Thus, *Urania* both establishes Wroth as an authorial figure who has the right to express her opinion on an issue that affects women including herself in the society and provides them with resistance mechanisms that would help them assert their individual will against the patriarchal authority. In a time when King James I instructs the priests to "inveigh vehemently against the insolencies of women" (Roberts, Critical Introduction xv) and the conduct manuals oppress them not to overreach their assigned roles, Wroth scrutinises if obedience to patriarchal authority is crucial, what happens when it is threatened or if there is any means for negotiation within the patriarchal structure. The network of relationships enables her to portray the panorama of the social formation that gives women little freedom. Through stories of enforced marriage and abusive fathers or husbands, Wroth criticises the dominant culture and creates alternative models for women represented by the heroines resistant to the patriarchal authority. In other words, the female characters try to "constitute consciousness . . . in dissident forms" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 38) against male injustice. As Cavanagh argues,

In contrast to the "silent woman" image often associated with early literature, these female characters provide considerable amounts of dialogue to the text, often offering outspoken opinions on issues involving . . . domestic affairs. ("Romancing" 20)

According to the principles of Cultural Materialist method "nothing can be intrinsically or essentially subversive" (Dollimore, "Materialism" 13) and the dissident quality of a work is dependent upon its immediate context. In this sense, to understand the social context Wroth wrote in order to illustrate her dissident stance better, it is necessary to assess the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in terms of the institution of marriage. Lawrence Stone in his extensive analysis *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* detects a gradual shift from open lineage family to the restricted patriarchal or nuclear family. While

in the former the union of the married couple and the children were less important than the wider kinship bonds such as cousinhood, the restricted patriarchal family started to gain more importance in the final decades of the sixteenth century with a focus on the conjugal couple and the inner circle they constitute together with the children rather than the relatives by blood or marriage (124). One of the reasons of this interest in the nuclear family stemmed from the shift in the religious understanding of Reformation in the Church. Contrary to the Catholic belief which was based upon the vow of chastity for the Church community, the matrimonial bond was ideal for the Protestant believers (135). The Catholic Cardinal Bellarmine, for example, thought of marriage as "a thing humane, virginity is angelical" while the Protestant William Perkins described it as "a state in itself far more excellent than the condition of a single life" (135). In other words, the Protestant belief emphasised the sanctity of marriage and whereas the institution of marriage was initially necessary only to avoid fornication and for legitimate procreation, the third ingredient *spiritual intimacy* came into prominence. Thomas Cranmer, the first Protestant archbishop of Canterbury, in *The Book of Common Prayer* regarded marriage vital for "mutual society, help and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and in adversity" (Stone, *Family* 136) or for Robert Cleaver marriage was a union "with the good consent of them both, to the end that they may dwell together in friendship and honesty, one helping and comforting the other" (136). Marriage became a partnership based on mutual love, affection and understanding. Accordingly, the familial influence on the choice of marriage partners decreased towards the end of the sixteenth century and the parental approval on the children's choices became less indispensable though still much valued. Still, however, the fatherly influence was much stronger in the matchmaking of daughters because they had no option to refuse their paternal choices (Wrightson 49-52).

Nonetheless, it should be noted that even while the opportunity to choose the spouses was developing gradually, marriage "was not a union for the satisfaction of psychological and physiological needs" basically but "an institutional device to ensure the perpetuation of the family and its prosperity" that foregrounded its "financial benefits" (Stone, *Crisis* 613). The relationship between the would-be-couple was of little importance compared to the material gain it would provide. Thus, "parental pressure was still predominant" (Stone, *Family* 193) and in the first

quarter of the seventeenth century, "one-third of the older peers were estranged from or actually separated from their wives" (Stone, *Crisis* 661) because marriages "deliberately designed to capture an heiress or to cement a political alliance, when the compulsion used may be supposed to have been particularly severe" (662). Marriage was even more problematic for the daughters because, whatever sects she belonged to, it was the "destined lot of a girl" (Kelso 91) and the choice of husband was at the disposal of the fathers, the truth which Vives explained the logic behind: "true virginity knows nothing of sexual union nor seeks after it . . . therefore . . . the young woman will leave all of that concern to those who wish as much good for her" (155).⁷⁴ The mid-sixteenth century proverb "there goes more to marriage than four legs in a bed" (Wrightson 58) was the summary of the outlook on marriage which did not regard physical attraction or mutual affection essential for its successful maintenance.

Since female sexuality was the determiner of a woman's social status either as a virgin, a wife, a widow or a whore⁷⁵ depending on her relationship with men, surveillance of female behaviour was crucial for the production of legitimate children.⁷⁶ On the other hand, romantic involvement was not necessary to procreate. James I in *Basilikon Doron* cautioned his son to "choose your Wife as I advised you to choose your servants . . . For if a man will be careful to breed horses and dogs of good kinds, how much more careful should he be, for the breede of his owne loines" (36). Similar to any patriarch, he regarded women an instrument for childbearing whose marketable value depends on her procreative aspect regardless of her thought or feeling. Earlier than James I's reign, in "An Homily of the State of Matrimony" (1562) and in "An Homily against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion" (1570) the religious, cultural and biological inferiority of women was emphasised and her obedience to the husband was advised several

⁷⁴ The Queen of Bulgaria reproaches that her father intervened in her choice "as if she weare nott able of her self to governe her self, butt must bee like an infant" (2:247).

⁷⁵ Shakespeare in *Measure for Measure* (1604) expresses a similar opinion. Lucio tells Duke Vincento that Mariana [or any women] "may be a punk; for many of them are neither maid, widow, nor wife" (5.1.177-78).

⁷⁶ As Ingram states, "contemporaries saw cuckoldry, a man's loss of control of his wife's body, as causing possible doubts about his ability to satisfy her sexually, his capacity to govern his household, and even perhaps his fitness for any kind of public office -in brief, about his manhood. Accusations or underhand aspersions of cuckoldry . . . touched man's honour to the quick. To be an unwitting cuckold was bad; to know oneself such was worse; to be exposed was a disaster, especially as a failure to respond would condemn the man to the utterly ignominious status of 'wittol' or complaisant cuckold" (104-05).

times. The famous verse from Gen. 3.16 "thy desire shall be unto thine husband" was perpetuated in the aforesaid homilies and in the conduct manuals and, as an important manifestation of social condition, women customarily ended the letters to their husbands as "your faithful servant and obedient wife" (Stone, *Family* 198). Finally, Plutarch's *Moralia*, a moral text oft-cited in the early modern age, fortified the identity of wife as inseparable from the husband:

Like as a mirror or looking glasse garnished with golde and precious stones, serveth to no purpose, if it doe not represent to the life the face of him or her that looketh into it; no more is a woman worth ought (be she otherwise never so rich) unlesse she conforme and frame her self, her life, her maners and conditions suitable in all respects to her husband . . . even so a wife should have no propoer passion or peculiar affection of her owne, but be a partaker of the sports, serious affaires, sad countenance, deepe thoughts and smiling looks of her husband. (qtd. in Wayne 69)

The model Plutarch offered was that of a mirror or a looking glass by which men would assert their omnipotence. In this model, an exemplary wife would be the one who wipes out her wishes and desires for the sake of her husband's and even what she could feel would be decided by her husband. The model called for the annihilation of the wife as she would be metaphorically dead to her own self. Since she would have to submit to the will of her husband, she would have no individuality of her own but would only be the perpetrator of her husband's desire and command. Not surprisingly, "in a society where circulation of discourses [was] controlled by men the definition of women [would be] inevitably patriarchal and reductive" (Belsey, *Subject* 164) and Plutarch's model would be instantly adopted by the patriarchal culture.

As the historical evidence suggests, on the one hand, there was an emphasis on spiritual union but there was a hierarchical relationship between the husband and the wife on the other. In other words, the teachings on marriage "negate" (116) what they initially propose as there is an emphasis both on mutual affection and wifely subjection. The conflicting views regarding the institution of marriage constitute "an insecure moment in patriarchy" (43) and their "plausibility falls into disarray" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 45) soon. Such a faultline or "the site of profound contradiction" (Sinfield, "Power" 265) within the institution of marriage enables Wroth to explore woman's place within family and matrimony, the destructive effects of marriage on women and the means to survive it and the patriarchal

formation collectively. Her condemnation of the arranged marriages and her valorisation of female perspective constitute dissidence. Wroth "insists on the woman's role in negotiating the arrangements" (Roberts, Critical Introduction lxii) because she takes into consideration the expectations of women as to marriage. She denounces marriage as enthrallment and as masculine violence via several stories in which women are victimised by the tyrannical patriarchs who do not treasure individual desires. Although the prevailing patriarchal power is much stronger than their individual power, the female characters manage to "disturb the system in violation of parental wishes" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 33) and claim dissidence once they do not readily submit to the dominant culture. In other words, Wroth does not recount stories of oppression but dissidence. Referring to the Elizabethan age, Sinfield claims that "relations between the stronger and the weak in the household . . . were characterised by personal cruelty and the exercise of autocratic power" (*Faultlines* 167). In the same vein, the examples below portray an oppressive power structure between the weak daughters and wives and the stronger fathers and husbands. The female struggle against the patriarchal dominance contributes to the creation of a *structure of feeling* as "that which is not fully articulated" but "not very silent" (Williams, *Politics* 168). Wroth and her heroines cannot manage to pulverise the patriarchal system yet they create emergent cultural practices in the face of patriarchal intervention.

The first example takes place between Limena, her father and her husband Philargus. Limena, who is forcibly married to a jealous but wealthy man, embodies the ideal pattern of femininity that prioritises submission to paternal authority over personal aspiration when she dutifully accepts to marry. She reflects the inner struggle between the public self that necessitates dutiful acquiescence and the private self passionately in love with Perissus:

Shee seeing it was her fathers will, esteeming obedience beyond all passions, how worthily soever, suffered; most dutifully, though unwillingly, said, she would obey; her tongue faintly delivering, what her heart so much detested; loathing almost it selfe; yet thus it was concluded, and with as much speed as any man would make to an eternall happines. (1:5)

Limena fulfils the seventeenth century maxim of chaste-silent-obedient on the surface because she does not protest against marriage. However, she remains constant to self-chosen love: "I worthily chose you; I lov'd you, and constantly

love'd you, and in this doe I best allow of my owne judgment" (1:10). Even though her physical ownership changes from the father to the husband, her rejecting the spiritual captivity results in violence:

He got a boate, and so passed over to this place, where ever since we have remained; for my part, with daily whippings, and such other tortures, as pinching with irons, and many more terrible . . . Once every day hee brought mee to this pillar where you found me, and in the like manner bound me, then whipt me, after washing the stripes and blisters with salt water: but this had been the last (had not you thus happily arriv'd); for he determined as he said, after my tormenting had been past, in stead of washing me with sea-water, to cast me into her, and so make a finall end of his tormenting, and of my torments. (1:88)

Limena carves a space within marriage immune to patriarchal intervention but it leads to torture by the husband who forces her to confess adultery. The incident is illustrative in several aspects. The detailed description of the torture methods shows the monstrosity of the mismatched husband and the cruelty of the father who forces her to marriage. Even though the patriarchal culture preaches obedience for the maintenance of social order, the episode suggests that filial obedience is not always the solution to ensure order. It, therefore, debunks the so-called benefits of conduct literature to maintain social harmony. That Limena is bounded to a pillar denotes her bondage to patriarchal culture but her heroic endurance against maltreatment asserts her passive resistance in the face of patriarchal oppression. Likewise, even though she becomes an exchangeable commodity between the father and the husband, the psychological/physical torture she endures reinforces her stoic resistance. When she states, "threatenings are but meanes to strengthen free and pure hearts against the threatners" (1:12) she shatters the belief that women are fragile and vulnerable. Contrariwise, her temerity against the patriarchal imposition evinces female power. The scars, as embodiments of defiance of the patriarchal authority, register the inviolability of her decisiveness and function as the records of her agency. Limena dissents from the tradition by thwarting the dictum that "your desire shall be to your husband" and becomes an agent of her own life when she insists on her own desire. However means he tries, Philargus cannot control his wife upon which his male ego is built. Limena abnegates his existence and embraces her own desire as an autonomous subject. It is noteworthy that she is sympathetically represented while Philargus and the father turn out to be villains and the former dies penitently asking for forgiveness in the end. In the tension between duty and desire, Limena

achieves agency by holding onto her soul. Wroth praises extramarital love and fidelity to a lover rather than a husband so long as it serves for female agency. She both foregrounds the female perspective and provides a critique of a mismatched marriage.

In the story of Liana, the father is responsible for the daughter's victimisation because he threatens to disinherit her and imprisons her despite "his promise, which was, never to force [her] against [her] will, to marry any" (1:248). Even though Liana loves Alanius, her father disregards her wish and demands obedience because he is determined to "breed" (1:247) her. The choice of the verb *breed* underlines the financial benefit she would provide due to new alliances and possible pregnancies instead of paying attention to what she feels because, in the patriarchal marriage market, women are valuable so long as they serve for the patriarchal practices. However, Liana does not keep silent but defies his authority:

yet tell this my father, his kind commands had more wrought in me, then his cruelty, yet neither against my loyalty in love; but now so hardned I am against paine, with use of paine, as all torment, and millions of them added to the rest, shall have no power to move, the least in my affection to unworthy change, for then should my soule smart, as onely now body is subject to these torments. (1:250)

She also stands upright against male-inflicted torture. Despite the physical imprisonment, neither the suitor nor the father can spiritually imprison her. She asserts that patriarchal restriction is not an impediment to true love and, by not following what is dictated, she defines herself in accordance with her personal will. In this sense, she displays more active resistance than Limena who silently submits to paternal authority. In any case, their stories go parallel because in each story the authority figure gets penitent of what he has done.⁷⁷ It dampens the apotheosis of male discourse and incites women to question what is demanded rather than simple submission and, more importantly, both stories culminate in triumphant agency for women once they unite with their own choices.

Lisia and Orilena are also victimised by patriarchal reasons that imprison them. They are forced to marry because their fathers consider financial benefits over their physical and psychological satisfaction. Lisia's fate is decided by her father who chooses a man of "churlishness," a "dull piece of flesh" (1:599) as a spouse.

⁷⁷ Her father accepts that his is "false judgment . . . a shame unto the Judge" (1:255).

She associates marriage with imprisonment when she states she could endure it only "by hunting and other delights abroad, to away trouble . . . at home" (1:559). Similarly, Orilena is compelled to marry a wealthy gentleman whom she describes as "the treasure of all hellish properties" and "Prince of wickednesse" (1:201). The theme of imprisonment recurs in the episode of Cephalonian lovers:⁷⁸ the daughter is "shut up in a Towre" (1:43) because she loves someone else. So as not to submit to her father's command, she elopes with her beloved on the marriage day as she does not accept physical and psychological enthrallment. The beloved is killed by an enemy and the daughter ends up in "the next Religious house, where shee would remaine till she might follow him" (1:44). Even though her choice to live in seclusion might be considered another form of imprisonment, the act is significant in that she *herself* decides the course of her life without patriarchal intervention. The episode interprets intentional reclusion better than marriage which suffocates women. The examples foreground female experience and highlight the female perspective on marriage as a form of imprisonment.

Heroines engaged in love triangles also reflect female assertiveness. *Urania* is sympathetic to the adulteresses because even though these women cannot unite with their beloveds, they maintain their relationship with or loyalty to them. The romance provides sexual freedom to the heroines. For instance, in the story of Laurimello and the Angler Woman, although the Angler Woman is forcibly married by her father, she has a secret relationship with her cousin. The narrator employs the spider imagery to explain the situation she is in: "which being to crosse from one beame to another, must worke by waies, and goe farre about, making more webs to catch her selfe into her owne purpose, then if she were to goe on ordinary straight course" (1:293). The analogy to the mythological figure Arachne is obvious in the quotation. In the Greek myth, Arachne is so excellent in weaving that she challenges Athena's skill. She is, however, transformed into an insect as a punishment since she questions the authority figure. The Angler Woman, also cognisant of her dissidence, challenges the patriarchal authority and associates her condition with a spider. On the other hand, even if what she turns into isolates Arachne from culture, it turns out to be fruitful in the end because she engages in what she enjoys doing most. The Angler Woman is also caught in a patriarchal network but she follows her desire even though her transgressive behaviour might

⁷⁸ Sydelia, who relates her story to Amphilanthus, is also imprisoned and tortured by her brother Terichillus and her beloved is slain by him.

conclude in punishment and ostracisation. The weaving metaphor stands for the female voice in her case. Likewise, Lady Pastora is "married to a Knight, but her affections [are] wedded to her owne choyce" (1:416). Although her beloved is married too, it is repeated that marriage does not hinder the marriage of true minds: "their love (for what love can be kept secret where such barres bee for enjoying) was seene and spoken of by many, yet few blam'd them, but wish'd they were free, and married together" (1:416). In the incident, Lady Pastora's affair is metonymic for her agency. Bellamira is also the victim of arranged marriage and she exerts covert resistance by complying with the rules in appearance. As she states, "how willingly would I have turned to the other hand: but contrary to my soule I gave my selfe to him, my heart to my first love. Thus more then equally I devide my selfe" (1:388). Bellamira does not suffer from physical violence but psychological constraint she endures is apparent. Even if her body is a conduit for male economy, by keeping her soul and body apart, she becomes self-assertive.

Although the tyrannical patriarchs or conduct manual authors including James I do not take into consideration the female opinion but focus on female body as a means of exchange for patriarchal control, the obvious emphasis on the distinction between body and soul ensures female empowerment. While the female body is trafficable, ownable and masterable, the soul is impossible to possess. Thus, women, who are under the yoke of marriage, embrace their soul both in order to establish agency either in seclusion or by finding solution to the oppression within marriage and to isolate it from the body employed by men to subjugate women. The female body is detained but the heroines integrate their soul and love that stand for their agency. Considering their various strategies, the female characters become models for "defiance, dissidence, resistance" (Branningan 108) against patriarchal oppression. On the other hand, it is notable that their action does not ensure subversion of the patriarchal order because, as Greenblatt states, total autonomous selfhood is a myth:

Whenever I focused sharply upon a moment of apparently autonomous self-fashioning, I found not an epiphany of identity freely chosen but a cultural artefact. If there remained traces of free choice, the choice was among possibilities whose range was strictly delineated by the social and ideological system in force. (*Self-Fashioning* 256)

In the same vein, the heroines cannot transcend the social forces which mould them into a patriarchally acceptable form. In other words, they still remain within

the boundaries of patriarchal system and the most autonomous choice they make is still as far as the social forces offer. Nonetheless, their action poses dissidence because much as they cannot subvert the patriarchal system nor are they contained by its practices but even the articulation of the misdeeds of the patriarchal figures, their disavowal of and resistance against the patriarchal practices amplify the female voice. In spite of their inability to become totally autonomous heroines, "dissident potential derives ultimately not . . . from conflict and contradiction" (41) which preaches mutual affection and submission to the patriarchs simultaneously and, when the heroines refuse to "identify" their "interests with the dominant" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 42) there inevitably occurs disturbances thanks to which they assert their agency. Through the aforementioned stories, *Urania* criticises fathers' "cruel and tyrannical power over their children" (1:43) and portrays the means women subvert their authority in order to assert individual will. It condemns paternal inconsiderateness and helps the subordinate claim their existence. Instead of meekness and silence, the muted half of the patriarchal system is given the chance to express the difficulties they face. Wroth emphasises that a woman should choose her partner without paternal intervention. As Andrea states, she "valorizes a woman's freely chosen love (whether adulterous or not) over the inescapable constraints of aristocratic patriarchal marriage" (337) and whenever marriage encumbers true love, extramarital love becomes rightful. Wroth sympathises with extramarital love because the patriarchal custom denies the means to forge subjectivity. It is not the victimised wives and daughters to blame but the patriarchal culture because if women were given the chance to fulfil their wishes, they would not cuckold their husbands or would look for alternatives to transcend fatherly authority. In this sense, *Urania* is a critique of patriarchal social formation which leads women to transgressive behaviour. It foregrounds the conflict between the dominant and the subordinate and the resistance strategies women develop. Krontiris considers it "a guide on how to thwart paternal authority" (*Oppositional* 128) because Wroth's heroines are no longer voiceless objects but articulate subjects of their individual desires. Even though they do not have total control of their lives, they carve space for themselves under the parochial social circumstances.

The criticism on the repressive context of marriage is further emphasised through heroines who do not consider marriage the only option but remain single. These women also represent agency as they reject male custody. For example, Alarina

changes her name to Silviana after her lover abandons her. Through renaming, she refashions her identity and her decision to “wed [her] selfe to chast Dianas life” (1:217) completely renounces the former identity defined by her relationship to a man. Silviana indicates that marriage is not the only destiny a woman has to embrace. Her statement “I love my selfe, my selfe loveth me” (1:224) is the highest degree one can achieve because she even rejects commitment to her self-chosen love. She becomes “[m]istrisse of [her] thoughts, and freedoms rule” (1:224) and establishes an autonomous, self-sufficient position. Likewise, the nymph Mirasilva lives alone in the forest after being abandoned by Sildurino (1:577); the Lady of Robollo resides in an isolated castle after the death of her betrothed (2:149). These characters take the vow of celibacy and govern their own territory. The ownership of the land refers to the ownership of their bodies and the places they live become the feminised space in which they relinquish their feminine duties. The voluntary reclusion endows them with a position of authority previously denied by men. In sum, Fancy recounts -also on behalf of the oppressed women- why she rejects all suitors because marriage would be “too strict a busines for [her] to undergoe” as “the bondage to sweet freedome” (2:38). She thinks the husband would strictly control her:

My man will say, “Why how now, wher had you thes things? Who gave them you?” This I like not . . . Thes things can nott bee given for any good butt to abuse mee . . . therfor never will I marry . . . Noe, libertie and good company are my chosen mates. (2:38)

Fancy imagines a companionate match with “handsome discourse with a reasonable husband, children to pass away the time” (2:38) but, as her name indicates, it is only a fancy for the seventeenth century women. Because of their nonconformist choices, these women become the conduit for flourish of emergent culture since their single status stands for a new practice previously unemployed by women.

On the other hand, *Urania* does not only represent mismatched marriages, tyrannical fathers or violent husbands but also offers examples based on companionate relationship. It envisions a better world in which marriage is based upon mutual affection and sanctified by the parents. It develops an emergent culture based upon new values, practices and relationships. Dollimore avers that “subjectivity” emerges when the dominant culture is “under pressure of contradictions” (“Shakespeare” 482). In this sense, the faultline regarding the cultural appreciation of the institution of marriage ensures the appearance of

emergent subjectivities such as articulate women who strive for their freedom and who question the patriarchal practices, the development of new relationships between the figures of authority and female figures, new practices which are not based upon the understanding of women as an exchangeable commodity and new values such as companionate marriages that cherish individual opinion over the patriarchal tradition. The couples who undergo various difficulties but end up triumphant in marriage such as Veralinda and Leonius, Limena and Perissus, Liana and Alanius, Orilena and Philarchos, Dalinea and Parselius, Urania and Steriamus, Philistella and Selarinus and Melasinda and Ollarandus provide an ideal for the institution of marriage in which free choice, personal desire and mutual affection between couples are taken into consideration because a woman is “not Marchandise, nor to be gaine that way, but her love [is] free, and freely should be given” (1:478). Through myriad examples, *Urania* displays female perception of love, choices, motives, heroism and endurance to foreground the female voice subordinated by the male hegemony in a patriarchal context which dictates “Lord the husband [and the father] in all estates from Shepheardes unto Kings” (1:343). By juxtaposing romantic relationships with arranged marriages, the romance urges women to fight against hardships. The portrayal of female experience is significant because women who refuse subjugation and resist patriarchal control threaten the social order and the orthodox dictum of obedience; those who seek to control their marital and sexual choices in order to claim agency over their lives despite parental coercion, physical violence and psychological torture occupy a subject position through self-assertion. To emphasise the female quest for agency, Wroth “affirms resilience rather than victimisation of the female character” (Miller, “Engendering” 158). If “subcultures constitute consciousness” what should be done is to “validate the individual” to increase the “potential resources of collective understanding and resistance” (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 38). This is what Wroth and her heroines instil. Pamphilia sums up the current discussion on the importance of reciprocal love:

Love is onely to be gained by love equally bestowed, the giver, and receiver reciprocally liberal, else it is no love; nor can this be, but were affections meete; and that we must not all expect, nor can it reasonably be demanded. (1:94)

In the second volume, Wroth inserts a striking episode -the story of Selarinus and the enchantress- in which she challenges the gendered hierarchy, punishes male inconstancy, the marriage market that commodifies women and the arranged

marriages. Selarinus falls in love with an enchantress upon his wife Philistella's death. The mysterious woman in fact fools him as she takes pleasure "in abusing mortals" (2:10). In a typical damsel-in-distress scene, she asks for his help and leads him to her castle. Interestingly enough, she does not let him take his horse and shield -the markers of his masculinity- and with an enchanted drink which fuels his love "soe [v]iolently as hee was allmost wild for want of her sight" (2:304) she totally strips him of his manhood and masculine identity.⁷⁹ Selarinus consents to be physically and psychologically dominated by the enchantress. In doing so, Wroth refutes the patriarchal assumption that women are more prone to passion than a man. Selarinus turns out to be a helpless man who can neither control his sexuality nor that of a woman, an unacceptable condition for the maintenance of the hierarchical sexual and social order under the patriarchal code. The objectification of his body and psychic domination also pose a challenge to the normative hierarchical order because it is based on the man's "identification with the soul [which] underscores and transcends [the woman's] with the body" (Rose xvii). What is more, the enchantress literally imprisons him in an isolated island where there is no one but the fairies: "in this pleasing delight to him (att that time) she held him somm yeeres till she had tow children by him, all that while never seeing anay butt her self and that little company" (2:305). Selarinus, a victim of sexual abuse, endures punishment by a woman who also molests him: he is "to bee a pray to the bacist, villainous subjection that ever was . . . unfortunate above all men, poore and still (being constrained by force, nott by will) to be ill" (2:305) and is released only "when she had her desire and ends of him" (2:397).

In the Selarinus episode, Wroth does not just denunciate the dominant ideology within the marriage market which exploits the weak but she inverts the gender roles each sex is traditionally associated with. She thereby saves women from the subordinate position they are compelled to occupy. Even if she cannot transcend the hierarchical gender structure which suppresses the weaker component of the binary opposition, the fact that she benefits from "inversion" (Dollimore, "Dominant" 182) proves the enchantress' dissidence. Wroth writes an alternative scenario for the relationships within the marriage market in which the male body is objectified, disempowered, made worthless and used for female aggrandisement. Contrary to the entrapment and sufferings of women, she rewrites the situation to

⁷⁹ "It was widely accepted that women held little control over their bodies, but it was a precept of manhood that man should" (Foyster 41).

demonstrate the destructive results of an enforced union. His body becomes a disposable object but valuable as long as it serves for female desire; he becomes important only for his breeding function. He is deprived of his power and masculinity; he becomes a model as to how women might feel once captivated. The story destroys the gendered hierarchical structure because the woman possesses the male body. It *at least* serves as a textual revenge on behalf of all victimised women. Selarinus waits for almost hundred pages to be released. When he is found in "the darck deserts," he is "soe weake, soe tattered, soe torne, as certainly hee was nott able to have lived, had nott Melissa by chance, looking over her bookes, found his infinite and neere-approching miseries" (2:397). Melissea physically cures him and Philistella, appearing in his dream after the rescue, "bitterly correcting him for his faults twise with spiritts and faries, and yet still expressing forgivnes with all truthe of remission" (2:398) provides him psychological recovery. The Selarinus episode is important in asserting female agency as healers considering Melissea and Philistella, as a manifestation of female desire considering the enchantress -who is not punished- and as the outspokenness of Wroth who does not hesitate to punish his male character for what he has done.

Pamphilia, the Queen of Pamphilia, has a substantial place in the romance among other female characters. The protagonist of the work, her prominent characteristic is her love for Amphilanthus while she also holds the positions of authorship and queenship. Much as she remains loyal to his love throughout the romance, Pamphilia is not a victim of unrequited love but it helps her become a skilled poet by which she earns agency. She not only manages to fulfil her duties towards the state but also illustrates the healing side of self-expression and female solidarity. The detailed analysis of Pamphilia and her motives demonstrate how she becomes an agent of her life within the patriarchal culture. Her multiple roles of authorship, queenship and friendship "combat" the dominant patriarchal culture which strives "to constitute [subordinate] subjectivities" and Pamphilia embodies an ideal model to develop a dissident one which would "trouble the social order" and "redeploy its most cherished values" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 299) of silence.

Leandrus' courtship with Pamphilia and her rejecting the marriage proposal build up Pamphilia's dissidence in the first place. Leandrus describes love as "a cureles wound by the never fayling commanding eyes of Pamphilia" (1:101) and even in

their first encounter, Pamphilia's "commanding eyes" constitute dominance over Leandrus. The scene recalls the traditional Petrarchan topos in which the male lover suffers from the cruelty of the distant lady who is mute so that the male could voice his desire but the present episode does not silence the female voice. Leandrus becomes functional in demonstrating Pamphilia's agency because when he proposes marriage, he turns out to be the mouthpiece of the cultural mores since he assumes Pamphilia would need male protection: "is it possible (most excelling Queene) that such a spirit, and so great a Princesse, should be thus alone, and adventure without guard?" (1:213). Pamphilia's answer contrasts the silent and submissive female image once she states she does not need someone to protect her because she is capable of taking care of herself: "'my spirit my Lord,' said she, 'as well guards me alone, as in company; and for my person, my greatnesse, and these walls are sufficient warrants, and guardians for my safety'" (1:213). Pamphilia trusts in her soul in order to be self-sufficient. She prioritises self-assurance over physical protection. However, Leandrus tries to persuade her: "'yet your safety might bee more,' said hee, 'if joynd with one, who might defend you upon all occasions, both with his love and strength, while these dull walls can only incompage you'" (1:213). Ironically enough, the narrator makes Leandrus foreground the female perspective because both for Pamphilia and several heroines, the dull walls are, indeed, the representatives of the jealous and stagnant husbands/fathers who suffocate their wives/daughters under the pretence of protection. For this reason, Pamphilia does not accept the proposal because she does not accede to the enslavement it would bring given that she is in love with someone else and she believes in her inner strength to protect herself in case of danger. Pamphilia thus establishes her agency. What is more, she reinforces it when she cunningly postpones the final decision. She manipulates the patriarchal formation and appropriates the conventional code of conduct:

I cannot but thanke you for your princely offer; but it must bee my fathers liking, with the consent of my nearest and dearest friends that can set any other Crowne on my head, then that which my people have already settled there; and the consent of so great a people, and so loving to me, must not be neglected; what vertues are in me, shall appeare through the obedience I owe, and will pay to his Majesty, and the rest: therefore I am altogether unable to give you satisfaction any further then this. (1:214)

Pamphilia exploits the custom of arranged marriage in which the father is the sole decision maker. She seems to obey the patriarchal prescription when she directs

Leandrus to ask the father's consent but she employs a clever manoeuvre to delay the decision. Even though the act ostensibly lessens her agency, it works for her interest in that when she declines the proposal once more in front of her father, she strengthens her autonomous stature considering that the father is higher than a suitor in the patriarchal rank. The father's attitude is worthy of attention:

After dinner the King call'd his daughter Pamphilia to him, telling her what an earnest suiter Leandrus was to him for his consent to have her in marriage, which he liked very well of, considering his worth, and the fitnessse of his estate, alleaging all the reasons that a wise and carefull father could make unto himself, or perswade with, to a beloved daughter. (1:262)

His attitude is not coercive but he wisely considers the good qualities Leandrus has. Instead of compelling Pamphilia to an unwanted marriage, he counsels her.⁸⁰ He assures of her agency and freedom of choice when he states "he would not force her to any thing against her mind" (1:263). The relationship is not based on the hierarchical one of the dutiful daughter and the authoritative father but on the exchange of opinions and mutual understanding. The father figure is distinctive of the age and their dialogue represents a new practice which flourishes between the father and the daughter. Thereby, *Urania* does not only criticise the tyrannical patriarchs but offers a better model to follow. Pamphilia neglects his counsel too:

That all those things his Majesty had said, she confessed to be true, and that he was worthy of the greatest fortune the world had in a wife: but his Majestie had once married her before, which was to the Kingdom of Pamphilia, from which Husband shee could not be divorced, nor ever would have other, if it might please him to give her leave to enjoy that happinesse; and besides, besought his permission, "for my Lord," said shee, "my people looke for me, and I must needs be with them." (1:262)

Pamphilia declines Leandrus' proposal also in front of her father when she states she has already been married to her state, which fortifies her authoritative position. She alludes to Queen Elizabeth I as an emblem of the impregnability of individual will. What is more, the narrative establishes an intergenerational bond with Queen Elizabeth I who, in her speech "The Second Version of the Speech

⁸⁰ Likewise, when Rodomandro asks his consent, he states it is valid only if Pamphilia accepts the proposal: "The King . . . gave his consent, butt thus, if she liked; other ways his consent (beeing but to her owne content) must stand fruitles . . . since without her liking hee would nott have had her to wronge her self, contrary to her affection, to bee forced, since force can never bee companionated with love" (2:270). The Lady of Robollo's father is also an affectionate father who does not force her into an unwanted choice although it is his last wish to see her daughter married: "mmy father . . . onely asked mee if I liked of itt, hee would never constraine mee" (2:150).

Concerning the *Queene's Marriage*," rehearses the similar idea: "Yea, to satisfie you, I have already joyned my selfe in Marriage to an Husband, namely, the King of England. And behold which I marvell ye have forgotten, the Pledge of this my Wedlock and Marriage with my Kingdom" (117). She privileges her responsibility for the state and the people over her marital concerns. Pamphilia employs the same strategy in order to ensure independence. The narrative builds Pamphilia after Queen Elizabeth I and justifies her agency. By fashioning an identity who acts as a "speaking subject in relation to Elizabeth's feminisation of the monarch's position" (Miller, *Changing* 113) Pamphilia also challenges James I who applies the same metaphor in his "Speech of 1603" which reads "I am the Husband, and all the whole Isle is my lawfull Wife; I am the head, and it is my Body" (272). Through allusions to actual figures, the romance establishes Pamphilia's agency and ensures dissidence against the seventeenth century socio-political culture. The Leandrus episode and the incidents that follow are important in several aspects. The father-daughter relationship dissents from the traditional structure and the King of Morea represents a solution to the tyrannical parents who disrespect filial choice. Both the father and the daughter reject blind obedience to the patriarchal prescriptions and evaluate the situation individually based on healthy communication. Pamphilia resists the patriarchal custom of arranged marriage and shows that wifehood does not define ideal womanhood. Thus, she exerts her will to define her identity outside the institution of marriage. The clever insertion of a similar version of Queen Elizabeth I's speech to the narrative legitimates Pamphilia's queenship. The episode suggests that so long as the individuals resist willingly participating in reinforcing the dominant culture, there is always room for dissidence and emergent cultural practices.

The conundrum as to Queen Elizabeth I's position who is supposed to be subordinate to men as a woman but who demands their submission as a monarch helps Wroth create Pamphilia to question the normative social order. Her queenship provides escape from marriage and even gives her a chance to rule. It is observable that Pamphilia resembles Queen Elizabeth I as both are powerful monarchs and skilful poets. In this sense, *Urania* touches upon the debate on the legitimacy of the female rule. That James I was a renowned misogynist is already known but the dispute over gynaecocracy and if women could be capable rulers went as early as the Queen's accession.

John Knox (1513-1572) published his pamphlet *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* in 1558. It was an obvious disavowal of female rule:

To promote a woman to bear rule, superiority, dominion, or empire above any realm, nation, or city is repugnant to nature; contumely to God, a thing most contrarious to his revealed will and approved ordinance, and finally, it is the subversion of good order, of all equity and justice. (Orlin 132)

Knox regarded female rule a deviation from the law of Nature and he underscored the cultural fear as to the feminisation of men under a female monarch.⁸¹ The accession was also against the patriarchal social order of the time but, since Elizabeth was the sole heir to the throne, his attack could not prevent her accession. On the other hand, John Aylmer, in his direct response to John Knox in 1559 in the anonymously-published treatise *An Harbour for Faithful and True Subjects against the Late-Blown Blast Concerning the Government of Women* asserted that female rule is not against nature and God:

We see by many examples, that by the wholle consent of nations, by the ordinaunce of God, and order of lawe, wemen have reigned and those not fewe, and as it was thoughte not againste nature: therefore it canne not bee saide, that by a generall disposition of nature, it hath bene, and is denyed them to rule. (qtd. in Roberts, "Radigund" 188)

According to Aylmer, who associated the presence of several female rulers in history with their capability to successfully govern their subjects, female rule was not against God's natural order. Interestingly enough, when Queen Elizabeth I in her famous speech in 1588 "To the Troops at Tilbury" divided her body politic from body natural, she alluded to the debate and, instead of embracing her femininity, she reinforced the cultural stereotype which presupposes female weakness and incompetence to rule.⁸² The repercussions as to the sanctity of female rule continued up to Wroth's time. She made use of the controversial issue to scrutinise

⁸¹ "I am assuredly persuaded, I say, that such a sight should so astonish them that they should judge the whole world to be transformed into Amazons, and that such a metamorphosis and change was made of all the men of that country . . . or at least that albeit the outward form of men remained, yet should they judge that their hearts were changed from the wisdom, understanding, and courage of men to the foolish fondness and cowardice of women" (Orlin 134).

⁸² "I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king -and of a King of England too" (96). Queen Elizabeth I renders herself an exceptional woman. She does not upset the patriarchal system.

what would happen once a female ascended the throne. Wroth rejects that female rule is against nature or incompatible with the social order. Pamphilia is a legitimate monarch who inherits the kingdom from her uncle: "Goe I must with mine Uncle, to be seene to the Pamphilians, and acknowledged their Princesse . . . He long since chose me, and to that end gave mee that name" (1:145). That she is a rightful heir is sanctified by her uncle as early as her birth when she is named after her native land. More importantly, even though she follows Queen Elizabeth I, Pamphilia transcends her example because the former denies romantic relationship and adopts a masculine spirit to reign mightily while Pamphilia integrates her public and private self. Her *feminine* spirit does not hinder her successful queenship. Even when she suffers for Amphilanthus, she does not abandon her public duties. In other words, while Pamphilia's identification with the late Queen establishes her agency in the first place, she does not simply imitate her. Her uniqueness stems from her ability to combine her public and private roles; she does not repress her biological sex but rules *as a woman* together with *woman-like* complaints in private. In other words, Pamphilia does not disregard her so-called imperfect *body natural* in favour of the masculinised *body politic*. The incident below also contributes to her agency as it highlights her aptitude to dominate events and people. When Urania, Parselius and Steriamus wander around the Island of Cyprus, they enter the Throne of Love, an enchanted palace which tests people in terms of their constancy and loyalty in love. The palace seems to follow the stereotypical gender ascriptions as each of its pillars represents the "lively Image of *brave*, and *mighty* men, and *sweet* and *delicate* Ladies, such as had been conquer'd by loves power" (1:47-48) [emphasis added]. The respective adjectives overlap with the traditional understanding of gender roles as men are qualified as *brave* and *mighty* while woman are *sweet* and *delicate*. On the other hand, that it is a "magical work . . . hung in the ayre" (1:48) implicates the artificial construction of these gender conventions which do not predicate on biological premises but the product of patriarchal discourse. Pamphilia shatters the gender structure when she reaches the site as a brave queen to save the captives. The episode reinforces her agency as an able queen and a suffering lover whose integrated bodies help her overcome the hardship.

In a similar episode, Pamphilia does not hesitate to seek adventure. Upon learning that Amphilanthus has lost his company and martial equipment, she moves quickly to help him. Two ladies and ten knights accompany her during the quest (1:575).

She initially feels desperate when she discovers Amphilanthus' armour and horse torn apart and in blood (1:581) and, as soon as she is portrayed as a helpless woman agonising over his death, "a Knight in gilt armour" appears to soothe the "miserable" and "poore Ladies" (1:582). While the scene alludes to the traditional *mise-en-scene* in which the damsel-in-distress expects to be saved by the valiant knight, the appearance of the knight indeed serves to reinforce Pamphilia's agency because she leaves him behind and enters the Hell of Deceit fearlessly: "Pamphilia adventured, and pulling hard at a ring of iron which appeared, opened the great stone, when a doore shewed entrance" (1:583). She does not expect help but risks her life to save him. These incidents focus on female heroism and become the means to assert her determination for individual action as a queen and a lover.

Pamphilia refuses Leandrus' proposal because of Amphilanthus who renders her "a patterne of Constancy" (1:28). Pamphilia's private self proves her agency within the dominant culture because her devotion to Amphilanthus enables her to express suffering and desire freely. Among many passages in which Pamphilia registers the private experience, the one below is expressive of her inner struggle:

"Alas," would she say (weeping to herself), "what have I deserved to be thus tyrannically tortured by love? And in his most violent course, to whom I have ever been a most true servant? . . . O love, look but on me, my heart is thy prey, my self thy slave, then take some pity on me."
(1:62)

Pamphilia articulates how she feels over Amphilanthus' unrequited love. In the dialogue between Leandrus, he criticises Pamphilia but it is understood that it is owing to the "soveraigne of [her] selfe by Judgement" (1:214) that she rejects him and persists in her affection for Amphilanthus. In this sense, Pamphilia's constant love serves as a resistance mechanism to ensure self-assertion and her personification of love as a tyrant evinces her will to command herself. Interestingly enough, her inner subjection to tyrannical love proves her agency in the public sphere. As Quilligan states, her willing subjection to love as an "act of willful self-definition" (273) defines Pamphilia's existence. During a conversation with Urania, she regards loyalty to Amphilanthus the determiner of her identity:

Thus you see it is truth, and such truth as only shall have end by my miserable dayes conclusion. To leave him for being false, would shew my love was not for his sake, but mine owne . . . I loved him for himselfe, and would have loved him had hee not loved mee, and will love though he dispise me; this is true love. (1:470)

She defends that true love is not contingent upon how the beloved behaves but it nourishes from an inner force. She does not define who she is according to a male figure but it is her "conscious choice emanating from her own nature" (Lewalski, *Writing* 273) that constitutes her unique identity. Pamphilia commands her own choice and this "self-chosen constancy . . . to a lover not a husband" (Lewalski, "Writing" 812) defines her as an autonomous subject. In the same vein, when the narrator states "though the sight which she desired, was hid from her, she might yet by the light of her imaginations (as in a picture) behold, and make those lights serve in his absence" (1:90) she focuses on her power to immortalise Love in verse instead of placing Amphilanthus to a divine status. Pamphilia's claim to agency stems from her own feelings rather than Amphilanthus' qualities. She does not reverse the Petrarchan tradition by silencing the male object. She totally erases its masculine constituent and foregrounds the personal female experience instead. Her devotion to Amphilanthus also serves as a counter-assertion against the accusation Swetnam puts forth that women are inconstant and unreliable.⁸³ Pamphilia who "seldome make any but Sonnets" (1:460) does not act as the passive recipient of male desire but her love constructs her identity as a skilled artist who can externalise her thought in verse. Writing -as the only means she could heal love melancholy- gives her the chance to abandon her passive stance the silent lady in the Petrarchan tradition suffers from. Pamphilia actively expresses her anguish by which she becomes visible. She does not transgress the maxim of chaste-silent-obedient in appearance but finds the means to convey her feelings. She engraves onto the bark of a tree when she does not have other means to voice her desire: "Since I find no redresse, I will make others in part taste my paine, and make them dumbe partakers of my griefe" (1:92). Through non-verbal communication, she urges others to witness her woe. Carving is an apt metaphor to materialise it:

⁸³ "Again in their love a woman is compared to a pumice stone, for which way soever you turn a pumice stone, it is full of holes; even so are women's hearts, for if love steal in at one hole it steppeth out at another . . . They are also compared unto a painted ship, which seemeth fair outwardly and yet nothing but ballast with her" (3). Wroth does not only make Pamphilia an embodiment of constancy but she inserts several sentences that emphasise male inconstancy: Limena contends the story of Alena and Lincus in which the former learns that "mens words are only breath, their oathes wilde, and vowes water" (1:228); Musalina states "the kindest . . . valiantest . . . and the best men, will, and must change, not that he, it may bee, doth it purposely, but tis their naturall infirmitie, and cannot be helped" (1:440); Pamphilia reads in a romance that although women are thought to be disloyal, men are more fond of infidelity because "it was necessary for him to exceede a woman in all things, so much as inconstancie was found fit for him to excell her in" (1:317).

Beare part with me most straight and pleasant Tree,
 And imitate the Torments of my smart
 Which cruell Love doth send into my heart,
 Keepe in thy skin this testament of me:

 Love sencelesse, neither good nor mercy knowes
 Pitiles I doe wound thee, while that I
 Unpitied, and unthought on, wounded crie:
 Then out-live me, and testifie my woes. (1:92-93)

Even though Pamphilia seems to internalise the patriarchal discourse because she does not want to share her verse with anyone, she violates the feminine conduct now that she writes secular poetry. What is more, she removes the female from the object position because the narrative focuses on Pamphilia's choice on love together with her desires and frustrations. True it is that she does not immediately intend her verse for public consumption but it concretises Pamphilia's agency as an articulate woman. She carves a cipher onto an oak tree to further her aim: "then tooke she a knife, and in the rine of an Oake insculped a sypher, which contained the letters, or rather the Anagram of his name shee most and only lov'd" (1:325). Pamphilia does not want to publicise her feelings in appearance but when the Queen of Naples, Limena and Perissus discover "many knots, and names ingraven up on the trees" (1:490) during a walk, she fulfils her subtle intention. Much as the group does not acknowledge the engraver, Pamphilia's veiled attempt to make her private feelings public asserts her agency. Supposing that the engraving on the tree symbolises Pamphilia, the onlookers become the audience and Pamphilia achieves to figure out a solution within the context that denies female authorship. Pamphilia's desire to gain public acknowledgement -though an anonymous one- illustrates her will to be independent of patriarchal restrictions and her act of writing with a phallic tool validates her position as the arbiter of love relationship. In doing so, she challenges the prescription that women should not produce love lyrics or that the maids should be seen but not heard. Contrariwise, Pamphilia is not seen but heard and establishes her subject position. She seems to demonstrate dutiful obedience to the patriarchal code of conduct described as a woman "wholly excellent" (1:61) and "who weares the crowne of all vertues" (1:214) but the act of carving for self-expression stands out as an indicator of her agency. Nonetheless, one may suspect that Pamphilia does not publicise her work as she is under the influence of patriarchal teachings but the main reason behind her secrecy is the invaluableness of her love. What she feels is so precious that she

does not want to degrade it: "shall I turne blabb? No Echo, excuse me, my love and choyce more precious . . . as none but we doe truly love, so none but our owne hearts shall know we love" (1:318). In other words, Wroth inserts the anonymous acknowledgement scene in order to criticise the social convention; what Pamphilia states and how she behaves do not conflict with each other.

The emphasis on her virtue also shatters the misogynist understanding that associates non-secular writing with promiscuity. In this sense, the romance questions the validity of the patriarchal discourse. In a similar situation when "tooke [Pamphilia] the new-writ lines, and as soone almost as shee had given them life, she likewise gave them buriall" (1:63) the act functions as a critique of the teachings that forbid women to produce non-religious works or compel them to keep their production in secret unavailable to public consumption. Even though Pamphilia censors herself within the narrative, the fact that Wroth keeps the sonnet within the metanarrative level renders them both transgressive in that Pamphilia is the one to produce while Wroth is the one to reproduce. In sum, Pamphilia's act of writing renders her dissidence because the act, being "distinct from the dominant," is still "active" for underlining her challenge against the patriarchal culture and even though it is "not yet fully articulated" (126) since Pamphilia cannot express herself in public, hers is a considerably important attempt to incorporate the "relatively subordinate" (Williams, *Marxism* 124) status of female authorship in the dominant culture.

It is notable that Pamphilia produces her work either in nature or in her chamber. Since these private spaces are sheltered against patriarchal intervention, they represent her agency as well. The conduct literature confines women into domestic place; Pamphilia follows the rule and retreats into private space. While she does not deviate from the prescription, she furnishes it subversively and creates a feminised space helpful for self-expression: in her room, she "taking a little Cabinet with her, wherein she had many papers, and setting a light by her, began to reade them, but few of them pleasing her, she took pen and paper, and being excellent in writing, writ these verses" (1:62). The private chamber separates her from the impositions of the dominant culture. It empowers her agency as a woman and as a poet since she can construct/reveal her identity without patriarchal interference. It becomes a site of dissidence in which she abandons her patriarchal roles. Isolation from the society invigorates her assertion against patriarchal control. Interestingly

enough, when Rodomandro proposes, she appears surrounded by her books and papers: "then hee went to her whom he found alone, onely boockes about her, which she ever extreemly loved and she writing" (2:270). Her private studies separate Pamphilia from the patriarchal culture but Rodomandro -who embodies it- intervenes to mold her into a socially assigned role. However, it is remarkable that even though he persuades her to marriage, he offers an ideal union which counts on respect and liberty. Rodomandro, remindful of Pamphilia's father who does not blindly stick to patriarchal rules, removes the patriarchal dictum that silences women in marriage: "nor seeke I soverainitie over love, as that way to master, butt to bee a meanes for mee, poore mee, to bee accepted and received by you" (2:271). Since Pamphilia thinks that marriage would restrict her agency, she rejects the proposal: "a booke and solitarines being the onely companions I desire in thes my unfortunate days" (2:271). Rodomandro assures her privacy, though:

Love your booke, butt love mee soe farr as that I may hold itt to you that while you peruse that, I may Joye in beeholding you and som times gaine a looke from you if but to chide mee for soe carelessly performing my office . . . Bee solitarie, yet favour mee so much as that I may butt attend you . . . I will keepe att what distance you please, butt still in your sight, els how shall I serve you? (2:272)

Rodomandro provides the secure space within the matrimonial bond. He represents a form of marriage ahead of his time based on mutual understanding and support in which the husband does not force the wife to obedience but supports the freedom for her inner quest. Wroth, who criticises the custom of arranged marriages through several stories, presents an ideal marriage based on the union between two equal people. Greenblatt states that "the choice [is] among possibilities whose range [is] strictly delineated by the social and ideological system in force" (*Self-Fashioning* 256) and Pamphilia "against her owne minde" (2:274) soon accepts his proposal. On the other hand, the wedding dress becomes emblematic of mourning. She does not wear a white gown that stands for purity and loyalty but chooses a black one. She exploits her brother's death as an excuse to convey her true feelings:

"For how can I Joye, having lost my deerest brother," sayd shee, "and truest friend. Why showld I bee triumphant, when hee is nott?" With those words, her eyes hapened (itt may bee) by chance, butt I thinke rather trully ment, on Amphilanthus, who blusht, then wept bitterly, turning him self to a window close by, as desiring non should bee wittness of his loss and shame. (2:275)

Her furtive glance at Amphilanthus and the colour of the wedding gown challenge the sanctity of the institution of marriage as each one implies Pamphilia's incessant love for Amphilanthus. *Urania*, in this sense, deprecates any marriage so long as it is not the result of a reciprocal affection and, for the same reason, "extramarital desires provoke minimal condemnation" (Cavanagh, "Prisoners" 95). Pamphilia remains constant to Amphilanthus but she cannot escape the patriarchal convention. Fortunately, the marriage represents an ideal male-female relationship which does not depend on hierarchy but equality as "youke fellows, noe superior, nor commanding power but in love betweene united harts" (2:381). Their marriage becomes an element of emergent culture as it is based mutuality. In spite of her new social status, Pamphilia proves her agency because she remains loyal to her self-chosen love; she continues her reading and writing activities to express herself; she does not fall under the hegemony of her father; she postpones marriage as much as possible; when she marries, she does not get involved in the marriage market but selects her partner individually; she challenges the institutional structure of marriage based on the inequality of sexes; and, although her association with Queen Elizabeth I immediately empowers her, the combination of two roles as a woman passionately in love and as a responsible female monarch renders her more potent a woman than her predecessor. Pamphilia always remains a "subject to her self" (Masten 78) whose several roles secure her agency and independence.

The fact that Wroth situates her heroines close to nature also contributes to their agency and dissidence. In *Urania*, nature is a *locus amoenus* because it does not contain any social institution and the oppression it imposes nor is it contaminated by patriarchal discourse. The feminised space and the congregation of women pose dissidence because they find the chance to reinforce solidarity and boost productivity. Their coming together "triggers the male heterosexual anxiety that women have a secret, intimate area closed to men" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 73) because the isolated space denies access to them. Once men cannot penetrate into the feminised space to validate their dominance, women gain the upper hand in the hierarchical power relationship. In other words, the feminine territory disturbs the patriarchal cultural ethos built upon masculine dominance. The manless setting foregrounds the autonomous presence of women.⁸⁴ Pamphilia, for

⁸⁴ Leandrus proposes to Pamphilia in a garden literally and figuratively threatening agency.

instance, while walking in the forest with her maids, "commands all the men to stay [behind], shee and her Ladyes only went to [Alarina] (1:216) upon which the latter starts to tell her story. She does not let her male servants enter the feminine space and offers Alarina her friendship in order to heal her suffering. In a social context in which she should not publicise her feelings, Pamphilia takes shelter⁸⁵ in the woods too. The natural imagery helps Pamphilia convey her innermost feelings through a sonnet. In other words, nature provides comfort the society denies. The feminised setting also justifies female writing as a fruitful occupation for other women. Pamphilia composes sonnets in order to keep her "disorderly passions" (1:92)⁸⁶ under control; Bellamira emphasises the refining effect of writing that she creates when she is alone;⁸⁷ *The Cyprian Lady*⁸⁸ focuses on the rejuvenating effect of nature:

I went one day to waulke into the sweete meades, and woods ajoining to them, carrying with mee a booke in my pockett to recreate my spiritts with when I pleased . . . and a bowe with Arrows, which I threw att my back for my defence. Thus I proceeded in my way, when on a suddaine I was surprisid with millions of phantisies and wandering thoughts. Soe as I hastened into a delicate wood . . . and layd mee downe under a faire oake, when thes Verces, to choke up the other phantisies, and give mee a little scope of expression, came into my minde. (2:411)

The aforesaid isolated places such as gardens or chambers recuperate the oppression women suffer from. Wroth tries to ensure that there is no anomaly in women's being on their own or travelling without male companion because they

⁸⁵ Contrarily, men find the means to soothe their lovesickness by participating in martial and public deeds. Amphilanthus advises Steriamus (who is in love with Pamphilia) to go on adventures in Albania stating "the rest of the World hath need of such princes" (1:85).

⁸⁶ Dolorina, likewise, advises Pamphilia to write down what she feels in order to remain mentally stable: "Shee would not bee answer'd so, but urg'd her againe, hoping to take her this way something from her continuall passions, which not utter'd did weare her spirits and waste them, as rich imbroyderies will spoyle one another, if laid without papers between them, fretting each other, as her thoughts and imaginations did her rich and incomparable mind" (1:499). Dolorina likens writing to a female occupation. With the domestic allusion in which she compares the act of writing with embroidery, she underlines the importance writing ensures based on the comparison of "rich imbroyderies" with a "rich and incomparable mind." Just as the embroideries will be ruined unless a paper is laid between them, in order to control ever-growing passions, a paper is needed to write down to keep them under control and prevent their fall into oblivion. She appropriates a transgressive act into a feminine form in order to emphasise the healing side of writing.

⁸⁷ "Thus passed I part of the night . . . putting my thoughts in some kind of measure, which else were measureless" (1:386-87). She writes "under a great Quince tree" (1:391).

⁸⁸ Her reading evolves into a fruitful process of writing in the pastoral setting.

are capable of protecting themselves. The feminised space not only ensures individual production but also serves as a safe haven where women come together and share sufferings in private. It becomes a sheltered space for female solidarity and conservation. In this sense, even though courts, battlefields and enchanted palaces are present as typical romance settings in *Urania* too, the natural setting is functional for foregrounding female experience as evidenced from the first scene in which the audience encounters Urania in a pastoral environment and heroines exchange their opinion on several issues. Bowerbank suggests that such a context "provides a textual shelter where women not only break the silence . . . in a patriarchal society, but also devise a collective process of storytelling and listening" (49). Wroth valorizes female friendship over the battles that separate men from each other whereas dialogue among women has an energising power: "for never was ther greater, nor Constanter love beetweene woemen . . . as while the warrs might bee cruell, and curst, yet they might in sweet conversation injoyne one the other" (2:109). The feminine space turns out to be an emergent context that focuses on female self-expression. It gives voice to the formerly silenced female interaction: for example, Veralinda counsels Pamphilia to abandon blind subservience to Amphilanthus but "bee the Empress of the world, comaunding the Empire of your owne minde" (2:40) and Alarina advises the same, "can thy great spirit permit thee to be bound . . . scorne such servilitie . . . never let so meane a thing ore-rule thy greatest power . . . command like thy self . . . Shall blindnes master thee, and guide thee?" (1:225) in an isolated feminine setting. Veralinda and Alarina believe women should not be defined in terms of their relationship with men but in terms of their individual traits and emphasise female independence.

The powerful bond between Pamphilia and her aunt the Queen of Naples also flourishes in the feminine space. In spite of the fact that Edward Denny blames Wroth for not following the path Mary Sidney Herbert exemplifies, she models the Queen of Naples after her aunt in *Urania*. Celebrated for her literary skills and excellent personality who is "perfect in Poetry, and all other Princely virtues as any woman that ever liv'd" (1:371) the Queen is the "true secretary of [Pamphilia's] thoughts" (2:277) and her "most honord friend" (1:363) who represents the female camaraderie women provide for each other. In their solitary walks "filled with store of wit" (1:366) Pamphilia and the Queen of Naples find an opportunity to exchange personal opinion. Their kinship echoes in the relationship between Candiana and Pamphilia who substitutes the Queen of Naples in the next

generation.⁸⁹ As the examples above evince, the feminine space contributes to female empowerment because women are given the chance to voice their personal opinion, experiences or sufferings on various topics such as love, marriage and patriarchal control. Wroth does not employ the "heroine/confidante pattern" (Miller, "Not" 125) that hierarchises women but situates them on the premise of equality and friendship.⁹⁰ None dominates each other but women advise one another based on their personal experiences. This "womanspace" (Waller, "Sidney" 39) creates an independent female culture in which women comfort each other. Contrary to the oppressive father image, the feminine space represents the comforting effect of motherhood. The heroines such as Urania, Melasinda, Bellamira, Veralinda, Alarina, Pamphilia, Dolorina, Silviana, Fancy and the Queen of Naples become surrogate mothers for each other. Together with the aforesaid heroines, the allusions to mythological figures such as Diana, Urania and Arachne and Lady Mary Wroth as mothering *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, the romance becomes a celebration of female solidarity. Likewise, when Pamphilia starts to read a romance in "a delicate thicke wood" that mentions "the affection of a Lady to a brave Gentleman" (1:317) *Urania* and the romance within the narrative not only foreground its pedagogical value as it warns against blind dependence on patriarchal prescriptions and challenges the conduct manuals that forbid romance reading but there also occurs an alliance among coterie of women whose experiences nourish each other once Wroth's audience witnesses Pamphilia's experience who witnesses her own experience. The feminised space in *Urania* is vital because Sinfield believes that it is only when women come together can they manage to overwhelm the "superior plausibility" the dominant ideological formation strives to "substantiate" and thereby create feminine consciousness. The female interaction, the exchange of ideas and experiences and female solidarity would enable women to "produce a dissident perspective" (*Faultlines* 38) and to flourish female discourse against the dominant ideological system which creates patriarchal plausibility recruiting women to remain in their subordinate position.

⁸⁹ When counselling and helping Candiana, Pamphilia is reassuring: "what you please to aske of mee, will I truly parforme, you beeing my deerest neece" (2:358).

⁹⁰ The choice of the title also indicates the importance of female friendship: Susan Herbert (1587-1629) the Countess of Montgomery, who is one of Wroth's best friends, is commemorated with the title (Miller "Engendering" 160).

To conclude, even though Wroth cannot force a considerable shift in the patriarchal system, considering the oppressive patriarchal context in which she produces *Urania*, the work proves dissident within the framework of Cultural Materialism. Wroth cannot subvert the institutions of the patriarchal order but she creates an emergent voice when she negotiates with the dominant culture, poses female voice and questions the validity of masculine discourse. Her romance embodies dissidence as "refusal of an aspect of the dominant" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 49) and she achieves a *structure of feeling* because her production is antagonistic to the dominant culture. In other words, the romance "exerts palpable pressure" against the patriarchal order and challenges its "formally held and systematic beliefs" (Williams, *Marxism* 132) even though it cannot subvert the dominant culture. Wroth constructs a critique of patriarchal practices but she does not argue for the abolition of the institution of marriage. Instead, she foregrounds female expression, reflects the tension women undergo as to their private self and public duty and challenges the gendered system that assigns women to subordinate roles. She responds to the cultural constraints through portrayal of heroines uncircumscribed by their social milieu. The stories the heroines experience grant them agency and, instead of focusing on female victimisation, they eventuate in female self-assertion. The heroines end up triumphant when they unite with their beloved; when they completely object to arranged marriage; when they endure physical and psychological torture; when they balance inner turmoil with public pressure; when they follow their desire once married; or when they never get married. Although independence from patriarchal interference becomes impossible at times, the heroines still manage to better their condition within the present order. Wroth's heroines are not defiant enough to pursue sexual desire but female heroism and the will to self-determination stand for the resolution to be the agents of their acts. The heroines dissent from the maxim of chaste-silent-obedient and refashion themselves against the seventeenth century parameters. These articulate subjects question the stereotypical understanding of femininity and forge idiosyncratic identities. Thus, the heroines challenge the hierarchical patriarchal culture and create gender confusion that threatens the social order. The bond among heroines defies the patriarchal ethos of dominant culture and the substitution of the knightly adventures with female experience enables the establishment of independent female existence. In a social context in which the acceptable female behaviour extends as far as the patriarchal figures approve,

Wroth saves women from the subordinate and silent position they are compelled to occupy. *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania* becomes a "site of struggle" (Dollimore, *Radical* li) in which the marginalised women of the patriarchal seventeenth century culture become the protagonists.

3.2. Anna Weamys & *A Continuation of Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia*

After Mary Wroth's scandalous publication of her work and the accusations it brought, female romance fiction lapsed into silence. One would never know if the negative attitude against Wroth's romance thus discouraged women to produce within the genre but it took three decades for another woman to write secular fiction while there was a substantial increase in the religious writing during the Civil War (Salzman 305).⁹¹ Anna Weamys' sole literary output was not a religious one but she chose to complete Sir Philip Sidney's unfinished romance *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*. Weamys' 1651 work *A Continuation of Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia*, despite its recent publication, was "an important landmark in the history of women's writing" (Travitsky 253) since it was "the second piece of original prose romance" (Hager 419) written by an English woman.

There is very little information extant on Anna Weamys and what is known of her is based on the prefatory material of her publication and the research of his modern editor Patrick Colborn Cullen, one of the very few scholars interested in Weamys' work. The title page demonstrates the author to be "a young Gentlewoman, Mrs. A. W." (107) and, in its second edition in 1690, her name was recorded as Anna Weamys by Edward Arber in *The Term Catalogues* (xvii). Weamys' father is thought to be Dr. Lodowick Weamys who was a Doctor of Divinity in the Church of England (Cullen, Introduction xviii). Contrary to Mary Wroth and Mary Sidney who built their careers upon powerful Sidney heritage, Weamys was only a churchman's daughter who employed Sir Philip's romance as a catalyst for her own work and who had "the chutzpah . . . to try her hand at writing a continuation to one of the best-known fictional works of the seventeenth

⁹¹ Still, women who wrote for publication constituted less than one per cent of the texts published between the years 1649-1688 (Hobby 6).

century" (Ziegler 231). Weamys must have been around twenty years old and unmarried when she wrote *A Continuation* as evidenced by the frontispiece and one of the prefatory poems which describes her as a young maid. Weamys' biography and the literary reactions to *Arcadia* in terms of women reading the work render Anna Weamys a dissident figure who does not comply with the patriarchal expectations of the seventeenth century. For example, Thomas Powell condemns women who read *Arcadia*:

In stead of Song and Musicke, let them learne Cookery and Laundrie. And in stead of reading *Sir Philip Sidneys Arcadia*, let them read the grounds of good huswifery. I like not a female Poetresse at any hand. Let greater personages glory in their skill in musicke, the posture of their bodies, their knowledge in languages, the greatnesse, and freedome of their spirits: and their arts in arreigning of mens affections, at their flattering faces. This is not the way to breed a private Gentlemans Daughter. (qtd. in Hackett, *Women* 106)

Powell was afraid that *Arcadia* would incite the maids, who would become "Poetresse" at home, to create their own stories under the influence of romance and reading romances would breed aspiration for class transgression. His fear comes true as Weamys does not obey what Powell dictates: she reads *Arcadia* and employs a servant figure who fantasises class transgression. In the same year when Powell thus reprimands romance-reading-ladies, Wye Saltonstall (1602-1640) in *Picturæ Loquentes* (1631) warns against the tempting power of *Arcadia* on maidens who are not acquainted with love: "she reades now loves historyes as *Amadis de Gaule* and the *Arcadia*, & in them courts the shaddow of love till she know the substance" (qtd. in Hackett, *Women* 107). He advises them to

shun such pleasure
As doth pervert the mind by strong temptation;
.....
Nor should they reade books which of some fond Lover,
The various fortunes and adventures show;
Nor such as natures secrets do discover,
Since still desire doth but from knowledge grow:
These bookes if that within the brest remaine,
One sparke of ill will blow't into a flame.

Another literary figure Charles Cotton (1630-1687) in one of his poems "The Surprise" also represents *Arcadia* as a text which might be sexually inciting. The narrator depicts a nymph caught reading the romance on a riverbank:

The happy *Object* of her Eye

Was *Sidney's* living *Arcady*;
Whose amorous tale had so betrai'd
Desire in this all-lovely *Maid*;
That, whilst her Cheek a blush did warm,
I read *Loves* story in her form:
And of the *Sisters* the united grace,
Pamela's vigour in *Philoclea's* Face.

In the same vein, the French bishop Jean-Pierre Camus (1584-1652) in his *Admirable Events* (1639) considers romances objects to be avoided since neither Briarius' hand nor Hercules' strength can overcome the seductive effect of those harmful books. He comments on the genre as follows:

The enterprise which I have taken in hand, is to wrestle, or rather to encounter with those frivolous books, which may all be comprised under the name of Romants, which would require the hands which fables attribute unto *Briarius*, or the strength which Poets give unto *Hercules*: the hands of Gyant to handle so many pens, and the vigour of the *Heros* to undergoe so painefull a labour . . . O why hath my pen the virtue to cure the wounds that these wicked books cause in this world! or at least, why cannot it devoure these monsters, which the writers of those aforesaid workes, mere inchanters of mindes cause to appeare in the formes of bookes? (qtd. in DeZur 106)

The aforesaid authors regard romances dangerous for young women because romance is an erotic and escapist fiction that might harm their moral wellbeing once they are attracted by wanton pleasures. In this sense, it is conjecturable that the negative appreciation of romance was still present in the second quarter of the seventeenth century even after more than ten decades Juan Luis Vives first expressed his dire discontent on the genre. Weamys, in this regard, as an unmarried young woman, proves to be a dissident figure who defies the patriarchal culture of her age when she participates in an act that she definitely should not. Much as the conclusion of the work with quintuple marriages might be suggestive of its conventionality at face value, the fact that the marriages are based on mutual consent and have Royalist overtones also render dissidence based on its definition as "challenging of authority in the early modern period, considering especially the ideologies and institutions of gender . . . state . . . and writing" (*Faultlines* x). Weamys pens *A Continuation* to assert feminine resistance and to criticise the seventeenth century political milieu. The romance succeeds in "the recovery of subordinate voices" and it is "alert to oppressive representations in terms of class and gender" (Sinfield, *Shakespeare* 25).

Despite the negative criticism of the work in terms of ideal womanhood, Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*⁹² was widely read in the seventeenth century and the incomplete *New Arcadia* welcomed several continuations. It was Sidney himself who invited and encouraged the reader to continue his romance:

But the solemnities of these marriages, with the Arcadian pastorals, full of many comical adventures happening to those rural lovers; the strange stories of Artaxia and Plexirtus, Erona and Plangus, Hellen and Amphialus, with the wonderful chances that befell them; the shepherdish loves of Menalcas with Kalodulus's daughter; the poor hopes of the poor Philisides in the pursuit of his affections; the strange continuance of Claius and Strephon's desire; lastly, the son of Pyrocles, named Pyrophilus, and Melidora, the fair daughter of Pamela by Musidorus, who even at their birth entered into admirable fortunes; may awake some other spirit to exercise his pen in that wherewith mine is already dulled. (630)

Sidney chose the male pronoun to address the future continuators but Weamys, whose romance was among the three sequels to his, was the only woman to take the challenge. Gervase Markham and Richard Beling were the other authors who continued the work and they wrote *The English Arcadia, Alluding his Beginning from Sir Philip Sidney's Ending* (1607 and 1613) and *A Sixth Book to the Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (1624) respectively (Moore 322-23). Anna Weamys made use of Sir Philip's romance as "a flexible template for her own independent fiction" (Hackett, *Women* 109) and completed the unfinished narratives of her selection from a feminine viewpoint. *A Continuation* was suggestive of her boldness and eagerness to take part in the male literary coterie. What is more, given the attitude of the dominant culture to romance and the patriarchal perception of female speech, it was venturesome of Weamys to transgress her social place and to write a continuation which would mean placing herself on the same status with Sir Philip Sidney.

Even the stationer's address to the reader at the beginning of the romance used to validate the cultural appreciation: he did not regard Weamys' romance an original work of art but promoted it as one dependent on *Arcadia*:

Marvel not to find Heroick Sidney's renowned Fansie pursued to a close by a Feminine Pen: Rather admire his propheticall spirit . . . Sir Philip's

⁹² The *New Arcadia* was published in 1590. It was composed of three books and left unfinished due to Sidney's death. The *Old Arcadia* was the version he had written earlier and it consisted of five books. The fragment of the *New Arcadia* and the last two and a half books of the *Old Arcadia* were printed together in 1593.

fantasie incarnate . . . In brief, no other than the lively Ghost of Sidney, by a happy transmigration, speaks through the organs of this inspired Minerva. (110)

The stationer deliberately underestimates Weamys' act and puts her into the passive role of a transmitter. He disavows her agency and power to produce when he thinks Weamys produces due to the infusion of Sidney's spirit. In the same vein, among the five commendatory poems that precede the romance, two of them downplay Weamys' agency. Although the poems celebrate Weamys' art in appearance, they intrinsically serve to praise Sir Philip Sidney's craftsmanship. One claims that "He breathes through female Organs, yet retains / His masculine vigour in Heroick strains" (114) and the other associates her success with the transmigration of souls instead of celebrating Weamys' power to compose:

*If a Male Soul, by Transmigration, can
Pass to a Female, and Her spirits Man,
Then sure some sparks of Sydney's soul have flown
To flames, for 'tis the course of Enthean fire
To warm by degrees, and brains to inspire. (115)*

On the other hand, despite the poems which tend to diminish Weamys' importance and agency, the fact that *she* concludes the unfinished stories gives her an authorial agency. In this sense, Sidney's text becomes a *pre-text* for Weamys' self-expression and she poses a challenge due to her will to share the former's literary authority. Her act might seem a simple continuation yet it is an important attempt to carve an autonomous space to assert her individual opinion. Weamys invests her romance with power and independent female presence. As Waller states,

The very act of writing the assertion of the significance of fantasy, the detailed planning, revision, circulation and publication . . . demonstrates a degree of agency that confounds the gender stereotypes to which she was otherwise assigned. ("Sidney" 53)

The continuation Weamys writes demonstrates her decisiveness in that it means she has *read* and *absorbed* Sidney's work and decided to complete it with her own version nourished by female commonsense. A continuation has the potential to "challenge the authority of a single author" (Simonova 8) because it helps the insertion of several incidents, dialogues, characters, psychological drives and viewpoints absent in the main text. The process blurs the distinction between passive consumption of the text and active production of another one. Thus, despite the aforementioned attempts to downplay her literary aptitude, the fact

that she produces in a transgressive genre and writes a continuation to surpass the original text prove Weamys' dissidence and agency. Spiller shares a similar idea regarding her desire to have the sole authority over her text: she "articulates her own theory of romance . . . through her refusal to create a relationship with Sidney that reiterates his relationship to his predecessors" and "Weamys thus demonstrates her own skills as a reader and writer of romance" (243). What is more, that Weamys provides a background for each of her characters at the very beginning of the work reinforces her authorial ownership:

In the time that *Basilus* King of *Arcadia*, with *Genecea* his Queen, and his two renowned daughters, the Paragons of the Wold, *Pamela* and *Philoclea*, were retired from the Court to a private lodge amongst the shepherds . . . In the time that *Pyrocles*, son and heir to the good *Evarchus* King of *Macedon*, disguised himself to an Amazonian Ladie, for the love of his Venus, the sweet *Philoclea* . . . And *Musidorus* Prince of *Thassalia* disrobed himself of his glorious raiment, and put on Shepherds weeds, for the sight of the stately *Pamela*. (117)

The introduction for each character eliminates the necessity to read *Arcadia* earlier than *A Continuation* in order to be informed about the previous events. It is a concrete evidence of Weamys' desire to be the sole possessor of her romance which can stand on its own. It both provides Weamys with agency and authorial power and renders *A Continuation* an individual production. More importantly, that Weamys focuses on minor characters who are slightly neglected by Sidney such as Helen and Amphialus, Claius, Strephon and Urania and the servant Mopsa, whose story is her invention, reinforces Weamys' (dis)position.⁹³ As Cullen also remarks, Weamys is "no mere docilely derivative women writer appending herself to a man's work" (Introduction xlili) but an able female author.

Cultural Materialism hinges upon the principle that culture is not static but includes contesting elements. For this reason, constituents of culture and the power structures within it are prone to shifts and are "constantly remade and relocated" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 46). In a given culture, the clash between the dominant and emergent cultural elements becomes "a significant site within which older and new interests could be tested and disseminated" (46). In the same vein, in the power structure between Sir Philip Sidney and Anna Weamys in which the *apprentice* author tries to overcome the *master* author, Weamys discusses the validity of what

⁹³ Sinfield likewise states that "a project for cultural materialism is to discover ways taking the opposite direction: of working with subcultures to reinforce and extend the potential of people who inhabit them" (*Faultlines* 291).

Sidney has written and disrupts his dominant position because her romance functions as a site in which she questions the taken-for-grantedness of her predecessor's ideas and disseminates her dissident thought in terms of politics and female emancipation instead. In other words, Weamys "embarrass[es] the dominant by appropriating its concepts and imagery" (Branningan 48) and thus achieves dissidence with her romance.

That Weamys wants to reach -or even surpass- Sir Philip Sidney's literary reputation is documented by Philisides' deliberate insertion into the narrative. Philisides -such as Astrophel- was one of the pseudonyms Sidney employed in his literary works (Simonova 49). While the fact that she includes him in the narrative might be "a personal tribute" (50) to Sidney, it is conjecturable that Weamys employs Philisides only to erase him so that she could reinforce her position. She murders Philisides by the end of the text: "before the Sun had fully dried it, there was found *Philisides* the despairing Shepherd dead, yet not by other practices than a deep melancholy that over-pressed his heart" (195). A superficial analysis might attribute his death to his unmarried status considering that each character is sanctioned with marriage because the only unmarried person is also killed and Philisides cannot unite with his beloved. On the other hand, that Philisides is killed to end his torment would be a naïve conclusion because he "carries an emblematic weight" (Simonova 49). The deduction that he is killed to complete his unfinished story does not make sense either because Philisides appears in the text only once. In other words, he is an inessential figure for the narrative. In this sense, his death becomes quite meaningful in that he is born to die only to elevate Weamys' authorial power because even though Weamys gets inspiration from Sir Philip Sidney to produce her work, the fact that she murders him by the end of the romance grants total authority over *A Continuation*. She evolves into an independent author from the one through whom Sidney purportedly transmigrates. Cullen also believes Philisides is a conscious inclusion within the framework of "an agonistic literary tradition" in which "the strong poet" is annihilated by "the belated one" (Introduction liv). Her romance might have been qualified as purely imitative otherwise but Philisides' disappearance by the end delivers Weamys' textual triumph. Her work becomes "a feminist act" in which she succeeds in "shortcircuiting" (Simonova 56) the Sidneian narrative. The relationship between Sidney and Weamys is representative of the "violent dialectic between the dominant and the subordinate" (Dollimore, *Radical* xxvii) and Weamys the

subordinate female author displaces him from his *dominant* position. She intervenes in the masculine discourse so as to disturb the hegemony of the dominant. In sum, in spite of its title *A Continuation of Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia*, Weamys' romance is not a simple continuation but a self-contained work in which she "re-initiates the act of writing the *Arcadia*" (Cullen, Introduction xl). Weamys realises Thomas Powell's fear when she prefers the pen to the needle and follows Tyler who encourages women to write in order to assert their own truth.

Apart from her obvious transgression of the maxim of silence, that Weamys does not make her identity public but merely inserts her initials attests to her disinterest in public acknowledgement -or to her fear of public backlash on the surface- but her emphasis on her sex and social status is indicative of her desire to resist the seventeenth century sociocultural mores in order to speak up on behalf of her silenced fellows. Within this framework, Derecho places *A Continuation* in the category of archontic literature⁹⁴ because it provides a social, cultural and political critique of the society an individual inhabits (66). Likewise, *A Continuation* deals with the subordinate culture of the seventeenth century and employs the genre as a tool of self-expression on the social and political issues of its time. According to Derecho, what Weamys does is quite notable because once women start to use the male archives in order to build their own production upon theirs, it demonstrates their free entrance to the male-authored texts without permission (66). Similarly, Weamys makes use of Sidney's text to create her own instrument of sociocultural protest. Her archontic work represents dissidence since it enables "an opportunity to highlight the inequalities of women's and men's situations in their culture by creating new versions of earlier stories and producing a contrast between the old and new tales" (68). The transgressive nature of *A Continuation* makes it "an example of early modern feminism" (68).

Cultural Materialism is based upon the presumption that culture is not monolithic. The ever-shifting position of the dominant and emergent culture owing to the incessant power struggle between them, on the other hand, helps realisation of

⁹⁴ *Archontic* is rooted in the word *archive* Derrida employs in *Archive Fever*. "By incorporating the knowledge deployed in reference to it, the archive augments itself, engrosses itself, it gains in *auctoritas*. But in the same stroke it loses the absolute and metatextual authority in might claim to have. One will never be able to objectivise it with no remainder. The archivist produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future. It expands incessantly which is called the archontic principle" (Derecho 68).

"individual wills" against the backdrop of limits against "social and individual fulfilment" (Williams, *Marxism* 87). Within this framework, Weamys' appropriation of the romance genre ensures individual achievement in terms of feminine dissidence. Weamys explores and expands on Sidney's discourse in order to express her opinion on the politics of her age, the condition of women and the patriarchal institutions. She selects certain stories from Sidney that he leaves incomplete and, through the stories, she demonstrates how female "might navigate the straits of female society in a judgmental and partisan society" (Mitchell ix). *A Continuation* functions as a space wherein Weamys foregrounds female power and agency over the conflicting socio-political discourses. In this sense, among the five commendatory poems ahead of the romance, the one thought to be written by Francis Vaughan is quite distinctive owing to its protofeminist content:

*Lay by your Needles Ladies, take the Pen,
The onely difference 'twixt you and Men.
'Tis Tyrannie to keep your Sex in aw,
And make wit suffer by a Salick Law.
Good Wine does need no Bush, pure Wit no Beard;
Since all Souls equal are, let all be heard.* (116)

The stanza indicates the social double standard that tyrannises women under the patriarchal code and it emphasises the essential equality of sexes. In an attempt to erase gender differences, it emboldens women to abandon domestic chores in order to save time for literary production. Its anti-misogynist theme defends female rights and female voice. It thereby foreshadows the dissidence the text sustains. Indeed, Weamys' dedicatory epistle immediately foregrounds female agency, solidarity and challenge against cultural constructions of femininity:

To the two unparalleld SISTERS, and *Patterns of Virtue*, The Ladie Anne Perpoint and The Ladie Grace Perpoint, *Daughters to the Right Honourable the Marquess of DORCHESTER*. IF I had not observed that the greatest humilitie, reigns in the bosoms of the Noblest Personages, I should not presume to Dedicate his most unworthie Fabrick to your Honours; especially when I consider the poorness of my endeavours . . . my ambition was not raised so high a pitch . . . until I received Commands from those that cannot be disobeyed. (109)

Weamys' dedication to two women indicates the taken-for-grantedness of the presence of female readership. She rejects the monstrosity associated with romance reading and writing Lady Mary Wroth has been accused of three decades

earlier; she thus legitimates female romance readership and authorship. In doing so, Weamys not only grants the Perpoint sisters -and female readers as a whole- a subject position but also creates a textual camaraderie among women. She simultaneously disregards the cultural dictate that debar women from reading romances. Furthermore, her agency is reinforced because the deliberate employment of the modesty topos attests to her awareness of the violation of patriarchal prescriptions. Despite the alleged insufficiency of her literary skills, once she claims to have received commands that she cannot disobey, she both dismantles/shares the responsibility for the production of a dissident work as the rhetorical excuse withdraws her to the safe zone of submission and exploits the patriarchal teaching that preaches total submission. Indeed, the modesty topos is one of the most widely used strategies the female authors employ so as to "disavow the role of the author" (Pender 1) during the medieval and the early modern ages. On the surface, it might amount to their internalisation of the patriarchal prescriptions which hinder women from speech and agency but it is a substantial textual practice female authors make use of in order to thwart any accusation of indecent behaviour. That is, it does not refer to their incompetence in literature but a "strategic self-fashioning" or an "authorial alibis" (3) which seems to undermine the female literary effort but functions as a subversive response against the dictates of patriarchal culture. Likewise, Weamys employs the rhetorical device to circumvent any attack and the dedication to female readership fundamentally increases her authorial agency. Furthermore, she qualifies her work as a fabric. *OED* defines fabric as "a product of skilled workmanship" (def. 1), "a manufactured material; a woven stuff" (def. 4) or "a building erected for purposes of manufacture" (def. 8). Likewise, Weamys resembles her romance a domestic material women embroider on; she domesticates the writing activity and the fabric metaphor subverts the tradition that restricts women within the feminine sphere against the cultural metaphors of the needle and the distaff employed to reinforce women's culturally sanctioned roles; and it implies the powerful construction of her romance that can stand upright as a result of a crafted endeavour which indirectly celebrates Weamys' literary aptitude and defies the oppressive patriarchal culture. John Taylor in his 1631 work *The Needles Excellency* preaches women silence in social and political matters of their age:

And for my countries quiet, I should like
That women kinde should use no other pike

It will increase their peace, enlarge their store,
To use their tongues lesse, and their needles more,
The needles sharpenesse, profit yields, and pleasure,
But sharpnesse of the tongue, bites out of measure.

The stanza reflects a cultural assumption regarding the suppression of female voice. Taylor does not approve of women's contemporary engagement with the political situation of the age because their petition writing to earn some social and political rights threatens male hegemony. On the other hand, "wherever there is a history of subjection to norms and truths, there is also a history of resistance" (Belsey, "Towards" 87) and, in a time when female engagement in politics is forbidden, Weamys benefits from her text as a fabric upon which she embroiders her social and political thought. She thereby "does insist on her own agency, both as a literary and as a social subject who is specifically gendered female" (DeZur 111) and *A Continuation* becomes a medium to convey her political and social opinion. Within this framework, this chapter analyses Weamys' employment of romance as a tool of political dissidence and the more personal criticism of the female oppression, the marriage market and the intersexual relationships based upon patriarchal formation together with the solutions or resistance strategies she provides.

A Continuation is interpretable as a subtle political allegory in which Weamys reflects her Royalist political view during Interregnum under the protectorate of Oliver Cromwell. In order to understand better the position of *A Continuation* and Anna Weamys, the political context she inhabits should be briefly provided because, as Dollimore states, "the mere thinking of a radical idea is not what makes it subversive" but "it is the context of its articulation" -that is, "to whom and in what circumstances" ("Materialism" 13) it is addressed- is what determines whether an idea is conformist or dissident. The seventeenth century was definitely a tumultuous period for the English monarchy. Upon James I's death in 1625 his son Charles I took the throne until his beheading in 1649. Charles I followed his predecessor regarding the monarchical rule since he was also a supporter of the absolutist regime who ardently defended the divine rights of the kings. Charles I, whose erroneous governmental strategies resulted in the alienation of the Parliament, never abandoned his royal privileges. He annulled the Parliament three times during his reign and starting from 1629 he adopted a policy of "personal rule" without the intervention of the Parliament. Apart from the absolutist one-

man-regime, he also brought out religious conflicts because in 1625 he married a Catholic woman, Queen Henrietta Maria, who resided in the Protestant England with a company of Catholic clergymen. When her entourage encouraged the conversion of some noblewomen into Catholicism within the royal court, the situation further alienated Charles' Protestant subjects from him. In the meantime, there was an increasing insistence on the political and personal rights against his strict governmental policy. The increasing decisiveness against absolutism led the congregation of the Long Parliament⁹⁵ in 1640 in order to constitute a political power against Charles I. While the Long Parliament did not have the intention to dethrone him initially, the fraction between the Parliament and Charles I got so wide as to hinder any reconciliation towards the end of 1641 that the Civil War broke out in 1642. Upon Charles I's accusation of five Parliament members for treason, the Parliament decided to gather an army to stand against the royal army with the aim of securing the rights and the presence of the Parliament which was believed to limit Charles I's dominance over the State and the Church. The Civil War lasted until the decisive defeat of the royal army at the Battle of Preston by the Parliamentarian forces commanded by Oliver Cromwell in 1648. Soon after the war, Cromwell reinforced his military power with political command once he constituted the Rump Parliament when he either imprisoned or forced to retire the members of the Long Parliament who were suspected of being Royalist sympathisers or who proposed negotiation with Charles I. Charles I was accused of treason and was sentenced to capital punishment. Upon the incident known as Pride's Purge in December 1648 and the beheading of Charles I in January 1649, Oliver Cromwell together with the Parliament members deemed the Rump Parliament the rightful administration of England and ruled over the country until the Restoration in 1660. During their time, the country became a form of republic without the monarchical sovereignty but with the ample executive, legislative and judicial rights of the Parliament. Charles I' decapitation resulted in the abolition of the monarchical rule in England (Abrams et al. 1213-26). The Interregnum lasted from 1649 to 1660 until Charles II was restored to the throne. The age was surely turbulent when the "supporters of Charles I and supporters of Parliament fought for control of the country" (Hobby 12) for ages.

⁹⁵ The Short Parliament was congregated by Charles I in order to provide financial support against the Scottish insurrection. When his order was declined by the Short Parliament, it was dissolved by him within a month (Abrams et al. 1223).

It was during the 1650s that the royalists -who were pushed to the margins of the society then- wrote religious nostalgic poems in order to commemorate the peaceful times under the royalist rule. After the second quarter of the seventeenth century, there simultaneously occurred a change in the common understanding of romance. Contrary to its decades-old association with female readership as a frivolous genre read privately for entertainment, the genre was employed to comment on the political happenings of the age. In the Caroline age that took its name from the reign of Charles I, the genre was qualified as "royal romance" (Patterson 167). Interestingly enough, despite several attacks that focused on its disconnection from the reality or the mundane affairs and its stimulating effect over emotion that allegedly blocks the faculty of reason, romance started "to be redefined as serious, as a way of perceiving history and even a means of influencing it" (168). The genre became an important medium for "addressing politics in the guise of love" (Newcomb, "Gendering" 132); it functioned as a tool to raise "political questions regarding aristocratic and royalist ideals" (Campbell 167). Regardless of the Parliamentarian or the Royalist causes, romance was regarded "to be a political form by members of both sides in the political conflict" (Smith 236). More importantly, it operated as a genre that "belonged specifically to the Royalists" (Potter 80). In other words, it turned out to be "the 'secret' signature of the Caroline court and of Interregnum royalism" (Newcomb, "Gendering" 132). The present cultural positioning of romance explicates Weamys' conscious choice of the genre⁹⁶ and *Arcadia* especially: the text was "adopted as an emblem of the Caroline court" (DeZur 107) because, according to *Eikon Basilike*,⁹⁷ immediately before his decapitation, Charles I quoted from *Arcadia* the verses similar to Pamela's to implore⁹⁸ God's mercy. Given the freshly-endowed sociocultural meaning of romance, that Weamys used to have a political agenda in

⁹⁶ Cullen also states that "what we know of this text -its production, its self-representation, its dedication, its genre, its subject- supports the hypothesis that it was the production of some sort of royalist network" (Introduction xxix).

⁹⁷ *Eikon Basilike: The Portraiture of His Sacred Majesty in His Solitudes and Sufferings* is a biographical text on Charles I which is supposed to have been written by John Gauden. It was published within ten days after his beheading.

⁹⁸ Pamela's speech in *Arcadia* is as follows: "O all-seeing light, and eternal life of all things, to whom nothing is either so great that it may resist, or so small that it is contemned: look upon my misery with Thine eye of mercy, and let Thine infinite power vouchsafe to limit out some proportion of deliverance unto me, as to Thee shall seem most convenient. Let not injury, O Lord, triumph over me, and let my faults by Thy hand be corrected, and make not mine unjust enemy the minister of Thy justice" (322).

mind while writing *A Continuation* is a sound deduction. Furthermore, apart from her political dissidence, her act was a challenge against the patriarchal cultural formation since women did not have the rights to interfere with the political issues or comment on them in the seventeenth century. The statement of the anonymous author of *The Lawes Resolution of Women's Rights* (1632) that "women have no voice in the parliament. They make no laws, consent to none, they abrogate none. All of them are understood either married or to be married . . . The common law here shaketh hand with divinity" (Aughterson 132-33) was the sum of the patriarchal political theory which was based on total submission to the rulers within the political sphere. In spite of the struggle to isolate women from the politics, they would soon find a passage to make themselves heard.

During the Protectorate, women started to write petitions to the Parliament in an attempt to voice their individual or contemporary political problems. The petitions submitted to the government officials thus became an instrument of resistance against the social injustice. An example was a petition entitled "The humble petition of divers well-affected women of the cities of London and Westminster, the Borough of Southwark, hamlets and parts adjacent. Affecters and approvers of the petition of September 11, 1648" written by Elizabeth Lilburne and a group of women in order to support the release of some Levellers⁹⁹ Cromwell had imprisoned. They asserted their presence within public:

Showeth that since we are assured of our creation in the image of God and of an interest in Christ equal unto men, as also for a proportionable share in the freedoms of this Commonwealth, we cannot but wonder and grieve that we should appear so despicable in your eyes, as to be thought unworthy to petition or represent our grievances to this honourable house. Have we not an equal interest with men of this nation in those liberties and securities, contained in the Petition of Right, and other good laws of the land? Are any of our lives, limbs, liberties or goods to be taken from us more than from men, but by the due process of law and conviction of twelve sworn men of the neighbourhood? (Aughterson 274)

Basing their argument upon equal creation of sexes by God, women positioned themselves on the same social and political status with men; they argued for similar rights such as the right to submit petitions to the government officials and to act without male supervision in law and legal transactions. In this sense, women

⁹⁹ The Levellers were the radical Parliamentarians who defended the deposition of the king and the nobles in order to strengthen the House of Commons.

claimed their right to be socially visible and to take active role in dealing with the contemporary political problems of the country they were the citizens of. The petitioning was an important step for women to claim their political rights and to assert their presence as the free citizens of England; it was also noteworthy considering that it was the result of a collective female effort. On the other hand, the appeal to gain some rights within the Parliament was an obvious trespass into the male territory and there readily came a "virulent attack on female petitioning" (Hobby 17). It was unacceptable for the patriarchal culture¹⁰⁰ to listen to women claiming political rights and therefore, they were restored to their ideal place with an immediate answer by the Parliament:

That the matter they petitioned about was of an higher concernment that they understood, that the House gave an answer to their husbands, and therefore desired them to go home, and look after their own business, and meddle with their huswifery. (qtd. in Belsey, *Subject* 182)

What is more, some authors created mock petitions in the late 1640s and 1650s. They parodied female petitioning in which the right to write petition was immediately associated with women's yearning for sex. One of the mock petitions, for instance, included women who complained of having little chances to have sexual intercourse (Hobby 18). In 1647 a petition was published to criticise women's attempt to have more rights: entitled "A Remonstrance of the Shee-Citizens of London, And of many other the free-borne Women of England, Humbly shewing their desires for the attaining of a free trade," women were accused of seeking "the sexual prowess of royalist soldiers" (18) while what they only wanted was social and political equality.

The present political context, the altered cultural appreciation of romance, the mockery of women seeking their political rights and the patriarchal insistence on female silence must have triggered Anna Weamys to contribute to the literate community of women and to employ her romance to express her political thought. At a time when the Parliamentary rule reigned over England, she benefited from her romance as an instrument of propaganda for the Royalist political order. *A Continuation* helped Weamys participate in the political discourse; her right as the reader of Sidney gave her also the right to comment on the cultural and political

¹⁰⁰ Vives also states that "in a woman, no one requires eloquence or talent or wisdom or professional skills or administration of the republic or justice or generosity; no one asks anything of her but chastity. . . In a woman, chastity is the equivalent of all virtues" (85).

state of her age. Weamys was a Royalist supporter during the Interregnum and she did not hide it as the father of the dedicatees of her romance Henry Perpoint was also a Royalist (Cullen, Introduction xxii). Given the political situation of the country, hers was a dissident act to go against the political regime and to advocate the Royalist cause. In other words, Weamys' romance functions as an emergent cultural practice because emergent culture "depends crucially on finding new forms or adaptation of forms" -such as the *royal* romance in the present case- and much as its "pre-emergence" (126) does not amount to full articulation of what is demanded, its "particular linkages [nostalgia towards the past], particular emphases [on the subordinate voice] and suppressions [of the dominant voice]" become the precursor of "deep starting-points and conclusions" [against the patriarchal tradition of marriage and in terms of the recovery of the subordinate voices] (Williams, *Marxism* 134).

The description of the Arcadian land Plangus arrives at embodies the harmonious/ideal state Weamys desires; its nostalgic depiction evokes the environment she would like to have in England:

But at last he entered into the pleasant country of *Arcadia*, which was adorned with stately woods: No cries were heard there but of the lambs, and they in sport too sounded their voices to make their playfellow lambs answer them again in imitation of the like. And the abundance of shade trees that were there, were so beautifull with the sweet melodie of birds, that any one, save love-sick *Plangus*, might think it a sufficient harmonie to draw away their delight from any other vanitie of the world. Besides, there were the Shepherds piping to their prettie Shepherdesses, whilst they chearfully sang to pleasure them again. In this sweet place, he sat himself down. (121)

The peaceful pastoral atmosphere contrasts the courtly turmoil and the political conflicts of the time England has recently experienced and, according to Weamys, it is only through the Royalist order that such peace can be restored again. She does not simply depict the ideal land but also offers the solution to provide it: Weamys believes that the peace within the state depends on the harmonious relationship of the royal couples and she builds her assertion upon the romantic example of Charles I and Henrietta Maria's marriage which renovated the English court during the Caroline age. The ascension of Charles I and Henrietta Maria to the throne considerably influenced the artistic and literary activities within the court when the fools and bawds of the former court were quickly substituted by the idealisation of the beauty of women and the harmonious heterosexual love. In

other words, the union of the divinely beautiful woman and the heroically virtuous man brought a fresh model of the ideal couple (Abrams et al. 1219) contrary to James I's derogatory attitude against women. Weamys models her ideal state upon the institution of marriage because the association of marriage, household and monarchy was an already established concept during her time. For instance, Cleaver and Dod states "a householde is as it were a little commonwealth" (qtd. in Belsey, *Subject* 143); Perkins asserts "a familie, is a naturall and simple society of certain persons, having mutuall relation one to another, under the private government of one" (Aughterson 148); Gouge remarks "good members of the a family are like to make good members of church and commonwealth" (147). Based upon the current discourse, Weamys associates the political turbulence with the discomfort within the household. Queen Henrietta Maria's personal letters reflect the extreme anguish she suffers from due to her forceful exile from England: she writes that "without you, I should not wish to remain in it an hour" (qtd. in Plowden 222) or in her 1644 letter states "I have there what I have not here, that is YOU, without whom I cannot be happy, and I think I shall never have my health till I see you again" (247). In other words, political discomfort wipes away their marital comfort. On the other hand, Elizabeth of Bohemia, Henrietta Maria's sister-in-law reckons that the social turmoil stems from Charles I who "doth nothing but by [Queen Henrietta Maria's] approbation" (212). She believes that the disruption of political/gender roles based on Henrietta Maria's command and Charles I's obedience results in political disorder. That is, Queen Henrietta Maria was regarded the reason for the alienation between Charles I and his subjects. Contrariwise, Weamys creates an alternative vision in *A Continuation* in which the royal marriage and the collective support by the court members promote political prosperity. She insists on the harmonious marriages of the royals which would affect the peace within the country in extension. Therefore, she includes for royal marriages within her narrative:

Fortune, dealing favourably, conducted [the Royals] safely and speedily to the *Arcadian* Court. Where they were received with such joy by their Consorts, and Parents especially . . . with their affectionate expressions . . . *Pyrocles* liked *Philoclea* best . . . when they were in her heavenly Angel-like companie . . . *Musidorus* avouched, his fair *Pamela* was always clad with such a Majestie . . . Then came *Plangus'* turn, who said that in his judgment, *Erona* deserved to be extolled in the highest measure . . . *Amphialus* was last, who protested there could not be a lovelier creature than *Helena* was, so adorned with gifts of Nature. (162-63)

When Weamys insists on the restorative power of the royal union, she both compensates for the long-lost happiness of Charles I and Henrietta Maria and proposes that political stability could only be achieved with personal stability among the royal people. As Newcomb also comments, "the extravagant marital closure seems to anticipate the Victorian marriage plot, but in an Interregnum context may gesture towards a fantasy of reconstituting the national status quo" ("Prose" 279). The heavenly beautiful women and their romantic involvement with their husbands ensure Royalist political strength. For this reason, the old and experienced governor Evarchus advises them marriage as soon as possible: "do not linger away the time in Courtship . . . Finish therefore the knot, that no crosses or calamities can unfinish, without further deferrings" (163). The harmonious union of the royals secures prosperity in the country and various misfortunes can be prevented so long as the powerful monarchs reign. The resolution of dynastic conflicts reiterates Weamys' commitment to the Royalist order and offers a vision of an idyllic context she imagines earlier in the text. The Amphialus and Helena episode further verifies the close relationship between the state and the household based on serene marriage that constitutes the backbone of Weamys' romance. As the narrator states, when Amphialus and Helena decide to marry, it does not only serve for their personal fulfilment but her subjects also feel mutually content: "now in the height of their superfluous complements, the news of the happy success of [their marriage] . . . such abundance of the Citie flocked to the Palace to see *Amphialus*" (146). The subjects want to know who their Queen's marriage partner is. When the couple voices their desire to get married together with the other couples in Arcadia, Clytifon thus warns that it might be "a disparagement for their Country to suffer their Princess to depart from thence . . . since the dishonour of [her] Countrey concerns [her] most; and in all reason [she] should have the most especial care to preserve it" (147). Therefore, when Helena agrees to share the happiness the news has brought with her subjects, the couple unites with the "Knights, Gentlemen, Citizens . . . the Countrey Peasants, and all sorts of Mechanicks, that with admiration pressed to gaze upon them" (148). The healthy communication between the couple reverberates throughout the subjects:

Amphialus and *Helena* concurring so well together, that nothing was commended by the one, but instantly it was highly approved of and valued by the other. Which combining of these, was a rare example for the under-workmen, they endeavouring to follow their Superiors Rule, delighting in these fellows judgements, did to the lovers joy,

unexpectedly finish their Art. (148)

As the quotation evinces, Weamys is of the opinion that once the subjects of each rank imitate the good relationship of the monarchs, they also learn to work together for the betterment of the whole nation. The country secures personal and political prosperity when the happily married governors preside over the subjects who are influenced by their example. Given the structural overlap between the state and the household, the harmonious marital union becomes a prerequisite for political progress for Weamys. Similarly, Jonathan Goldberg argues that the family in early modern England "was understood as part of the larger world, both as the smallest social unit from which the larger world was composed and as the essential link between persons" (8). The positive example of the institution of family provides consecutive benefits for the construction of an ordered society which would contribute to the political integrity. The conclusion of the romance further emphasises Weamys' political stance in which the healthy relationship among generations becomes requisite for the survival of the monarchy:

But before the solemnities were quite over, there came more Princes that had partaken of the benefit of *Musidorus* and *Pyrocles*' valour, with Presents of gratitude for their Brides, *Pamela* and *Philoclea*. Then after all Ceremonies accomplished, they retired severally to their flourishing Kingdoms of *Thessalia* and *Macedon*, and *Armenia*, with *Corrinth*, where they increased in riches, and were fruitfull in their renowned Families. And when they had sufficiently participated of the pleasures of this world, they resigned their Crowns to their lawfull Successours, and ended their days in Peace and Quietness. (196)

Upon their nuptials, the royal couples return to their respective kingdoms; they reign over their countries peacefully and they leave the throne to the next generation without bloodshed or political strife when they are too old to rule. Weamys creates a tranquil society both the royals and their subjects live in harmony with each other and in which people from all social strata are peaceful. She portrays a cultural formation that stands in stark contrast to the bloody and discordant one presiding over the England of her time.

Closely related with her political concerns, Weamys provides a model of companionate marriage through the aforementioned couples both to transform the convention of female submission in marriage into the one in which romantic involvement reigns and to fortify her Royalist propaganda considering the intricate relationship she presupposes between the state and the household. To fulfil her

aim, Weamys intends to efface the substantial influence of social and political tradition which prescribes absolute submission because "[t]radition [as an actively shaping force] is in practice the most evident expression of the dominant and hegemonic pressures and limits" (Williams, *Marxism* 115). Thus, Weamys rebels against the traditional pressures which hinder transgressive achievement either in political or personal terms. She, therefore, reinforces the evolving interest in the new model of companionate marriage of the seventeenth century which provided the individuals with relative freedom to select their future partners (Stone, *Family* 325) when love became "a common and expected ingredient" (Cressy 261) to establish the matrimonial bond. She was also influenced by the example of Charles I and Henrietta Maria who nourished the companionate marriage with the fashioning of Platonic love cult in the English court. Henrietta Maria followed Catherine de Vivonne, the Marquise de Rambouillet, who had helped refine the morals and manners of the French court and elevated the status of women in France (Stavig 36). The Queen had the same idea in mind when she started to refashion the English court. A letter James Howell wrote in 1634 expresses the new fashion as follows:

The Court affords little News at present, but that there is a Love call'd Platonick Love, which much sways there of late; it is a Love abstracted from all corporeal gross Impressions and sensual Appetite, but consists in Contemplations and Ideas in Mind, not in any carnal Fruition. This Love sets the Wits of the Town on work and they say there will be a Mask shortly of it, whereof her Majesty and her Maids of Honour will be part.
(37)

Queen Henrietta Maria struggled for the purification of the morals of the English court and marriage for love. The philosophy that flourished was based on the precepts such as "fate reigns over the couples", "beauty and goodness are equal", "beautiful women are worshipable", "true love is of divine origin", "love is an omnipotent guide to virtue" and "love allows liberty of thought and action" (Sensabaugh 109-26). The Platonic love cult exalted women as heavenly beautiful paragons of virtue. Marriage meant the harmonious union of body, spirit and mind and personal attraction become an important ingredient of a good match (Wrightson 58). Under the influence of Henrietta Maria, love became a prerequisite for the comfort and happiness marriage provided and "love itself [became] fully moralised and spiritualised . . . as the wholly human ground of a lifetime of domestic accord" (Belsey, *Subject* 207). In other words, marriage protected its

realistic appeal but it turned out to be a sacred institution in which the partners supported each other in prosperity and adversity. An anonymous piece stated that the married couple "may joyfully give due benevolence one to the other; as two musical instruments rightly fitted, do make a most pleasant and sweet harmony in a well-tuned concert" (qtd. in Parker, *Estate* 50). On the other hand, the companionate marriage and the Platonic love cult brought out public contention because there was an increasing emphasis on individualism that defies the hegemonic structure of patriarchal culture. Interestingly enough, the Puritans also believed in the divine status of marriage but their definition was based on the submission-control model. It was even arguable that "the Protestant sanctification of marriage and the demand for married love itself facilitated the subordination of wives" (Stone, *Family* 202) because affection towards husband was represented as a wife's sacred duty. In other words, the companionate marriage was thought to provide egalitarian relationship between the husband and the wife but the actual situation was a hierarchical one both in social and legal terms. The anonymous author of *The Lawes Resolution of Women's Rights* (1632) remarked as follows:

It is true, that man and wife are one person, but understand in what manner. When a small brook or little river incorporateth with Rhodanus, Humber or Thames, the poor rivulet loseth her name: it is carried and recarried with the new associate; it beareth no sway . . . I may more truly, far away, say to a married woman, her new self is her superior, her companion, her master. (qtd. in Hobby 2)

The Protestant preachers contradicted their own ideas when they insisted on companionate marriage on the one hand and argued wifely subjection on the other when there aroused an anxiety regarding the increasing individual freedom to choose spouses without parental approval. In other words, the controversial conclusion as to marriage resulted in "an insecure moment in patriarchy" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 45) and the aforesaid "site of contradiction" (Sinfield, "Power" 265) led to a critique of the patriarchal institution. Weamys, under the influence of the freshly-emerged approaches to marriage, expressed her ideal marriage which is based on the mutual affection couples. In a social milieu in which the prevalence of patriarchal strictures is observable despite little attempts to overcome it, Weamys' emphasis on companionate marriage contributes to the present marriage debate and renders her female characters free individuals who have already chosen their spouses without paternal coercion. As Hackett states, marriage was "an arena in which women -at least in fiction- [could] exercise a degree of agency"

and “achieve a kind of triumph” (*Women* 110) and Weamys fulfils her share of the task. The four royal marriages constitute a happy conclusion as a “tour de force” (Cullen, Introduction xxxviii) by which the female characters assert agency. There are various romantic scenes that describe women as heavenly beautiful and men knightly courageous but the climactic point in *A Continuation* when the beauty of each woman and their nuptials are depicted asserts Weamys’ insistence on marriage for love as follows:

When the Middle-day had almost run his course to the After-noon, the four Bride-grooms imitating one another in their Apparel, were all in gay cloth embroydered with gold, richly clad, yet not fantastick; in their left hands they held their swords, but in their right hands their Brides. First went *Musidorus* leading his fair Princess *Pamela*, whose comely behaviour and sweet sympathie, manifested her joy . . . Upon her head she bare an imperial Diadem, which agreed comparatively to her stately mind . . . And round her Neck she wore a Chain of Orient Pearl . . . Thus she guarded to the Temple with her beloved *Musidorus*; and after them *Pyrocles* and *Philoclea*, *Plangus* and his *Erona*, and *Amphialus* with his *Helena*, all in the same order as *Musidorus* and *Pamela*: then the Priest united their hands, and as their hands, so their hearts together. (164-65)

It is important that each female character is given the chance to pursue their desires and the right to select their spouses. The quadruple marriages secure political stability and grant women the agency to reach a happy conclusion. Within this framework, Weamys proposes that companionate marriage is an empowering solution both for the female characters and the state in which harmonious relationship and healthy communication would preside in each citizen.¹⁰¹ More importantly, the happy conclusion she describes definitely calls for her desire for political stability and her defence of the Royalist order. In other words, she “creates her own response to [the present situation] in a project that would easily win the approval of a royalist audience” (192) but against the Interregnum government. *A Continuation* becomes an effective tool to voice her Royalist opinion and “a portrait of Nirvana for a royalist coterie audience” (Campbell 195). Weamys rewrites *A Continuation* in accordance with her own political taste; the rightful succession and the tranquillity it provides express Weamys’ desire to reverse the political context. She thereby poses a challenge to the government whose rule she is subject to. Even though she cannot bring Charles I back and unite him with Queen Henrietta Maria, she promotes the restoration of Charles II. Thus, she

¹⁰¹ “If Weamys were a Victorian woman novelist, we might find her emphasis on marriage and sentiment subservient and conventional” (Cullen, Introduction xliii).

grants her romance a function to contribute to the Royalist agenda by providing an example of an ideal monarchical system. Weamys' romance is nostalgic in recalling the recently-lost peace but it foreshadows the Restoration thanks to her resolution to support the Royalist cause. When romance becomes a serious instrument for envisioning a solution to the present political order, Weamys secures her social and political agency through her response she models after the romantic relationship of the royal couples and the accession of their legitimate successors to the throne. To realise her Royalist propaganda, Weamys benefits from "the power of literature to convey dissident ideas and desires" (Dollimore, *Radical* xxvi) because, addressing the Royalist audience during the Interregnum, she is aware that she poses dissidence against the contemporary political order. Nevertheless, instead of keeping silence against what she cannot change at once, she "develops an oppositional selfhood" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 37) with the aim of raising political awareness and inserting her personal critique on what she does not approve of. On the Cultural Materialist basis, if "nothing can be intrinsically or essentially subversive" but the non-conformist quality of a work depends upon its "context and reception" (Dollimore, "Materialism" 13) the fact that Weamys proposes the restoration of monarchical rule within the Protectorate decidedly renders *A Continuation* a dissident production.

Regarding the association between the state and the household, Weamys also poses a threat to the patriarchal structure of the society. While the officials hinder women from dealing with political matters by either parodying or charging them with lasciviousness, Queen Helena, for instance, foregrounds female voice within the political sphere. When she decides to hold the marriage ceremony together with those of Musidorus' and Pyrocles' in order to enhance the reputation of her kingdom, her gift of eloquence stands out during her address to the subjects: "*Helena* gallantly played her game . . . [She] declared her mind to them . . . which at first startled them, but she argued in her own defence so wisely, that she quickly confuted and pacified those disturbers" (147-48). Helena's persuasive rhetoric reinforces her agency and authority while her husband Amphialus stays in complete silence during the speech. She presents authority over the husband and the subjects. If the hierarchical formation within the household resembles the governmental structure or the patriarchal state is imitable by the members of the family, Helena's speech not only disrupts the pillar of the hierarchical structure based on the binary opposition of the silent woman and the commanding man, it

also bestows women within the political context a subject position; it secures female agency to interfere with the social affairs of their time; it gives women a chance for public acknowledgement; and it encourages them to raise their voice against the patriarchal culture. Weamys' political agenda serves for several purposes at once.

Weamys' romance is not only a *royal* romance but a "feminist rebuke to [her] sources" (Simonova 202). She does not restrict it to politics but she also adopts the traditional understanding of romance as the narrative of love and heroism and touches upon intersexual relationships through which she challenges the patriarchal culture by amplifying female voice, by reversing the traditional gender roles and by reflecting the oppression of women.¹⁰² The female characters Mopsa, Queen Helena and Urania help her assert female agency via their experiences and offer a critique of the society. The first character to be analysed -Mopsa- is quite an interesting figure whose characterisation helps Weamys question the cultural assignments that suppress women based on their gender and class. Since Mopsa is a doubly oppressed character within the seventeenth century society owing to her sex and lower class background, she serves perfectly for foregrounding female voice and agency. A brief introduction to the condition of the servants in the early modern age highlights Mopsa's importance within the narrative better.

The sixteenth century priest William Harrison (1534-1593) described the economic, social and religious characteristics of the English society based on the data he gathered from various sources and his observations. Within this framework, he basically determined four classes: the highest group were the gentlemen such as the nobles and the knights "whome their race and blood or at least their vertues doo make noble and knowne"; the second group comprised of the inhabitants of the cities whose occupations signified their position within the society; the third group was the people from the countryside who were the landowners; and the lowest degree people were the labourers, the artificers, the husbandmen and the servants who had "neither voice nor authoritie in the common wealthe, but are to

¹⁰² Within this framework, Weamys must have been influenced by the French heroic romance which was very popular in the 1650s. These heroic romances were quite long narratives with intertwining stories which mainly focused on love, chivalry and honour. Madeleine de Scudéry was its most important representative with her *Ibrahim* (1641), *Artamène ou le Grand Cyrus* (1649-1653) and *Clélie* (1654-1660) (Salzman 306).

be ruled and not to rule the other" (Wrightson 4).¹⁰³ The servants held the lowermost place for whom sheer obedience to the master of the household was an obligation. The hierarchical structure that constituted the backbone of the patriarchal household (and the society in extension) was followed in the treatment of the servants too. Thomas Smith (1513-1577) in *The Commonwealth of England, and Manner of Government Thereof* (1589) comments on the structure of the household as follows: "the house I call here: the man, the woman, the children, their servants bond and free, their cattle, their household stuff and all other things which are reckoned in their possession" (Aughterson 142). He situates the servant one level above the farm animals, both of which belong to the *paterfamilias*. The servants *naturally* lacked power and they were devoid of voice. For example, Thomas Tusser (1524-1580) argues in *A Hundred Good Points of Housewifery* (1557) that "no servant at table use saucily to talk, lest tongue set at large out of measure do walk" (199). Within the patriarchal structure, the condition of the female servant was twice worse than the male servant because she had to obey the masters of the house -the husband, the wife and the children- and she always had to keep her silence. The female servants, who were usually between 10 to 30 years old and unmarried, held a substantial place within the system since 29 per cent of the all household used to have servants (Burnett 1). These women, known as the "maidservants," carried out several tasks such as milking the animals, cooking the dishes, cleaning the house and caring the children. In this sense, their position was considered to be a necessary stage to learn the essentials of wifhood (118-19). Since there was a close association between the ideal womanhood and ideal servitude, despite the increasing awareness of women who wrote petitions to the Parliament, servants submitting petitions to the officials were virtually absent. There was just one "The Maid's Petition" (1647) which was surely known to be written by a female servant who demanded one day off each second Tuesday of the month (121). The female servants lacked voice and social rights, they did not own material things either. Katherine Prince, who was a servant to a gentleman in Buckinghamshire, represented the situation of her fellows: she wanted her debt to be paid in her last will because she owned nothing (122). That she lived in destitute even in a relatively well-off house suggested her poverty and the insufficient properties she had to subsist on. These maidservants were also exposed to sexual abuse. The patriarchal culture which regarded the wife her

¹⁰³ The shifting class structure based on the changing economic system is disregarded.

husband's property readily seized the servant's autonomy and condoned her exploitation. As suing the employer¹⁰⁴ for sexual abuse would mean losing the servant position or it would even expose the complainant to slander, the maidservants could never complain of the abuse they suffered from or spoke up in court (Burnett 125). Furthermore, the female servant used to suffer from physical violence. The case of a Cambridgeshire servant reflects the violence she underwent by a husbandman. The husbandman was summoned to the parish on account of her death upon the eyewitnesses' testimony who told of the violence he accepted afterwards: "he made hir carrye her owne dunge out of the house in hir mouth, And had drawne hir through a pitt of water in a colde frostie morninge . . . he had put a knyfe to hir mouth & said he would cutt out hir tonge and . . . cutt parte of hir eyebrow" (122). In other words, he materialised the virtues of silence and obedience the prescriptive literature extolled as the fundamentals of ideal womanhood. The examples above were the few among the many which oppressed the female servants. It is therefore no surprise that they did not write petitions nor produced literature because they had no personal space and time to meet their individual needs but had to deal with their masters and the household chores, and more importantly, they struggled to survive poverty, physical violence, psychological oppression and sexual abuse. Servants and women at the same time, these women held a doubly disadvantageous place within the patriarchal culture. The female servant was defenceless and she had to bear the brunt of the system. Situated at the lowest level of the social order, she was objectified and her agency was denied all the time. Her object position enabled the maintenance of the master's dominance and secured the social structure.

The relationship between masters and servants during the early modern age highlights the tension among different power groups. The possible aspiration of the servants to reject their roles and the anxiety of the masters to keep them in their place inevitably cause social conflict and even alterations with the social order in the long run. Foucault states that power relations "depend on a multiplicity of points of resistance . . . present everywhere in the power network" (95). Each individual is subject to power relations and power does not stem from a particular

¹⁰⁴ "Richard Napier, the astrologer and physician, worked in London between 1597 and 1634. Of the eight women who came to him to complain about sexual abuse, only one is known to have prosecuted her employer" (Burnett 125) and now that "the woman servant is usually imagined as socially disadvantaged and sexually needy, then it is only a small step to the expectation that her body is readily accessible" (133).

group. Different discourses “transmit and produce power . . . but also undermine and expose it, render it fragile and make it possible to thwart it” (101). In other words, in spite of the attempts of the dominant culture to suppress the subordinate, culture is never monolithic but always contains fissures for the emergence of the silenced voices. The fact that the masters are in need of the servants to assert their presence enables the agency of the servant because he/she is deeply depended upon by the master and he/she is needed to be dependent on the master. The servant’s subordinate position he/she is readily associated and the master’s continual struggle to dominate the other constitutes a power structure. The latter’s status as the master and the employer defines his/her place against the servant’s subservience. In *A Continuation*, Weamys focuses on the exploited constituent of this power structure and, despite the examples provided above, she reflects resistance that disrupts the seemingly unbreakable power of the dominant culture. She thereby challenges the contemporary social order and asserts the agency of the female servant who constitutes an antagonistic force against the dominant.

Mopsa, whose characterisation is Weamys’ original composition, asserts her existence against the backdrop of a highly patriarchal society. Owing to her will to tell her story within a group of royals and the protofeminist content of the inset story, she negates her subordinate position, empowers herself and contests the hierarchal arrangement. Since emergent culture is antagonistic to the dominant culture, “scripting from below by lower-order characters immediately appears subversive” (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 33) owing to their threat to disrupt the social order and Mopsa succeeds in the task because her act proves her dissidence. While it is Weamys who invests Mopsa with a protofeminist mission, the character first appears in Sidney’s *Arcadia*. She is the daughter of Miso and Dametas,¹⁰⁵ King Basilius’ servants. Similar to her parents, Mopsa is so ugly a maid that she inspires a poem which mocks her appearance:

¹⁰⁵ “Truly with none other but one Dametas, the most arrant doltish clown that I think ever was without the privilege of a bauble, with his wife Miso and daughter Mopsa, in whom no wit can devise anything wherein they may pleasure her but to exercise her patience and to serve for a foil of her perfections. This loutish clown is such that you never saw so ill-favoured a vizor; his behaviour such that he is beyond the degree of ridiculous; and for his apparel, even as I would with him: Miso his wife so handsome a beldam, that only her face and her splay-foot have made her accused for a witch only one good point she hath, that she observes decorum, having a forward mind in a wretched body” (Sidney 14).

What length of verse can serve, brave Mopsa's good to show?
 When virtues strange, and beauties such, as no man them may know:

 Like great God Saturn fair, and like fair Venus chaste:
 As smooth as Pan, as Juno mild, like Goddess Iris fact,
 With Cupid she foresees, and goes God Vulcan's pace:

 Her hair like Crapal stone; her mouth O heav'nly wide!
 Her skin like burnished gold, her hands like silver ore untry'd.
 As for her parts unknown, which hidden sure are best:
 Happy be they which will believe, and never seek the rest. (14)

While Kalendar describes the princess Pamela and Philoclea "beyond measure excellent" (13) the *contreblazon* poem ridicules Mopsa because Pan the god of wildlife is not smooth but is half goat half man with hairy legs and horns, it is far-fetched to think of Venus chaste as she is the goddess of love and Cupid is blind. The association with Venus and the "heavenly wide" mouth which amounts to her loquaciousness represent Mopsa as frivolous and morally degenerate. Considering that for the early modern physiognomy¹⁰⁶ the bodily signifiers were quite important to interpret one's personality, the uglier a woman looked like, the wickedder she was supposed to be; and, a pleasant face meant purity of soul and virtue. In other words, the Renaissance Petrarchan and Neoplatonic understanding of beauty was based upon the close proximity between the inner and the outer self and the comeliness of a woman was dependent on her inner goodness. Thus, the fact that one's nature can be judged by how he/she appears causes further discrimination and Mopsa as a bad-looking servant woman is pushed to the margin in *Arcadia*.

That Mopsa is not given importance or the right to speak is evidenced by how the princesses treat her. Philoclea recounts Pyrocles' "wonderful valour" and let Pamela tell hers thinking that she has "held the stage long enough" (Sidney 195). At this point, Miso interferes to speak next but the company decides to "draw cuts" (198) to choose who will tell the following story. Mopsa gets the short straw. As soon as she begins her story, Philoclea interrupts; she does not allow Mopsa to recount it but suggests her to tell it during her marriage ceremony in exchange for "the best

¹⁰⁶ "According to physiognomy, which is concerned with the 'interpretation,' 'rule,' or 'essence (*gnomon*) of 'nature' (*physis*), there is an intrinsic relation between form and content, exterior and interior, *physis* and *psyche*. The body is perceived as a legible 'text,' which openly communicates a person's character and provides an insight into the disposition of man, provided that all signifiers that become visible on the bodily surface are given careful consideration" (Baumbach 582).

gown"¹⁰⁷ (199) she wears. Interestingly enough, the group skips Mopsa's story and Pamela begins hers. Lamb notes that women "are not allowed to talk for very long" (*Gender* 94)¹⁰⁸ in Sidney's narrative and Mopsa has the least proportion considered in relation to others. The incident might seem to grant women the power of speech among themselves but it should be noted that Zelmane, who acts as a mediator among women which puts her/him to a powerful position, is actually Pyrocles in disguise. Thus, Zelmane/Pyrocles has the ability to interfere their storytelling whenever he wants to. In the narrative, women even among themselves have limited agency to relate their experiences and the servant Mopsa speaks quite shortly. She has never been given the chance to complete her story to get the gown. In other words, in *Arcadia* Mopsa has a trivial presence; she holds an ornamental position simply constituting one of the subplots. In *A Continuation*, however, she is not a minor character but struggles for agency through speech. The amplification of her voice indicates Weamys' interest in women, the underrepresented and their experiences. As Campbell remarks, Weamys "subverts the traditional power structure as seen in the *Arcadia* in which men tell stories to women . . . and women's stories are often cut short" (182). Mopsa might even represent Weamys due to her struggle against patriarchal oppression. Weamys introduces Mopsa in the text only in terms of her parentage. The absence of previous description Kalendar provides such as her physical appearance or personal traits indicates Weamys' attempt to save Mopsa from the negative effect of Sidney's earlier presentation. What is more, while the narrative records her father's presence, he is textually absent. Mopsa's deliberate disconnection from parental roots and the forceful obedience it would bring ensure her agency and freedom to act without paternal interference and, as soon as she enters the narrative, she immediately explains her desire. The incident indicates Mopsa's shifted position within the romance; she is no more devoid of reason or employed for ornamental purpose but an agent for the underrepresented people:

¹⁰⁷ "Now good Mopsa," said the sweet Philoclea, 'I pray thee at my request keep this tale till my marriage-day, and I promise thee that the best gown I wear that day shall be thine.' Mopsa was very glad of that bargain, especially that it should grow a festival tale" (199).

¹⁰⁸ Lamb adds that "despite its sympathy for women, the *New Arcadia* conveys a strong sense of the danger of women's speech" (90). In this sense, Sydney seems to agree with the cultural assumption which considers female speech negatively. Andromana would be an example: "Therefore did she try the uttermost of her wicked wit, how to overthrow him in the foundation of his strength, which was in the favour of his father . . . it required the more cunning how to undermine it" (202).

[Mopsa] went to Philoclea, and wrying her neck one way and her mouth another, she squeezed these ensuing words. Fair Princess, I intend not to forget the promise you made me, when I told you a part of a curious tale, how you assured me your Wedding Gown, if I would afford to finish my Storie on that welcom day . . . you do not vouchsafe me to be in your books . . . remember me, or your Gown. (166)

The choice of particular words further demonstrates Mopsa's insistence on her demand. Philoclea, for instance, who "could not forbear blushing to hear Mopsa reprove her so sharply," promises to keep her word, upon which Mopsa leaves "impatently" (166). Her aggressive manner blurs the master-servant distinction. While the former supposedly commands and the latter obeys, they exchange roles; the dialogue -or, a monologue because Mopsa's direct speech is inserted but Philoclea's answer is recoded indirectly- lays bare the sensitivity of social constructions which might be easily destroyed once Mopsa -the servant, the obedient, the silenced- refuses to enact her assigned role. Likewise, when Mopsa starts to speak in "the midst of the Royal companie" Pyrocles upon realising "*Mopsa's* ambition . . . immediately caused all noises to be hushed, that he might with the greater attention hearken to *Mopsa*" (166). She thus challenges the social order when she insists on the prerogative to speech. Even though Mopsa inhabits the patriarchal culture, "structure is enabling" and "affording sources for both acquiescence and revolt (Sinfield, *Postwar* 31). In this sense, to speak from an independent position refers to her agency. That she speaks in public, which is the province of the royals in the present context, attests to the fluidity of the ascribed social roles. It threatens the maintenance of social order and questions the patriarchal discourse which debar women from public speech and acknowledgement. Her deed becomes socially disruptive because she does not fulfil her duty properly. The narrative becomes a catalyst for the subordinate to question the social discourse which mutes their voice to pursue their wishes and rights. Interestingly enough, contrary to Philoclea, who tries to settle Mopsa in her silent position by renewing her promise, the fact that Pyrocles silences everyone to listen to Mopsa attentively ensures the solution to the present situation. In other words, *A Continuation* does not merely identify the cultural defect or criticise it but offers a solution to rehabilitate the malfunction in the society. It proposes that once men listen to women rather than disregarding their desires or regarding them ornamental objects or once the government officials take into consideration the citizens' problems, there would be no obstacle in the path of social and political progress. Mopsa silences all the others; a subordinate person is hearkened for the

first time; she thereby becomes the mouthpiece for the oppressed and for all women. Mopsa -an oft-neglected figure- resolutely achieves her desire to take part in the narrative. Her transgressive attitude might initially seem to contradict with the previous analysis based on the political reading of the text that promotes the Royalist cause but it should be noted that Mopsa (or Weamys) does not propose the subversion of the social structure but negotiates the possibility for the improvement of social conditions for the underrepresented figures. Dorrego shares a similar view: "Weamys female protagonists are all within the bounds of patriarchal morality . . . but they are allowed a certain agency, some chances to decide, command and be obeyed" (72). In this regard, her stance fulfils dissidence because patriarchy does not crumble nor does the governmental structure change (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 49) but Mopsa protests against an aspect of the dominant she does not agree with. Apart from Mopsa's partial success in practically usurping the position of the royals, her ambition to earn the wedding gown also defies the patriarchal culture. Bartholomew Batty (1515-1559) in *The Christian Man's Closet* (1581) suggests women not to preoccupy themselves with "silks, as taffeta, damask, satin and velvet" (Aughterson 178). When she sets mind on the riches of the world instead of indulging in heavenly matters, Mopsa openly challenges the patriarchal prescription. More importantly, the wedding gown embodies her desire for class transgression. The passage below reflects how Mopsa imagines the dress:

[Mopsa's] little apprehension had alredie seized on *Philoclea's* glittering Gown, and she imagined it hung upon her mothie Karkass; and in that firm perswasion she stood looking upon her self like a Peacock, untill *Pyrocles* called to her, which made her skip, and rub her eyes before she could discern her self to be yet in her rustie Feathers. (166)

To own the wedding gown elucidates the importance of Mopsa's act better because the cultural implication of the dress is quite important for the seventeenth century audience. As Guillory explains, within the early modern context, "the institution of clothing . . . as a properly semiological distinction" (76) embodied both sexual and social difference. The custom of clothing based on differences was thought to stem from the natural difference among social classes rather than being regarded a result of cultural construction. The sartorial difference was an external marker to identify one's social status and its violation attested to the contemporary anxiety regarding the class struggle. In other words, there was an emphasis on the overlap with one's attire and the class (or sex) he/she belongs to. Howard also asserts that "dress, as a highly regulated semiotic system, became a primary site

where a struggle over the mutability of the social order was conducted" ("Cross-Dressing" 422). He records Philip Stubbs (1555-1610) who in *Anatomie of Abuses* (1583) assaulted the people who wanted to transcend their assigned class. Stubbs stated,

there is such a confuse mingle mangle of apparell in Ailgna, and such preposterous excesse therof, as every one is permitted to flaunt it out, in what apparell he lust himselfe, or can get by anie kind of meanes. So that it is verie hard to knowe, who is noble, who is worshipfull, who is a gentleman, who is not. (422)

Stubbs was against the violation of the dress code because, as an important signifier of class, he believed it would disrupt the social order as the confusion of the attires peculiar to each class would erase the social differences essential for the wellbeing of the society. The dress code was of utmost importance for the status quo. What Stubbs maintained was valid in the following decades too. As Burnett relates,

Viewed as particularly troublesome by the authorities were maidservants who confused occupational categories by dressing extravagantly. In 1611 the Common Council in London ruled against those waiting-women and chambermaids who flouted the sumptuary laws by parading in large ruffs, lace trimmings, fine petticoats and fancy aprons and ribbons. (127)

Moreover, the pursuit of the dress code was represented as God's order. William Perkins, for instance, put forth the necessity to follow the convention:

[The attire] must be answerable to our estate and dignitie, for distinction of order and degree in the societies of men. This use of attire, stands by the very ordinance of God; who, as he hath not sorted all men to all places, so he will have men to fitte themselves and their attire, to the qualitie of their proper places, to put a difference betweene themselves and others . . . many in these daies do greatly offend . . . The Artificer commonly goes clad like the Yeoman: the Yeoman like the Gentleman: the Gentleman as the Nobleman: the Nobleman as the Prince: which bringeth great confusion, and utterly overturneth the order which God hath set in the states and conditions of men. (qtd. in Dollimore, *Dissidence* 288)

As the excerpts indicate, the dress code was significant in order to define one's social status. Since it was thought to be divinely ordered, its violation was against the social and divine rule and there was deliberate intention "to legitimate inequality . . . by representing the social . . . as decreed by God" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 114) because hegemony should always be attentive and responsive to

the oppositions which threaten its dominance (Williams, *Marxism* 113) in order to keep its dominant status. In this sense, contrary to the ideological strategy which naturalises the difference between social classes, the insistence against the violation of the dress code also reveals the malleability of the social distinctions and empowers the subordinate. In the same vein, the wedding gown represents Mopsa's yearning for a higher social status and enables her to acknowledge her potential to rebel against the dominant discourse. That she looks like a peacock, the traditional symbol of pride and magnificence, reinforces her excessive desire to transgress her class and her aspiration to ascend higher functions as a threat to the allegedly natural social order. The aspiration to the wedding gown becomes a subversive act within the existing order because she believes she could earn a respectable status within the society once she owns it. It is true that Mopsa cannot transcend her class yet the appropriation of the dress to transcend the one she belongs to represents her agency to act however she wants.

The desire to get the ownership of the gown also represents her sexual defiance because it implies her enthusiasm to marry. The fact that the father figure is absent to control her sexual relations, which implies that she would herself choose whom to marry, renders her a transgressive character because, contrary to the maxim of chaste-silent-obedient, her story tells of a maiden who gets married without paternal approval and the wedding gown symbolises her wish to soothe herself sexually. Even though there is no clue as to her future involvement in (extra)marital relationship, her "frank sexuality" (Newcomb, "Prose" 279) disrupts male superiority over female sexuality. The conduct literature continuously emphasises female chastity. Women, regardless of their marital status, are expected to refrain from indulging in activities that might feed them sexually; they are instructed to keep their sexual appetite in check in any case. In this sense, the implication that Mopsa baldly pursues a husband becomes a dissident act which evacuates the sanctity of marriage and challenges the custom that allows sexuality as far as the male head approves. Mopsa -as a marginal figure- gains discursive authority to criticise the social regulations in terms of her sex and class. In sum, when Mopsa finishes her tale, she possesses Philoclea's "Bridal Roabs" (169) and, as Eckerle concludes, contrary to her appalling characterisation by Sir Philip Sidney, Weamys' Mopsa turns out to be the one "that has the potential to rewrite her role in literary history as a symbol . . . of women's narrative success" (*Romancing* 175). Even though what she desires seems insignificant within the

narrative, the gown becomes metonymic for her dissidence and agency considering the present culture.

The story Mopsa tells is another element which reinforces her agency. She recounts the love story of a maiden and a knight whose adventure is a mini romance populated with the nymphs, the magical nuts, the witches and a happy conclusion within the larger structure of *A Continuation*. The story is important in that it both projects Mopsa's fantasy of happy union and becomes a space where female characters assert certain amount of power. Mopsa relates the exposition, the raising action and the climax of the story as follows:

There was a King, (the chiefest man in all his Countrey) who had a prettie Daughter, who as she was sitting at a window, a sprightlie Knight came to her, and with his dilly Phrases won her to be his own, and stealing out of her Fathers Castle, with many honey kisses, he conjured her not to enquire after his name, for that the water-Nimphs would then snatch him from her: howbeit one time, in a darksom wood, her teeth were set so on edge, that she asked, and he presently with a piteous howling vanished away. (166-67)

At first glance the story seems to criticise female promiscuity, curiosity, loquaciousness and lack of patience which would make it a didactic one that punishes female disobedience but it turns out to be one that foregrounds female agency and solidarity based upon the reversal of gender roles with a blissful denouement. After several hardships upon their separation, the maiden decides to consult her two aunts to find a remedy to her dire condition and each of them gives her a nut counselling not to open it until she becomes extremely desperate.

[After a while] a grisly old woman came to her, commanding her to open one of the Nuts; and she considering, that of a little meddling cometh great ease, broke it open, for nothing venter, nothing have, which Proverb she found wondrously true; for within the shell she found a paper, which discovered that her Knight was chained in an ugly hole under ground in the same wood where she lost him. But one Swallow makes no summer; wherefore she cracked her other Nut, from whence there flew out gold and silver in such abundance. (167)

The aunts help the maiden about the place the knight is taken prisoner and provide the treasure and the old woman lays down the money to guide her. The maiden reaches the cave where "her Knight vented a thousand grievous groans" (168) and "unchain[s] him" (169). While they spend the night in the cave "with their sugar-kisses" the old woman, who advises the maiden previously, "appear[s]

to him and release[s] him of his Bondage by Witchcraft." The maiden and the knight arrive at the court where hrt father "who entertain[s] them bravelie, pleasing them with delicate sights, as Puppet-plaies, and stately Fairs" immediately sanctions their marriage and they live happily ever after. The narrator qualifies the story as "ridiculous" and "tedious" (169) because it is quite an ordinary one of entrapment and release -to mitigate its transgressive effect- yet, since its protofeminist content represents a fantasy world dominated by women, it becomes an important tool to assert female agency. Having populated with powerful female figures such as the water nymphs that capture the knight, the maiden who goes on a quest to save him, the aunts who give the maiden the nuts and the old woman who advises her how to use them, the story is a rendition of an unorthodox power structure. The story refashions the dominant ideology and, instead of disregarding the binary opposition of the strong and the subordinate, it reverses the generic convention of damsel-in-distress into knight-in-distress. It inverts gender roles; the conventional mise-en-scene of the damsel-in-distress is substituted by a helpless knight who desperately laments while the maiden saves him from captivity. It turns the hierarchical construction of the saver and the saved upside down. Furthermore, the absence of the authority figures such as fathers or husbands enables the maiden to experience sexual desire freely. The fact that the couple remain in the cave and "pleasure" each other with "sugar-kisses" (169) rather than returning instantly to the court where the patriarchal rule presides over is a forceful indication of the protofeminist content of the story which cherishes female desire and opinion over social mores. The maiden is not an ownable object among men; she asserts individual desire when she elopes with the knight or has sexual intercourse; and she is never interrogated or punished because of her elopement by the father who contrasts the tyrannical violent father representation. The story also foregrounds female solidarity owing to women who help each other. The female characters benefit from one another to solve the problem. In this sense, the witch holds a substantial place because the story refashions the female witch whose power helps release an abducted knight from enchantment. Ironically enough, the witch who captivates the knight and who liberates him is the same person -the old woman- but the entrapment-release model is instrumental for asserting female agency given that the knight remains helpless against her power in any condition. Contrary to the representation of Sycorax in Shakespeare's *The*

*Tempest*¹⁰⁹ who imprisons Ariel within a pine whom Prospero saves afterwards, the female mage in Mopsa's story proves to be a beneficial one. The witch was surely a wicked figure in the early modern period. She was represented to be "predatory, dominating, usually lustful, destructive and voluble" (Belsey, *Subject* 165). She was a transgressive figure which subverted the ideal womanhood endowed with power the patriarchy denied her. Since she was placed outside the framework that demarcates woman and man, she was thought to be ugly, unwomanly, uncontrollable, monstrous and sinister. Her unauthorised power and disobedience to patriarchal prescriptions and ideal feminine categories -for instance, the witches were always thought to be unmarried, childless and lecherous *femme fatale*- rendered her a punishable figure because the witch threatened the system which regulated the patriarchal practices. She was self-contained in that she was not powerful in relation to her father as a princess or to her husband as a queen. Exod. 22.18 preached "thou shall not suffer a witch to live" and the patriarchal culture punished the witches for their transgression. As Belsey states, "witchcraft was first made a statutory offence in 1542 and . . . the main period for executions was 1559-1675 . . . within this period there were peaks in the 1580s and 1590s . . . and in 1645-1647" (*Subject* 185). Interestingly (or naturally) enough, there was a rise in witch trials when women demanded more rights and intervened in the religious and political affairs because the witches -or indeed women who were accused of witchcraft due to their rebellion- challenged the present social order. In fact, the witch represented what might become of women unless they obey the male authority who thereby faced ostracisation and punishment. As opposed to the infernal witch image, the beneficial one Weamys creates who helps the helpless poses a challenge to the misogynist understanding and the dominant culture of the age. Thus, she urges the reader to think over the patriarchal discourse in attempt to show an otherwise truth. Williams believes that "there is always other social being or consciousness which is neglected and excluded" but Weamys saves the witch figure from the periphery and relocates her in a central position. Through refashioning the misrepresented figure, she stimulates the reader to resist the

¹⁰⁹ "This blue-eyed hag was hither brought with child / And here was left by th' sailors. Thou, my slave, / As thou report'st thyself, wast then her servant; / And, for thou wast a spirit too delicate / To act her earthy and abhorred commands, / Refusing her grand hests, she did confine thee, / By help of her more potent ministers, / And in her most unmitigable rage, / Into a cloven pine, within which rift / Imprisoned thou didst painfully remain / A dozen years, within which space she died / And left thee there, where thou didst vent thy groans / As fast as mill wheels strike. Then was this island / (Save for the son that she did litter here, / A freckled whelp hag-born) not honored with / A human shape" (1.2.269-84).

"seizure" that the dominant imposes as "the ruling definition" (Williams, *Marxism* 125) regarding the representation of the witches. Moreover, when she sets the witch as an exemplary figure, she triggers women to refuse submission to patriarchal imposition. If the witch embodies rebellion against the ideal womanhood, Weamys asks women to claim their own choice disregarding the necessity to fit in the imposed patriarchal categories. Mopsa's story asserts her agency and it becomes subtly propagandistic in terms of the woman question as it is "alert to oppressive representations" (Sinfield, *Shakespeare* 25).

So as to prevent any attack she might face, Weamys employs the peripheral servant figure because she does not hesitate to express a radical idea which might be unspeakable by one of the royal protagonists. More importantly, she presents a figure "that a specifically dominant social order neglects, excludes, represses, or simply fails to recognise" (Williams, *Marxism* 125). Mopsa's ability to question patriarchal assumptions foreshadows the prospect of an alternative social structure in which women can freely express their desires and speak louder and in which intersexual relationships take place within the framework of individual features rather than stereotypical constructions. *A Continuation* predicated that focus on emergent female subjectivity promises the disruption of ideological occlusion that restricts women to inferior status.

The romance also underlines female solidarity and agency through the story of Helena and Amphialus. In *Arcadia*, Helena is desperately in love with Amphialus who is deeply affectionate for Philoclea. Helena proves an irresponsible queen who does not consider the wellbeing of her subjects. The love triangle she constitutes leads a tragic end because she falls in love with Amphialus when he actually courts her on behalf of his friend Philoxenus. Upon a misinterpretation, Amphialus kills Philoxenus and Timotheus¹¹⁰ and leaves Corinth. Helena, whose slavery to passion blocks her reason, immediately follows Amphialus. As she states, "for this cause have I left my country, putting in hazard how my people will in time deal by me, adventuring what perils or dishonours might ensue, only to follow him who

¹¹⁰ "[Amphialus] was fain to defend himself, and withal so to offend him that by an unlucky blow the poor Philoxenus fell dead at his feet, having had time only to speak some few words, whereby Amphialus knew it was for [Helena's] sake: which when Amphialus saw, he forthwith gave such tokens of time-felt sorrow that, as my servant said, no imagination could conceive greater woe. But that by and by an unhappy occasion made Amphialus pass himself in sorrow: for Philoxenus was but newly dead, when there comes to the same place the aged virtuous Timotheus; who (having heard of his son's sudden and passionate manner of parting from court) had followed him as speedily as he could" (54).

proclaimeth hate against me" (54-55). Helena proves to be an irresponsible queen who lacks the ability to think and behave wisely. In other words, she realises John Knox's postulation that women are unable to rule. What is more, Helena previously sneers at marriage because she regards it a form of submission: "I as then esteeming myself born to rule, and thinking foul scorn willingly to submit myself to be ruled" (54). Her hubris that she is not predisposed to obedience turns into submission when she blindfoldedly pursues Amphialus and leaves herself at his disposal. In sum, the Sidneian narrative punishes Helena for her irresponsive, passionate and arrogant behaviour. The text also emphasises her helplessness and the rivalry between Helena and Philoclea because Helena considers Philoclea responsible for Amphialus' woe. When Amphialus gets wounded, her only reaction is to cry over his body:

With that the body moving somewhat, and giving a groan, full of death's music, she fell upon his face, and kissed him, and withal cried out; "O miserable I, that have only favour by misery;" and then would she have returned to a fresh career of complaints, when an aged and wise gentleman came to her . . . and withal, that it was fitter to show her love in carrying the body to her excellent surgeon, first applying such excellent medicines as she had received of him for that purpose, rather than only show herself a woman-lover in fruitless lamentations. (414)

Helena reinforces the cultural expectation when she complains and helplessly laments over his body. She is unable to reckon a solution until "an aged and wise gentleman" -who represents reason and experience- urges her to take Amphialus in order to cure his wounds. The episode stops there. Helena is never given another chance for happiness. On the other hand, Helena's characterisation in Weamys' text again reflects the "violent dialectic between the dominant and the subordinate" (Dollimore, *Radical* xxvii) because Weamys interferes in the masculine construction of Sidneian narrative in order to disrupt the hegemony of the patriarchal discourse regarding Helena's representation. *A Continuation* challenges the assumption that women lack the faculty of reason or they are unable to control their passion. While the previous version portrays Helena a negligent queen and a desperate woman who cannot handle her situation without male help, the Weamys version depicts her as one attentive to her subjects and the events around her. For example, when Clytifon arrives at Corinth with a letter from Arcadia, the folk starts to gossip: "the Citie swelled with rumour, every one being greedie to know that which nothing concerned them" while Helena "whose watchfull eyes and attentive ears could not pass by any suspicious whisperings, but would always make strict

enquire of the cause of them" (132) followed the reaction of the subjects in order to control the course of events. She represents a responsive ruler who could balance her personal and political affairs and who takes her subjects into consideration. She is still in love with Amphialus but manages to control her feelings: "this [Philoclea and Amphialus' marriage] fancie of *Helena* made such a wound within her breast, that a thousand of sighs had free passage there, and in silence she did think out her complaints" (133). She evolves into a mature woman who has learnt to "moderate" her feelings "within the bounds of reason" (134) and to integrate her public and private self in the Pamphilian fashion of Wroth's *Urania*. Furthermore, she is no more a helpless woman. It is Helena who nurses Amphialus when he is unconsciously wounded:

When Helena had convened her beloved *Amphialus* to her renowned Citie *Corinth*, and lodged him in the richest furnished Chamber that could be devised . . . then she advised with her skillfull Chyrurgeons how she might have his wounds healed; and had always an especial care to see the salves applied to them her self. (129-30)

Helena personally attends to Amphialus. She becomes a healer who restores Amphialus' health. It is notable that Helena does not decide to cure Amphialus because a man instructs him to do but she takes the initiative. The absence of the old man the Sidneian text has reinforces her agency. Amphialus' unconscious situation also helps Helena articulate her love for him. She becomes a speaking subject who freely expresses her feelings:

Then began she to discourse with him, as if he could mind her what she said. Tell me dear *Amphialus*, said she, what occasion have I given you to make you hate me? have I not ever honoured and loved you far above my self? O yes! and if I had a thousand lives to lose, I would venture them all for your sake. (130)

The address is important in that while Amphialus lies unconsciously, Helena has the discursive authority. The scene reverses the Petrarchan tradition of the lady and her beloved in which the woman is muted so that the male lover voices his desire, frustration and woe. The tradition mutes female voice, objectifies woman, makes use of her to assert male voice and predominance. Likewise, Amphialus embodies the silent woman whose presence enables Helena to situate herself in a subject position by which she meditates over unrequited love. She substitutes passivity with agency while Amphialus is in a silent position. Their relationship objectifies Amphialus whose presence becomes a conduit to assert Helena's

discursive and physical agency. Helena does not hopelessly shed tears but devises a plan to gain Amphialus. She is neither an inept figure nor consumed by passion but handles the situation logically. Helena, an agent woman actively pursuing her desire, writes a letter to Philoclea to get her help. The incident reverses the custom which represents women helpless and men competent to change the course of events. It should be noted that Amphialus is helpless not because he is wounded but because he has no other option but obey Philoclea's request. When she learns that Amphialus would send a letter to Philoclea, she writes another one that seeks compassion for Amphialus: "*let me therefore intreat you to shew your compassion to him by mildness, and suffer his punishment, may be sincere affection to me; and you will infinitely above measure oblige your devoted servant*" (137). In the meantime, Amphialus writes Philoclea that "*I shall account my self happy in obeying your desires at the last moment, which I vow to accomplish what ere it be, with cheerfulness; and with this undaunted resolution*" (142). He thereby surrenders himself to her mercy. Philoclea immediately responds it "to command him to put in execution *Helena's demands*" (142):

I humbly crave of you not to refuse Beautie and Honor when it is so virtuously presented to you by the famous Queen Helena, whose love-lines surpasses all others. Therefore if you esteem of me, prove it by entirely loving of her, who, I am sure, will endow you with all such blessings as may enrich your contentment. And now with full satisfaction, that you will grant me my request, I close up these abrupt lines. (145)

As the excerpts demonstrate, in the love triangle between Helena, Amphialus and Philoclea, women hold the powerful position while Amphialus fulfils what he is ordered. Amphialus' lack of agency renders him vulnerable to women who govern him. Much as the tone of each letter is mild, the choice of particular words such as *command* and *demand* reinforces Philoclea's dominance over Amphialus. The letter functions as the personal and political manifestation of Philoclea's power. Amphialus becomes an instrument for the assertion of female power because Helena and Philoclea master him. Furthermore, the text grants Helena the option to choose the person she wants to marry. In this sense, the patriarchal custom of marriage which never seeks female approval is turned upside down. Amphialus becomes a trafficable and masterable object among women. The narrative rewards Helena who is previously punished and subtly criticises the patriarchal custom of arranged marriage which silences women and disregards their opinion. Moreover, the episode is important in exemplifying female solidarity. Helena and Philoclea are

not represented to be rivals but they help each other for personal achievement. The solidarity between Helena and Philoclea empowers them. Together with the absence of the scenes which focus on male superiority, their alliance creates feminine space based on support and friendship. Their solidarity grants them a measure of independence in which male predominance is circumvented. The supposed rivalry evolves into a beneficial relationship. The incident thus emphasises the network of women whose solidarity creates opportunities to fulfil female wish by which male hegemony becomes ineffective. *A Continuation* advises women to abandon rivalry and support each other against the patriarchal culture which deprives them of their power. Having started with the address to Perpoint sisters and Francis Vaughan's protofeminist poem, continued with Mopsa's story and reinforced by the solidarity between Helena and Philoclea, the romance provides women with a powerful message to support each other perpetually against injustice, oppression and hardships if they want to have more visibility. Where the dominant culture posits power "as seamless and all-pervasive" (Belsey, "Towards" 88) Mopsa, Helena and Philoclea demonstrate that "agency is virtually inescapable" so long as women devote to "taking up arms or taking flight" against the patriarchal domination. The female solidarity is indispensable in order to create collective feminine consciousness and their example proves that once "the apparently isolated power of individual genius turns out to be bound up with collective, social energy" (Greenblatt, "Resonance" 221) there is nothing women cannot deal with.

Furthermore, Weamys employs Urania to criticise the oppression women experience in the marriage market and their treatment as commodities by men. She represents the molestation women suffer from. Weamys handles the story within the context of a love triangle in which the old Claius and the young Strephon chase Urania. Sinfield is of the opinion that "a dominant discourse cannot prevent 'abuse' of its resources" (*Faultlines* 48) and, likewise, when Weamys consults the Sidneian text to produce her own interpretation, she exploits the former interpretation which practically erases Urania from the text. In *Arcadia*, Claius-Strephon-Urania episode takes place in the First Eclogue of the *Old Arcadia* Lamon recounts. In the Sidneian version, Urania is an absent angelical figure whose sole function is to reinforce the indestructible friendship between Claius and Strephon who lament over her absence and the ennobling influence of love. There is no more detail as to their condition. Claius, Strephon and Urania establish a

Petrarchan pattern: Urania is heavenly beautiful, chaste, distant, cold and impregnable whose unattainability renders Claius and Strephon more passionate. While Claius and Strephon are given the opportunity to express their anguish, Urania, the recipient of male desire, is never allowed to explain her feelings or experiences. She is a mute love object whose non-existence serves for the exaltation of men. In other words, she does not have the agency her namesake possesses in Wroth's *Urania*. On the other hand, Weamys exploits the Petrarchan pattern in which the lady inhabits the space the sonneteer confines her. *A Continuation* materialises Urania's celestial nature; her physical presence provides a visual representation of the commodification of female body and a down-to-earth picture of the society in terms of the custom of arranged marriage and the oppression women endure.

True it is that Weamys presents a realistic relationship but Urania is still as heavenly beautiful as the sonnet ladies: she is the "Mistress of perfections" (170) "a fair Shepherdess, who might be very well taken for [Goddess] *Flora*" (168) and Claius and Strephon, who are "both slaves to *Urania's* piercing Eyes" (170), follow her with "eyes fixed on her in celestial admiration" (168). Nevertheless, Urania does not reciprocate their affection because of her self-sacrificing nature (not because she is a cold woman in the Petrarchan fashion). She escapes from Claius and Strephon so as not to harm them. As she states, she has "excused [her] self, and retired into solitarie Groves . . . studying for the probablest Antidotes that might cure their distempers" (175). The fact that Urania hides in solitary places might be a result of her altruism but a deeper analysis is suggestive of her desire to escape from the male gaze who struggles over her ownership. When the emphasis on the sight is taken together with the deliberate withdrawal from their company, it demonstrates her effort to overthrow the object position she is imposed on. In other words, her conscious isolation from her suitors attests to Urania's "struggle to avoid the constructing of sexual relations by patterns of domination and submission" (Waller, "Sidney" 55). Since the patriarchal culture acknowledges the submission of women natural, instead of explicit refusal, the only resistance mechanism Urania has is self-isolation. It becomes a solution to assert her agency because she states that "it hath been always contrarie to my chast disposition, to accept the least motion concerning a married life" (171). Urania's deliberate abstention from courtship or marriage best presents her desire to remain single. Urania is aware that in the early modern social context "male

status and identity are made to depend on the bodily pursuit of the spouse" (Tricomi 110) which would make her a commodity. It is the reason why she rejects wifehood as it would function as a testament to male superiority. In this way, she poses a challenge against the social structure which regulates familial relationships. Her resolution against marriage also defies the religious teachings. As Jankowski states, "the discourse of virginity carried encoded within it the notion of an anomalous female nature that was threatening to established Christian notions of woman's submissiveness and subordination" (30). In other words, it is compulsory for a woman to marry and procreate through which her sexuality would be under control and any aberrant behaviour to threaten male hegemony would be eliminated. In sum, non-marriage is not a status for Urania either in social or in religious terms. Her desire to remain single renders her a dissident person within the seventeenth century society.

Urania does not submit to patriarchal prescriptions but the possibility to get away with the punishment or the opportunity to do what she wants would be quite an unrealistic solution. She is confronted with the same obligation any seventeenth century daughter would experience when she is forced by her parents to marry "the wealthy Heardsman" (183) Antaxius. Remindful of several Wrothian heroines, Urania expresses her discontent but the inability to rebel against the parental authority:

Too great a burden for me to bear oppresses me, *Antaxius* is too officious in his love, I wish he were more calm; my Parents rigor is too too intolerable, unless by disobedience had been palpable; I have never offended them wilfully, no not in this their desired Match, except they interpret my silence for a refusal, that being the onely symptom of my discontent, nor do I reveal my affection to any but thee my Sparrow. (181)

She is stuck between her inconsiderate parents who disregard her opinion and an obtrusive man who does not take into consideration her feelings. She only desires to escape "the *thraldom* of Antaxius" (182) because arranged marriage is a form of imprisonment which would enslave her. Unfortunately enough, Antaxius "rudely" carries her "without resistance" by the parents despite "her commands . . . ordain[ing] the contrary" (184). She is taken prisoner but manages to escape. The incident shows that Urania is not a completely helpless or passive character but who has the resolution to stand against paternal oppression and an arranged marriage. However, she is immediately abducted by a "Knight named *Lacemon*,

who violently carrie[s] her away from her sheep" (187). While the chivalric code instructs to help the ones in need, to protect the defenceless, to pursue quests which would bring honour and glory, to fear God and be pious, to refrain from lechery, to respect women and to protect their chastity, and to be polite, just and merciful, Lacemon does not have any of the aforesaid virtues. He is a lustful and violent man who kidnaps a weak woman:

Tyger *Lacemon*, or Monster, for his disposition could never pretend to humanitie, being prepared in a readiness to commit such a treacherous act, came from a darksome hole, suitable to his practices, and seized on me and my Sparrow for Prisoners . . . where in a Cave he hath enclosed me: and perceiving, that I consorted with my Bird, and delighted in its Innocencie, a virtue which he mortally deserted, he unmercifully murdered it . . . thus he endeavoured to terrifie me with his crueltie, but if it were possible, it made me more enflamed to withstand his assaults; neither threats, nor intreaties were wanting to tempt me to his base desires, but I absolutely refused him. (192)

As the passage indicates, Lacemon disrupts the chivalric code due to the physical and psychological violence he imposes on a helpless damsel. Urania undergoes a torture-like experience when she refuses to obey his demands. Her endurance in the face of maltreatment demonstrates her integrity which saves her from commodification and the murder of the sparrow registers the inviolability of her resolution against sexual abuse. Urania again manages to escape from the "dreadful" (193) would-be rapist who tries to operate "so heinous a trespass" (188) upon her chastity. Her stoic endurance against Antaxius and Lacemon proves "a certain element of autonomy in her character" (Dorrego 71) which resists masculine sexual desire. Likewise, Lalus compels Urania to courtship:

The young shepherd *Lalus* . . . forced her to grant him the privilege of Charactering her perfections in Poetrie, amongst which he had declared his Lust, shadowing it with the title of Love, when he might as well transform a Dove to a Kite, or a Wolf to a Lamb, as lust to Love; *Urania* abhorring him for it. (186)

Even though his courtship seems innocent, the deliberate selection of the words *forced* and *lust* as well as his tendency to manipulate love indicate that Lalus might put Urania in jeopardy. In this context, having been among the three "presumptuous Rival[s]" (188) and the innocent ones Claius and Strephon, Urania ends up with no choice but marry someone. Urania neither considers marriage nor romantic relationship; her "continuing flight and absence" function as "a flight from desire . . . as its object" (Cullen, Introduction li) but the patriarchal cultural

circumstance obliges her to marriage. It is the reason why Claius and Strephon consult the princes to decide whom Urania should marry. Even though she has the freedom of choice since her late parents leave her "the libertie to dispose of her self" (194) when Urania leaves the decision to Pyrocles and Musidorus, it does not amount to her passive status in the marriage market but her deliberate insistence on her personal integrity. In other words, Urania is "[s]o indifferent in [her] choice" (175) that she only wants to remain single. If Weamys had not included the stories of abuse by Antaxius, Lacedemon and Lalus, Urania might have been qualified a passive heroine when she leaves the decision to Pyrocles and Musidorus. On the other hand, the narrative builds up so ominously for Urania that she is left with no choice but marriage. Being under constant pursuit and surveillance, Urania becomes a conduit for the assertion of masculine desire. In this sense, instead of running the risk of being victimised by several violators, Urania makes a pragmatic decision: to marry someone is the best solution for protection. As Mitchell and Osland also remark, "Urania's actions consistently demonstrate a keen sense of pragmatism, rather than passivity or inaction" (79). The precariousness of her situation results in marriage as she is vulnerable to possibly dangerous future suitors. In the Urania episode, the romance provides a critique of the oppressive society which allots no space for women to act in accordance with their wish but have to comply with the patriarchal rules. The incident *at least* fulfils the readerly expectation when it rewards the youth and Urania marries the young Strephon thereby keeping the possibility of romantic love alive. The Urania episode represents the dire straits women face within the patriarchal society. Weamys celebrates marital union in *A Continuation* but she does not disregard the patriarchal oppression and its subsequent damages. Enforced to mismatched marriages by parental coercion and the danger of sexual harassment if unmarried, *A Continuation* offers a critique of the patriarchal culture in which marriage is presented as the sole option to avoid being the victim of male desire. Together with the punishment of the violators by death, the romance portrays an agent heroine who challenges the social and religious mores, who rebels against arranged marriages, who rejects submission to commodification of female body, who subverts male superiority and who makes a sound decision when she chooses among her suitors. Urania cannot realise her individual desire but she finds the most beneficial solution to assert agency no matter how limited it is. In Sidney's *Arcadia*, Urania is an allegorical figure whose physical presence is not requisite for

the narrative; in Wroth's *Urania*, she is totally an agent woman; and, in Weamys' *A Continuation*, re-situated in the centre of several characters, she is like a union of Sidneian and Wrothian heroines who is neither wholly dependent nor independent but who is an astute person struggling to choose the best among the limited possibilities she has. Still, her disinterest in marriage or romantic desire renders her a dissident woman whose agency is provided by her pragmatic reasoning.

Sinfield believes that "storytelling . . . has the power to rearrange and reinvent our conceptions . . . we may also encounter something quite unexpected . . . which reorganises our knowledge around different objects and dissident ideas" (*Faultlines* 219-20). When Weamys decides to complete the stories Sidney leaves incomplete, she does her share of the task because she asserts dissidence and raises awareness against inconveniences in the system. Within this framework, she employs *A Continuation* for manifold purposes: she dreams of a peaceful system which promotes mutual understanding among sexes and different social classes. The culture she imagines gives voice to the lowest social class; each individual and their ideas, experiences, desires are taken into consideration. True it is that she chases after a smooth system but she also presents the ways in which "defiance, subversion, dissidence, resistance, all forms of political oppression, are articulated, represented and performed" (Branningan 108) within the Cultural Materialist basis through the stories of Mopsa, Helena and Urania. Even when she deals with the monarchical problems and nostalgically evokes the companionate relationship of the royals, she does not disregard the social realities of the time which oppress the so-called inferior class and gender. On the contrary, she commits herself "to the transformation of a social order which exploits people on the grounds of gender and class" (Dollimore and Sinfield, Foreword viii). Being aware that there is always a neglected "alternative perception" (Williams, *Marxism* 126), she tries to "amplify the marginalised voices of the ruled, exploited, oppressed, and excluded" (Lentricchia 15). Despite its remoteness from "the anxieties of reality" (193) but knowing that it "will still contain that reality" (193) Weamys benefits from the genre to realise her "wish fulfilment dream" (Frye, *Anatomy* 186) of social and political harmony.

CHAPTER 4

FEMALE AGENCY IN ITALIAN CONTEXT

This section discusses Moderata Fonte's *Thirteen Songs of Floridoro* and Giulia Bigolina's *Urania: The Story of a Young Women's Love* to show the agency the afore-mentioned authors have and their dissident stance in the context of their literary works. Within the framework of Cultural Materialism, which concentrates on the subordinate voices within the dominant, the chapter asserts that Moderata Fonte and Giulia Bigolina thanks to their act of writing and the exemplary female characters in each text through their various adventures and speeches which question the patriarchal teachings and assumptions resist the hierarchical gender structure, the patriarchal construction of womanhood and the dominant culture of the Renaissance society to foreground female agency, female voice and female experience. Taken collectively, their literary position within their sociocultural context addresses the basic concept of our critical approach -dissidence- which refers to the "challenging of authority in the early modern period, considering especially the ideologies . . . of gender . . . and writing" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* x).

Notwithstanding the dominance of the patriarchal values in the Cinquecento Italy, the emergent female voice is not absent within the dominant culture. Although the conduct literature and the decrees of the Council of Trent give the impression that the patriarchal teachings are immediately adopted by the subordinate, Williams avers that "*no mode of production and therefore no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention (Marxism 125)* [emphasis in the original] and, establishing its discussion upon his hypothesis, the present chapter seeks to examine the underrepresented part of the Cinquecento Italian culture, whose two representatives are the Venetian Moderata Fonte and the Paduan Giulia Bigolina. Cultural Materialism acknowledges the polyphony and homogeneity prevailing in a given culture and thus is alert to detecting its silent voices because it presupposes that no matter how subordinate one might be within the social order, still "non-dominant elements interact with the dominant forms, sometimes co-existing with . . . but also challenging . . . them" (Dollimore, *Radical* 7). Within

this framework, the literary stance of Moderata Fonte and Giulia Bigolina is quite important in that even though Fonte, for instance, writes her romance based upon the model Ludovico Ariosto sets forth, she “embarrass[es] the dominant by appropriating” (Branningan 48) his work and Giulia Bigolina aims at producing an authentic romance in order to defend the worth of women whose sole origin she claims to be her wit and intellect. In other words, Fonte and Bigolina are nourished by the cultural debates of their age and refashion their works in order to serve for their profeminist purposes. Despite the attempts to police women through religion and conduct literature, they manage to “gain subversive leverage” and enable to make “repression apparent” and “silences audible” (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 299). Fonte and Bigolina fulfil their share of the task when they resist against patriarchal culture and the stereotypical understanding of womanhood. In this sense, their romances become emergent cultural elements as emergent culture “depends crucially on finding new forms or adaptation of forms” (Williams, *Marxism* 126). True it is that their presence does not extend its influence so far as to subvert the dominant culture but its “particular emphases [on the subordinate voice and on the patriarchal practices]” become the precursor of “deep starting-points and conclusions” (134) in terms of the recovery of the subordinate voices and to shatter the patriarchal understanding of womanhood. Their act is significant as it gives voice to the subordinate.

Furthermore, the female characters Fonte and Bigolina create pose dissidence against the dominant culture. Risamante, Queen of Phrygia, Lucimena, Celsidea and Circetta in Fonte’s *Floridoro* and Urania in Bigolina’s *Urania* realise the Cultural Materialist concern aiming at recovering the subordinate voices. It is through these characters that Fonte and Bigolina challenge the patriarchal oppression, patriarchal practices and the patriarchal discourse which collectively label women as intellectually and physically insufficient. The amplification of the female voice through their experiences, their relationships with certain male and female characters, their outlook on education, love and marriage, their defending their true worth independent of male appreciation, their courageous expression of their desires and the criticism of contemporary patriarchal practices in terms of the dowry system, arranged marriages and the art of painting render them agent heroines whose alternative perception is not overshadowed by the male discourse but who is given the chance to claim agency and prove their dissidence within the patriarchal social order. In each romance, through certain “strategies of

negotiation" such as the refashioning of dominant ideologies through "(mis)appropriation and their subversion through inversion" (Dollimore, "Dominant" 181-82) several relationships between Risamante and Macandro, Risamante and Cloridabello in Fonte's *Floridoro* and Urania and Fabio in Bigolina's *Urania* reverse gender roles. The misappropriation of the hierarchical binary opposition of the stronger and capable man and the weak and helpless woman both reflects the conflict between the dominant and the subordinate and shows that as long as the subordinate does not yield to the demands of the dominant, there occurs a possibility to transform the oppressive social order. According to Sinfield, it is only when women unite can they overwhelm the "superior plausibility" the dominant culture "substantiates." The dialogue and solidarity among women help them "produce a dissident perspective" (*Faultlines* 38) and assert agency against the dominant culture which establishes patriarchal plausibility convincing women to remain in their subordinate position. In this context, it is safe to conclude that Risamante, the Queen of Phrygia, the fay and Circetta in Fonte's *Floridoro* and Urania and the five women in Bigolina's *Urania* through their solidarity and dialogue "combat" the patriarchal culture and "develop dissident subjectivities" which "trouble the social order" and "redeploy its most cherished values" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 299) of female submission and silence.

The clash between the dominant and emergent cultural elements becomes "a significant site within which older and new interests" are "disseminated" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 46). Romance, for Fonte and Bigolina, becomes a beneficial instrument in which they disseminate their dissident opinion in terms of the debate on women. Both authors scrutinise the validity of the patriarchal culture in order to promote female emancipation. Despite the struggle of the dominant culture to legitimate and naturalise its power, power is never irresistible and indestructible. While it posits power "as seamless and all-pervasive" (Belsey, "Towards" 88) Moderata Fonte, Giulia Bigolina and their female characters demonstrate that "agency is virtually inescapable" as long as women devote themselves to "taking up arms" against the patriarchal domination.

4.1. Moderata Fonte & *Thirteen Songs of Floridoro*

And further, if they could with their owne pen,
Set forth the worthie praise of their owne kind,
And not to be beholding unto men,
Whom hate and envie often so doth blind,
To make us heare the good but now and then,
But evrie place full of their ill we find;
Then sure I judge, their praises would be such,
As hardly men should have attained so much. (37.2)¹¹¹

In the thirty-seventh canto of his *Orlando furioso*, Ludovico Ariosto exhorts women to take up the pen and to write their glorious achievements themselves which, he believes, owing to the hatred and jealousy menfolk have bred, have been overshadowed but have the power to reverse history once recorded. Interestingly enough, while the encourager is the best-selling chivalric fiction author and the genre is quite popular in the Italian peninsula, the female contribution to the genre is virtually non-existent in the Cinquecento Italy. The present situation renders Moderata Fonte's (1555-1592) *Tredici canti del Floridoro* [Thirteen Songs of Floridoro] (1581) a pivotal effort in terms of female empowerment since it "is the first major attempt by a woman writer in Italy to enter the mainstream of romance production" (Kolsky, "Moderata" 166) and it "represents the first sustained effort on the part of a woman writer to pen a Renaissance romance on the model of Ariosto and Boiardo" (Finucci, Introduction 22) in order to amplify the female voice thanks to the *querelle des femmes* topics it deals with. Fonte's dissidence stems from her choice of the genre when there are only few women trying their hand in romances. Ariosto writes his own fifty years earlier singing "of ladies, knights, of passions and of wars, or courtliness, and of valiant deeds" [le donne, i cavalier, l'arme, gli amori, le cortesie, l'audaci imprese io canto] (1.1) and Fonte, following her predecessor's path, writes on "the glorious deeds and the sweet affections of illustrious knights and ladies" [canta l'inclite imprese e i dolci affetti de' cavallieri e delle donne illustri] (1.2) with a similar decisiveness to create her own work. Her case, however, is unusual because, as her biographer and guardian the Venetian historian Giovanni Niccolò Doglioni (1548-1629) remarks, while an expert lover

¹¹¹ "E che per sé medesime potuto / avesson dar memoria alle sue lode, / non mendicar dagli scrittori aiuto, / ai quali astio et individua il cor sì rode, / che 'l ben che ne puon dir, spesso è taciuto, e 'l mal, quanto ne san, per tutto s'ode; / tanto il lor nome sorgeria, che forse / viril fama a tal grado unqua non sorse" (37.2). Numbering refers to canto and octave in respective order.

sings naturally of love or a mariner of winds, it is quite marvellous of an inexperienced virgin, who is confined within the restricted walls, to perfectly sing poetry, the fact which surprises both the world and nature according to him¹¹² (qtd. in Finucci, Introduction 1). Doglioni eulogises Fonte's vivid imagination in lyrical enterprise yet her position as an author of romance in the wake of the Council of Trent is what makes Fonte twice laudable considering the oppressive age she writes in because, no matter how attractive reading or writing of chivalric adventures might be, following the post-Tridentine regulations, the authors perforce pen religious works on the lives of saints and women are strictly discouraged to read, as Lodovico Dolce (1508-1568) states, "all those lascivious books, all those romances and many errant knights" (qtd. in Finucci, Introduction 18). Silvio Antoniano in *Tre libri dell'educazione e politica dei figliuoli*, only within two years after Fonte's publication, advises families not to "have in their home love books or . . . romances . . . because there is no usefulness in them . . . and they can be secret and pernicious teachers of grave sins" (18) and in Lucca 1585, an Order for Nuns forbids reading romances, novellas, comedies, sonnets and songs since they are thought to be non-religious and addressing to senses.¹¹³ The surveillance continues at the dawn of the seventeenth century evinced by the Veronese bishop Sebastiano Pisani's (1606-1670) instruction to matrons to inspect the nuns' dwellings and to confiscate all the books of chivalry (18). Considering the hostility against secular works and the period when romances were among the Index of Forbidden Books, that Fonte produces a chivalric fiction featuring a female protagonist with the aim of asserting her position as an author proves her dissidence within the social context of post-Tridentine Italy as to its "challenging of authority in the early modern period, considering especially the ideologies and institutions of gender . . . and writing" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* x). Even though Moderata Fonte produces her romance based on the path Ludovico Ariosto sets forward, she indeed manages to "embarrass the dominant by appropriating" (Branningan 48) his work in that much as she is nourished by his example, she refashions the genre to serve for her feminist agenda. In this sense, her romance

¹¹² "Che d'amor canti il ben esperto amante / . . . il marinar de venti . . . / Maraviglia non . . . / Ma che tu non esperta verginella, / Stando rinchiusa in fra l'anguste mura, / Di tutto ciò perfettamente canti / Non pur stupisce il mondo, e la natura."

¹¹³ "Sono proibiti alle monache tutti li libri di romanzi, novelle, commedie, sonetti, canzoni, lettere et ogn'altra che contenga materia, concetti, e parole sensuali et secolaresche" (Finucci, Introduction 19).

functions as an emergent cultural element given that emergent culture “depends crucially on finding new forms or adaptation of forms” (Williams, *Marxism* 126) Fonte successfully employs. Cox also supports the hypothesis when she states that Fonte “was something of an anomaly in Venice . . . especially with regard to genre” (Introduction 3) she utilises.

That Fonte would not internalise the patriarchal principles of silence and obedience was evident from her childhood, the literary career that followed and the support she got from her family. Fonte -who was born as Modesta Pozzo- was born into an upper-middle-class parents, the *cittadini originari* of the Republic of Venice. Since she lost her parents at an early age, she was raised by her maternal grandmother Cecilia Mazzi and her step grandfather Prospero Saraceni. Upon her brief customary education at a convent, the Saracenis promoted Fonte for further studies and supplied her with materials to read and study (Doglioni 6)¹¹⁴ and although Fonte did not have a private tutor, she learnt to read and write in Latin by studying her brother Leonardo’s assignments. Soon after she started to live with the son-in-law of Prospero Saraceni, Giovanni Niccolò Doglioni, Fonte became a kind of *enfant prodige* in town thanks to his encouragement. She married Filippo Zorzi in 15 February 1583 when she was customarily at quite a late age for women of the time to marry¹¹⁵ either because of the dowry problems (Finucci, Introduction 2-5) or possibly owing to her dedication to the literary activities given that she produced the bulk of her work before marriage.

Fonte was supported by her grandparents, her guardian Doglioni and her husband and she used to have a privileged status as a member of an upper-class family, as a woman, however, she was cognisant of the “disadvantages and inequalities” of her sex and she displayed “a remarkable ‘feminist’ consciousness” (Malpezzi Price, “Figurata” 25) in her works concentrating on the problems women face in the patriarchal culture. Taking into consideration her awareness of women’s unfavourable conditions, it is not surprising that Fonte adopts the pen name Moderata Fonte when she first publicises her romance abandoning her baptismal one. Although it is common for men to use pseudonyms at that time, Fonte is an

¹¹⁴ “Onde il Saraceni, che vedeva questa sua natural inclinazione, per tanto maggiormente infervorarla, andava sempre con novelle invenzioni dando materia de dire, non le lasciando mancar libri per poter a suo modo su quelli leggere e studiare” (6).

¹¹⁵ The average age was sixteen in the second half of the sixteenth century (Chojnacki 313).

exception as she gets a *nom de plume* for herself. At first glance, Fonte seems to be under the influence of the patriarchal teachings limiting her public appearance when she states in a 1580 letter to Francesco dei Medici as to why she chooses a pseudonym: "since my own true name I have not judged it well to expose to public censure, being a young marriageable woman, and according to the custom of the city, obligated in many respects."¹¹⁶ Yet, it is soon understood that it is clever of her to prefer Moderata Fonte -a mid-sized fountain- instead of her baptismal name Modesta Pozzo -a modest well- (Finucci, Introduction 5). In other words, notwithstanding adopting the customary topos of modesty, Fonte figuratively refuses to be a silent, passive, stationary and invisible well but yearns for an audible, active, mobile and visible fountain. Her name as the signifier of her non-patriarchally conditioned being stands out for her dissident nature as "a spring of life, a source of knowledge, and a stream of learning" (5). Even though she keeps the water symbolism to qualify her literary career, Fonte's contest against the enclosed well in favour of a dynamic fountain can be understandably considered her resistance against the passive role women are assigned, which suppresses their reproductive force. When Fonte's son Filippo Zorzi celebrates his late mother's literary success in a commemorative sonnet that precedes *Il merito delle donne*, he also likens her to a decisive and triumphant fountain against the puissant rivers such as the Arno and the Po, the symbols of Dante and Ariosto respectively:

Né a colui forse esser vinto sì spiacque
 Come dell'Arno e 'I Po son l'onde meste
 Della perduta gloria e ne fan feste
 L'onde in meto di cui Venere nacque
 Se 'I dolce al dolce noce t'I'amar giova
 Che dir si può? Se non, che man di Dea
 L'ordine di natura abbia mutato?
 Ma se donna mortal fè questa nova
 Stupenda opra, chi negherà che dato
 Non gli abbi il Ciel quanto dar gli potea?¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ "Sotto imaginato nome di Moderata Fonte, poi che 'l mio vero, et proprio non hò giudicato esser bene di esponer alla publica censura, essendo giovane da marito, et secondo l'uso della città obligata à molti rispetti" (qtd. in Finucci, Introduction 5).

¹¹⁷ Cox translates the poem as follows: "And little as he enjoyed being vanquished, the waters of the Arno and the Po are now perhaps even sadder at their lost glory, while the waves from which Venus was born rejoice at their victory. So we have fresh water working to the detriment of fresh water and the benefit of the salty ocean. What can we say? The only explanation must be that a goddess's hand has changed the normal order of nature. Or, if it really was a mortal woman who was the author of this uncanny and remarkable feat, who can deny that she must have received from the heavens all those gifts the heavens can bestow?" (Introduction 29-30).

Even though Fonte writes three religious works under the influence of the post-Tridentine teachings, namely a drama *Le feste, Rappresentazione avanti il Serenissimo Principe di Venetia Nicolò da Ponte, il giorno di Santo Stefano* (1581) and two pious poems *La Passione di Christo, descritta in ottava rima* (1582) and *La Resurrettione di Ciesu Christo, Nostro Signore, che segue alla Santissima Passione, descritta in ottava rima* (1592) to honour Jesus Christ, it is *Tredici canti del Floridoro* and *Il merito delle donne*, the two landmarks of her literary career, that reflect her resistance against and her desire to assert agency within the dominant patriarchal culture of the sixteenth century Venetian society. If “for women to speak is to threaten the system of differences which gives meaning to patriarchy” (Belsey, *Subject* 191) and considered together with the water/river metaphor attributed to her, that Fonte’s afore-mentioned two works make her a dissident speaking subject unacceptable for the patriarchal culture would be a reasonable inference as she devotes them to “commitment to the transformation of a social order which exploits people on the grounds of gender” (Dollimore and Sinfield, Foreword viii).

In *Il merito delle donne* [The Worth of Women], thought to be completed just one day before her death in 1592 and posthumously published in 1600, Fonte argues against the misogynist attacks launched by Giuseppe Passi (1569-1629) who in his treatise *I donneschi difetti* [The Defects of Women] (1599) repeatedly preaches women silence and obedience due to their innate deficiencies. Fonte’s work, “an impassioned defence of female equality” (Snyder 162) written in a dialogue form¹¹⁸ harbouring women from different phases of womanhood such as wives, a maiden and a widow, focuses on the natural worth of women simultaneously pondering on the reasons why women have become the oppressed and marginalised half of the society. Lacking even one male character accompanying the group, the speakers are given the opportunity to freely share their opinion on marriage and familial relationships. *Il merito* emphasises the restrictions the society imposes on women, which Fonte and her characters oppose reasoning that women are not the second sex by birth but have become thus by custom as a consequence of “an abuse that has been introduced into the world and that men have then, over time, gradually translated into law and custom” [ma non di merito, questo è un abuso, che si è messo nel mondo, che poi a lungo andare si hanno fatto lecito ed ordinario] (61).

¹¹⁸ The work resembles Baldassare Castiglione’s *Il Cortegiano* and Pietro Bembo’s *Gli Asolini* but she revolutionises the genre as she employs only female speakers (Ross 151).

The work defends the natural equality of each sex, challenges the patriarchal discourse which bullies women and “offers an innovative vision of a secular female community” (Ross 151). In *Il merito*, which is in fact a record of her observations, Fonte uses her right to criticise the malfunctions in the patriarchal society she is a member of and presents the discontent she feels due to the oppression of women by abusive and unjust practices. Corinna, who is the spokesperson for Fonte, expresses how she and each woman in extension should feel and be as follows:

The heart that dwells within my breast is free: I serve no one, and belong to no one but myself . . . Beauty, youth, pleasures, and pomp are nothing to me, except as a trophy to my pure thoughts, offered up of my own free will and not through chance. And thus in my green years, as in the riper ones that await me, since men’s deceptions cannot obstruct my path, I may expect fame and glory, in life and death.

[Liberò cor nel mio petto soggiorna, / Non serva alcun, né d’altri son che mia . . . Bellezza, gioventù, piaceri, e pompe, / Nulla stimo, se non ch’ a i pensier puri, / Son trofeo, per mia voglia, e non per sorte. / Così negli anni verdi, e nei maturi, / Poiché fallacia d’uom non m’interrompe, / Fama e gloria n’attendo in vita, e in morte.] (49-50)

In *Floridoro*, Fonte rehearses the same view on female oppression and her act of writing chivalric fiction is laden with the desire to transcend the limit the society imposes on women as authors and individuals. In this context, the romance embodies dissidence within the Cultural Materialist framework considering its struggle for “the recovery of subordinate voices” and alertness “to oppressive representations in terms of gender” (Sinfield, *Shakespeare* 25). Even though Fonte cannot complete the work,¹¹⁹ the fact that she deals with a masculine material demonstrates her unconventional position. On the other hand, Doglioni remarks Fonte’s unaccustomed womanhood integrating her feminine duties with writing:

The *Floridoro* and all the other things, she wrote in the same manner, for, as a woman, she had to attend to womanly tasks like sewing, and

¹¹⁹ In a dedicatory letter [lettera autografa] to Francesco Medici, the dedicatee of the romance, Fonte states her intention to complete the work: “And if it turns out somewhat pleasing to the world and especially to your Most Serene Highness, since the work is already totally plotted, and will reach better than fifty cantos, I will force myself with all my strength to reduce it to its perfection” [La qual cosa, se conoscerò esser di qualche gusto al Mondo, et specialm[en]te, alla v[ostra] Ser[enissim]a Alt[ezz]a (essendo già totalm[en]te ordita l’opera, che arriverà à meglio di cinquanta canti) mi sforzerò con tutte le forze mie di ridurla alla sua perfettione] (Fonte, *Floridoro* 48). There is no definite reason as to why she did not finish it, though. While the fact that she had to marry and the responsibilities that followed might have been the two reasons, Malpezzi Price believes that it was impossible for Fonte to write for her heroine(s) an ending that she really desires considering the religious and social milieu of Venice in the 1580s (*Moderata* 30-31) the time when the decrees of the Council of Trent were becoming effective on women.

she did not wish to neglect these labours because of the false notion, so widespread in our city today, that women should excel in nothing but the running of the household.

[e così tutto il *Floridoro* e altro ha ella composto di quella maniera; perciocché come donna attendeva ad offizi donneschi del cucire e non voleva lassar quelli per l'abuso, che corre oggidì in questa città, che non si vol veder donna virtuosa in altro, che nel governo di casa.] (9)

As the excerpt evinces, Fonte challenges the dominant tendency which either restricts women to solely domestic matter or accuses them of abandoning their fundamental duties. In other words, she becomes a "working mother" (Ross 150) managing to balance her *feminine* role¹²⁰ as a mother and her *masculine* role as an author. Situated at the matrix of familial relationships -an adopted daughter, a wife and a mother but also a prolific author- Fonte achieves an amount of independence combining the gender expectations the patriarchy assigns her with her authorial aspect. Interestingly enough, while her will to become a writer attests to her claim for intellectual activity, as Kolsky interprets, that she does not renounce her fundamental roles as a wife and a mother does not make her a threatening figure against the patriarchal Venetian society ("Controversy" 974).

However, Fonte is nourished by her femininity and when she employs a domestic metaphor referring to her writing experience, she adroitly appropriates the transgressive act to prioritise her gender and her literary achievement:

I with such beautiful threads adorn and weave
my cloth, which in itself has a rough texture,
That it can indeed seem beautiful; and it can stand near
any other of gold and silver,
.....
Whose fame ascends beyond the stars.

[Io di sì bei fili adorno e tesso
La tela mia c'ha in sé rozzo ordimento,
Che ben può parer bella e star appresso

¹²⁰ Doglioni also praises her as follows: "Madonna Modesta brought [her children] up with all possible diligence, perfecting the most refined of skills in them; and certainly, few children of their age can be compared with them . . . [She] was extremely good at running her household: so good, indeed, that her husband scarcely needed to give it a thought and confessed on several occasions that . . . She took everything out of his hands and did it all herself, with extraordinary efficiency and diligence" [Sono stati allevati da lei con tutta quella maggior diligenza possibile per farli riuscire eccellenti nelle più rare virtù. E veramente pochi di quella età puonno ad alcuno di essi assigliarsi . . . Era di così gran governo in casa, che 'l marito poca cura n'aveva e ha poi più volte confessato di non sapere, che cosa sia l'aver carico di figliuoli, né di casa, perciocché ella sollevandolo di ogni cosa ne aveva la cura e al tutto con maravigliosa prontezza e diligenza provvedeva] (37-38).

Qualunque altra si sia d'oro e d'argento
.....
Di cui la fama ascende oltra le stelle.] (*Floridoro* 13.2)

Fonte's employment of the words such as "weave," "cloth" and "texture" is emblematic of her conscious attempt to domesticate a supposedly dissident act of secular writing. Fonte thus subverts the custom which confines women to feminine sphere based upon the cultural signifiers of female handicraft cementing their idealised roles. What is more, her comparison of the work to durable materials such as silver and gold implies the skilful construction of the romance whose eternity would commemorate the literary talent of its creator, which would shine despite the patriarchal efforts to overshadow it and which would defy the oppressive culture that hinders women from public acknowledgement. The stanza displays Fonte's veiled attempt to gain immortality through her verse.

As well as the domestic allusion, which is indicative of Fonte's gendered act of writing within a male genre and her covert desire to gain public attention, her appearance among the contemporary Venetian writers within the narrative indubitably reinforces her agency as a single female author among the coterie of men. She is the sole female author among the thirteen men described.¹²¹ The act communicates her determination to be visible within the patriarchal culture that underestimates women's intellectual competence:

On the last facade, which was sculpted
in back where there was little light,
a solitary young woman stayed.
She did not dare come out with the others into the light,
quite ashamed that she, too bold,
aspired to the way which leads to heaven,
having as low and dull a mind
as her design was clear and sublime.

[Nell'ultima facciata, che scolpita
Di dietro fu dove era poce luce,
Una giovane stavasi romita
E non ardia con gli altri uscir in luce,
Vergognandosi assai che troppo ardita
Aspirasse alla via ch'al ciel conduce,
Avendo tanto basso e fosco ingegno

¹²¹ The thirteen poets are Domenico Venier (10.23-24), Maffeo Vernier (10.24), Celio Magno (10.25), Bernardino Partenio (10.26), Orsano Giustiniano (10.27), Erasmo Valvasone (10.28), Vincenzo Giliani (10.29), Alberto Lavezuola (10.30), Bartelomeo Malombra (10.31), Casare Simonetti (10.32), Giulian Goselimo (10.33), Cesare Pavese (10.34), Gianmarino Verdizzotti (10.35).

Quanto sublime e chiaro era il disegno.] (10.36)

In the first place, it is notable that Fonte makes use of the modesty topos in her self-portrait. That she does not “dare come out . . . into the light,” that she is “quite ashamed,” that she has “low and dull a mind” but “too bold” to “aspire to the way which leads to heaven” contribute to her self-effacing and self-diminishing representation and they also rehearse the sixteenth century patriarchal assumption that women are intellectually weak and are in need of patriarchal surveillance in case of their transgression. The octave establishes the patriarchal description of ideal womanhood. The following octave, however, immediately deconstructs the initial intention. The description continues:

She wore a long white skirt,
as for the virginal state is appropriate,
and she seemed at an early and youthful age
to have lofty thoughts kindled in her heart.
This damsel had no caption
to make her plain to the other senses,
for the sculptor who fashioned her portrait
did not wish that her name be known.

[Bianca avea indosso e lunga la gonnella
Come allo stato virginal conviensi,
E pareva in età verde e novella
Aver nel petto alti pensier accensi.
Non avea breve alcun questa donzella
Che la fesse palese agli altri sensi,
Ch'allo scultor che la sua effigie esprese
Grato non fu che 'l nome si sapesse.] (10.37)

It is learnt that the sculpture has a “long white skirt”, it is “virginal” and it is at a “youthful” age enough to kindle “lofty thoughts.” In other words, it represents exactly someone who should not deal with writing but the sculpture, which is a substitute for Fonte, gives the message that *she* is there among men despite preclusion. The deliberate self-humiliation at the former octave cannot “dispel the boldness of Fonte’s move in literally carving herself a space in a male literary canon” (Cox, Introduction 5). Furthermore, the colour symbolism and the emphasis on her maidenhood shatter the misogynist understanding which associates female speech, non-secular writing and public presence with sexual impropriety. The self-portrait, in this sense, also questions the validity of patriarchal discourse. What is more, the fact that the sculpture is an unnamed woman might lead one to think that she is not given a name probably because she is not thought to be as worthy

of attention as the male authors. However, it is safe to assume that the sculpture is deliberately left anonymous so that it not only represents Fonte but also honours all the female authors who have been marginalised and the womankind as a whole who has been oppressed, ostracised and despised simply because of her sex by the unequal patriarchal practices but still has the perseverance to assert her existence. In other words, the self-insertion both celebrates women's literary enterprise into the male world of literature and asserts their determination to be within them no matter how biased and discouraging an attitude they might face with. If the parade of male authors represents the dominant culture, the sculpture stands for emergent culture which is "distinct from the dominant . . . active and pressing but not yet fully articulated" (Williams, *Marxism* 126). The monument has a momentous impact on asserting the female right to write; its solid texture connotes resistance against time and patriarchal oppression. Baycock states that "what is socially peripheral is often symbolically central" (32). Likewise, even though Fonte situates the sculpture in the remotest point under dim light, she implies that women are at the heart of the society no matter how contemptuous mankind might be. When her pseudonym and the self-portrait (she describes it in two stanzas while other male poets are depicted in one stanza except for Domenico Venier) are considered together, it is safe to conclude that they serve as Fonte's "jaunty self-assertiveness" and that Fonte is keen on asserting her authority and her "protofeminist sensibility" (Cox, Introduction 5) as an author. Fonte reproachfully states in *Il merito* that the worth of women is not celebrated while men are always honoured:

Few sculptures are commissioned now, except to commemorate some important person, like a prince or a lord or a famous captain. Such men frequently receive the honour of having statues, columns, and other similar constructions erected in their honour, to reward their merits and preserve their fame for posterity. And our own rulers here in Venice have done just that on various occasions in the past, to the glory of deserving soldiers and citizens of the republic.

[Oggidi par che sia molto più in pregio la pittura e pochi si servano della scoltura, se non in caso di onorar qualche persona d'importanza, come prencipe, signore, o capitano illustre, a cui per gli meriti del suo valore si soleno drizzar statue, colonne e simili edifici a perpetua memoria della sua fama, come molte volte in varie occasioni hanno fatto anco questi nostri signori per la gloria di lor benemeriti soldati e cittadini.] (227)

In *Floridoro*, she not only keeps Ariosto's advice and starts to praise the courageous deeds of women but she also erects a statue in their honour to

celebrate their achievements. In fact, Fonte compares writing with the pursuit of *masculine* acts to imply that women could achieve in both regardless of conveniences attributed to each sex:

Always one has seen and sees (provided that a
woman wanted to devote thought to it)
more than one woman succeed in the military,
and take away the esteem and acclaim from many men.
Just so in letters and in every
endeavour that men undertake and pursue;
women have achieved and achieve such good results
that they have no cause at all to envy men.

[Sempre s'è visto e vede (pur ch'alcuna
Donna v'abbia voluto il pensier porre)
Nella milizia riuscir più d'una,
E 'l pregio e 'l grido a molti uomini torre;
E così nelle lettere e in ciascuna
Impresa che l'uom pratica e discorre
Le donne sì buon frutto han fatto e fanno,
Che gli uomini a invidiar punto non hanno.] (4.2)¹²²

Despite the "lack of successful female models offered by the available print literature" (Finucci, Introduction 22) that Fonte celebrates female achievement and that she addresses social inequalities render her, her characters and her work dissident on three levels because Fonte suggests that women can write on the supposedly masculine themes and that they can be quite successful on whatever they do once given the chance. She emphasises the prowess women have both in heroic achievement and as an author. Schiesari states that "to arm women would create a double threat to men: not only an emotional but also a physical danger" and thus men believe "women must be despoiled of arms and of rhetoric because they are disarming of male virility" (75). Fonte and her female characters in the romance collectively pose an emotional and physical danger against the patriarchal culture because, as the following discussion will show, all are emotionally, physically, intellectually and rhetorically armed against patriarchal oppression.

¹²² Fonte rehearses the same idea regarding women's military skills in *Il merito*: "if women do not bear arms, that isn't because of any deficiency on their part; rather, the fault lies with the way they were brought up" [Oltra di ciò non manca alle donne per esser meritamente amate, oltre la corporal bellezza e leggiadria, fortezza di animo e di corpo e in quel che non vagliano per armeggiare, non è lor mancamento ma di chi dà loro creanza, poiché si è visto chiaro di quelle che sono state già tempo allevate sotto tal disciplina, quanto son riuscite valorose ed esperte, avendo appresso quel particolar e proprio dono del presto consiglio] (100).

The romance, notwithstanding its misleading title of a male warrior whom the reader could only meet in the fifth canto, functions as “a spirited passage of feminist polemic” being the author’s “first overt public pronouncement on the question of the status of women” (Cox, Introduction 5). *Floridoro* revolves around the adventures of its warrior protagonist Risamante. Her encounters with different people and supernatural entities during her quest to regain the kingdom of Armenia from her sister and the experiences of several male and female characters which constitute the work’s subplot enable Fonte to criticise the patriarchal culture and question its teachings. The romance is a guide on how a female author could negotiate the generic features of a given work. Hall believes that such a negotiation “acknowledges the legitimacy of . . . hegemonic definition, while, at a more restricted, situational level, it makes its own ground rules [operating] with exceptions to the rule” (37). Drawing on Hall’s formula, Ann Rosalind Jones states that “a negotiated viewer position is one that accepts the dominant ideology encoded into a text by particularities and transforms it in the service of a different group” (4) and Dollimore asserts that “non-dominant elements interact with the dominant forms, sometimes co-existing with . . . but also challenging, modifying or even displacing them” (*Radical* 7). In the same vein, Fonte, writing from a position of negotiation and subordination, makes use of and exploits the conventions of the dominant culture and genre in favour of women. Even though *Floridoro* follows the generic features such as heroic adventures, helpless characters, enchanted places, heavenly beautiful women, jousts, fights against supernatural creatures, magic and sorcerers, it turns the generic expectations upside down. Dollimore believes that “subordinate, marginal or dissident elements could appropriate dominant discourse and transform them in the process” (“Materialism” 12). Likewise, contrary to the patriarchal representation of women as relentless witches, as seductresses or as mourning damsels-in-distress in contradistinction to the omnipotent portrayal of manhood, in Fonte’s text,

there are no seduction scenes, no wicked witches, no sexualised enchantresses, and no pictorial Petrarchan representations of women in various stages of disrobing. Men, it turns out, are . . . inconstant in their choices and moody in their attitudes, traits that usually characterise the women penned by male authors. (Finucci, “Moderata” 756)

Within this framework, the invincible Risamante as the warrior heroine and her role as the saviour of people is the first example Fonte employs that thwarts patriarchal discourse on femininity. Risamante, whose experiences the reader witnesses in

almost each canto, is motivated by her desire to regain the rightful kingdom of Armenia from which she has been disinherited by her twin sister Biondura. The combats with Macandro and Cloridabello both prove Risamante's aptitude in martial arts and Fonte's protofeminism regarding the *querelle des femmes*. Dollimore believes that when struggling against the dominant culture, one should not adopt "simple denunciation of dominant ideologies" as it might be "dangerous and counter-productive" for the subordinate. He instead proposes certain "strategies of negotiation" such as the refashioning of dominant ideologies through "(mis)appropriation and their subversion through inversion" ("Dominant" 181-82). In the same vein, in Risamante's first encounter with a man, Fonte does not disregard the binary opposition of the strong and the subordinate but inverts the generic convention of power. In the first canto, Risamante is pitted against Macandro, a ferocious warrior, who has arrived at the Greek land to fight so as to honour his lady Biondura's beauty which "has no peer in the world" [non ha in terre uguale] (*Floridoro* 1.17):

I will go, if your judgment approves it,
 outside of the city, next to the great olive tree.
 There I will await whoever might come to the trial
 against me, for I declare I till prove
 whose beautiful eyes and whose beautiful divine countenance
 do not yield before any other's beauty,
 but that there is no human face to match hers.

[Io me n'andrò (se 'l tuo parer l' approva)
 Fuor della terra al grand'olivo accanto,
 E ivi aspetterò chi venga in prova
 Contra di me che di provar mi vanto,
 Che la regina mia sol si ritrova
 I cui begli occhi e 'l cui bel viso santo
 Non pur non cede alla bellezza altrui,
 Ma non è volto uman simile a lui.] (1.19)

It is notable from the adjectives employed to describe Macandro that he is an extremely self-confident and brutal warrior. Depicted as "the fierce, crude man" [l'uom crudo e fiero] (1.14), he is also quite arrogant and because of his "great pride" [gran superbia] (1.22) and "his valour which he considered so great" [il valor ch'ei tanto in sé stimava] he speaks "with a loud and haughty voice" [disse con alta e con superba voce] (1.15) to challenge the warriors. The narrative builds his power so great that he seems invincible; indeed, a group of mighty men try but cannot outdo him while it is soon understood that his indomitable depiction serves

for authorial aims in that it is Risamante who with "harsh and biting sword" [la spada aspra e pungente] (2.21) beats the rival. Macandro, the ultimate representation of ideal manhood, falls dead by a phallic weapon. That is, Risamante manages to subvert the masculinity Macandro represents. Although Fonte uses the masculine pronoun to refer to Risamante until she removes her helmet to meet the generic conventions, it is immediately understood that the victor is indeed "a most noble maiden" [una gentilissima donzella] (2.25) who startles everyone at court by overcoming the so-called weakness of her sex. Interestingly enough, to everyone's surprise, she looks exactly like the portrait Macandro has hung on the tree earlier:

Just as one who is present when
a woman holds a mirror before herself,
and now gazing at the natural face,
now at its likeness in that glass,
examining every part, cannot discern
anything that might differ between them,
just so this woman seemed to resemble in all her parts
the beloved of the king of the Parthians.

[Come chi fosse alla presenza quando
Tiensi donna talor lo specchio inante,
E ora il viso natural mirando
Venisse, ora in quel vetro il suo semblante
Non saprebbe ogni parte esaminando
Qual cosa fusse in lor dissimigliante,
Così parve costei del re de' Parthi
L'amata in tutte assimigliar le parti.] (2.28)

In the final canto of the work, the scenes recur when Risamante fights against Cloridabello who also acts on behalf of Biondura in order to save her kingdom from Risamante's threat. He is also beaten by the armoured warrior:

Cloridabello raises his shield in a hurry
When he sees the blow falling, for his own defense.
The proud blow cuts in two parts the shield,
And into his head penetrates the cruel sword.

[Cloridabello alza lo scudo in fretta,
Visto il colpo calar, per sua difesa,
Taglia in due parti il colpo altier lo scudo
E penetra nel capo il brando crudo.] (13.62)

What is more, in the similar scene that closes the work in which Cloridabello looks at his opponent's face when she uncovers, he cannot comprehend why the woman for whom he jousts wounds him. He confuses Risamante with Biondura:

"Is it not," he said, "the beloved face
that Love's hand stamped in my heart?
Are these not the beautiful eyes that caught me
with a sweet snare and placed me in sweet error?
Indeed I am not so blind nor so foolish
as not to recognise the one who has taken my heart."

[Non è questo (dicea) l' amato volto
Che mi stampò nel cor la man d'Amore?
Non son questi i begli occhi, che m'han colto
Al dolce laccio e posto in dolce errore?
Io non son già sì cieco né sì stolto
Che non conosca chi m'ha tolto il core.
Dunque dalle mia dea restai conquiso,
E rimango prigion del suo bel viso.] (13.66)

It is hard to discern the two women since they are twin sisters "except that one is soft and delicate, and the other goes armed as a warrior" [eccetto ch'una é molle e delicata e l'altra va come guerriero armata] (2.30). Identical in appearance but essentially incompatible, the twins demonstrate the shaping force of the society on individuals. Risamante is raised by "the great wizard Celidante . . . in a castle founded in the middle of the sea" [Celidante gran mago . . . dentro una rocca in mezzo il mar fondata] (2.31-32) while Biondura inherits the royal household. The former, having been grown up in isolation from culture and the patriarchal environment and exempt from male dominance and rules, does not identify herself with the conventional female roles and does not hesitate to prove her might among male warriors. In other words, she realises Mirandola's oration that one should be maker and molder of one's self. Equally important is the fact that, Celidante embodies a father figure distinctive of the age as he rejects blind commitment to patriarchal dictates. The fact that the twins are of the same blood but extremely different in nature enables Fonte to express one of the most forceful defences of equality between sexes rebelling against the patriarchal culture which evaluates women lower than men while they are as capable as them in truth. In other words, Fonte does not transcend the social structure which categorises each sex based on their stereotypical characteristics but tries to erase the hierarchical structure. Misappropriation becomes an effective tool to produce counter-argument against inequality and oppression:

If when a daughter is born the father
Set her with his son to equivalent tasks,
She would not be in lofty and fair deeds
Inferior or unequal to her brother,
Whether he placed her among the armed squads
With himself, or set her to learn some liberal art.
But because she is raised in other pursuits,
For her education she is held in low regard.

[Se quando nasce una figliola il padre
La ponesse col figlio a un'pra eguale,
Non saria nelle imprese alte e leggiadre
Al frate inferior né disuguale,
O la ponesse in fra l'armate squadre
Seco o a imparar qualche arte liberale,
Ma perché in altri affar viene allevata
Per l'educazion poco è stimata.] (4.4)

Fonte points out the double standard regarding the upbringing of sexes in that, according to her, it is not because of the innate insufficiency that women cannot overcome the manly deeds but they are not given the opportunity to excel. In other words, Fonte defends that it is not the ability that women lack but the means to reach education which hinders their development. She criticises the unfair education system which offers men every opportunity but expels women from the right to education. Thus, she challenges the cultural assumption that women are the less skilful sex. The episode is crucial for the representation of the "dialectic between the dominant and the subordinate" (Dollimore, *Radical* xxvii) and the means to question women's culturally sanctioned place. It suggests that as long as the individuals resist willingly participating in reinforcing the dominant culture, there is always room for dissidence and excellence. In the most renowned octave of the work, Fonte argues that women and men are of the same substance; therefore, there is no reason that women would be less successful than men:

Women in every age were by nature
endowed with great judgment and spirit,
nor are they born less apt than men to demonstrate
(with study and care) their wisdom and valour.
And why, if their bodily form is the same,
if their substances are not varied,
if they have the same food and speech, must they
have then different courage and wisdom?

[Le donne in ogni età fur da natura
Di gran giudizio e d'animo dotate,
Né men atte a mostrar con studio e cura
Senno e valor degli uomini son nate;

E perché se comune è la figura,
Se non son le sostanze variate,
S'hanno simile un cibo e un parlar, denno
Differente aver poi l'ardire e 'l senno?] (4.1)

Fonte emphasises women's equality with men and believes that it is the patriarchal culture that limits them. She states that female achievement and oppression are based upon *nurture* not on *nature*. The fact that Risamante is raised in isolation from the society and its prescriptive rules explains the reason why she has become such a powerful woman. The identical appearance of Risamante and Biondura in opposition to their different personalities functions to support her view on women and on the patriarchal culture. While Risamante is in a political fight with her sister on a literal level, they allegorically represent the two facets of femininity and their fight stands for Fonte's challenge against the patriarchal construction of ideal womanhood. Even though they indistinguishably resemble and are as beautiful as one another, Risamante represents valour, courage, power, perseverance, strength and resolution -the features traditionally associated with manhood- whereas Biondura, although the reader cannot meet her in person, is the damsel-in-distress figure and object of desire who needs the help of several knights to commemorate her beauty or to protect her kingdom. Risamante defends herself and fights for what she thinks she should rightfully possess, Biondura needs others to fend off attacks. The former represents self-sufficient uprightness, the latter embodies defencelessness. In this sense, that they are assigned to opposite roles is a textual strategy Fonte employs to abolish the idea of female helplessness Biondura represents. In other words, Fonte makes Risamante fight against Biondura so that she could beat what she stands for. The physical defeat of Macandro and Cloridabello becomes metonymic for the defeat of the stereotypical attributes the patriarchal culture demands from and envisions in women or considers inappropriate for them through which menfolk are able to control them and to exalt their masculinity as their saviours. Thus, the apparent rivalry between the twins both demystifies the biased construction of ideal womanhood which is not based on biological attributes but on custom and questions the validity of patriarchal discourse. Havel believes that it is the "individuals [who] confirm the system, fulfil the system, make system, *are* the system" (136) [emphasis in the original] because it is due to their willing contribution to the making of ideology without critically inquiring its impositions that the dominant culture fortifies its influence. To put differently, ideology acculturates women into certain behavioural

patterns by representing them as "decreed by God or simply natural" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 114) to maintain the present order. On the other hand, Risamante, by laying bare the unequal upbringing of each sex and by embodying a heroine who transcends the limits of her sex decreed by convention, proves to be a dissident figure because she does not subscribe to the operations of patriarchal ideology; she does not allow the dominant culture to "recruit" and "transform" her "into a subject" (Althusser 1504). Contrarily, she challenges the dominant culture which preaches female silence and obedience and creates false consciousness regarding the inferior status of women. The episode makes it possible that emergent culture might surface as long as an individual does not unquestionably accede to the teachings of the dominant because it is simply due to cultural operation that there is inequality between sexes. On the other hand, even though Biondura embodies the idealised features of femininity as she is incapable of independent action but in need of help at first glance, Fonte is attentive not to portray her as someone totally under the tutelage of men. For instance, although both Macandro and Cloridabello declare that they are in love with Biondura, there is no indication that she is willing to marry either of them. Biondura's position as a woman who does not offer her body as a trophy for the victor makes her considerably different than and resistant to the conventional patriarchal expectation within the genre in which women are treated as exchangeable objects. The fact that Macandro has Biondura's portrait which makes her "the object of a voyeuristic gaze" (Finucci, Introduction 27) and the generic expectation that once he defeats Risamante, Biondura would reward Cloridabello with her body in exchange for her kingdom and would marry him also reinforce the present argument that she would be vulnerable to male desire in their attempt to obtain her. Within this framework, much as Biondura is initially represented as a helpless woman, it is conjecturable that she has limited agency because she does not promise to couple with any man. The absence of the idea of woman-as-commodity is an important indication of Fonte's desire to save women from the object position they are compelled to occupy and to transform the current social order.

More importantly and interestingly enough, it is Risamante who saves Biondura from the marketable condition. Macandro "hangs on a branch of a sacred olive tree a portrait of a magnificent and gracious lady" [appeso a un ramo avea del sacro olivo un'effigie di donna alma e gentile] (1.32) and as soon as Risamante appears "the portrait which is hung high in the branches falls onto the meadow" [gran cosa

da notar fu vista allora, che tosto ch'egli uscì cascò sul prato l'effigie che dai rami alta pendea che tanto il gran Macandro in pregio avea] (2.7). If the portrait and its frame are taken as metaphors for the patriarchal culture which renders women immobile and restricts them within the border as much as the patriarchy allows, its disjuncture from the tree immediately brings to mind the redemption of women from the patriarchal rules they have to cling tightly. In other words, Risamante destroys Macandro by whom Biondura is made an object through a portrait and she beats Cloridabello who represents saviours for the damsels-in-distress. It is interesting that while Risamante and Biondura are rivals on the surface, the fact that she annihilates any possibility by which she is made an inferior object implicates Fonte's covert desire to foreground female solidarity in which the abler woman saves the weaker one. Despite the political antagonism between the sisters, the repetition of the battle-defeat scene twice discredits Risamante's quest as only to regain her kingdom but celebrates her -and Fonte's- insistence on solidarity. Given that Biondura and Risamante become rivals as a result of a patriarchal paternal injustice because their father disinherits one and does not mention her twin to the other, that female solidarity could be achieved once the patriarchal intervention is also eliminated turns out to be a sound deduction.

Moreover, the fact that Risamante is in pursuit of her kingdom both reinforces agency embodied through heroic achievement and becomes a guide for those who pursue individual wishes. Cox believes that for the female readers "the female knight was capable of taking on an emblematic significance that extended beyond the fabulous world of romance and touched on their own aspirations and experience" ("Women" 138). Likewise, Risamante's quest to regain her land is also a quest for identity in that she loses the family name when she is kidnapped. It initially seems like a downside yet the fact that she builds up her political and military success and the titles she would naturally earn after the conquest not only proves her agency but also gives the female reader the occasion to identify with her through which she could take up arms against what she considers unjust practices. In sum, Risamante aims "not to be her sister, but to have what her sister has" (Finucci, Introduction 31) and it is through her depiction that Fonte obliquely instructs women to resist patriarchal injustice, which marginalises one in favour of the other and to think beyond the boundaries, which otherwise compartmentalises women and men based on their so-called essential characteristics. The romance provides "an unequivocally positive portrayal of the

empowered female" (MacCarthy 73-74) who pioneers female agency that dissents from the teachings of the dominant culture.

On the other hand, the masculinised heroine Fonte portrays and her covert desire to outdo her sister as the idealised portrayal of womanhood might make one think that Fonte serves for the interests of the patriarchal culture and is being complementary to its rules. Within this framework, it should be noted that Fonte does not aim to undermine the features traditionally accorded to women such as compassion, pity, modesty and mercy but fights against those which push them to an inferior position. She does not try to marginalise the traditional attributes of women nor does she praise the masculine woman only. For example, Risamante behaves quite humbly when she refrains from relating her military achievements¹²³ or she, who has "a soft and humane heart" [l cor molle e umano], does not kill Cloridabello but "with a pitiful hand hurriedly frees his head from the bloody helm" [con pietosa mano dell'elmo sanguinoso il capo sbriga] (13.63) and "with great pity" [con gran pietà] has him taken to the "regal pavilion and doctored (for he was severely wounded) treating him like a king, not like a prisoner" [quel re condur nel regio padiglione e medicar, che forte piagato era, trattandolo da re non da prigionie] (13.70). Low states that the purpose of the warrior women is "not to punish their opponent but to change his view of what is due to women" (141). In the same vein, Risamante does not fight pointlessly but becomes an exemplary figure for women to decide their fate themselves without patriarchal interference or without necessarily losing their femininity to achieve success at what they aim. Since Risamante does not renounce her femininity completely but navigates between masculine and feminine gender codes, Fonte gives the message that the supposedly feminine characteristic of being merciful is as natural as to take part in masculine adventures. Not being an "either/or" but a "both/and" figure, Risamante evacuates the fixed gender categories and exposes their artificiality serving for the interests of the dominant culture. Her identity transcends the dichotomous construction of gender; her correspondence to both masculine and feminine conventional gender distinctions resists definition and poses a challenge against the patriarchal understanding of gender roles which is based on difference. It is concludable that Risamante, as the integration of the masculine and the feminine,

¹²³ "Risamante was not opposed to his / entreaty, though it was quite reluctantly / that she narrated to others her successful feats / and made known her lofty triumphs" [Risamante al suo prego non si rese / Contraria, ancor ch'assai mal volentieri / Narrasse altrui le sue felici imprese / E fesse noti i suoi trionfi altieri] (5.68).

becomes “an emblem of a quest for identity beyond the constraints of conventional gender prescriptions” (Cox, Introduction 6). Remindful of Fonte’s association of the martial skills with writing in the fourth canto, her identification with the sculpture among male authors similar to what Risamante does in the battlefield and the positioning of the statue at the silent edge evoking Biondura’s passivity in the tenth one, *Floridoro* preaches women to overcome gender distinctions that oppress them and undermine their capabilities. It is for this reason that Zanette considers the work an “epopee of feminism” [l’epopea del femminismo] (qtd. in Finucci, Introduction x).

The substitution of the knightly adventures with female experience enables the establishment of independent female existence and renders the work a “site of struggle” (Dollimore, *Radical* li) against patriarchal hierarchical order. That Fonte aims to shatter the rigid system of sexual difference is made apparent when she not only attributes male characteristics to a woman but also female characteristics to a man. As soon as Risamante takes off her helmet, a heavenly beautiful woman appears despite her former masculine omnipotence:

She removed her helmet and uncovered the blonde
tresses, clearer and more luminous than gold.
And two stars appeared, so joyful
that for envy the sun hid itself in the sea.
Her fresh, rubicund cheeks moved
the lilies and crimson roses to envy,
and her hand, which she had bared as well,
seemed whiter than snow.

[Si tolse l’elmo e discoprì le bionde
Chiome dell’or più terse e luminose,
E due stelle apparir tanto gioconde
Che per invidia il sol nel mar s’ascose,
Movean le guancie fresche e rubiconde
Invidia ai gigli e alle purpuree rose,
La man, che disarmata anco tenea,
La neve di candor vincer pareva.] (2.26)

It is notable that Risamante does not renounce her femininity as an Amazon warrior, who is traditionally thought to embrace masculinity and thus transcend her sex, would do. King and Rabil state that within the generic convention of romance, since power is within the masculine realm, a woman who possesses it is either masculinised or her female identity is erased (Introduction xxvii). On the other hand, Fonte neither prioritises masculinity nor regards power solely entitled to

men. Risamante never chooses femininity over masculinity or vice versa but embraces them both: "she as a woman possessed as much beauty as she did valour as a warrior in the saddle" [come donna avea tanta bellezza quanto valor come guerriera in sella] (2.39). In line with the present discussion, Fonte depicts the eponymous hero with characteristics traditionally attributed to women:

The expression of his comely face was so agreeable,
so lovely the splendour of his beautiful, golden hair,
and his appearance was so divine,
that every heart, even a harsh one, was inclined to love him.
With his shrewd father came the noble son,
in delightful and lovely clothing.
Love laughed in his tranquil brow;
rather he appeared Love's very image.
His splendid white and vermilion complexion
made every eye eager to contemplate him.
Every part of him, except his speech,
appeared that of an illustrious and beautiful girl.

[L'aer del suo bel viso era sì grato,
Sì vago lo splendor de' bei crin d'oro,
E la sembianza avea tanto divina
Ch'ad amarlo ogni cor ben ch'aspro inchina.
Venne col padre accorto il gentil figlio
Con un vestir delizioso e vago,
Amor ridea nel suo tranquillo ciglio,
Anzi pareva d'Amor la propria imago.
Lo splendido color bianco e vermiglio
Ogni occhio fea di contemplarlo vago,
Ogni sua parte fuor che la favella
Par d'una giovenetta illustre e bella.] (5.45-46)

While the title of the work bears his name and creates the generic expectation that it will honour his courage, heroic achievements and his exalted masculinity, Floridoro's aforesaid features are never taken into consideration but his immaturity, his nature sentimental enough to make him cry few times and his physical complexion become an object of inquiry. When he is incognito, he even uses the pseudonym "Biancador" (10.79) recalling Risamante's armour having "the insignia of a white lily on green" [l'insegna in verde è un giglio bianco] (1.51) which is the colour of chastity and purity commonly associated with women. Except for one occasion in which he beats a rival in honour of Celsidea, he remains a sixteen-year-old boy who is like "the mockery of a true knight" (Malpezzi Price, "Moderata" 124) who cannot act without his father's permission. When he gets a letter faking her mother's illness, he bursts into tears:

Floridoro reads and is so upset,
he is so moved with compassion,
that he cannot hold back from his eyes the tears
which, streaming down his beautiful face, fall to his breast.

[Floridor legge e si conturba tanto,
Tanto s'intenerisce di pietade,
Che non può raffrenar dagli occhi il pianto
Che 'l bel viso rigando in sen gli cade.] (7.21)

Both Risamante and Floridoro are the androgynous characters because neither Risamante nor Floridoro solely adopts feminine or masculine character traits but inhabit them both. Secor defines androgyny as "the capacity of a single person of either sex to embody the full range of human character traits, despite cultural attempts to render some exclusively feminine and some exclusively masculine" (139) and Heilbrun states that "androgyny seeks to liberate the individual from the confines of the appropriate" (x). If what is appropriate is decided by what the patriarchy preaches serving the interests of the dominant based on cultural conventions, Risamante and Floridoro, looking like the pairs who complete one another, together misappropriate gender stereotypes. Their identity spills over the so-called sacrosanct gender distinctions and thus undercuts the established social order. Navigating the straits of gender, androgyny in the text serves as a challenge against the patriarchal social system which configures ideal models of masculinity and femininity based on sexual difference enabling the dominant to dichotomise each sex in order for surveillance by the dominant. Cull argues that "the inversion of sexual roles is a form of androgyny . . . [which] takes the form of an anti-feminist comment" (327) and, according to Dollimore, "in appropriating, inverting and substituting for masculinity, the female [androgynous] inevitably put masculinity itself -and sexual difference more generally- into scrutiny" (*Dissidence* 305-06). Reversing the features conventionally attributed to men and women likewise and laying bare their artificiality, Fonte resists the male-dominated society which hierarchises men and women. Their androgyny interrogates the validity of these hierarchised binaries. It displaces the naturalised notion of gender which reinforces masculine hegemony. It lays bare that the symmetric opposition of gender is a myth.¹²⁴ As sex is biologically determined but gender is the product of cultural

¹²⁴ Butler also states that there is no essential identity and what is called gender is readily applicable to both sexes. She argues that "production of sex as the prediscursive ought to be understood as the effect of the apparatus of cultural constructions designated by gender" (7). The cultural and social realities regarding gender are constructed and the categories of sex are disruptable.

processes, Risamante and Floridoro support Fonte's former proposition that each sex should get education equally because there is no exclusively feminine or masculine traits employed to subordinate one sex to the other. In other words, Fonte employs androgyny as a form of dissidence to refuse "an aspect of the dominant" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 49) to criticise the imposed gender roles and to show that women are able to succeed in whatever they start doing because there is intrinsically no difference; she demonstrates how people are defined by the society simply based on culturally constructed criteria. Her wifehood and motherhood Doglioni eulogises without relinquishing her writing career also support the current discussion as Fonte, both in the romance and in her personal life, engrains the idea that women could achieve success regardless of discriminating practices. As well as the androgynous characters, the ideal representation of knighthood, which is not reserved for men only, also reinforces Fonte's stance against discrimination between sexes and shatters the patriarchal discourse based on their dichotomous positioning. That she does not fall into textual fallacy is evident from the characterisation of male warriors who do not fit in the ideals of knighthood but who have several innate defects. Firstly, Fonte nostalgically identifies the characteristics of an ideal knight and exposes the wrongdoings of the apparently ideal knights afterwards:

O great virtue of the knights of the past,
 who with so much pity employed their arms!
 Without obligation, courteous and agreeable,
 always for innocents they wielded the sword.
 Among so many perils where they were
 called, their own lives they risked
 to save those of strangers,
 neither their countrymen nor their kin.

[O gran virtù de' cavallier passati
 Che con tanta pietà l'armi portaro,
 E senza obbligo aver, cortesi e grati,
 Sempre per gli innocenti il brando opraro,
 E fra tanti perigli, ove chiamati
 Furon, le proprie vite avventuraro
 Per salvar quelle di persone strane,
 Alla lor patria e al sangue lor lontane.] (3.1)

The ideal knight is the one who is courteous, always selflessly helping the helpless regardless of whether they are acquaintances or not but the knights within do not match with this idealised portrait. Fonte thus challenges the chivalric code of masculinity and erases the possibility that she indeed serves for the interests of

the patriarchy despite unintentionally. For instance, Nicobaldo and the king of Pygmies reverse the traditional gender roles when they act as men-in-distress. Nicobaldo proves to be a coward man when he cannot rebel his authoritative father who compels him to an arranged marriage or when he cannot devise a plan such as elopement with his beloved or even committing suicide -typical generic topoi of romances- to assert his agency. He is prophesised that only a "regal girl" can save his beloved from the Castle of Fear [Castello della Paura] she is imprisoned in.¹²⁵ Similarly, the king of Pygmies arrives at the Greek land to get assistance because he does not have the "strength consistent with [his] spirit to be able to liberate [Raggidora]" [non mi diè forza all'animo conforme per poter liberar donna] (2.96) the lady he is in love with. Both men lack the fortitude to help those who need their help; they substitute the helpless women of romances and evacuate the myth of manhood. Worse than Nicobaldo and the king of Pygmies, Lideo and Amandriano become deceivers when they cannot obtain the women they desire. Lideo falsely accuses Raggidora of killing the king leading to her imprisonment as the courtiers immediately believe his word (2.93) while, in fact it is he who slanders her because she, who "wants to die sooner than be his wife" [che vol prima morir ch'esser sua moglie] (4.58), resists "his amorous affection" [e contraria al suo amoroso affetto] (4.51). Likewise, Amandriano the duke of Transylvania dupes the recently widowed Queen of Dacia with the help of the avaricious servant Parmino when she does not accept Amandriano's marriage proposal. He, who knows that "[Amandriano] was a rich and generous lord" [un ricco e liberal signore] (1.63), becomes the traitor "in whom she trusts" [l'infido Parmin, di cui si fida] (1.84) while she is saved by a wizard when she enters into a garden with the hope of finding treasure.¹²⁶ In the same vein, Acreonte persuades his brother to intrude in Celsidea's chamber in an attempt to rape her while he ends up accidentally killing him. In all cases, there is a threat to female body, her autonomy and her decisions; and the knights, who are supposed to help the helpless or who should chastely admire the ladies, try to exploit their vulnerable situation and attack them once their desire is not fulfilled. The three men offend

¹²⁵ "Consider my words firm and steadfast, / for you must await the arrival / of a regal girl, illustrious and beautiful, / who will go armed like a warrior in the saddle" [Tieni il detto mio per fermo e saldo, / Ch'aspettar ti convien l'avenimento / Di una regia fanciulla illustre e bella / Ch'armata andrà come guerriero in sella] (6.79).

¹²⁶ She wants the treasure not due to avarice but Parmino rumours that a king would wage war on her; "the circumstance pressing her is grave and the time brief" [il caso è grave che la preme e breve il tempo] (1.81) she has to follow the bull-calf for self-protection.

the code of chivalry and the respective stories pay attention to the sufferings of women in the patriarchal society that does not respect their choices but condones brutal behaviour when men want to seize women. On the other hand, Macandro, who initially best represents ideal masculinity with his resolution to honour his lady, indulges in the sin of hubris when he challenges the warriors to fight but in the end beaten by Risamante, a woman he should supposedly outdo. The brief epigram Fonte inserts "pride on the other hand is boorish and base; it urges its followers on to their own detriment" [la superbia all'incontro è rozza e vile e in danno proprio i suoi seguaci sfrena] (2.2) warns against its dangers which Macandro falls prey to represented through his pride of male superiority. While the representation of Macandro destructs the model of knighthood, Risardo dishonours its constitutive element: the quest. One of the stock characters of chivalric fiction, the knight-errant experiences several adventures as part of his maturation and as Erich Auerbach asserts "the very essence of the knight's ideal of manhood is called forth by adventure" (Auerbach 135) through which he documents his intelligence, courage, might, invincibility, astuteness and selfless benevolence. Contrariwise, the wandering hero Risardo, rather than fulfilling the duties of knighthood, abases himself every time he tries harder to prove his masculinity. True it is that Risardo starts as an ideal knight when he decides to save Raggidora: "Now be at peace, for I promise and swear to you . . . to liberate this woman from such a sentence" [Or datti pace, che ti prometto e giuro . . . di liberar costei da tal sentenza] (2.68) because he is aware of the seriousness of the deed and he seems to fulfil the readerly expectation. Immediately however, he hears of the news from the Greek land and "no longer does he care to go to beautiful Alexandria" [Come Risardo ha inteso il suo concetto, più d'ir non cura in Alessandria bella] (4.17) but sails there to take part in the tournament in honour of Celsidea, a perfect occasion to show off with the possibility to earn her as a trophy in turn. On his way to the tournament, Risardo forgets his promise again when he comes across Odoria with whom he falls in love at first sight and travels to the temple at Delphi. Risardo's inconstant nature destroys his claim for ideal knighthood and the more he tries to prove it, the worse it gets. Considering the characterisation of Risamante, Floridoro and the other knights together, Jaffe aptly concludes that

This characterisation of the male personages was deliberate, not the result of any ineptitude of the part of the author for drawing a male character. She was intent on forcing her readers to become aware, by changing the genders of the active and passive characters, that the

reading to which they were accustomed reflected the different socially prescribed roles for which men and women were differently trained, roles that required men to be active and women to be passive. *Floridoro* is meant to raise consciousness by thwarting the reader's conventional expectations. (390)

Fonte seems to provide an allegory of seven deadly sins through the male characters: Amandriano, Lideo and Acreonte represent lust; Parmino stands for avarice; Nicobaldo and Risardo embody sloth; Macandro symbolises pride; Lideo and Acreonte impersonate wrath; and, Risardo represents envy. They are treacherous, inconstant, incompetent and weak; they are unable to keep their promise, unable to defend the defenceless and even pose a threat to women. They are the culprits women should prevent from. Fonte records what she promises:

I would tell you how now this man, now that one,
Often takes on the semblance of a greedy wolf;
Others of the muddy and filthy animal;
Others of the stolid bear, fell and treacherous.

[Io vi direi come di lupo ingordo
Spesso pigli sembianza or questo or quello,
Altri dell'animal fangoso e lordo,
Altri di stolido orso iniquo e fello.] (8.5)

Fonte, in order to escape the dilemma of ideal knighthood associated with men, does not stick to traditional depictions but represents the deficiencies of male warriors to show that power -or whatever positive attributed to men- is not reserved for the so-called superior sex but based upon personal character traits. Knighthood represents the masculine hegemony but hegemony is always "a process . . . a realised complex of experiences . . . continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures" (Williams, *Marxism* 113). Fonte's argument against ideal knighthood embodies the threat against their hegemony and highlights the fluidity of hegemonic structures and the vulnerability of the so-called superior position of men. She reflects that both femininity and masculinity are sociocultural constructs employed by the patriarchal discourse to subjugate women. True it is that Fonte still stays within the patriarchal encoding of knighthood and her representation cannot "crumble" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 49) the patriarchal institution yet blurring the gender differences and applying the cultural attributes of knighthood to Risamante uncloak her agency and destabilise the gendered order, which appears as an instance of dissidence within the framework of the chivalric ethos.

At this point, it would also be beneficial to briefly contrast Fonte and her heroine Risamante with Ariosto and his lady-errant Bradamante whom the protagonist is closely modelled on. Even though owing to his interest in the *querelle des femmes* Ariosto includes one of the most important defences of female achievement in *Orlando furioso*, he seems to adopt an ambiguous attitude towards the issue. One of the most fashionable examples of the female warrior, Bradamante behaves subversively at times due to her quest as a cross-dressed woman to fulfil her wishes. However, even from the beginning Bradamante is driven by her desire to follow and to marry her beloved Ruggiero eventually. The romance records her metamorphosis from an independent heroine to an angel-in-the-house figure; she "ultimately reinforces the gender distinctions [she] ostensibly challenges" (Cox, "Women" 140). Probably because she is ultimately controlled by a male pen, Bradamante fulfils the expectation of the patriarchal culture. Her identity and action are constituted in accordance with her relation to a man. On the other hand, Risamante is against the traditional construction of femininity of her time because her quest is not to unite with the man she loves but to gain her inheritance by means of independent effort. She does not have a love object nor is she driven to find one. It is her self-motivation that constitutes her desire, which makes her a self-sufficient "free-spirited guerriera" (Cox, "Women" 140).

Nevertheless, it is learnt that Fonte would marry someone to establish the progeny of the Medici dynasty. Whether Fonte inserts the scene to honour the Medici family and the dedicatee Bianca Capello whom Francesco de Medici has recently married or because she somehow has to follow the patriarchal teachings in case of any criticism by the patroness or the reader is not known but, despite the seeming conformity to the patriarchal rules, Fonte still manages to emphasise Risamante's autonomy. In Ariosto's work, the mage Melissa informs Bradamante that her offspring will be a son -Ruggierino- begot by the seed of Ruggiero [del seme di Ruggiero in te concetto] (*Orlando* 3.24) and thereby emphasises the patrilineal roots of the Este family the work honours, the fact which indirectly diminishes her importance because even the son's name recalls his father. In Fonte's version, however, the mage Circetta gives Risamante a ring that would make her invincible, shows her "[her] illustrious and worthy progeny in a mirror where everyone can see his bloodline before it comes to be" [tua progenie illustre e degna in uno specchio onde ciascun vedere puote la stirpe sua prima che venga] (3.40) and states that her only child will be a girl -Salarisa- and "by you she will be conceived"

[da te concetta] (3.44) while the father will be “the king of Cyprus” [re di Cipro] (3.44) the man who is not even given a name and who does not appear in the text at all. Ariosto seems to focus on the seed which elevates masculinity whereas Fonte emphasises the womb. The episode celebrates the matrilineal bloodline by which dynastic wealth and power would prosper. Regarding the male-dominated society of Venice in which laws and customs were patriarchal, descent was patrilineal and the patrimony was shared among the brothers, the fact that Fonte decides on a matrilineal descent to honour the Medici house is quite challenging of the patriarchal culture. At this point Risamante’s concession to her traditional gender role might be dubious yet considering the time Fonte writes and her ultimate desire to honour the Medici family, the fact that she makes Risamante marry should not be considered a form of containment. It might be thought that Risamante would relinquish her androgyny when she becomes a mother but the absence of any reference to her falling in love with the man she is destined to match and her insistence on the throne throughout the work suggest that her androgyny and determination to act independently will not be contained and therefore she will not reinstate patriarchal dominance. In other words, it is implied that her prospective motherhood is included not to curtail her androgynous identity but to honour the Medici family¹²⁷ and to celebrate the existence of an alternative model against patrilineality. Over and above what has been stated thus far, it should be kept in mind that “if there remain[s] traces of free choice, [it] [is] among possibilities whose range [is] strictly delineated by the social and ideological system in force” (Greenblatt, *Self-Fashioning* 256). It is quite likely that Fonte cannot imagine an extremely transgressive character. In this sense, Risamante cannot transcend the social forces which mould her into a patriarchally acceptable form but still remains within the boundaries of patriarchal system and the most autonomous choice she can make is still as far as the social forces allow. Nevertheless, her matrimony poses dissidence because it envisions emergent culture based upon an oppositional social system *aka* matrilineality against patrilineality.

Furthermore, it is notable that Risamante learns of her future in a cave, a womblike place. More interestingly, the place in which she learns of her future

¹²⁷ The fact that Catherine de’ Medici, who reigned over France as a widow and regent queen, adopted the symbol of Artemisia who was an androgynous warrior-heroine who integrated her femininity with masculine powers (King and Rabil xxvii) supports Fonte’s manifold aims when shaping Risamante’s character.

belongs to the Queen of Phrygia who takes shelter there with her illegitimate son in order to escape from her rageful husband whom she cheats when he is away. Apart from underlining matrilineal progeny, the episode reflects on female sexuality undaunted by patriarchal teachings and female solidarity. It reinterprets and re-genders the myth of St. George who saves the virgin queen from the dragon who would kill her on her wedding day. Equally interesting is the fact that Risamante encounters with the dragon (or the serpent as Fonte uses them interchangeably) in a *locus amoenus*. The garden, which is endowed with beautiful flowers, odours, singing birds and groves, is remindful of the Garden of Eden where a snake appears suddenly. In this context, it is also like a rewriting of the Genesis myth in which Eve is eternally punished when she takes the initiative to decide individually. Cultural Materialism postulates that "a dominant discourse cannot prevent 'abuse' of its resources" due to the perpetual power struggle between the dominant and the dissident and "there can be no guarantee that the subordinate will stay safely in its prescribed place" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 48). Resistance develops alongside the endeavours to contain it and, in the struggle between power and its subversion, the possibility to spoil the machinations of power emerges. Laden with biblical and mythological allusions likewise, Fonte's episode, celebrating female power and solidarity not only turns out to be a story of wish fulfilment which rewards women but it also reverses the gender roles as it is a woman who succours a woman.

As soon as Risamante kills the serpent, the Queen of Phrygia, who is imprisoned in the "cruel tomb" [quella tomba fiera] (3.19) with her son, invites the warrior into her dwelling and starts to tell her story. Although she seems to be happy with her husband for some time she soon falls in love with "a courteous king" [un recortese] (3.29) by whom she becomes pregnant. In order to escape the fury of the cuckolded husband, a fay helps and counsels her and prophesises that she would be saved by a woman:

She placed here that serpent
to guard me against everyone;
and she told me, "From here do not depart
until the dying dragon vanishes,
because at that time, in that same moment
that the slain dragon disappears,
your lord will perish,
And released you will be from this prison.
And know that the dragon is not to be
overcome by the valour of any baron,

but by the hand of a noble virgin,
who has no peer from Bactria to Thule."

[Pose qui quella serpe acciò che stesse
Alla mia guardia contra ogni persona,
E mi disse: "Di qui non ti levare,
Sin che 'l dragon morendo non dispare.
Perché in quell'ora, in quell'istesso punto
Ch'essendo ucciso sparirà il dragone,
Sarà rimasto il tuo signor defunto
E tu sciolta sarai della pregione;
E sappi che quel drago esser consunto
Non deve per valor d'alcun barone,
Ma per man d'una vergine gentile
Che non ha paragon da Battro a Thile."'] (3.35-36)

And the prophecy comes true when Risamante saves the queen from imprisonment. Despite being a short one within the narrative, the episode is quite revealing in several aspects. First of all, even though it is not definitely known if the marriage is an arranged one but the fact that the queen lived "within bounds" [vissi un tempo al segno] (3.28) and "the new passion" [la nova passion] (3.31) has "kindled and pricked [her] heart with love" [del suo amor il cor m'accese e punse] (3.29) suggest that she is the victim of an arranged marriage. In this sense, the episode criticises the custom of arranged marriage which does not take into consideration female opinion. It should be noted that although the adulteress queen seems to verify the misogynist belief that women are sexually unruly and in need of surveillance, the fact that it might be because of the result of an enforced marriage mitigates her *offence* and seems to put the blame on the decision makers who disregard if women might suffer from obligations. Furthermore, it is probable that Fonte, who is aware of the double standard within the society regarding adultery, deliberately saves the queen and blesses her with a child instead of punishment compensating for the unjust treatment of women. Fonte states in *Il merito* that since it is men who make the law, they do not punish themselves but castigate women when they commit adultery. The excerpt is worth quoting:

"I remember reading," said Helena, "that in antiquity they used to punish women's transgressions extremely severely by law, while men went unpunished." "Well, the reason is obvious," replied Corinna. "Men may be wicked but they aren't stupid, and since it was they who were making the laws and enforcing them, they were hardly going to rule that they should be punished and women go free."

["Io ho letto" disse Elena "che gli antichi castigavano per legge le donne che erravano, severissimamente, lasciando gli uomini impuniti." "Eccovi

detta la ragione” rispose Corinna “non erano già pazzi in questo gli uomini se erano scelerati, che avendo essi a dar leggi ed essequirle, avessero liberato le donne, castigando loro stessi.”] (96)

Fonte thereby questions the biased customs imposed on women by men and challenges the pillar of the patriarchal culture based on the control of female sexuality. Since controlling the female body is the cornerstone of the patriarchy once the woman decides to recover her body from oppression and control, it turns out to be a solution for her salvation. It is at this point that the episode lays stress on the importance of collective endeavour against patriarchal oppression. In this context, that the queen is kept in a cave should not be taken as a punishment but a protection by the fay. The absence of torture or death by revenge the mage hampers and the eventual rescue by Risamante establish female solidarity which instructs women to come together. The snake initially represents the jealous husband and the patriarchal society always ready to punish the transgressor. On the other hand, considering that it is placed at the entrance by the fay, when Risamante kills it she not only destructs it and saves the queen from imprisonment but Fonte misappropriates the patriarchal metaphor against itself to emphasise female solidarity as well:

The greedy beast with mouth open
rushed upon her, and yet it could not catch her.
Rather, incautiously it swallowed the iron of the lance
which the lady wielded against it, and pierced and struck itself.
The lady centred the point more and more
so that in vain the dragon rolled and circled around.
The dragon pierced itself, and in its dire distress
as much as it could it shook itself and drew back.

[L'ingorda fiera con aperta bocca
Le corre sopra, e corla già non puote;
Ma 'l ferro incauta della lancia imbocca,
Che oppon la donna, e sé fora e percote.
La donna sempre più la punta imbrocca,
E fa che 'l drago invan s'aggiri e ruote.
Si fora il drago, e per la doglia dira
Quanto più può si scuote e si ritira.] (3.15)

Remindful of her victory over Macandro and foreshadowing the other over Cloridabello, the present defeat upsets the gender ascriptions and challenges the patriarchal culture. Even though the serpent attempts to catch her, it cannot be effective on Risamante. Ironically enough, the serpent, which cannot undo her, destructs itself (as Macandro kills himself and Acreonte kills his brother). Having

been supported by the inability of Nicobaldo to save his beloved from an unwanted situation and the king of Pygmies to release Raggidora from prison, the episode is telling regarding the celebration of female solidarity in that it preaches women to be their own saviours rather than waiting for a man for redemption. Fonte produces a female microcosm in which the patriarchal rules do not apply but nurturing female nature becomes apparent. Nina Auerbach believes that such a microcosm is an "emblem of female self-sufficiency which creates [her] own corporate reality" (5). Fonte applies the same formula when she shows women to believe in themselves against the yoke of patriarchy.

According to Sinfield, only when women unite can they succeed in circumventing the "superior plausibility" the dominant culture strives to "substantiate" and thus create feminine consciousness. The female solidarity and dialogue among the fay, Risamante and the Queen of Phrygia enable them to "produce a dissident perspective" (*Faultlines* 38) and to assert their agency against the dominant culture which creates patriarchal plausibility recruiting women to remain in their subordinate position without questioning its imposed truths. Their solidarity grants them a measure of independence in which male predominance is circumvented. The episode thus emphasises the network of women whose solidarity creates opportunities to fulfil female wish by which male hegemony becomes ineffective.

In a similar episode, Fonte criticises the convention of arranged marriage which does not take into consideration individual opinion but goes hand in hand with patriarchal social order. Before analysing the episode and its implications, a brief introduction to the perception of the institution of marriage would explicate Fonte's dissidence better. The patriarchal rules valid in England apply to Italy too: generally women did not have a say over the decisions made by their parents who unite the partners in such a way that the property and titles could transfer from one generation to the other. As love was not an integral constitute to forge new alliances, it was not taken into consideration. In lieu of political prosperity, the marriages were arranged when the girls were in puberty both to protect any threat against their virginity and to benefit from their fertility to produce as many successors as possible (Bartlett 37-38). There is even evidence that the negotiations started when the daughters were less than two years old (Dean and Lowe 14). What is more, although under *ius commune* [common law] the individuals were principally free to choose their spouses, those who did not take

paternal approval might have faced disinheritance or stigmatisation. Thus, marrying against the consent of *paterfamilias* was unacceptable; should the father was dead, the male kinsmen were responsible for establishing the contract. Because social and political compatibility were of utmost importance, one daughter could easily substitute the other (Kirshner 91-92) when it was necessary. The institution of marriage served for the interests of the families and women had no role other than child bearers in marriages. Bartolomeo Gottifredi summarised in *Specchio d'amore* (1547) that one marries out of necessity but loves for delight: "per necessità si ama . . . e per diletto si ama" (qtd. in Richardson 198). Interestingly enough, starting from the 1540s, there was an increasing emphasis on mutual love in marriage because, while the Council of Trent restricted the lives of women on the one hand, it started to stress *amore maritale* on the other. Serving for the interests of the Church, Alessandro Piccolomini, for instance, in *Dialogo de la bella creanza de la donna* (1538) criticised marriages not based on love and believed that the wife, whose individuality is still annihilated, should be counted as one with her husband "una cosa intessa con lui" (qtd. in Richardson 199) or Giovanbattista Giraldi Cinthio wrote of in the introduction to *Hecatommithi* (1565) that love should be the "cornerstone of marriage" (200). All in all, it was the Council of Trent and the Church's desire to increase its influence on the principles of marriage that reaffirmed "matrimony was a sacrament" (Richardson 203). In other words, the conflicting views regarding the institution of marriage constituted "an insecure moment in patriarchy" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 43). Such a faultline within the institution of marriage that prescribed obedience to the husband on the one hand but focused on the necessity of love to establish the contract on the other leads Fonte explore woman's place within family and matrimony and, even if there is no indication that Fonte suffers from an arranged marriage personally, as a keen observer of her age, she criticises the custom then present.¹²⁸ In *Il merito* she touches upon a shared misery and repeats the familiar imprisonment imagery:

¹²⁸ The Sabine iconography was employed to celebrate marriage. Engraved on a *cassone* or *spalliera*, these panels reinforced the identity of women as meek child bearers, devout mothers, submissive wives and even receivers of violence when needed because, according to the classical sources such as Livy, Ovid and Plutarch, the Sabine women, despite their initial protest but final resignation, were those who were kidnapped from their families, raped and enforced into marriage to reproduce by the Romans under Romulus' command when the neighbouring states did not accept to forge alliance with the newly-established city of Rome around eight BC to increase its population (Musacchio 67-82).

Women who are married -or martyred, more accurately- have endless sources of misery. First there are those husbands who keep their wives on so tight a leash that they almost object to the air itself coming near them, so that the poor things, thinking that by marrying they are winning for themselves a certain womanly freedom to enjoy some respectable pastimes, find themselves more constricted than ever before, kept like animals within four walls and subjected to a hateful guardian rather than an affectionate husband.

[Quelle donne che vanno poi a marito, o al martirio (per meglio dire) infiniti sono i casi delle loro infelicità. Perché prima vi sono di quelli mariti, che tengono tanto in freno le mogli loro, che a pena vogliono che l'aria le veggia; di modo che quando credono esse, con l'aver preso marito, aversi acquistato una certa donnesca libertà di prender qualche ricreazione onesta, si trovano le misere esser più soggette che mai; ed a guisa di bestie, confinate tra le mura, essersi sottoposte, in vece d'un caro marito, ad un odioso guardiano.] (68)

Fonte regards marriage an enforced subordination and in *Floridoro* she demonstrates the injustice again. What is remarkable in her representation is that she is sympathetic not only to women but she also portrays a suffering man because he also has to obey what his father mandates. The lovers exchange words to demonstrate the agony because their fathers do not ask for their opinion: "wretched us," [Lucimena] answers, "for we are oppressed by precisely the same misery" [miseri noi, rispose ella, ch'appunto da una stessa miseria oppressi semo] (6.22) and Nicobaldo states "it does not avail that I beseech and refuse him, for he wants me to take a wife despite myself" [ma non val ch'io lo supplichi e gli nieghi, che vol che donna al mio dispetto tolga] (6.29). The latter's father threatens him with disinheritance; and, the fathers do not break their promises because they do not want to tarnish their reputation rather than considering their children's will. The fact that Lucimena has "rich and honourable dowry" [con una ricca e onorata dote] (6.30) is enough for Nicobaldo's father and hers believe that she would be happy with whomever he chooses. The episode, concentrating on the themes of reputation, the social oppression and financial benefits, lays bare their ills on individuals. More importantly, while the sufferings of women in the marriage market are oftentimes reflected, it is innovative of Fonte to portray a male point of view, the would-be husband who also has to marry under compulsion. Nicobaldo considerably voices the helplessness of women in the marriage market: "if a man is forced to submit to his father, what can a weak damsel do?" [che s'uom sforzato al padre si riporta, che può fare una debile donzella?] (6.33). In this sense, Fonte empathises with both sides and offers a critique of the patriarchal culture which

even victimises men, the supposedly privileged half of the system. She thereby proposes a collective effort to transform the society against blind obedience to its rules which distress the subordinate regardless of age, rank or sex. It is notable that Fonte does not simply denigrate men nor does she adopt a polarising attitude but she invites each member of the society to unite and change the mores which usurp their rights. In the meantime, Fonte meets the readerly expectation and the story turns out to be one of wish fulfilment in that, unbeknownst to them, the lovers are betrothed to each other:

Each of us looks at the other and says not a word,
brought from one extreme to the other.
We realise that we have made the passage
from an extreme torment to an extreme joy.

[Ciascun di noi si guarda e non fa motto
Dall'un estremo all'altro ricondotto.
Da un mal estremo ad un estremo bene
Ci conosciamo aver fatto tragitto.] (6.45-46)

Fonte compensates what women lack in their lives. She criticises the injustice done to the helpless and voiceless and the tradition which infantilises women and deprives them of their agency. Lucimena and Nicobaldo cannot overthrow the dominant culture; in this sense, they are not subversive characters but their resistance against the patriarchal system proves their dissidence within the Cultural Materialist framework since they become antagonistic to the dominant culture in an apparently seamless power structure and manage to detect and criticise the malfunction within the dominant social order while neither proposes the abolishment of the institution of marriage as a barrier to individual freedom but simply fulfilling dissidence as "refusal of an aspect of the dominant" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 49). In sum, although the prevailing patriarchal power is overwhelming, Fonte manages to "disturb the system in violation of parental wishes" (33) and amplifies the voice of the oppressed.

While Fonte rebels against the convention of arranged marriages which renders women an object of exchange among menfolk, in the story of Celsidea she likewise manifests her opinion against the commodification of women, the theme she implies both in relation to Biondura and Lucimena. One cannot help but agree with Karras' assertion that romances are filled with "trophy wives" (164). To provide a few examples, in one of the classic ones, the renowned Knight's Tale of Chaucer's

Canterbury Tales, Palamon and Arcite, who are both in love with Emily, jousts over her body although she is not willing to marry either of them but wants to pursue a chaste life; or, in *Orlando innamorato* of Matteo Boiardo, Angelica announces whoever fulfils the deed shall have her as a reward in exchange: "Ma chi potesse Uberto scavalcare, / Colui guadagni la persona mia" (1.28). In other words, women are not given the chance to express their choices or even whether they would like to marry at times, they are customarily regarded to become trophies in exchange for the courageous acts of men or they are destined to be the wives in honour of whom the knights duel. Fonte feeds on such a generic convention which silences women. The romance opens with the scene in ancient Greece in the court of King Cleardo for whose celestially beautiful daughter Celsidea the jousts are organised. The description regarding her beauty builds up the narrative:

This girl's gracious, noble appearance
 (she was called Celsidea)
 and her habits were so lovely and pious
 that she seemed not a mortal woman but a goddess,
 such that her fame overshadowed that of all other women
 throughout the world, nor did people speak of anything else.
 And while every man talks and reasons of her,
 every other woman loses the claim of being beautiful.

[Erano i graziosi almi sembianti
 Di costei, che fu detta Celsidea,
 E i suoi costumi sì leggiadri e santi
 Che pareva non mortal donna ma dea,
 Tal che sua fama a tutte l'altre inanti
 Pel mondo già né d'altro si dicea,
 E mentre ogn'uom di lei parla e favella,
 Ogn'altra perde il titol d'esser bella.] (1.8)

Celsidea, who is depicted as a typical Petrarchan lady at the same time having been "endowed with excellent wits" [fu dotata d'eccellente ingegno] (1.7) drawing attention to her intellectual capacity, establishes the readerly expectation that she is going to marry the knight who beats the others. Fonte, however, immediately subverts the topos:

Behold, the lofty prize which is reserved for the victor
 is carried by with superb and magnificent pomp.
 Bright and shining, of rich gems
 a crown was formed, and of gold.

[Ecco portar con pompa alma e superba
 Il pregio altier, ch'al vincitor si serba.]

Di ricche gemme splendida e lucente
Era composta una corona, e d'oro.] (7.3-4)

While the jousts are still held for her honour and the warriors fight to prove their might, King Cleardo does not present his daughter as a reward. True it is that Celsidea is the object of desire as she is physically in front of an audience that admires her but the fact that she is just the holder of the prize implies dissidence. Considering that woman-as-trophy is an endorsement of the superiority of men which relegates women to a subordinate and passive position, it is obvious that Fonte challenges the hierarchical gender system which objectifies and mutes women benefiting from them as conduits for assertion of male power. What is more, given that it is Risamante -a woman- who beats all the men who might disturb Celsidea's will to remain single (at least for the time being and thereby keeping the possibility for mutual love alive) Fonte's stance against the patriarchal culture which exploits women however they wish becomes apparent. In this context, the work repeats its message that women should be in solidarity to protect each other from patriarchal malfunctions and that women belong to nobody but solely are in command of their bodies and actions. The assertion that women are the only possessors of their bodies is a serious blow against the milestone of patriarchy based on the control of female body.

Finally, apart from Risamante's martial success¹²⁹ emphasising the necessity of equal education, her androgynous characterisation challenging the hierarchised society, her role as a saviour underlining the female solidarity regarding the cases of Biondura, the Queen of Phrygia and Celsidea, her struggle against unjust practices enticing the reader to resist oppression and her resolution for agency in her relationship with Macandro, Cloridabello and Biondura when she is in pursuit of her kingdom, Risamante is also the instrument for Fonte to criticise the dowry system then-current in Venice. She expresses her discontent as follows:

¹²⁹ "In every place, whether cities or castles / of that realm, wherever they lifted up their brows, / the knights and the damsel saw / flutter the banners of the white lily. / Risamante had already taken everything / from her sister Biondura's clutches, / and for her all those lands were held / which she had subdued in those wars" [In ogni loco, o sian città o castella / Di quel reame, ovunque ergono il ciglio / Veggiono i cavallieri e la donzella / L'insegne sventolar del bianco giglio; / Che 'l tutto Risamante alla sorella / Biondura avea già tratto dell' artiglio, / E si tenean per lei tutte le terre / Ch'ella avea debellate in quelle guerre] (13.45).

How many orphans¹³⁰ today have no access
to the possessions that were their fathers'
for lacking, not someone who would court death,
but someone who would employ even his tongue in their favour?
As if speaking were a great concern,
if first their hand is not filled with gold,
few are the lawyers willing to undertake the task
of opening their mouths in their defence.

[Quanti orfani oggi son cui sono oppresse
Le facultà che de lor padri foro
Per aver (non chial morir s'appresse)
Ma chi opri pur la lingua in favor loro;
Come fusse il parlar grande interesse
Se lor prima la man non s'empie d'oro,
Pochi avvocati son che tor l'impresa
Voglian d'aprir la bocca in lor difesa.] (3.3)¹³¹

While the criticism is confined to one octave only, it is important in terms of being Fonte's overt critique and observation of the society in which women suffer from thereof. As Pomata observes, in the third quarter of the sixteenth century in the northern and southern Italian cities the aristocratic families started to give more importance to patrilineality and the dowry system was shaped based on male primogeniture and *fedecommesso*¹³² which customarily excluded women from inheritance (75). While the *ius commune* (common law) was more latitudinarian in giving dowry rights to women, the *ius proprium* (municipal law) was implemented by a stricter procedure called *in fraterna* which enabled each brother to attain a part of the inheritance in accordance with primogeniture but which soon excluded even the younger brothers to get their share. Not surprisingly, the case of women was worse because the rule in Venice let women inherit equally only when there was no heir (even there were inequalities among sisters). On the other hand, dowry was indispensable for each woman of all strata because she had to donate it

¹³⁰ Even though Fonte uses the masculine plural form of the word, it is probable that she refers to the situation of women since she voices a similar sentiment in *Il merito*. As she states, although there are some lucky women who are left dowries by their fathers, there are also some who "receive a share in his estate along with brothers . . . but who then find themselves imprisoned in the home like slaves by their brothers, who deprive them of their rights and seize their portion for themselves, in defiance of all justice" [Altre, cui pure i lor padri, o per buona sorte lasciano loro la dote, o morendo ab intestato di ragione succedono in parte nelle facultà co' fratelli, sono da quelli tenute in casa per ischiave ed usurpato la lor ragione, e goduto il loro, contra ogni giustizia] (63).

¹³¹ In the next octave she thanks her guardian Niccolò Doglioni who takes care of Fonte's inheritance, though.

¹³² It used to be a testamentary provision which determined a line of heirs over several generations granting them the property (Pomata 75).

to the convent if she was unmarriageable (due to age or beauty) or she also needed a certain amount to obtain a prestigious husband or at least to be considered eligible for marriage. In any case, the status of woman was dependent on the dowry she would get (Finucci, Introduction 27-29). In other words, having no other means to earn money but always being financially dependent on men, there was almost no option for women to survive respectably in the society. It is the reason why Fonte criticises the authority figures that deprive women from dowry rights leading them to face hardships. In this sense, it turns out to be quite reasonable that Risamante struggles for her share of the land and does not accept her fate as decreed by the father. According to Finucci, Risamante evaluates her father's decision to disinherit her as "paternal negligence" and "in phallic disrespect for his Law" (Introduction 27) she acts to invalidate his will. The episode criticises the common practices, questions its efficacy and serves as a warning against the male family members who discriminate their daughters or who disregard their right to patrimony. In a social and legal context in which women cannot individually represent themselves but have to have a *mundualdus* (Bartlett 42) to act on behalf of them in legal transactions, that Risamante nullifies her father's decision and that she claims her right to have a word on a legal issue thereby asserting her political presence and right to speech as a free individual within legal and social context prove her agency and dissidence against the patriarchal dominant culture which makes use of law in accordance with the interests of men. Regarding the social and legal situation she dwells in, the fact that Fonte criticises the dowry system "however lightheartedly" should be considered "a political gesture, however oblique" (Cox, Introduction 17) because she succeeds in representing the current legal regulations as different forms of legitimating male oppression.

It is thanks to the oppositional positioning of Risamante and Biondura and the androgynous characterisation of Risamante and Floridoro that Fonte manages to criticise the patriarchal system which deems women inferior to men and which hinders their right to education; within the framework of Risamante's experiences, Fonte shatters the male discourse built upon the superiority of men; she succeeds in raising awareness against inconsiderate male practices such as arranged marriages and the conduct of dowry issues; and, she invites women to solidarity against the dominant culture which objectifies, subordinates and silences them.

The figure of mage Circetta is also one of the most interesting characters through which Fonte poses a critique of the patriarchal discourse. She benefits from a familiar mythological story -that of Circe and Ulysses; she rewrites the myth and she creates an alternative vision against the firmly established tradition which severely charges Circe with seduction. If "a dominant discourse cannot prevent 'abuse' of its resources" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 48) what remains for Fonte is to produce her own interpretation by exploiting the patriarchal rendition in order to save Circe and the mage figure from derogation. In the classical tradition, Circe is the representative of sexuality and sensual pleasures. In one of the most famous examples, in Homer's *The Odyssey*, Circe is able to transform the nature of animals because when Odyssey and his crew arrive at her cottage, they see to their surprise that the wild animals, instead of attacking them, behave as tamed ones wagging their tails.¹³³ More importantly, Circe is influential on men as she, together with her beguiling voice, lures the group into forgetfulness with the meal that "wipes from them their memories [as to] any thought of home" (10.243-60). In other words, the mesmerisingly incarcerated warriors forget about their duties which would prove their masculinity. Gareth Roberts notes the widespread connection between Circe and the dangerous sexuality she poses throughout the sixteenth century:

That Circe offers pleasure is expressly stated in the motto to Whitney's Circe emblem *Homines voluptatibus transofmantur* [men are transformed by pleasures] and is a Renaissance commonplace. Equally clear in Alciato's¹³⁴ motto is the stigmatisation of both these pleasures and the female figure who offers them, *Cavendum à meretricibus* [beware of whores] . . . Circe signifying pleasure . . . entices, deceives, unmans, liquefies and enervates men. Circe was a shameless and lascivious

¹³³ "But these beasts made no attack against my men. No. They stood on their hind legs and fawned, wagging their long tails . . . with the food she mixed a vicious drug, so they would lose all memories of home. When they'd drunk down the drink she gave them, she took her wand, struck each man, then penned them in her pigsties" (10.277-79; 308-12).

¹³⁴ Andrea Alciato (1492-1550) was famous for his *Emblemata*. His emblem book, composed of Latin texts accompanied with illustrations, was quite popular in the sixteenth century. In *Emblematum libellus* (Venice, 1546) he covers the theme "cavendum à meretricibus" and illustrates Circe with a poem: "Sole satae Circes tam magna potentia fertur, / Verterit ut multos in nova monstra viros. / Testis equus domitor Picus, tum Scylla biformis, / Atque Ithaci postquam vina bibere sues. / Indicat illustri meretricem nomine Circe, / Et rationem animi perdere, quisquis amat" [So great, we are told, was the power of Circe, daughter of the Sun, that she turned many persons into new monstrous shapes. A witness to this is Picus, tamer of horses, and Scylla with her double form, and the Ithacans who became pigs after drinking the wine. Circe with her famous name indicates a whore and shows that any man who loves such a one loses his reason] (Glasgow University Emblem Website).

woman who enticed men from proper business and duty to a life of pleasure. (199-200)

Circe, owing to her characterisation as a threatening figure with the ability to transform and to metaphorically castrate men, has been regarded a dangerous woman. Her power to emasculate men has been a threat to the patriarchal formation as she strips men of their masculinity. In *Floridoro*, Circe is physically absent but her ethos continues. Circetta, the daughter of Circe and Ulysses, is first introduced in the fifth canto when the knights Silano and Clarido are shipwrecked on an unknown island and witness Circetta's transforming a knight into a tree:

The knight, leaving his carnal garment,
becomes a tree trunk at a simple conjuration;
his arms becomes branches, and the new stalk
spreads its graceful green foliage to the sky.

[Il cavalier lasciando il carnal panno
Divenne tronco a un semplice scongiuro,
Le braccia si fer rami e 'l novo stelo
Spiegò la vaga e verde chioma al cielo.] (5.27)

What is more, Circetta has the same ability to domesticate animals, the fact which reinforces her close modelling after her mother:

But the pious damsel, who can command
the elements with her rare artifices,
with the power of a single word
soothes that whole beastly herd

[Ma la donzella pia, ch'agli elementi
Può comandar con suoi rari artefici,
Con la virtù d'una parola sola
Tutta placò quella ferina scola.] (5.36)

It is observable that Circetta is still bounded by the characteristics of male tradition as the figure is also modelled upon Ariosto's sorcerers. Kolsky depicts her as "an amalgam of Ariosto's Alcina, Logistilla and Melissa" ("Moderata" 170) because she never grows old and transforms the knights into trees similar to Alcina and she is the one who reveals the future of the Medici dynasty to Risamante just as Melissa reveals that of the Este to Bradamante. Fonte, however, does more than simply bestowing Circetta the role of a messenger. She earns a more significant role in that she becomes the mouthpiece for the silenced women and subverts the patriarchal mythmaking. Bearing the traditional attributes of her mother, true it is that Circetta preliminarily seems like an evil mage since her act verifies the

misogynistic stereotyping yet Fonte produces the scene only to deconstruct it and to disappoint the readerly expectation. That Circe meddles with a malevolent act is immediately destroyed when she starts to defend her mother:

And, be silent, you who say unjustly
that she transformed his companions into beasts,
for she never, if not forced,
caused displeasure to whoever turned to offend her.

[E taccia pur chi dice ingiustamente
Che trasformasse i suoi consorti in fiere,
Che mai non fé, se non sforzamente,
A chi la volse offender dispiacere.] (8.13)

Circetta turns out to be the advocate of her mother who has been unjustly blamed for her act. After she relates the relationship between her parents, she illustrates the reason shadowed by the patriarchal discourse as to why Circe gets revenge: according to the story Circetta tells, "with the cunning at which [Ulysses] was an expert and learned, one day he stole away without saying a word" [con l'astuzie ond'era esperto e dotto, un dì se l'involò senza far motto] (8.14) and since Circe has made "every science" [ogni scienza] (8.16) known to him, she cannot stop him from going away. It is interesting that the sentence refers to Circe's naivety contrary to her perpetual accusation with cunningness. Moreover, the absence of any reference to her supposed frailty for sensual pleasures is notable to save her from the influence of the biased representation. Indeed, Circetta defends her mother that she is "the beautiful and virtuous fay" [la bella e virtuosa fata] (8.12) who has employed magic only to correct the injustice done to her in her own manner rather than out of sheer self-pleasure as it has been commonly represented. In this context, Circetta challenges the misogynist tradition which stereotypically associates Circe with deceit and seduction. Circetta mitigates her mother's malice as she represents her seduction and subsequent abandonment by her father in a manner which invites the reader to empathy. "Circe's own culpability is in turn deflected and mitigated by her daughter's sympathetic narration of her seduction and abandonment by Ulysses" (Cox, "Women" 142). In other words, being aware that the representation depends on by whom the story is told, Fonte employs Circetta to defend those who have been misrepresented by the dominant. She subverts the traditional misogynistic understanding that characterises Circe as malicious and lascivious and argues that her representation is "a fantasy created by men for men" (Finucci, Introduction 25). By turning upside

down the version created by men, Fonte interrogates the truth of the Circe myth and those similar to it which charge women with several crimes; she implies that they can always be reinterpreted and challenged. She thereby foregrounds the excluded female voice. Williams believes that "there is always other social being or consciousness which is neglected and excluded" but Fonte relocates Circe in a central position and, through refashioning the misrepresented figure, she stimulates the reader to resist the "seizure" that the dominant imposes as "the ruling definition" (Williams, *Marxism* 125) regarding the representation of the convicted and marginalised characters. Marie de France in the fable "The Lion and The Peasant" writes that "It is a known fact everywhere: A man can paint, sculpt pictures, too. These things a lion cannot do . . . If lions could make statues, you would see plenty of men under the paws of lions" (Bloch 132). Her statement is later echoed by The Wife of Bath in her Prologue to her tale: "Who painted first the lion, tell me who? / By God, if women had but written stories, / As have these clerks within their oratories, / They would have written of men more wickedness, / Than all the race of Adam could redress" (682-86). Both excerpts focus on the power of representation in deciding over the worth of women. Marie de France and Chaucer were cognisant of the power of language and literature which caused great disparity between the representation of women and men. In this sense, the examples perfectly convey Fonte's message in that she also tries to assert through the story of Circe that one's superiority depends on the viewpoint from which it is portrayed. She uncovers the fact that the negative representation of Circe does not stem from her malicious nature but from the bad stories written to derogate her. She questions the arbitrary dominance of men within the society and tactfully challenges their claim to superiority by demystifying that it is shaped and made real by the patriarchal discourse. Fonte, in this way, interrogates and refutes the intrinsic values of patriarchy. If "subcultures constitute consciousness" what should be done is to "validate the individual" to increase the "potential resources of collective understanding and resistance" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 38). This is what Fonte and Circetta try to instil. Sinfield believes that "storytelling . . . has the power to rearrange and reinvent our conceptions . . . which reorganises our knowledge around different objects and dissident ideas" (219-20). When Fonte decides to rewrite the Circe myth, she does her share of the task as she raises awareness against tendentious representations. Her act of rewriting renders dissidence because it, being "distinct from the dominant," is still "active" for

underlining challenge against the patriarchal culture and even though it is "not yet fully articulated" (126) since it is impossible to shatter the tradition at once, hers is a considerably important attempt to incorporate the "relatively subordinate" (Williams, *Marxism* 124) status of female viewpoint in the dominant culture.

Equally interesting is the fact that Circe harms her own daughter. While her situation initially gives the impression that Circetta perpetuates her mother's sinister acts, it is soon learnt that she is also victimised by her and is under the influence of a spell which incarcerates her in the island since then:

I too am subjected to a hard fate,
and I sprinkle my cheeks with tears,
hoping in vain for the arrival of a knight.
Who knows if one of you is not that very one?

[Ch'anch'io son sottoposta a sorte dura
E ne spargo di lagrime le gote,
Sperando invan d'un cavallier l'ingresso,
E chi sa ch'un di voi non sia quel d'esso?] (5.31)

Regarding her maternal imprisonment, it might be thought at first glance that Fonte still promotes the interests of the patriarchal tradition as there is no complete absence of Circe's vengeful action. That is, she is not completely exempt from her negative characterisation. The description of revenge scenes in which Circe destroys the cities and nature is strategically important to convey Fonte's message powerfully instead of simply denouncing her for what she has done without scrutinising its background. By refraining from producing a purely innocent identity for Circe and by recording her wrongdoings, it is probable that Fonte is trying both to create a more down-to-earth character who would facilitate readerly identification and to underline that the next generation (the daughter in this case) should not necessarily be blamed for and judged by what the former generation commits. In this sense, there is a strong allusion to the banishment of Eve and Adam from the Garden of Eden of which Eve is accused and the womankind, being the daughters of Eve, has been everlastingly punished with subjection, silence and obedience as a consequence ever since. Thus, Fonte challenges the patriarchal discourse that blindly blames women; she even resists the supreme patriarchal word regarding the Original Sin; and, she emphasises the importance of communication and empathy among people based not on discriminating one sex over the other but on mutual understanding to eliminate problems.

In the meantime, Fonte reconfigures the enchantress figure. Contrary to the initial misinterpretation which readily identifies Circetta with Circe, Circetta is “against type” (Finucci, Introduction 24) because she also wants to escape the destiny that compels her repetitive transformation. In other words, Circetta evolves into a sympathetic character whose role within the narrative is not to perpetuate the misogynist sensibility but to underline its disconnection from the truth. What is more, “the desexualisation of the figure of the maga” (Cox, “Women” 142) is another factor that Fonte challenges in that she demonstrates that it is not only men who are victims at the hands of women. There is no hint as to Circetta’s sexuality or her promiscuity; she is not carnal but virginal; she is deprived of any malicious thought but an innocent figure. When she invites the knights into her palace, “the young woman affirms and swears that she guarantees them against any treachery” [la giovinetta afferma e giura che d’ogni tradimento gli assicura] (5.34) for which her mother is blamed continually. She is described as “honest” [onestà] (7.52) and as “the most sweet virgin” [la dolcissima vergine] (5.37) who blushes when Silano pays her a compliment:

The lady lowers her honest and chaste eyes
at that speech which is by no means unwelcome to her,
and adorns her face with the beautiful colour
that the rose reveals in the morning sun.

[Chinò la donna i lumi onesti e santi
A quel parlar che non le fu già grave,
E ’l viso ornò del bel color che suole
Scoprir la rosa al matutino sole.] (5.39)

Fonte purges Circetta of the attributes of a seductress. As *Floridoro* is an incomplete romance, it is not known if it is going to be Silano who would save Circetta but the symmetrical positioning of Circe’s and Circetta’s stories in terms of their transforming men and the nature of animals, their skills in magic and their having been visited by the knights whom they are physically attracted is suggestive of the fact that, despite their difference in characterisation, the virginal Circetta will also share her mother’s fate and will be exploited by Silano¹³⁵ who cunningly flirts

¹³⁵ His his characterisation reinforces that he resembles Ulysses having the tendency to exploit Circetta: “But the astute Silano, who from peril / tries to draw himself with cleverness and wits, / turns often towards her his courteous brow, / and shows her this and that sign of love, / for without gaining her grace and counsel / he does not hope to reach the destined point” [Ma l’ astuto Silan, che dal periglio / Si cerca trar con arte e con ingengo, / Gira spesso ver lei cortese il ciglio / E le mostra d’amor questo e quell segno, / Che senza aver da lei grazia e consiglio / Giunger non spera al destinato segno] (8.34).

with her to his own benefit. The conventional roles are reversed; the traditional themes of deception and exploitation associated with Circe is thus transferred to men; Ulysses and Silano become the deceivers while Circe and Circetta turn out to be the deceived ones owing to their naivety, innocent love and confidence in men. As Cox states, "this transformation very effectively shortcircuits the implicitly misogynistic allegorical logic of more conventional versions of the episode" ("Women" 143). By rewriting the myth of Circe, Fonte questions the taken-for-grantedness of the myths, exposes their fictionality, their being a propaganda tool for patriarchal discourse. She thereby challenges the canonical understanding and offers her own feminist agenda instead. Subverting the tradition enables Fonte to collectively criticise men who are, according to her, duplicitous by nature, the fact which erases the necessity for present-day Circes to change their inborn traits:

It seems to me she did not do much in changing
human bodies into bears, wolves, and bulls,
when in our age men in erring
are transformers of themselves.
I see them go around changing themselves
with such facility, without employing verses or potions,
that I esteem that art little,
since our century so frequently takes part in it.
Each man is so good a magician with his own form
that she could not match their skill at that time,
when she employed to change our image
so many herbs, so much study, and so much time.

[Poco mi par che fesse ella cangiando
Gli umani corpi in orsi, in lupi, in tori,
Quando alla nostra età gli uomini errando
Di lor medesmi son trasformatori;
E con tal facilità girsi mutando
Gli veggio senza oprar versi o liquori,
Che poco stima in ciò fo di quell'arte
Poi che 'l secol di noi n'ha tanta parte.
Ciascun dell'esser proprio è sì buon mago,
Che non ne seppe tanto ella in quel tempo
Quando spese in cangiar la nostra imago
Tant'erbe, tanto studio, e tanto tempo.] (8.3-4)

Fonte thereby provides a critique of male behaviour that no longer needs "verses or potions" because men have replaced Circe already. She refashions the conventional roles accorded to Circe and her victims; the rewriting simultaneously functions as an important warning against women's voluntary subservience to men in the name of love. The love-bounded Circe wastes her talent in sorcery to

destroy whatever surrounds her: it is “quella gran crudeltà nata d’amore” (8.20) that leads to her self-destruction. Fonte thus highlights the dangers of being subjected to a man and the necessity for women never to lose their agency as it might lead to self-victimisation. That Fonte urges women to be the sole commanders of themselves is first hinted at when Risamante never chases a man but her kingdom. The imprisoned Raggidora and Circetta reinforce her argument that women should never desperately wait for a saviour to escape from a dire situation but should take the initiative to be their own autonomous deliverers. The implication that Circetta might fall prey to what her mother experiences earlier is a subtle warning against women to have the courage to direct their destinies themselves because Fonte preaches that it is only through their own action that women can have what they desire. In this way, she even subverts the generic convention of romance based upon chivalry and love, the latter being its one of the most important two constituents. She engenders the genre in a profeminist fashion when she removes love from its central position and even represents it as a hindrance against female freedom and emancipation and when the knights such as Macandro, Risardo, Silano, Amandriano, Lideo are depicted negatively harming women on the plea of love. Circetta, whose “speech was so sweet and so pleasant that in her age she had few peers in the world” [avea un parlar sì dolce e sì giocondo ch’all’età sua poche ebbe pari al mondo] (11.92), becomes the spokesperson for Fonte to voice the sufferings of women in stark contrast to the male-oriented representation and to trigger women into agency. That Fonte “has rewritten the role of the seductress in romance” (Kolsky “Moderata” 171) is an accurate statement considering Fonte’s ardent desire to provide a critique of the male and to incite women to agency leaving the burden of their predecessors behind. Fonte, in the Prefatory Sonnet to the Most Serene Don Francesco de’ Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany, states her indecisiveness as to deciding over her theme:

To enter among the diverse paths
 and among the immense roads I desire and dare—
 onto which of them must I now send forth my verses?

[Io, che d’entrar fra li sentier diversi,
 E frà l’immense vie bramo, & ardisco,
 Per quale hor deggio incaminar miei versi?] (*Floridoro* 51)

Soon, however, she makes a dissident choice when she represents her aspirations as to how women should be regarded and how ideal women and womanhood should be despite the oppressive cultural constructs and stereotyping imposed by the patriarchal discourse, the fact which renders the romance "wish fulfilment dream" (Frye, *Anatomy* 186) of social equality.

In conclusion, even though Fonte cannot subvert the patriarchal system, considering the disheartening patriarchal context she produces *Floridoro*, the work proves dissident within the framework of Cultural Materialism. Fonte produces an emergent voice when she negotiates with the dominant culture, poses female voice and questions the validity of masculine discourse. Her romance embodies dissidence as "refusal of an aspect of the dominant" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 49) and she achieves a *structure of feeling* because her production is antagonistic to the dominant culture. In other words, the romance "exerts palpable pressure" against the patriarchal order and challenges its "formally held and systematic beliefs" (Williams, *Marxism* 132) even though it cannot subvert the dominant culture *in extenso*. Working with the examples available to her but creating transgressive stories among them, Fonte employs the form of chivalric romance and the "themes of the genre for the purpose of re-forming it, by playing its games, with the result that it undermines the patriarchal ideology . . . for the critique of male-dominated society is not sporadic in the poem" (Kolsky, "Moderata" 182). She provides a good example of how a woman could exploit the generic conventions of romance and authors a feminine example of a cinquecento *romanzo cavalleresco*. Being aware that the heroines have "emblematic significance" (Cox, "Women" 138) for the female readers who could realise their wishes in terms of female emancipation, Fonte creates a model of powerful heroines who thwart the readerly expectation and transgress the place they are assigned. Risamante resists the patriarchal definition of gender; she turns out to be a warrior heroine who even outdoes the fiercest man in the battlefield thanks to her education which is not shaped by her sex; marriage is no longer the quest but she is in pursuit of her kingdom that becomes metonymic for her rebellion against the paternal authority and her criticism of the legal system; Biondura is doomed to fail because she cannot go beyond the traditional feminine attributes; Circetta is no more the seductress but a virginal character who transcends the evil characterisation of her mother but who is likely to experience her hapless fate again that becomes the representative of male inconstancy through which Fonte poses a biased patriarchal discourse and

the exploitative nature of men; the knights are no longer the embodiments of ideal knighthood but treacherous, morally weak, unstable and prone to vice and lustful thoughts; the suffocating enforced marriage of a couple is a common theme but miraculously turns into one of wish-fulfilment while there is no mention as to utterly abolish the tradition; the Queen of Phrygia, brandishing her sexual freedom against the patriarchy, is not punished for her extramarital affair but protected by a fay who heralds her redemption by Risamante, the stance of whom underscores the importance of female solidarity for release from patriarchal dominance. If gender is a process of configuration, Fonte is aware that it can be re-configured any time. Fonte and her female characters demonstrate that "agency is virtually inescapable" so long as women devote themselves to "taking up arms" against the patriarchal domination (Greenblatt, "Resonance" 221). True it is that no matter how transgressive she is considering the age she writes, Fonte is still within the constraints of her culture but she manages to destabilise the established gender roles, to dismantle the biological, social and mythological scaffolding of male hegemony and to denunciate the tyranny of men. As Kolsky states, Fonte makes "a determined effort to rewrite the myth; to valorize female achievement in the context of a universal story" ("Moderata" 171). *Floridoro* becomes an allegory of quest for women in search of their identity undaunted by subservience to men. Fonte resists female subordination and envisions instead a model of non-hierarchical at times feminised social order based on female experience, agency, progeny, achievement, solidarity and self-sufficiency. She "combat[s]" the dominant patriarchal culture and "develop[s] dissident subjectivities" which would "trouble the social order" and "redeploy its most cherished values" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 299) of silence and subjection to men. She anticipates that "'society' is never only the 'dead husk' which limits social and individual fulfilment" but in which "individual wills" (Williams, *Marxism* 87) are also realised through the contestation and renewal of old structures. If it was in Italy that the revival of Greek civilisation and humanism took place, it was inevitable for the intellectuals to have a word on the current situation of women because humanism focusing on collective human development necessitated the fight for female empowerment as well. While writing in a relatively free context of the cinquecento Venice, by employing a masculine genre, Fonte fulfilled her share of the task, spoke against the social injustice and the patriarchal rules, transgressed her allotted place, criticised the limited opportunities offered to women and managed to speculate a different social order

compensating for women's real-life difficulties. In a given culture, the clash between the dominant and the emergent becomes "a significant site within which older and new interests" are "disseminated" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 46). Romance, for Fonte, functions as an important space in which she can disseminate her dissident opinion. By raising protofeminist issues in the text, she establishes a strongly dissident stance against the fundamentals of patriarchal social order. Malpezzi Price notes that Fonte "was able to elaborate and divulge in a non-conformist message which helped gradually to modify certain aspects of the prevalent social ideology with regard to women" (*Moderata* 20-21) benefiting from "the power of literature to convey dissident ideas" (Dollimore, *Radical* xxvi). The argument is easily confirmable with her verse as hers was a life dedicated to trigger women for realising their own worth and power:

And although of so worthy and so famous
a status there are not great number of women,
it is because on heroic and valorous acts
they have not set their hearts for various reasons.
Gold which stays hidden in the mines
is no less gold, though buried;
and when it is drawn out and worked,
it is as rich and beautiful as other gold.

[E benché di sì degno e sì famoso
Grado di lor non sia numero molto,
Gli è perché ad atto eroico e virtuoso
Non hanno il cor per più rispetti volto.
L'oro che sta nelle minere ascoso
Non manca d'esser or, benché sepolto,
E quando è tratto e se ne fa lavoro
E' così ricco e bel come l'altro oro.] (4.3)

4.2. Giulia Bigolina & *Urania: The Story of a Young Woman's Love*

True it is that it was Moderata Fonte who was one of the best-known and innovative authors of female romance of her period but there was indeed an earlier figure of the century who must have encouraged her successor to write on the woman question. The pioneer on the subject was Giulia Bigolina (c. 1518-c. 1569), the recently-discovered author of a prose romance entitled *Urania, nella quale si*

contiene l'amore d'una giovane di tal nome [Urania: The Story of a Young Woman's Love] (1552).¹³⁶ Even though Bigolina's work has not earned its deserved place in the literary arena throughout the centuries and it was published as late as 2002¹³⁷ for the first time, the year when it was re-discovered after it had remained in oblivion in Biblioteca Trivulziana in Milan for five centuries, it is a *sine qua non* work concerning female agency both because Giulia Bigolina is a pivotal figure in terms of the history of profeminist literature as the "literary innovator and defender of women" (Nissen, *Kissing* 2) and because her work has a pioneering role regarding the female contribution to literature within the romance genre being "the first fiction in prose authored by a woman writer in Italian" (Finucci, "Giulia" 1). What renders Bigolina a dissident figure does not only stem from her being the first female author to write a prose romance in Italy but her including a treatise on the worth of women that precedes Fonte's *Il merito delle donne* also signals her non-negligible stance. *Urania* "constitutes the first feminist entry into the debate on a woman's proper place politically, culturally, and philosophically" (Finucci, "Giulia" 2) in the early modern Italian culture and it is the privileging of female voice and experience that marks the work's and its author's dissidence. Bigolina's profeminism stands out thanks to her desire to discuss the role of women in the society in the 1550s and the romance "anticipates women's writing in the later Cinquecento in its experimentation with narrative forms and in the profeminist sensibility it manifests" (Cox, *Women's* 121).

As regards to her biography, there is very little information extant on Giulia Bigolina. It is known that she used to belong to a noble family from Padua and her parents were Gerolamo Bigolin and Alvisa Barbo Soncin. Bigolina is supposed to have married Bartolomeo Vicomercato by 1534 as it is the year when she gets her dowry. It is also known that her husband, by whom she has three children, dies earlier than Bigolina. Based on the imprecise and scant information, Finucci estimates that Bigolina must have been born around 1518-1519 considering the customary age for marriage among the girls of the time and that she must have

¹³⁶ In the dedication, Bigolina addresses Salvatico Bartolomeo as "Dottor di Legge" [Doctor of Law] and emphasises his youthfulness. As it is known that he receives his degree in Law from the University of Padua in 1552, when he is around nineteen, this document serves as an evidence for dating the completion of the work (Nissen, "Motif" 207-08).

¹³⁷ Finucci hypothesises that the reason why *Urania* remains unpublished must have been due to the fact that the Inquisition severely censored the unorthodox books and Bigolina's work was surely an unorthodox one being a romance written by a woman and including a protagonist who travels through the country in disguise ("Giulia" 34).

been dead by March 1569 as it is the year when she is recorded in a tax document as *quondam* [formerly, once] Giulia Bigolina ("Giulia" 2-5). Similar to her limited biography, very little is known as to Bigolina's literary output. The only work known apart from *Urania* is a novella entitled "La Novella di Giulia Camposanpiero et di Thesibaldo Vitaliani" [The Novella of Giulia Camposanpiero and Thesibaldo Vitaliani] which is thought to be a part of a non-extant work. "Giulia Camposanpiero" recounts the adventures of the female protagonist Giulia who is in pursuit of her beloved Thesibaldo whom she secretly marries eventually. The work is remarkable in that it includes "one of the few secret marriages in Renaissance literature that ends well" (Nissen, "Motif" 207). The overt theme of freedom of choice in marriage in the novella betokens Bigolina's enthusiasm for amplifying the female voice, for focusing on the customary issue of arranged marriage women suffer from within the oppressive patriarchal culture and for suggesting solutions to their everyday problems in a fictional setting. The themes she deals with do not change in *Urania* either. Nissen observes that

Bigolina's surviving works indicate her preference for fantasies of love in which female protagonists are endowed with an almost limitless ability to choose the objects of their affection without consulting their families or running grave risks to their honour. ("Motif" 207)

Urania contains the generic qualities of romance such as love, the separation of lovers, cross-dressing and disguise, several encounters and adventures, quest and reunion with the beloved ending in marriage yet what makes it unusual is Bigolina's ability to experiment with the predominantly masculine genre of the age in favour of women and their interests. The work is equally significant due to its emphasis on the insight into the psychology of its protagonist and the feminist passages that establish the path for future profeminists in Italy.

Urania recounts the experiences of an intelligent and virtuous woman [Urania] who leaves her native land [Salerno] in a melancholy state upon being abandoned by her lover [Fabio] in favour of a more beautiful but less virtuous woman [Clorina]. While Urania departs from Salerno on the grounds of a "monomaniacal love" (Finucci, "Giulia" 15) the journey soon turns into a quest "in search of herself" (1) through the Italian cities. In other words, contrary to the initial impression, the work does not focus on the victimisation of a woman by unrequited love or her inability to recover from its influence but it records a process of maturation and emphasises the effort to overcome lovesickness owing to frustrated expectations.

In the meantime, Urania re-genders the theme of quest -the key constituent of romance- in order to refurbish her true worth independent of male approval and demonstrates once more that romance is "a perfect arena for the autonomous action of female characters" (23). Together with the emphasis on female agency, Bigolina challenges the patriarchal discourse that diminishes the worth of women or misrepresents them, she provides a treatise for their defence and she questions the contemporary practices of the art of painting that make women the objects of male gaze. Taken collectively with her creation of an independent protagonist who privileges wisdom over beauty and the subsequent failure of another character [the Duchess of Calabria] who exposes her body in front of an artist, it is concludable that Bigolina has written her romance to "inspire women to take control of the way they are to be put on display, in terms of both their bodies and their talents" (Nissen, *Kissing* 2) and to save them from the silent object position they are assigned by the patriarchal mores.

Considering the period between 1560 to 1580, which coincided with the end of the Council of Trent (1545-1564) when there occurred a "misogynist turn" (Cox, *Women's* 123) in the Italian culture that substantially mutes female voice, that Bigolina and her work have almost been forgotten for centuries is not a preposterous consequence given that she used to write at a time when the society and the printing market were under the influence of the post-Tridentine values in which the printing of religious works had the highest share among others and the female authorship was decidedly marginalised (Cox, *Women's* 124-27). In this sense, it is safe to suggest that Bigolina's *Urania* poses dissidence considering the gender ideology of its age and it succeeds in the Cultural Materialist scheme which is aimed at "the recovery of subordinate voices" (Sinfield, *Shakespeare* 25).

Bigolina does not start to tell Urania's story immediately but begins the work with an introduction. The introduction, in which she declares to dedicate the romance to Mr. Bartolomeo Salvatico Magnificent and Excellent Doctor of Law [Al Magnifico et Eccelente Dottor di Leggi] (57), presents the themes she would cover throughout the romance such as female agency, lack of female agency and the most useful instrument of self-expression women could employ to foreground their worth and experience. The proem records the process Bigolina decides to pen a story with the aim of leaving a remembrance for Salvatico whom she bears "the perfect, chaste and heartfelt love" (59) [l'affetto del mio cuore honestamente et

perfettamente vi amo] (58). She follows the examples of victorious heroes:

I must leave you some remembrance of myself, so that when I will no longer be living, you will not forget the great and pure love I bore you in life. While pondering at great length how best to do this, I remembered how the ancient heroes, who had done so many marvellous deeds in the world, often left their images sculpted in marble, bronze, gold, or other metals after they were gone. (59)

[et ciò era di lasciar qualche raccordanza di me medesima presso di voi, acciò che quando io più viva non fosse, non vi uscisse fuori della memoria il grande et puro amore co'l quale vivendo vi havevo amato. Et mentre più volte pensando, et ripensando n'andavo intorno a quello, che io havesse potuto operare, acciò che di me qualche raccordanza vi rimanesse, sovvenemi come quegli antichi heroi, i quali contanti maravigliosi fatti fecero al mondo, la maggior parte di loro lasciarono dopo morte le loro imagini tale in marmo, tale in bronzo, tale in oro, et tale in altro metallo scolpite.] (58)

She relates how she settles upon having her portrait painted by an artist:

Thus it seemed to me, according to the example these men provided, that the best way to leave a vivid memory of me after my death was to give you the very image of myself. But the light of reason was not entirely extinct in me, for I could still discern that sculpture, appropriate for great personages, was hardly appropriate for someone of my sex, my degree, and especially my humble accomplishments. Therefore I decided to leave you my image in painting. (61)

[Ond'io da que' tali pigliando argomento pareva a me che verun'altra più propria operatione, non harrei potuta fare, per lasciar dopo la mia morte, viva in voi di me la memoria, come era la imagine di me stessa lasciarvi. Ma non essendo a fatto il lume della ragione in me estinto, il quale pur mi lasciava discernere come al sesso, nè al grado, et meno alla bassezza delle operationi mie non convenevasi che in scoltura (sola convenevole a gran personaggi) io mi vi lasciassi, deliberai la imagine mia lasciarvi in pittura.] (60)

As soon as she reaches the conclusion, however, an allegorical figure appears. The figure, a "homunculus" (61) [homicciuolo] (60) whose name is Judgment [Giudicio] reprimands her because of her mistaken decision:

Just now you conceived the notion that your painted image would be suitable vehicle for keeping yourself alive, after death, within his memory. In so doing you showed poor judgment . . . An image is material, whereas the soul or intellect upon which it would act is the very essence of spirit. Thus the one could not function with the other . . . Therefore I counsel you not send the image of your face . . . If you love him with your heart and revere him with your intellect, send an image of your heart and intellect. (69, 71, 75)

[Et tu pur hora con poco Giudicio facevi disegno che la dipinta tua imagine a lui donata fosse convenevol soggetto per far che dopo morte tu restassi ancor viva nella memoria di lui . . . la imagine cosa materiale, et l'animo, over lo intelletto nel quale ella ha da operare, essendo essenza dello spirito, l'uno nell'altro non opererebbono mai . . . Se adunque col cuore tu l'ami, et l'osservi con lo intelletto, mandagli una imagine del cuore et dell'intelletto.] (68, 70, 74)

The dwarf asserts that an image is an inanimate object without having the capacity to represent the soul or intellect of its owner; instead, he advises her to create a representation of her essence so as to reach the spirit of its addressee. Urging her to "make visible that which has been invisible" (81) [ch'era invisibile l'harrai fatto visibilmente apparere] (80) after a lengthy dialogue, Judgment counsels her to present what dwells within her through writing rather than posing passively in front of an artist who would simply produce an object that does not reflect her soul but her appearance. Reminiscent of the scene the narrator Christine de Pisan experiences in *The Book of the City of Ladies* in which the allegorical figure Lady Reason appears to activate her creative process while she is meditating upon the misogynist attacks launched on women, Judgment arrives to save Bigolina's authorial persona from the passive and non-productive situation she falls prey to. Contrary to Lady Reason, however, Judgment adopts a belittling attitude regarding the natural incompetence of women. He states that she would be excused for her poor quality work since women are not as accomplished as male authors:¹³⁸

Surely you are no Socrates and no Plato, who has had to travel along the obscure and difficult path of Philosophy. No indeed are you one of those celebrated poets, such as Horace or Virgil . . . Instead you are Woman, possessing only as much virtue and wisdom as it seemed fit to the heavens to bestow upon your humble being . . . And since you are a woman, you will be excused to a great extent for your humble and low style. (81)

[già che tu non sei Socrate o Platone, che sì ti convenisse per gli difficili et oscuri passi della profonda filosofia passare. Nè ancora sei veruno di quei celebrati poeti come furono Oratio o Virgilio . . . Ma si sa che sei donna, et solamente tanta virtude et sapere possedi quanto parvero a i cieli che all'humile tuo essere bastevole fosse . . . Imperciò che perchè tu sei donna, sarai in gran parte escusata dell'humile et basso tuo dire.] (80)

Given that even the homunculus -purportedly impartial and leading her to true path- rehearses the patriarchal teachings that cherish female accomplishment as

¹³⁸ It is notable that Judgment is naked due to his impartiality but he has prejudice: "My nudity shows that [judges] should be without hatred or partiality when judging others" (63).

far as their sex could achieve, Bigolina emphasises the difficulties female authors might face when trying to negate the patriarchal construction of ideal womanhood and to destruct the preconceived opinion on women. Within this framework, it is conjecturable that Bigolina deliberately inserts such a biased comment to reflect the cultural beliefs of her time. Interestingly enough, she herself also seems to reiterate the patriarchal understanding in that she decides to write notwithstanding her "weak powers" (59) [le deboli forze mie] (58) or "weak wit" (81) [il mio debole sapere] (80).

I drew forth an image from my low intellect, an image which took its shapes and colours from the will of my heart. This little work, deriving thus from both my intellect and my heart, is called *Urania*. (83)

[del mio basso intelletto una imagine trassi, la quale della volontà del mio cuore pigliando la effigie et il colore da amendue insieme questa operetta ne è uscita, che *Urania* si chiama.] (82)

The purposeful use of negative adjectives such as *weak* and *low* to qualify her skills initially creates the impression that she is under the influence of the patriarchal values that underestimate the ability of women to produce literature but it is soon made clear that Bigolina makes use of the topos of modesty commonly used by the female authors of the medieval era and the Renaissance. At first glance, it may amount to her internalisation of the prescriptions hindering her agency but the modesty topos essentially serves as a "strategic self-fashioning" (Pender 3) functioning as a subversive response against the dictates of patriarchal culture. In fact, Bigolina resists the disdain and asserts her competence; a careful reading displays that she does not yield to patriarchal teachings: firstly, even though she states that a sculpture is "hardly appropriate for someone of my sex" (61) the fact that it is the "light of reason"¹³⁹ (59) preaching her to acknowledge her inferior position implies that it is a statement she does not credit but the one the patriarchal culture imposes on women; secondly, having been influenced by the "great personages," when she compares herself with "the ancient heroes" and their "marvellous deeds," she covertly disrupts the hierarchical system and situates herself on a footing equal to men; and thirdly, although she makes Judgment use the sentence "you are no Socrates and no Plato" (81) when contrasting her with them and other classical authors to emphasise her lesser skills, the deliberate

¹³⁹ The specific use of the word "reason," which is traditionally associated with manhood and culture, demonstrates the disheartening influence of patriarchal culture on women.

allusion to Dante, who employs the same syntax "I am not Aeneas, I am not Paul" [Io non Enëa, io non Paulo sono] (2.32) in *Inferno*, is highly suggestive of her confidence in her literary aptitude and power to produce literature as skilful as her male predecessors. Finally, the fact that she regards her "wit" and "intellect" as the sole sources of her work despite their "weak" and "low" qualities reinforces her authorial agency. Nissen observes that

Neither the romance nor novella ever really allow for a purely psychogenic origin for themselves . . . [but] a pre-existing tale, anecdote, or historical event is simply being retold, or that the narrative purports to be an account of lived experience. Bigolina, in effect, cuts through centuries of pretence when she makes her forthright claim to have spontaneously invented a story . . . that therefore cannot be attributed to any source but her own imagination . . . In doing so, she must have been fully aware of how innovative it would appear to the readers of her time. (*Kissing* 47-48)

Writing in a period in which the Italian culture is under the influence of the prescriptions of the Council of Trent when female speech and public acknowledgement are frowned upon, it is dissident of Bigolina to demonstrate her intellect as the sole origin of her romance, the fact which renders her even more innovative and challenging than her successors Lady Mary Wroth, Anna Weamys and Moderata Fonte who are somehow under the influence of Sir Philip Sidney and Ludovico Ariosto when producing their works. Bigolina represents literature as a handy medium to convey women's feelings, thoughts and interests triggering them to be active producers of literature similar to what her contemporary Margaret Tyler does in England. She thereby interrogates the imposed social conventions that hierarchically position women as passive consumers, muses or silent recipients of dedications and challenges the monopoly of male authors in literature. Much as she adopts the modesty topos, Bigolina is self-confidently driven by a sense of duty to transcend the limits placed upon her sex via the experiences of her protagonist Urania and the Duchess of Calabria who functions as a foil to Urania.

The most striking example Bigolina communicates her message to urge women to be engaged in production is provided in the episode of the Duchess of Calabria who is depicted as an autonomous and resolute widow in the first place:

This lady was not yet twenty, and she had been a widow, with no children, for little more than a year . . . Since she had spent two years with an old and very jealous husband, who had caused her no end of pain and misery, and since she was quite afraid the same thing could

befall her a second time, she had secretly determined never to marry again, and to maintain honourably a state of perpetual widowhood. (185)

[d'età gli venti anni, et era di poco più d'un'anno (senza alcun figliolo) rimasa vidua . . . Ma lei, che con un vecchio et gelosissimo marito, con suo smisurato affanno et accerbissima pena era vissa due anni; et dubitando fortemente, che forse la seconda volta potrebbe inciamparsi ancora, haveva perciò tra sè stessa determinato di non mai più alcun marito volere, ma in perpetua viduità, et con honore viveri sempre.] (184)

Apart from relating an independent woman, the excerpt also gives hints as to the common marital practices of the age. Although the Duchess is not yet twenty, that she is a widow for more than a year after two years of marriage is indicative of her marriage realised at a young age; and the fact that she has spent two years with an old and jealous husband in misery proves that she has been the victim of an enforced one. The survivor of an arranged marriage and a possibly tyrannical husband, the Duchess wants to enjoy the state of widowhood without being subjugated by a man. The initial description characterises her as an autonomous woman embodying a model for others to emulate. Immediately however, it is learnt that she relinquishes the control of her land to the counsellors due to her inexperience and young age:

This lady . . . had chosen four wise old men to act as her counsellors, and to these she left the governance of her lands, and all the responsibility for maintaining them . . . Of these four there was one who was older than the others, and who could give wiser counsel. The Duchess loved and honoured this man as if he were her father, and in him alone she confided all of her greatest secrets. (185)

[Haveva costei . . . quarto sapienti vecchi per suoi consiglieri eletti, alli quali tutto il governo dello stato, et di ciascun'altra cosa appertinente a chi regge la cura lasciava . . . Et de gli quatro eravene uno più grave d'età, et di più maturo consiglio de gl'altri; il quale lei proprio come se padre le fosse stato l'honorava, et amava; et in lui solo vie più che ne gl'altri i suoi maggiori secreti tutti fidava.] (184)

The fact that the Duchess passes the responsibility over old men foreshadows the exemplary role she would fulfil quite antithetical to what the narrative initially establishes. Moreover, having the habit of collecting the portraits of renowned people, when the Duchess, who has vowed never to marry again, falls in love with the Prince Giufredi of Salerno as soon as she sees his portrait, she allows herself to be controlled by another man as well as her counsellors. Her love-at-first-sight experience is depicted as follows:

These eyes were formless and inanimate; yet once Love had come to rest in them they had the same effect on the Duchess as the living, animate eyes of the Prince would have had, or perhaps their effect was even greater. (189)

[Chè quantunque fossero senza obietto et inanimate, essendovisi Amore entro riposte, fecero nondimeno quell medesimo, anzi maggiore effetto in lei, che gli vivi et animati del prencipe non harrebbero fatto.] (188)

It is important that the passage reflects the understanding prevalent among the artists of the Renaissance. Rigolot summarises that the Renaissance culture was fascinated with the idea of illusionist representation and that the idea permeating among the artists was that they were endowed with the natural talent to bestow life upon their artefacts. The myth of Pygmalion was emblematic of the fascination with the power of art to instil life rather than being a tool of representation. In this context, the portrait had such a great influence over individuals that falling in love with a painting even if it did not represent a real person was not unaccountable (160). The excerpt relates the same incident the Duchess experiences. The reference to the common appreciation in the art of painting both foreshadows Bigolina's engagement in the artistic practices of her age -a field of male activity- and reflects her agency to comment on them opposing the dictum of silence. Unable to make a decision, the Duchess decides to consult the wise old counsellor:

She knew that on her own, and without good advice, she would never be able to handle this situation in an honourable fashion, so she decided to discuss it with her wisest, oldest, and most beloved counsellor, and place the responsibility for the entire affair in his hands. (191)

[Ma conoscendo che da sè sola, et senza gran consiglio non si sarebbe un così gran negotio potuto honorevolmente ispedire, deliberò perciò con quello suo più saggio, et antico, et da lei più de gli altri amato consigliere haverne di ciò parlamento, anzi tutto il carico di cotal cosa sopra le sue spalle riporre.] (190)

The excerpt highlights the Duchess' inability to decide on her own. What is more, that she leaves the responsibility and decision to the counsellor also demonstrates lack of agency. True it is that the dialogue reflects a healthy domestic relationship¹⁴⁰ between the Duchess and the old man which is not based on the hierarchical one of the obedient daughter and the authoritative father but upon a

¹⁴⁰ "Nevertheless, since I love you as a father, and since (as I know) I am equally loved by you as a daughter . . . Now, my most honoured father . . ." (193) [Nondimeno, perchè come padre vi amo, et (come io so) perchè da voi parimente, come figlia son amata . . . Hor dunque, padre mio honoratissimo . . .] (192).

constructive communication functioning as an exemplary practice flourishing between the father and the daughter to follow but the fact that the Duchess does not have an opinion concerning a situation directly related to her underlines the harms of women's passivity. The Duchess' conviction that "you have heard all of my need, and my desire; and you are fully aware how you hold my very life and death in your hands" (193) [havete il bisogno et il desiderio mio tutto inteso, per la qual cosa potete conoscere come di me la vita et la morte nelle mani vostre si trova] (192) demonstrates the worst decision a woman could make and the one she should not definitely take. The following events together with such a self-annihilating sentence serve as a warning against women who do not have self-confidence and an opinion of their own and who act diffidently and passively relinquishing vital decisions in their lives to the patriarchal figures. In the same vein, the fact that the Duchess of Calabria is not given a specific name but is merely addressed with the title she earns from her marriage also underlines that she has no individual identity. She could have built up one if she had managed to assert agency by being self-confident enough to live responsibly.

The old man soon comes up with the worst solution he could find: "This was his plan: the artist would use all of his skills to paint a very lofty image of the Judgment of Paris" (195) [il che fu ch'egli volle che lo accorto pittore con quella maggior diligenza ch'egli sapeva usare sopra uno nobilissimo quadro in Giudicio di Paris pingesse] (194). He advises the Duchess to have herself painted as Venus and send Prince Giufredi the image to make him fall in love with her and ask his hand in marriage. The allusion to the Fall of Troy both establishes a thematic link with the introduction -which privileges writing over painting- and it signifies the destructive consequences of objectification of women with an advice to overcome subjugation by men. It is necessary to take into consideration the cultural understanding of female painting in terms of the woman question in order to understand better the reason why Bigolina is against such objectification at this point because, "the mere thinking of a radical idea is not what makes it subversive" but "it is the context of its articulation" -that is, "to whom and in what circumstances" (Dollimore "Materialism" 13) it is addressed- is what determines whether an idea is conformist or dissident.

It should be noted that the depiction of the portrait, in which the female body is dismembered, reflects the masculine understanding of female beauty adopted by

male artists of the era and often employed in the Petrarchist poetry:¹⁴¹

Please, see, my lord, how these golden curls resemble nets which could entrap a thousand hearts . . . and these eyes which resemble two stars . . . and her well-proportioned nose, as well as her rosy cheeks and tiny mouth . . . But then, what are we to say about this throat, and this bosom, both of which are whiter than snow? . . . To sum up, whoever looks her over from head to toe, and regards her closely, will conclude that great Mother Nature never created, nor ever could create, a body more perfect than this one in every beautiful detail. (203, 205)

[Deh per cortesie mirate un poco Signore, come queste aurate crespe chiome paiono reti da allacciar mille cuori . . . gli occhi, che a due stelle si assomigliano . . . il ben proportionato naso, le gote di rose, la picciola bocca . . . Ma che diremo poi noi di cotesta gola, et petto, che vincono di bianchezza le nevi? . . . Et in fine chi da capo a' piedi ben la mira, et considera, dirà che le gran Maestra Natura giamai altro corpo più di questo d'ogni bellezza perfetto, nè creasse, nè potesse creare.] (202, 204)

Agnolo Firenzuola (1493-1543) sets down in his widely read treatise *Dialogo delle bellezze delle donne* (1542) the characteristics of ideal female beauty quite similar to the ones Bigolina employs such as golden and curly hair, swelling breasts and slender legs.¹⁴² The treatises following his work also contribute to such an understanding of female beauty. In the same vein, the artists such as Titian in *La Bella* (1536), Giorgione in *Laura* (1506), Raphael in *La Fornarina* (1518-1520) and Parmigianino in *Antea* (1520) create a generic image of beauty by bringing together separate lovely features of many women none possessing perfect beauty in truth (Garrard 568-70). The women in portraits transcend all the defective features of individual women and they represent the ideal beauty which annihilates the presence of women as specific individuals. What stands out in these portraits is their corporeal beauty where "the question of identity is immaterial" (Cropper, "Beauty" 178). Simons observes that "individualism, in its anachronistic and fixed sense, does not illuminate Renaissance portraiture of women" (310) because the physical presence of the woman serves merely as a conduit through which the

¹⁴¹ Nissen notes that "by Bigolina's time, the description of the beautiful woman in terms that evoke painting had become a standard topos in lyric poetry (especially in the hands of Petrarchists), in romances in both prose and verse, in didactic dialogues on beauty, and in the ekphrasis of paintings in the letters of Aretino and his followers" (*Kissing* 124).

¹⁴² The treatise "draws upon the vision of many earlier writers, and it is probably the most complete exposition of the beauty of the ideal woman among the multitude of sixteenth-century treatments of the theme, being concerned not only with her perfect features, but also with her colours, proportions, and such elusive qualities as her *vaghezza*, *leggiadria*, and *grazia*" (Cropper, "Beautiful" 374).

male artist could display his talent. In other words, there occurs “a phallogocentric translation from the feminine surface back to the masculine creative process” (311) and the painting indeed feeds the male desire to dominate and possess the woman while rendering her a passive icon. Goffen likewise notes that another painting by Titian, namely *Venus with a Mirror* (1555) which features a nude woman partly covered with a crimson mantle looking at herself in a mirror, “authorises” the viewer to gaze at her celebrating “the exaltation of beauty that is embodied in the goddess and knowable through sight” (136) and inviting the viewer to a voyeuristic experience. In sum, it is assumable that women are treated as ornamental objects for the visual gratification of men both as viewers and creators in the Renaissance painting and that the portraits of women do not focus on women as individual subjects but they emphasise masculine creativity and his ownership of the image. Considering the situation, it is conjecturable that Bigolina designedly inserts the subplot of the Duchess to show its dangers to women who passively expose themselves in portraits instead of trying to stand out as individuals.¹⁴³ Bigolina “reject[s] the passive objectification of female beauty in painting thereby refuting a norm by which representations of women [are] circulated” (Jed 985) and she foregrounds female opinion against the authoritative artistic views of her culture. Apart from enabling Bigolina to criticise the commonly-held notions of her time, the story of the Duchess serves as an exemplum for women who hand over the control of their lives to men even if they are wise and the destructive consequences of lack of female agency. Bigolina warns women against the practices rendering them the objects of voyeuristic pleasure and advises them never to let their bodies be seen as signifiers of eroticism or nameless icons of beauty. She conveys a telling message that only when women stand upright as agents of their lives instead of decorous images can they win in the end and achieve their wishes. Even though the Duchess initially seems to overcome the limits imposed on her when she rejects to marry again after being widowed indicating that she has the capability for independent action, the erroneous decisions she makes result in her self-inflicted punishment. As Nissen argues, Bigolina believes that “women who seek to memorialise themselves by posing for paintings, by relying on a sort of passive visual display of their physical essence, will ultimately fail to make a lasting or

¹⁴³ Contrary to the expectations of the Duchess, the old counsellor and the artist who paints her, the portrait does not affect its addressee. Suffering from unrequited love and knowing that “she had put her beautiful nude body on display for no good purpose” (287) [con poco suo utile havea fatto mostra dello ignudo suo bellissimo corpo] (286) the Duchess of Calabria dies in grief.

worthy impression" (*Kissing* 8). She thinks that women should not trust someone else's skills but believe in themselves to communicate their innermost feelings. She thereby questions and resists against the idea of the objectification of women present in the literature and arts of her time; she thinks that women should not overrate physical display of their beauty but should use their intellect to assert their presence. Thus, she offers literature as a solution. She advises women to be the author of their own portraits and to make the best of their power to create; she represents writing as an individual endeavour to assert agency. She thereby refutes gender roles and transcends gender limitations that hierarchise men and women as the active agents of arts versus its passive objects or recipients. Bigolina believes that women should promote their worth not through exhibiting their beauties which would objectify them but with their ability to compose their own works of art which would establish them as subjects. She is of the opinion that literature is the best means to convey the emotions and thoughts because it only has the potential to provide the truest portrait of a person. According to her, once a woman learns to benefit from literature as the manifestation of the soul and intellect, she cannot help but become "the champion of individual self-expression" (Nissen, *Kissing* 110). The episode of the Duchess of Calabria demonstrates the consequences of submitting to domineering masculine voice and provides a moral message for women encouraging them to realise their own potential. The Duchess serves as a foil to the protagonist Urania and communicates that what really matters for a woman is not the exaltation of her physical beauty but her virtues, intellect and determination to act individually.

Bigolina creates juxtaposing stories through the experiences of the Duchess of Calabria and Urania to inform that women should be individuals with a mind of their own and trust in their virtue and agency. Her protagonist Urania embodies the virtues Bigolina thinks women should have. Urania is quite a virtuous and erudite lady from Salerno who hosts the saloon meetings in her house. The narrative begins with a description which exalts her:

There lived in that city a young woman of a very noble family named Urania. Aside from the fact that she was quite properly skilled in vernacular literature, so that the Muses were her companions as much in prose as in verse, she was also endowed with so noble a spirit that she would have chosen to die a thousand times rather than see her lovely soul give way to single vice. (85)

[si trovava in quella città una giovane d'assai nobil famiglia, per nome Urania chiamata; la quale oltre che nelle volgari lettere fosse assai convenevolmente dotta, et che le Muse sì nelle prose, qual nelle rime le fossero amiche, era ancora d'un così nobile animo ornata, che più tosto che un sol vitio da quel suo così bel amino s'havesse veduto uscire, harrebbe eletto di morir mille volte.] (84)

The excerpt emphasises that she has knowledge in vernacular literature, she produces literary works in prose and verse and she strictly abstains from vice. It is notable that Bigolina upsets one of the generic qualities of romance, namely the topos of the description of the protagonist in terms of her physical features. The reader never learns of her hair or eye colour or any information related to her body. Neither in the introduction nor in the following sections there are blazons that celebrate Urania's beauty as the ones praising the Duchess of Calabria. By not dismembering Urania, which would make her an object of male gaze otherwise, but emphasising her virtue, Bigolina indeed saves her from the possessable ornamental position she might end up with and establishes a thematic link with the proem in which Judgment advises Bigolina's authorial persona to foreground intellect rather than physical appearance. Equally interesting is the fact that Urania is not as beautiful as the other women around her: "This quality [virtue], more than any great beauty she may have had, caused her to be loved and desired by many noble youths of Salerno" (85) [Era costei per cagion di cotali sue virtudi, più che per gran bellezza che 'n lei si ritrovasse, da molti nobili giovani di Salerno amata, et desiderata] (84). She disrupts the tradition of romance ladies who are surpassingly beautiful but she is by far the most virtuous, intelligent and erudite one among the others around her. It is innovative of Bigolina to create a heroine who does not stand out with her physical attraction but with her literary skills and her amiable personal traits. The absence of the father figure is also notable as Bigolina creates a heroine who is free to make her own choices and decisions. The only person she feels responsible for is her mother whom, indeed, she does not submit to: "there was no one else to whom Urania owed obedience, save her Mother" (89) [la madre di lei . . . alla qual sola si trovava di ubedire obligata] (88). The total absence of paternal authority is indicative of Bigolina's challenge against and criticism of the patriarchal teachings which claim that women are in need of paternal observance in case they transgress their assigned place and dishonour their families or because they are unable to take care of themselves or make their own decisions being supposedly less intelligent than men. Through Urania's characterisation, Bigolina refutes such stereotypical understanding of womanhood.

Urania is an independent woman; she is famous for her virtue and she is able to make wise decisions without male interference or social constraints. She embodies the ideal self-sufficient and resourceful woman Bigolina envisions.

Although Urania is indifferent to love affairs and to her various suitors, she soon falls in love with Fabio who is a man as well-bred as her: "aside from his great knowledge of Latin literature, he was also adorned by heaven with the best manners, and a grace which made him pleasing to every virtuous heart" (87) [Imperciò che oltre ch' egli fosse nelle latine lettere assai dotto, era ancor di belle creanze sommamente adorno, et d'una gratia dal ciel concessagli, la quale ad ogni virtuoso cuore lo facea grato] (86). Not having the authority figure to enforce her into an arranged marriage, Urania chooses Fabio as a lover because they have common tastes. Equally significant is the fact that love-at-first-sight experience central to romance is invalid for their case since Fabio falls in love with her only hearing the praises of her virtue and Urania is attracted to him because of his manners and interest in literature. Their intellectual dialogue is worthy of attention:

On those days when he could not come to see her, he did not fail to make up for this by sending her polished love letters; and she, who was highly skilled in this pursuit, answered them with letters of her own which were no less polished or pleasing. Often she added many beautiful and erudite sonnets to her letters, along with other types of poetry. (87)

[Et que' giorni che andar non vi poteva, non mancava con amorevoli et dotte lettere di supplire; alla quali (sì come da colei, che bene il sapea fare) erano non men gratamente, che dottamente risposto. Et spesse volte alle lettere aggiungeva de' molti vaghi et dotti sonetti, con altre qualità di rime.] (86)

Bigolina shortcircuits the connection between love, sight and beauty in their love affair and thereby demonstrates her dissidence concerning the practices of her culture and her desire to appropriate the generic features of romance to her own profeminist use. Soon, however, Fabio disappoints Urania as he abandons her in favour of a more beautiful woman, upon which she decides to leave Salerno. The insight into the psychology of the protagonist highlights the importance Bigolina gives to female voice and women's individual experiences:

She was quite certain that this rival could not match her in virtue, however much prettier she may have been. Despite this certainty, Urania felt such boundless grief at this state of affairs that she thought she

would surely die . . . Therefore she resolved . . . to flee Salerno without delay, dressed as a man, and wander the world until such a time as the great suffering and considerable discomfort that she would undergo along the way might free her heart from its excessive, indeed insane, love for Fabio; only thus could she prove merciful to herself. (89)

[quantunque certissima fosse che di virtù non le si uguaglierebbe, quando ben l'avanzasse in bellezza, sentiva nondimeno di cotal novo accidente un così smisurato dolore, che per lo grande affanno si pensava di certo morire . . . deliberossi che incontrar di ciò le ne potesse di volere senza indugio vestita da huomo et sola fuor di Salerno partirsi, et andar pe' 'l mondo errando sin tanto che il lungo patire et molti disagi che per lo camino harebbe sofferti, il soverchio amor che a Fabio portava, anzi più tosto la insania le levasser del cuore, et di sè stessa la facesser pietosa.] (88)

In the first place, it is notable that Urania does not confine herself into domestic space contrary to the patriarchal prescriptions. Even though she leaves her home for a long time without her servants or any guards, the fact that her honour or virtue is never called into question suggests that so long as a woman is wise and well-mannered there would be no harm to her propriety. In other words, Bigolina invalidates the patriarchal prescription that women should be confined indoors to keep them intact instead offering the proposition that women are capable of taking care of themselves even in difficulty. What is more, Urania's voluntary exile from the society has a recuperative effect since she knows that in order to maintain her sanity¹⁴⁴ she should undergo such process of introspection and healing. That is, her temporary victimisation by unrequited love and frustrated desire seems to shatter her previously established agency but the fact that she decides to undertake a journey to recover from her obsession indeed reinforces it because, knowing herself better than everyone else around her, Urania does not need to consult anyone and she makes the wisest choice to get rid of her sorrow. She conveys the idea that women can deal with any problem they face so long as they are determined enough to remain true to themselves. It is also notable that although she is grief-stricken, Urania does not feel desperate because she is self-

¹⁴⁴ "This romance topos begins with insanity, or at least the fear of insanity, which then leads to a complete alteration of the character's normal behaviour and appearance, as well as his or her self-imposed exile from society. In the case of the standard male romance protagonist, the flight to woods to avoid being seen and recognised in a state of grief leads to the protagonist's complete loss of identity [such as Orlando in Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, Yvain in Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain* and Tancredi in Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*]" (Nissen, *Kissing* 193).

confidently¹⁴⁵ aware that her true worth does not depend upon the preferences of a man or her physical beauty. Before leaving the city, she writes a letter to Fabio to express her opinion. Disappointed by the fact that "female comeliness is the eternal glue of man's affection" (Finucci, "Giulia" 17) she reproaches his blindness to the true beauty of a woman. She shows him his errors and poor judgment:

Here is their great miracle: I have already given you something which your pretty lady cannot give you for all eternity, nor all of the most excellent painters, nor indeed that great artist, Nature. Every time you look upon and contemplate in your hands the many and varied works which I composed, both poetry and prose, you will see they are all portraits, even if they are each different; and each of them by itself, as well as of them taken together, show you how much beauty there inside of me. Now you see what I have already made plain to you: that those beautiful things which you can see in me everyday (that is, at such times as you might deign to use your intellect and regard me and my many portraits) deserve more to be loved and held dear by you than any other greater physical beauty one could want to have. (99)

[Et ecco il loro miracolo grande, che quello che dar non ti può la tua bella donna in eterno, nè tutti i più eccellenti pittori, nè ancora la gran maestra Natura lo ti potrebbe dare, io già te l'ho dato; che quante volte miri, et consideri le tante et varie sorti di rime et prose che da me composte tieni nelle tue mani, tanti ritratti vedrai esser quelle, quantunque diversi fossero, li quali ciascun da per sè et tutti insieme quanta sia in me bellezza ti manifestano. Hor cedi che già ti ho fatto conoscere come le bellezze, le quali ciascun giorno tu poi vedere, quando in me et in molti miei ritratti con lo intelletto tuo ti degnassi mirare, più meritano d'esser da te amate et tenute care, che qual'altra maggior corporale bellezza esser si voglia.] (98)

As the passage manifests, Urania acts like the alter-ego of her creator since both she and Bigolina's authorial persona comprehend the importance of literature to express one's unique inner portrait. Likewise, both emphasise the transitoriness of physical beauty deeming that a woman's own power to create is the best way to reflect her intellectual resources. The romance's "clear correction of petrarchismo" (Yavneh 1172) proves that women should learn to improve their intellectual properties instead of privileging their physical appearance or others' opinion. In this sense, Urania's disappointment stems from the fact that no matter how

¹⁴⁵ "I have chosen to lessen my pain by leaving my homeland. You will have been the cause of this: my country will be deprived of someone of great worth, and perhaps it will never see the likes of me again" (103) [ho eletto per minor mio male ha propria Patria abbandonare et lasciare; et così sarai tu cagione, ch'ella resterà priva di tale, che forse un'altra simile non ne tirenerà seco] (102). The sentence at the end of the letter "remember also that at one time you did not disdain to call me your teacher" (107) [come già non ti sdegnati chiamarmi Maestra] (106) also shows her self-reliance.

intelligent women might be, men still cherish the female body, which in turn leads to their objectification either in portraits or to female passivity through marriages based on hierarchical relationships instead of companionate ones nourished by exchange of opinion and common tastes. In the proem and via the juxtaposing experiences of the Duchess and Urania, Bigolina suggests that women should focus on cultivating themselves. She represents the zeitgeist of the Renaissance by promoting *la donna universale* as a companion to *l'uomo universale*.

Apart from Urania's agency to decide what is most suitable for her and her letter to Fabio in which she emphasises her intellectual and artistic capability, the fact that she decides to leave Salerno disguised as a man is also notable in terms of the thematic and didactic concerns of the work. After submitting her letter to a servant, Urania dresses in the men's clothes and takes the road to Naples (109) [Et indi de' panni che da huomo s'havea fatti vestitasi, et sopra un'ottimo roncin salita, nascosamente n'uscì di Salerno et verso Napoli prese il camino] (108). It is true that Urania originally dons male attire only for practical reasons so that she would not be recognised by anyone else, she would be able to hide her sex and she would suffer for Fabio unmolested.¹⁴⁶ Throughout the journey, however, cross-dressing evolves into a pragmatic tool serving Bigolina's profeminist aim because it is thanks to her cross-dressing that Urania becomes a figure of authority embarking on the roles of counsellor and saviour. That is, while her cross-dressing is primarily a pragmatic solution to survive in an alien environment, it soon turns into a political act to assert female agency and to defend the female sex. Within this context, it is assumable that Bigolina employs cross-dressing as a form of resistance against the patriarchal culture since it provides Urania with opportunities to refute the misogyny embedded in culture, to transgress the teachings imposed upon women and to embrace the attributes such as courage and valour traditionally considered masculine. Urania is dressed in men's attire because she does not want to conform to the prescription that women should stay indoors, and by means of experience, she succeeds in subverting the hegemonic and hierarchical sexual arrangements upon which the patriarchal culture is built.

Cross-dressing becomes a handy instrument for Bigolina to resist against the oppressive culture she dwells in considering its religious and social implications. For instance, transvestism is forbidden in Deuteronomy 22.5 which states "a

¹⁴⁶ In *Canzoniere* 35, Petrarch also finds peace in the countryside.

woman shall not wear a man's garment, nor shall a man put on a woman's cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God." The Scripture regards it an impiety violating the word of God and a transgression of the social order sanctioned by Him since it preaches that the outer garment of a person should match with his or her sex. Apart from being strictly repudiated in religion as a moral disorder, cross-dressing is also frowned upon as a sign of social disorder. In order to prevent such disorder, *Statuti della repubblica fiorentina*, for instance, forbids the practice as early as the fourteenth century:

It is established that no woman is to go about the city or suburbs dressed in virile clothing, nor any man in female clothing. And the podestà is required, in the first month of his term of office, to have it proclaimed through the city that no woman or man is to dare or presume to do this, and that she who contravenes is to be whipped through the city, from the communal palace to the place where she was found. (qtd. in Dean 199)

Similar to what the legislation decrees, Silvio Antoniano in his conduct book *Tre libri dell'educazione cristiana e politica dei figliuoli* rehearses the dictates of the Council of Trent in order to fashion the identity of its addressees in line with the patriarchal values of the Cinquecento Italy. One of the sections of the Council, "Decreto sul modo di vivere e su altre cose da osservarsi nel Concilio" [Decree on lifestyles and other things to be observed in the Council], which takes place on January 7, 1546 only six years earlier than Bigolina's work, preaches the rules to be obeyed by both sexes in terms of clothing and adornment to refrain from vice. Antoniano likewise advises parents to supervise and discipline the appearance of their children to obey the morality code. Fathers, for instance, are instructed to control their sons' apparel in case they lose their virility and, in one of the chapters regarding the dressing of women entitled "dell'onestà degli abiti femminili ed in specie del velo" [of the honesty of female clothing and especially of the veil] he states that it is indecent of a woman to dress in such a way that her clothes would make her appear more like a man than a woman" (Paulicelli 16-17). Given that clothes have been the markers of sexual difference, sartorial choices of women have been of great concern for fear that transvestism gives them an opportunity to experiment with genders roles. As the religion, the legislation and the conduct literature underscore, women are not permitted to cross-dress because it is thought to be a sin and an illicit act. It is conjecturable that cross-dressing is severely objected to because it helps women obtain the privileges of the opposite

sex and thereby disrupt the gender hierarchy considering that a woman masquerading as a man poses a challenge against the patriarchal understanding of female roles and the perception of women and symbolically earns the freedom denied her as a woman. Keeping also in mind that men are not allowed to don female attire either, that cross-dressing implicates the fluidity of gender roles becomes a reasonable assumption. Indeed, either male or female, cross-dressing assaults cultural boundaries that differentiate sexes, which is against the hierarchical construction of patriarchal culture based upon the unequal positioning of women and men. Zimmerman believes that cross-dressing has "a disturbing anarchic potential" (43) and Dollimore similarly adds that it "epitomises the strategy of transgressive reinscription" calling for "intense anxieties" regarding the "unsettling of gender and class hierarchies" ("Shakespeare" 483). The patriarchal society subordinates women to men and, for its maintenance, it seeks to perpetuate the inferior status of women through religion, conduct literature and legislation. Given that the attire is the signifier of one's sex, when a woman dons male clothes, it amounts to her renouncing her subordinate position. In other words, male disguise makes her an uncontrollable independent woman who threatens to overthrow the patriarchal hierarchy because it lays bare that once she wears male attire, she can easily perform masculine behaviour undermining the superiority of male. Howard in the same vein reckons that "cross-dressing, as fact and idea, threaten[s] a normative social order based upon strict principles of hierarchy and subordination, of which women's subordination to men [is] a chief instance ("Cross-Dressing" 418). Blurring sexual difference and the attributes of each sex, cross-dressing challenges the validity of gender hierarchy and unravels the artificial construction of gender distinctions. It enables women to resist captivity both physically and ideologically. Garber asserts that it creates a cultural anxiety "confounding culture" as a "disruptive element" and creating "a category crisis of male and female" (17). Since gender is not fluid and dress functions as a cultural signifier of one's belonging either to the category of male or female, these categories, thought to regulate the social order, become dysfunctional; and, the gender ambiguity disrupts the clear-cut hierarchy between men and women.

On the other hand, Kuhn argues that in some circumstances cross-dressing does not blur sexual difference but intensifies it especially when the women in disguise cannot fulfil the masculine roles their male attire necessitates (55-56). In order to decide whether Urania's transvestism challenges the patriarchal hierarchy by

creating innovative subject positions or polices gender difference by strengthening the masculine and feminine roles sanctified by the patriarchal culture, it is necessary to examine the function of Urania's cross-dressing within the framework of the romance. Although it is difficult to decide at once if her cross-dressing perpetuates or disrupts patriarchal culture considering her situation in that she supposedly dons male attire to preserve her virtue and feminine propriety on the one hand but her decision to travel to heal the unendurable love she feels for Fabio hints her sexual desire thus rendering her morally ambiguous within the patriarchal understanding of femininity on the other, it is still safe to conclude that Urania's cross-dressing makes her a champion of female agency. Hackett believes that "the cross-dressing female traveller combines geographical mobility with mobility of gender and identity" ("Suffering" 128). Her statement is valid for our protagonist too since her two dialogues with the group of women and men trigger women to be aware of and question the patriarchal construction of social rules and her rescuing Fabio eventually proves her agency and renders her an exemplary figure for women to emulate. Her multiple roles of counsellor and saviour "combat" the dominant patriarchal culture which strives "to constitute [subordinate] subjectivities" and Urania embodies an ideal model to "develop dissident subjectivities" which would "trouble the social order" and "redeploy its most cherished values" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 299) of passivity and subjugation to a man.

During the journey, Urania encounters a group of five women. Bigolina benefits from the genre of the *questioni d'amore* in which young people from each sex come together in a *locus amoenus*, discuss the nature of love and counsel each other in this section of the work. The protagonist enters into "a pretty little wood" (111) where there is "a very lovely spring" (113) in the middle of trees [che all' entrar di un piacevol boschetto dove era una bellissima fonte" (110, 112). Urania, acquiring the name of the very man by whom she is disappointed, accepts the ladies' offer to join them and answers their questions. Since he¹⁴⁷ states that his profession is the study of vernacular literature, they ask him to "teach and instruct" (113) [ci potrà insegnare et ammaestrare] (114) them. One of the ladies asks what kind of a lover a woman should choose and if the man should be old or young to prevent being abandoned by him. He advises the ladies as follows:

¹⁴⁷ Bigolina uses male pronoun when she is in disguise. I refer to her as "he" henceforth.

And I will say this, that it does not seem to me that you should worry about the age, nobility, or wealth of the man that you wish to choose as lover as much as you should be sure that he is adorned with excellent manners, and that he takes delight in some particular virtues. (123)

[Et dirò così, che a me non pare che tanto debbiate haver cura alla età, nobilitade, o ricchezza di quello che elegger per amante vi volete, quanto maggiormente dovete esser bene avvertite che d'ottimi costumi sia ornato, et di qualche particular virtù si diletta.] (122)

The excerpt has two aspects that call attention. Firstly, it is notable that the custom of arranged marriage seems to be non-existent among these women as there is no mention or criticism of the practice at all but they are only willing to learn the qualities a marriageable man should have in order to choose the best option for them. Either the absence of the patriarchal authority figure arranging the marriages such the father or the brother or their exemplary behaviour respecting their decision sanctions their independence. Just as Urania does not have a father to submit to, the women do not feel obliged to consult their elders either. Secondly, Bigolina invites the reader to avoid the stereotypical understanding of arranged marriage and the choice of partners. That is, she believes that age difference between the partners does not necessarily mean that it would bring unhappiness; class distinction between them does not inevitably lead to discordance; or a woman marrying a wealthy man does not always become an exchangeable commodity between the father and the husband. According to her, these infamous criteria -age, class and wealth- should not be interpreted prejudgmentally so long as a woman chooses a virtuous and good-tempered man. She believes that the qualities women usually suffer from in arranged marriages can also ensure their happiness as long as they choose their partners without patriarchal intervention.¹⁴⁸ It is interesting that while Bigolina's *Urania* is chronologically the earliest one among the romances of Lady Mary Wroth, Anna Weamys and Moderata Fonte, it is the only one that does not deal with the

¹⁴⁸ Likewise, Clorina is given chance by Prince Giufredi to choose either Fabio or Menandro as a husband. It is interesting that the Prince does not ask her father's opinion to decide on behalf of his daughter but she is free to choose either of them. Paternal authority is not absent but ineffective in her case. The father only advises her regarding Fabio's better qualities: "to these words Clorina's father added many others, praising Fabio and exhorting his daughter to liberate him" (229) [alle cui parole il padre di lei tante altre, et così lodevoli, in favour di Fabio esortando la figliuola a liberarlo] (228). The father is not oppressive; instead of compelling Clorina to choose the man he desires, he counsels her and cherishes her opinion. He thus ensures her agency and freedom of choice. She embodies agency and independence as she determines the man she wants to marry against the preference of her father and even the Prince. The scene is remindful of the dialogue between the King of Morea and Pamphilia in Wroth's *Urania*.

problem of arranged marriage but it focuses virtue and common tastes as criteria for choosing marriage partners. Instead, the only anxiety of women is not having the opportunity to cultivate themselves:

You men keep us from working in the field of literature and in the sciences, both aesthetic and practical, so that all the glory they bestow is yours alone; therefore we spend our lives, which are truly unhappy, deprived of all pleasure and knowledge, unless love awakens our wits to some extent. And what is worse, we are mostly thought of as foolish by you men, on account of our inherent great kindness. (117)

[Voi huomini acciò che la gloria tutta sia di voi soli ci impedita che nelle discipline delle lettere, et nelle belle et utili scienze si possiamo essercitare. Onde se Amor qualche poco in noi non desta lo ingegno, questa nostra, per lo vero, infellicima vita passiamo ignude et prive d'ogni piacere, et sapere; et peggio è ancora, che le più volte la nostra troppa bontà, presso voi altri huomini nome di sciocche ci acquista.] (116)

Women reproach that they are highly engaged in the thoughts of love because they are not given the chance to flourish themselves intellectually by dealing with literature and sciences. It is probable that they are not allowed to either because men would be jealous of their accomplishments, because it is thought to be against female decorum, or because they are not given enough education to participate in them. In the meantime, using Fabio as a spokesperson, Bigolina reiterates her message that women should attend activities which contribute to their productivity; she urges women to be aware of their own creative power; and she stresses that "love of virtue should dominate all other concerns in the choice of a mate" and "women should be respected by men, and allowed to participate in the arts" (Nissen, Introduction 41). The episode enables Bigolina to emphasise the necessity of self-cultivation and to reflect the problems of women who are not permitted to deal with intellectual activities. After the dialogue, Fabio decides to leave even though the ladies want to host him. It is again remarkable that the ladies do not feel the necessity to ask for their fathers' permission; they seem to be unbounded by convention as inviting a single man in the house is incompatible with female propriety.

The following day Fabio encounters five gentlemen who happen to be in love with the women he encounters a day before. The second dialogue contributes to the tradition of *querelle des femmes*. Bigolina's defence of women renders her the first

female author to contribute to the topic in Italy.¹⁴⁹ Her cross-dressing enables Urania to transcend the restrictions upon her sex and the five men, who consider Fabio an exemplary individual, ask for his advice.¹⁵⁰ The demand -actually stemming from Urania's disguise because men respect her as she looks like an experienced man- enables her to defend and speak on behalf of her sex. Finucci believes that "this new prowoman militant stance is different" ("Giulia" 27) as Bigolina does not defend the superiority of women but the equality of sexes; she does not focus on the excellence of female sex but the worth of women as individuals based upon their honour and virtue. The dialogue begins with the commonly-held misogynistic belief that women are less perfect than men:

We have considered how man is so much more perfect than woman, which has led some wise men to the opinion that the lowest and least of men on earth is worth more than the most noble and most worthy woman alive . . . I judge that it is far more necessary that a man employ great diligence in discovering and selecting the least imperfect among the many imperfect women, than it is for women to choose the best out of many perfect men. (141)

[Ma hora consideranno come quantunque l'huomo di assai maggior perfettione sia che la donna non è, onde d'alcuni savi fu opinione che più vaglia il più vile et da poco huomo che si ritrovi nel mondo che la più nobile et valorosa donna che viva . . . Et perciò dico che ciò considerando prendo argomento, et giudico dover esser cosa vie più necessaria assai che l'huomo usi maggior diligenza nel conoscere e leggersi tra le molte imperfette donne la meno imperfetta; che alle donne non è tra molti perfetti scegliere lo migliore.] (140)

Stating that such comments do not have a reasonable basis but are spoken merely out of passion, Fabio asserts that women are also as perfect as men and they would be able to be as successful as them in "noble art, lofty science, or other kind of skill . . . if it has been permitted to women to participate in these fields at all" (141) [nobil' arte, alta scienza, overo altra sorte di virtù . . . se è stato lecito di potere entromettersi] (140). He adds that "there have been among the women a Sappho, a Carmenta, an Hortensia, and many others hardly less wise or learned

¹⁴⁹ Her predecessors were Galeazzo Flavio Capella, Baldessare Castiglione and Lodovico Domenichi who defended women in their works *Della eccellenza et dignità della donna* (1525), *Il libro del cortigiano* (1528) and *La nobilità delle donne* (1549) respectively. Although there is no proof as to her having read Christine de Pisan, Bigolina must also have been influenced by her brilliant defence of women in the *Book of the City of Ladies*.

¹⁵⁰ "We would like you to give us the same advice and instruction, regarding the kind and quality of woman that a man should choose for his beloved" (139) [consigliarci et insegnarci di qual sorte et conditione debbe l'huomo eleggersi donna amata] (138).

than the men who have been mentioned" (143) [tra le donne vi son state una Safo, una Carmente, una Hortensia, et molt'altre poco men de gli allegati huomini dotte] (142). Employing Fabio as the mouthpiece to criticise and correct the faulty aspects of her culture, Bigolina thus emphasises the unequal practices regarding the upbringing of sexes because she believes that it is not due to their imperfect nature that women cannot succeed in the scientific and literary fields but because they are not given the chance to deal with them. In this sense, she challenges the cultural assumption that women are the less perfect and skilful sex because she implies that each woman has intellect and each woman has the potential to become a Sappho or a Carmenta¹⁵¹ at length. In other words, Bigolina advocates that it is not the innate insufficiency of women that renders them imperfect but the barriers against their education. She believes that women should be provided with the same intellectual tools men have since they are as capable as them in truth. She implicitly states that the inferiority of women is not biological but political and it is due to the oppressive patriarchal context restricting their self-cultivation that women cannot ascertain their creative resources. Just as she establishes in the poem, rehearses in the episode of the Duchess and reinforces through the characterisation of Urania, Bigolina regards women capable individuals with a mind of their own and encourages them to assert their individuality through their acts. Now that it is achievable by means of education, she defends that women should have access to education. Her defence is significant in terms of representing the "dialectic between the dominant and the subordinate" (Dollimore, *Radical* xxvii) and the means to question women's culturally sanctioned identity and place. It suggests that so long as the individuals do not readily consent to the impositions of the dominant ideology, there is always room for dissidence and wish-fulfilment and women can earn their rights once they start to question the cultural practices. Bigolina's defence immediately recalls the concept of hegemony, which is always "a process" vulnerable to changes: "It does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures (Williams, *Marxism* 113). In the same vein, since it is the so-called superiority of men which regulates the social system, the gentlemen feel responsible to defend their stance and reinforce their dominance against any threat from the subordinate. Therefore,

¹⁵¹ Sappho is a Greek poet credited as the inventor of the Sapphic verse; Carmenta is a seer and the creator of the Latin alphabet; Hortensia is known for her eloquence. Their stories are available in Boccaccio's *Famous Women* which was translated into Italian in 1545.

one of the men objects to Fabio's eulogy for women and argues that those such as Helen and Medea are evil women who cause disaster.¹⁵² The cross-dressed heroine is quick to respond: "I pray you to reverse the order of things, and admit that the vain and immoderate desire of Paris in the first place, and subsequently his treacherous obstinacy, were the cause of every evil and city's downfall" (149) [ma volgete l'ordine vi prego, et dite più tosto il vano, et disordinato appetite di Paris primieramente, et dopo la sua tenace ostinatione fu cagion d'ogni male et ruina] (148). Fabio refutes the accusation that Helen is the cause of fall of Troy; she blames Paris for its destruction. Likewise, regarding Medea's revenge, he reasons that women become revenge-thirsty¹⁵³ because of the injuries they suffer:

If women are vengeful, by necessity it follows that first of all they have received offenses from us, since injury always precedes vengeance . . . Thus they come to do us harm, taking their revenge on us, after first having suffered at our hands. (153)

[Se le donne vendicose sono, necessariamente seguita che da noi primieramente habbino ricevuta la offesa, poi che sempre la ingiuria alla vendetta precede . . . onde elle di noi vendicandosi, vengono quelli ad ingiuriare da i quali primieramente ingiuriate furono.] (152)

Bigolina's defence conveys the message that since men dominate the culture, they also shape its values and beliefs but what women should do is to question the arbitrary dominance of men and their fallacious representation of women in order to resist their claim to superiority. It is only achievable by demystifying that the cultural representation of women in derogatory terms is shaped and made real by the patriarchal discourse because men do not want to lose the privileges of their sex. By asserting an antagonistic interpretation regarding the cases of Helen and Medea, Bigolina interrogates the validity of patriarchal mythmaking and the similar stories charging women with several crimes. She thereby aims to hold a mirror up to the experiences of women. Williams believes that "there is always other social being or consciousness which is neglected and excluded" but Bigolina, through

¹⁵² The Aristotelian idea that women are jealous, vengeful, deceptive and querulous was common in culture: "The female is softer in disposition, is more mischievous, less simple, more impulsive, and more attentive to the nurture of the young . . . Woman is more compassionate than man, more easily moved to tears, at the same time is more jealous, more querulous, more apt to scold and to strike. She is, furthermore, more prone to despondency, and less hopeful than the man, more void of shame, more false of speech, more deceptive" (*History of Animals*, 608b).

¹⁵³ He contrarily gives several examples such as Marius, Sulla, Nero, Phalaris and Ezzelino who have become vengeful tyrants without having received any injury from anyone (153).

refashioning the misrepresented figures, triggers the reader to resist the "seizure" that the dominant imposes as "the ruling definition" (Williams, *Marxism* 125) regarding the representation of the female characters convicted by the patriarchy. If "subcultures constitute consciousness" Bigolina tries to increase the "potential resources of collective understanding and resistance" of women (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 38) through her defence. She thereby interrogates the intrinsic values of patriarchy and invites the reader to be alert to oppressions and misrepresentations which diminish their worth and virtue. Urania embodies a threat against male superiority; the dialogue highlights the fluidity of hegemonic structures and the vulnerability of the so-called superior position one has within it and reflects the fluctuating nature of hegemony as a process of consolidation and resistance. Fabio finally concludes that being a man or a woman does not define one's honour but it is "acquired through one's own personal worth, through virtue, through intelligence, and above all else through a generous and most lovely soul" (155) [anzi col proprio valore, con virtù, con l'ingegno, ma sopra ogn'altra cosa con un generoso, et bellissimo animo s'acquista, poche vi dico ritrovarsene al mondo] (154). It is through these neutral qualities that Bigolina instructs women to not to submit to patriarchal injustice and to think beyond the boundaries so as to efface the hierarchy between women and men based upon their so-called essential characteristics.

The disappointed heroine develops into a resourceful one who cures not only her lovesickness but also redeems her beloved. As well as the freedom of speech and movement, her cross-dressing also enables Urania to save Fabio, who is in prison due to his attempt to steal a magical garland from the Prince's palace, from execution. The episode again encourages women to subvert the male dominance through their action demonstrating that women can achieve success in military deeds too. It is learnt that there is only one solution to rescue Fabio from death. He is in despair with "a fog of sighs and tears" (237) [un nembo di sospiri et di lagrime] (236) carrying the characteristics traditionally attributed to women:

Any maiden, be she noble or common, who might succeed either through guile or stratagem to get a kiss from his Wild Woman, would receive the noble Fabio as a husband, together with a dowry of ten thousand ducats from the Prince. (233)

[qualunque donzella nobile, o non nobile si ritrovasse, la quale con ingegno, o con arte tanto s'affaticasse, che potesse dalla sua Salvatica Femina levare un bacio, le fosse il gentil Fabio concesso per merito con dote di diecemila ducati di quelli del Prencipe.] (232)

Dollimore states that, when resisting against the dominant culture, one should not embrace “simple denunciation of dominant ideologies” as it could be “dangerous and counter-productive” for the subordinate. He instead suggests certain “strategies of negotiation” such as the refashioning of dominant ideologies through “(mis)appropriation and their subversion through inversion” (“Dominant” 181-82). Likewise, in the Fabio episode, Bigolina does not disregard the binary opposition of the strong and the subordinate but inverts the generic convention of damsel-in-distress into knight-in-distress. In other words, she does not transcend the social order which categorises sexes based upon their traditional attributes but reverses the present hierarchical structure. She employs the very signifiers of sexual difference in terms of dress and traditional attributes to undermine its essentialist basis. In this sense, misappropriating the generic convention of romance becomes an effective tool to produce counter-argument against female incompetence. The episode refashions the dominant ideology and instead of disregarding the binary opposition of the strong and the subordinate, it becomes Urania who helps Fabio who is penitent of his wrong choices. Bigolina feeds on the generic topos which objectifies women so that Fabio becomes a trophy in exchange for the courageous act of a woman. Taking into consideration that woman-as-trophy is an endorsement of the superiority of men which relegates women to a subordinate and passive position, it is obvious that Bigolina challenges the social order which objectifies and silences women making use of them as conduits for assertion of male power. Urania, who dons male clothes again,¹⁵⁴ saves Fabio from execution.

The strategy of cross-dressing helps Urania resist containment physically and ideologically. It erodes the codes that inform masculinity or femininity and blurs the lines that demarcate gender. It liberates her from oppression; it licences her to move freely in the public space and to act efficaciously to influence people. It is originally thanks to her disguise that she safely travels across the country defying restraint. More importantly, as her dialogues with the group of women and men prove, her cross-dressing gives Urania an authority as a counsellor, an advisor and a teacher because women attentively listen to her believing in her wisdom and men take her opinion on women into consideration having been convinced that she is a man. While Urania begins her journey to heal spiritually, it evolves into a quest

¹⁵⁴ “From the innkeeper she was able to get a suit of clothes such as a brigand would wear, which was very greasy and smelled oddly from the great quantity of sweat it held” (253) [le ritrovò una certa veste come di masnadiere, la quale unta, et bisunta, per molto sudore stranamente putiva] (252).

with a pedagogical purpose as she not only recovers from her suffering but she also tries to rehabilitate others when she communicates her message concerning the importance of virtue independent of one's sex, the necessity of wise choices and action and the worth of women. Cross-dressing not only violates the dictum of silence, it also entitles Urania with a didactic mission to refute the misogyny embedded in her culture. True it is that she manages to defend her sex loudly and eloquently only because she is thought to be a man; still, however, released from the social restrictions and obligations imposed upon her sex such as silence, obedience and passivity, Urania can reveal her mind frankly and even becomes an advocate of profeminism. In this sense, her cross-dressing is equal to nonacquiescence to patriarchal culture as she rejects to belong to a culturally idealised category of womanhood actually scripted by men. Nissen states that "the motif of the woman in disguise becomes a grand vehicle for pronouncements on social reform" and endows Bigolina with the means "for re-examination of the roles of the sexes and status of women in society" ("Motif" 214). As well as asserting female agency as a teacher, the strategy of cross-dressing enables Bigolina to explore the foundation of patriarchal ideology established upon the hierarchical positioning of sexes. The fact that Urania realises a supposedly masculine act embarking on the role of a saviour does not only have an empowering influence on her but it also dismantles the patriarchal understanding of femininity; that is, her male disguise helps her assume power unveiling that masculine prerogatives or the characteristics conventionally attributed to men are not innate but are the result of the making of patriarchal culture given that she also has valour and courage as perfectly as a man would have. Such a situation immediately underscores the underlying uneasiness men feel that women cannot be kept under patriarchal control completely. It dispels the assumption that women are the powerless and helpless. Urania's having the upper hand as a counsellor and deliverer of Fabio calls into question the fixity of gender roles and interrogates the rigidity of patriarchal values and teachings promulgated by official discourses which disdain women. It thus leads to gynophobic anxieties regarding the subversion of patriarchal order because it undermines the notion of woman possessable by man when the cross-dressed woman accomplishes her goals without male help. As Dusinberre concludes,

The masculine woman and the woman in disguise are both disruptive socially because they go behind the scenes and find that manhood

describes not the man inside the clothes, but the world's reaction to his breeches . . . A woman in disguise smokes out the male world, perceiving masculinity as a form of acting. (244-45)

The cross-dressed Urania uncloaks the unequal construction of gender and the relative easiness women can invade the power and province of male. Once she impersonates the opposite sex successfully and thus reveals the permeability of the borders segregating the sexes, she clearly threatens the pillars of patriarchy raising the question "how secure are those powers and privileges assigned to the hierarchically superior sex, which depends upon notions of difference to justify its dominance" (Howard, "Cross-Dressing" 435). It might be thought at this point that Urania's cross-dressing does not challenge the patriarchal culture but complements it since she earns authority only due to male disguise and her oscillating the positions of subject as an agent heroine and object as a wife blurs her stance within the patriarchal culture. Nonetheless, the fact that the reader is aware of her sex from the beginning and readily attributes her accomplishments to Urania and to her steadfastness emphasises that so long as a woman is decisive enough to stand upright against injustice she can overcome any obstacle. She thus draws a portrait of female heroine undaunted by conventions, courageous enough to speak her mind and determined to keep her independence. What is more, her obligatory cross-dressing stresses the oppression women have to endure within the patriarchal environment since even Urania, who is known for her virtue in her hometown, has to cross-dress so as not to vitiate her honour. In either case, cross-dressing destabilises the boundaries of gender.

Considering that to transgress the dress code amounts to disruption of the social order which is thought to be immutable, it is concludable that Bigolina has a social agenda in mind when she employs the strategy of cross-dressing. Taken collectively with the introduction in which Judgment advises Bigolina's authorial persona to create her own work of art, with the failure of the Duchess of Calabria who relinquishes her decision to men and with the autonomous heroine aware of her true worth independent of male approval, the strategy of cross-dressing and its implications complement Bigolina's purpose to trigger women to depart from the feminine stereotypes of weakness, to realise their own power and to assert their agency in any phase of their life. Havel believes that it is the "individuals [who] confirm the system, fulfil the system, make system, *are* the system" (136) [emphasis in the original] as it is owing to their willing contribution to the making

of ideology without critically inquiring its impositions that the dominant culture strengthens its influence. Urania, contrarily, emphasising the unequal opportunities bestowed upon each sex and embodying a heroine who transcends the limits of her sex decreed by convention intellectually and physically, proves to be a dissident figure because she does not subscribe to the operations of patriarchal ideology; she does not allow the dominant culture to "recruit" and "transform" her "into a subject" (Althusser 1504). What she does instead is to challenge the dominant culture which preaches female silence and obedience creating false consciousness regarding the inferior status of women. In this sense, *Urania* makes it possible that emergent culture might surface as long as an individual does not unquestionably accede to the teachings of the dominant because it is due to the cultural operations that there is inequality between sexes.

Either because of the generic convention of romance which results in the happy reunion or to offer a realistic portrait of her age to be taken seriously, Bigolina finishes the work with the marriage of Urania and Fabio. Greenblatt states that "if there remain[s] traces of free choice, [it] [is] among possibilities whose range [is] strictly delineated by the social and ideological system in force" (*Self-Fashioning* 256) and, in the same vein, it is inevitable that Urania is re-feminised through marriage and social decorum is sanctioned in accordance with what the patriarchal culture demands. Still, Urania's effort is not contained because she eventually becomes triumphant in the love affair with Fabio and his rescue, in the dialogue with men in defence of women and in her journey for self-healing. True it is that Urania cannot transcend the social forces which mould her into a patriarchally acceptable form and she still remains within the boundaries of the patriarchal system but the messages she communicates through her dialogue with the women and men and her interest in intellectual activities together with her will to act independently prove that she embodies an ideal Renaissance woman endowed with free spirit and enthusiasm for autonomous action.

To conclude, although Bigolina cannot force a considerable change in the patriarchal system, considering the oppressive patriarchal context in which she writes the work, *Urania* poses dissidence within the framework of Cultural Materialism. Bigolina manages to foreground female voice when she negotiates with the dominant culture and questions the validity of patriarchal discourse and practices; she emphasises female experience together with its consequences and

provides an exemplum for women through the Duchess and Urania; she challenges the gendered system that assigns women to subordinate roles; and she responds to the cultural constraints through her heroine uncircumscribed by her social context whose experience as a cross-dressed woman grants her agency and interrogates the stereotypical understanding of womanhood. Her romance embodies dissidence as "refusal of an aspect of the dominant" (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 49) because her production is antagonistic to the dominant culture. The "palpable pressure" it exerts against the patriarchal order and its "formally held and systematic beliefs" (Williams, *Marxism* 132) renders it a dissident work of art because it eventuates in female self-assertion. Bigolina advises women to assert themselves as writers and to create their own portraits as individuals instead of making themselves eroticised ornamental icons of beauty either in art or in domestic sphere. She counsels them to be valued for their action not for their appearance. She thus urges women to step out of the Renaissance codification systems in terms of beauty, the status of women and the roles of women and men in the society. It is quite clever of Bigolina to employ romance, the supposedly frivolous genre, to convey her pedagogical message thus shortcircuiting the patriarchal association with literature and sexuality since she invites women to participate in literature as a means to exalt their virtue and to exploit the genre didactically to communicate her desire in a patriarchally acceptable form. In a social context in which the acceptable female behaviour extends as far as the patriarchal figures approve, Bigolina saves women from the subordinate and object position they are forced to occupy. *Urania: The Story of a Young Woman's Love* becomes a "site of struggle" (Dollimore, *Radical li*) in which the subordinate half of the Cinquecento Italy is instructed to be the commanders of their lives. Bigolina must have been aware that no matter how tiny her voice is, her romance would motivate women for self-actualisation:

These people never see how a drop of water is the softest and weakest thing of all, yet it has the force and strength to wear away and perforate the highest marble, if it drips thereon repeatedly. (149)

[Non veggono questi tai tutto il giorno come la goccia dell'acqua della qual, cosa più molle et tenera non si trova; nondimeno ella ha forza, et potere di cavare, et forare il durissimo marmo, se spesse fiate sopra gli goccia.] (148)

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Renaissance culminates in the humanist philosophy as the celebration of potential power of men and his intellect to help him advance through learning and individual endeavour but one should ask if the cultural awakening as to the capabilities of individuals also flourishes in the female sphere. In other words, one should raise the question if women had a Renaissance. Once Joan Kelly-Gadol poses it, she pessimistically proposes that women did not have a Renaissance because the sociocultural milieu did not grant them the opportunity to cultivate themselves as much as men but moulded them into decorous objects dependent on them. Although her conclusion might be an overstatement, she is partially right in her claim because the British and Italian cultures in the Renaissance were regulated by patriarchal presumptions and principles and women were decidedly subordinate to men. Nonetheless, this dissertation argues that, despite the restrictive patriarchal culture, women had a Renaissance and they made themselves heard through romance authorship. Within this framework, keeping Kelly-Gadol's question in mind, this study attempts to explore female agency in the early modern British and Italian context in Lady Mary Wroth's *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, Anna Weamys' *A Continuation of Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia*, Moderata Fonte's *Thirteen Songs of Floridoro* and Giulia Bigolina's *Urania: The Story of a Young Woman's Love* by focusing on female empowerment in their romances on a historicist basis. Its theoretical framework is Cultural Materialism because the discussion is based upon the analysis of each romance within its own period of production and it takes into consideration the fissures in the dominant ideology to amplify the silenced voice of the system. Given that the early modern British and Italian societies were predominantly patriarchal, the study aims to recover the subordinate constituent of the early modern culture. For this reason, it reads romance as a genre which grants voice to women; it argues that romance is instrumental for women to raise their voice against social injustice and to assert their independence. It puts forward that the female romance as a dissident genre, female romance authors due to act of writing and the female characters in each romance by means of their various

adventures resisting patriarchal prescriptions challenge the gendered hierarchical structure, the patriarchal discourse, the patriarchal construction of femininity and the biased patriarchal institutions of the early modern period. Thus, the study foregrounds female agency, female voice and female experience.

The romance genre is chosen in this study because, despite its infamous cultural appreciation by the patriarchs as trivial, immoral, unintellectual and lust-provoking, it evolves into a useful instrument for women in which they disseminate their opinion. Even though female authors benefit from the generic features of romance such as quests, heroic adventures, helpless characters, enchanted places, heavenly beautiful women, jousts, fights against supernatural creatures, magic and sorcerers, they turn the generic expectations upside down and render romance a tool for profeminist purposes. Romance resists the dominant ideology as regards to women; it helps them challenge the culturally sanctioned feminine roles and values; it grants women the right to speak thanks to its representation of behavioural patterns different than the patriarchally imposed; it lays bare the tension between cultural inscriptions and individual desire and the unjust diffusion of power between sexes thus making possible a gradual shift away from the Renaissance ideal of femininity. The romance "in the conditional or subjunctive mode" as "could have, should have, or might have been" (Roberts, "Knott" 126) relocates women in the central place, reinterprets the patriarchal prescriptions from the female point of view, revises the patriarchal thought and renews enthusiasm for female independence. It embodies the possibility for emergent thought within the dominant culture.

In spite of the adverse criticism it receives, great interest in romance in England and Italy leads Margaret Tyler and Laura Terracina to question the dominant understanding regarding the genre in the sixteenth century. Their act turns out to be revolutionary in terms of romance readership and authorship since they advocate the rights of women as its readers and authors. By encouraging women to read the material forbidden to them, they defy the prescribed feminine propriety and defend that if romances are substantially addressed to and read by women, they should equally have the right to read and even to translate/write them. Underlining the faultline that lies at the heart of the literary circle encouraging female readership with dedications on the one hand but labelling reading romances a transgressive activity on the other, Tyler and Terracina justify the act of romance

writing and question the imposed social conventions that hierarchically position women as passive consumers and men as active producers. Indeed, Lady Mary Wroth publishes the first part of her romance with her name on the first page; despite the severe criticism she gets from a court member, answering him back, she claims a position of authority as a female author who cannot be silenced by attackers; and, she writes the second part afterwards. Anna Weamys, who does not use a pseudonym despite her humble background, designedly inserts the surrogate Sidney into the narrative only to kill him so that she reinforces her authorial power over her production; Moderata Fonte, notwithstanding an epitome of an ideal woman, strengthens her agency as an author when she positions herself as the only woman among the coterie of Venetian writers of her time representing her determination to be visible within the patriarchal culture despite marginalisation; and, Giulia Bigolina -inciting women to be engaged in literature-becomes the first woman to defend their rights and worth in Italy under the influence of the Tridentine rules then. The authors in question verify that women, though few in number, have a Renaissance as they are among those who lay the foundation of the emancipation of womankind. Appropriating the pen for the profeminist use, "not defects in nature, but the intelligent seekers of a new way, these women wield the picks of their understanding to build a better city for ladies" (King 239) and manage to deliver their non-conformist message as intellectual individuals to mend the misogynist understanding that relegates women into silence, submission and domesticity. Although they cannot be truly called feminists as they are not consciously organised to defend the political, economic or social rights of women, it is safe to state that they possess the spirit of feminism as they recognise the conflicts in gender relations and the limits set upon women and try to combat them.

Lady Mary Wroth, whose romance hinges upon the legacy of Sir Philip Sidney, benefits from his model to a subversive end and offers a critique of patriarchal practices. Within the framework of arranged marriages in the subplots of *Limena*, *Liana*, *Lisia*, *Orilena*, *Bellamira*, *the Angler Woman* and *Lady Pastora*, *Urania* privileges the desires and feelings of women and emphasises the tension they experience as to their private self and public duty. By creating articulate, autonomous, courageous, intelligent and vigilant heroines such as *Urania*, *Pamphilia*, *Melissea*, *Silviana* and *Fancy* who challenge the gendered hierarchical system that assigns women to subordinate place and preaches silence and

obedience, the romance resists the cultural constraints and assumptions embedded in the society. The experiences of the female characters grant them agency and, rather than ending up with female victimisation and submission thereby confirming and reinforcing the patriarchal ideology, they culminate in female assertion. The heroines prove their dissidence and agency when they express their desire and opinion in public or through their verse in private in contradistinction to the patriarchal teachings; when they unite with their beloved despite patriarchal hindrances; when they remain true to themselves in the face of oppression; when they oppose arranged marriages rebelling against the authority figures; when they put up with physical and psychological torture; when they independently choose to remain single being cloistered in a convent notwithstanding; or, when they exchange opinion and share their experiences in the feminised space. Their heroism and the will to self-determination demonstrate their resolution for independence. Dissenting from the maxim of chaste-silent-obedient, these women challenge the stereotypical understanding of womanhood as passive, submissive, weak, helpless and unintelligent upon which the patriarchal dominance is built. Likewise, inverting the gender roles in the stories of Urania & Perissus, Urania & Parselius, Pamphilia & Amphilanthus and the enchantress & Selarinus defies the gendered hierarchy and becomes an effective tool to assert female power in speech and action. In this sense, the romance not only gives voice to women by foregrounding their agency through their experiences but it also questions the patriarchal discourse, undermines the pillar of patriarchy based upon the unequal diffusion of power between men and women and creates gender confusion that threatens the patriarchal social order.

Anna Weamys, who completes the narrative threads Sir Philip Sidney leaves incomplete, produces a double-layered romance. It is possible to read *A Continuation* as a political allegory in which Weamys offers a solution to the political instability then-current in England. The romance contributes to the Royalist agenda by providing an example of an ideal monarchical system Weamys calls for. It functions as an efficient instrument for envisioning a remedy for the present political order; she thus secures her social and political agency through a response she models after the romantic relationship of the royal couples and the accession of their rightful successors to the throne. Weamys defends the Royalist cause during the Interregnum and she interrogates the validity of the Parliament. Her political commentary thus poses a challenge against the political system. Weamys

is not only politically committed to transform the social order she is discontent with but she also has a profeminist agenda in mind when she deals with intersexual relationships. As well as the promotion of companionate marriage as a prerequisite for political prosperity, the romance serves for her profeminist purpose. Through the companionate marriages of Pamela & Musidorus, Philoclea & Pyrocles, Erona & Plangus and Helena & Amphialus, Weamys covertly criticises and resists the patriarchal practices because the couples autonomously choose their partners. She likewise promotes self-chosen union via the story of the maiden in Mopsa's narrative. In the same vein, the Urania episode demonstrates the oppression women face within the patriarchal society. Although *A Continuation* celebrates mutual love by means of the aforesaid examples, it does not disregard the patriarchal oppression but disapproves the convention of arranged marriages. It criticises the dominant culture in which marriage is presented as the only option to avoid being the victim of male desire. Still, it presents Urania as an agent heroine who challenges the social and religious mores, who rebels against an enforced marriage and who rejects submission to commodification of female body. The most remarkable aspect of Weamys' romance is the characterisation of the servant Mopsa to whom she gives voice so that a figure doubly marginalised in terms of her sex and class publicises her wish and opinion. As impressive as the refashioning of the servant figure is the reconfiguration of the witch who subverts the misogynist understanding of the age. The romance thus urges the reader to think over the patriarchal discourse in attempt to show an otherwise truth and functions as a crossover for the exploited and the underrepresented to make them visible. Reversal of gender roles in opposition to the patriarchal understanding of womanhood in the episodes of Amphialus & Helena and the captive knight & the redemptive maiden in Mopsa's tale also questions the gendered hierarchical structure and threatens the patriarchal order established upon the binary opposition of the submissive woman and the omnipotent man.

Benefiting from Ludovico Ariosto's example to convey her profeminist message, Moderata Fonte uses the form of chivalric romance to resist the patriarchal ideology. She creates powerful heroines who challenge the assumptions and teachings of patriarchy. The warrior heroine Risamante shatters the patriarchal definition of womanhood when she becomes triumphant due to her upbringing unbecoming of her sex according to the patriarchal understanding and when she quests for her kingdom which symbolises her rebellion against the paternal

authority and her criticism of the dowry system. Biondura, who serves as a foil to her twin sister, utterly fails because she cannot transcend the conventional feminine attributes. Juxtaposing their characterisation, Fonte invites female readers to resist the patriarchal practices and the traditional understanding of womanhood which is indeed the sum of patriarchal discourse. Circetta no more embodies the seductress but is an innocent character through which the romance poses the one-sided representation imposed by the patriarchal discourse. The enforced marriage in the episode of Lucimena & Nicobaldo rejects the patriarchal convention and the Queen of Phrygia, asserting her sexual freedom, is not punished for her extramarital affair but protected by a fay who heralds her salvation by Risamante, whose stance collectively underlines the importance of female solidarity for release from patriarchal dominance. *Floridoro* destabilises the traditional attributes of gender, dismantles the biological and social scaffolding of male hegemony and denounces the oppression men impose on women. It objects to female subordination but offers instead a model of non-hierarchical social order based on female agency, achievement, solidarity and self-sufficiency.

Giulia Bigolina, the first woman in Italy to write on the debate on women to defend her fellows, also criticises the patriarchal discourse. She focuses on female experience and offers an exemplum by means of the adventures of the Duchess and Urania. Through the episode of the Duchess, the romance warns women against the patriarchal practices -even for the sake of the art of painting- which make them objects of voyeuristic pleasure and communicates that only if women are the agents of their lives can they become triumphant in the end and achieve their aspirations. It thus rejects the idea of the objectification of women present in the literature and arts of the time and advises women to use their intellect to assert their agency. Representing literature as a solution, it transcends gender limitations that categorise women as the passive icons of beauty. *Urania* also responds to the cultural constraints through the protagonist Urania, who is uninhibited by her social context, whose experience as a cross-dressed woman ensures her agency and gives her the chance to refute the stereotypical understanding of womanhood as she proves to be well-mannered, well-educated, wise and valiant at once both in the dialogues with women and men and in saving Fabio. Likewise, reversal of gender roles contrary to the patriarchal understanding of femininity when she saves Fabio from captivity questions the gendered hierarchical structure and threatens the patriarchal order built upon the

hierarchical positioning of sexes. The romance thereby urges women to step out of the Renaissance codification systems in terms of beauty, the status of women and the roles of women and men in the society.

The four authors in question and the female characters in each romance defy the sixteenth century definition of womanhood owing to their determination to resist passivity, objectification, silence, obedience to men and captivity in the domestic sphere. Now that whether a text is subversive or conformist depends on the context of its production, considering the patriarchal oppression and the cultural appreciation of romance, the genre turns out to be instrumental for asserting their agency and materialises their dissidence. It becomes representative as to how even the seemingly strict patriarchal culture is challengeable and embodies Dollimore's assertion that culture is not "a unitary phenomenon" but the locus in which dominant and non-dominant elements co-exist and interact with each other whereby the subordinate culture gets the opportunity to challenge the dominant (*Radical* 7). Romance confirms the postulates of Williams, Sinfield and Dollimore that culture simultaneously includes the dominant and the emergent cultural practices; there is a constant struggle between them because the dominant wants to maintain its hegemony while the emergent continuously threatens its status; and power is never monolithic, all-pervasive or flawless. Similarly, it is safe to state that romance threatens the dominance of the patriarchal culture in the centuries in question by not consenting to its teachings, by refuting its assumptions and by interrogating the validity of the prevailing beliefs even though neither the authors nor the characters in romances manage to shatter it completely. In this sense, romance does not correspond with the concept of containment New Historicism employs because in the aforesaid romances women are not devoid of agency but there is always room for dissent; the so-called homogenous dominant culture cannot safely keep its status because of women's revolts; any challenge to the dominant is not ignored nor is recuperated or policed but women become victorious; the genre does not function as an instrument for consolidation of the dominant; it does not entrap them to extend social control; and it does not silence them but asserts their agency. Their awareness of the oppression by the patriarchal culture enables them to develop oppositional identities. Although the female authors or characters do not represent a completely subversive image of the prescribed gender categories, through strategies of negotiation with the patriarchal culture such as the repudiation and reinscription of the feminine roles,

the critique of the institution of marriage and challenging the patriarchal values and codes, they not only circumvent restrictions the patriarchal social system imposes but also lay bare that the co-existence of the dominant and emergent cultural forces produce a heterogeneous system of consolidation, resistance and negotiation within culture, that -despite the dominance of one social group who keep others under control- its position is vulnerable because once the oppressed no longer consent to be controlled by the dominant, the possibility for rebellion emerges, and that as long as the individuals resist willingly participating in reinforcing the dominant culture, dissidence and emergent cultural practices come to the fore. Therefore, both the female romance authors and their agent characters prove to be substantially important as they give voice to the subordinate and disturb the patriarchal social order. They collectively prove that romance in the Renaissance "operates in the emergent cultural rector" and "that it represents the new feelings, the new meanings, the new values" (Williams, "Base" 44) because their stance is in opposition to the patriarchal construction of womanhood and gender relations. As they do not espouse the dominant discourse but try to act on their own envisioning a different social order at least in a fictional setting and urging women to awake, it is safe to conclude that these women, who indeed vitiate the dominance of patriarchy, have "though not a room, a coach of their own" (Howard, "Cross-Dressing" 430). All in all, the study is supposed to fill the gap in terms of gender and romance studies due to its focus on the early modern British and Italian female authors' contribution to their respective literary fields so as to raise awareness in terms of the female oppression and the various strategies they employ to trigger female emancipation.

Lady Mary Wroth, Anna Weamys, Moderata Fonte and Giulia Bigolina welcome further studies in which their works can be discussed alongside other romance authors. The comparative analysis of Wroth's sonnet sequence, drama and romance might be a topic for exploration; the songs and poems within the romance might offer a venue for discussion thematically and stylistically; Weamys' only production might be put under scrutiny within the framework of a contrastive study with Sidney's romance, of literary adaptation studies, and of the tradition of political romance; Moderata Fonte's heroine might be examined in detail together with the warrior heroines of Torquato Tasso, Ludovico Ariosto, Matteo Boiardo, Margherita Sarrocchi and Lucrezia Marinella; her oeuvre might be studied in terms of the *querelle des femmes* tradition in Italy; Giulia Bigolina's two works might be

discussed together and her romance might be read within the framework of the novella tradition. A further study can be conducted upon the contemporary romance novel, which is counted as the pulp-fiction of the twenty-first century, to determine if women still suffer from patriarchy, if its effects still reside in the Western world, if romance novel offers a critique of patriarchy, and if it functions as a venue for wish fulfilment and female agency similar to its Renaissance counterpart. A qualitative research based on interviews and questionnaires might be carried out with romance novel readers having particular demographic qualities to verify its hypothesised effect on female readership.

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APPENDICES

A. CURRICULUM VITAE

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Surname, Name: AYDOĞDU ÇELİK, Merve

Nationality: Turkish

Date and Place of Birth: 29.09.1987, Çorlu

E-mail: merve_aydogdu1987@hotmail.com

EDUCATION

Degree	Institution	Year of Graduation
PhD	METU English Literature	2018
MA	METU English Literature	2013
BA	Hacettepe University	2010
	English Language and Literature	
BA	Anadolu University	2010
	Business Administration	
High School	Çorlu Mehmet Akif Ersoy	2005
	Anatolian High School	

CERTIFICATES HELD

June 2018	Certificate Programme in Turkish Folk Literature Anadolu University, Open Education Faculty
September 2009	Certificate in English Language Teaching Hacettepe University, Faculty of Education

WORK EXPERIENCE

Year	Place	Enrolment
2011-2018	METU Department of Foreign Language Education	Research Assistant
2010-2011	Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli Univ. Department of English Language and Literature	Research Assistant

FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Turkish (native), English (advanced), Italian (intermediate)

PUBLICATIONS

1. Aydođdu elik, Merve. "Lady Mary Wroth'un *Love's Victory* Eserinde Evlilik Kurumu Eleřtirisi ve Kadının Gulenmesi." *Filoloji Arařtırma rnekleri Kitabı*. Ed. Nuh Dođan. Ankara: Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık, 2018. 21-30. ISBN: 978-605-7928-08-5
2. Aydođdu elik, Merve & Yarkın elik. "The Woman Question & Dissidence: Laura Cereta and Christine de Pizan." *Academician Publisher Scientific Researches Book: Social Sciences*. Ed. Hanna Rog. Ankara: Akademisyen Kitabevi, 2018. 43-52. ISBN: 978-605-258-065-3
3. Aydođdu elik, Merve. "John Milton'ın Politik Grřleri zerine Bir İnceleme." *MSBİD Munzur University Journal of Social Sciences* 6.12 (2018): 8-24. ORCID ID: 0000-0001-7354-9705
4. Aydođdu elik, Merve. "V. S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*: The Story of a Shipwrecked Man." *The Journal of International Social Research* 49.10 (2017): 13-26. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17719/jisr.2017.1551>
5. Aydođdu elik, Merve. "The Princess of Polka Dots: Yayoi Kusama & Her Post-Structuralist Art." *International Peer-Reviewed Journal of Communication and Humanities Research* 13 (2016): 168-181. DOI: 10.17361/UHIVE.20161324493
6. Aydođdu, Merve. "Lady Mary Wroth's *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*: A Female Voice in the Male Tradition." *BJES Beder University Journal of Social Sciences* 13.1 (2016): 26-34. ISSN: 2310-5402
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8. Aydođdu, Merve. "An Althusserian Reading of Harold Pinter's *One for the Road*." *Journal of History Culture and Art Research* 3.1 (2014): 1-11. DOI: 10.7596/taksad.v3i1.306
9. Aydođdu, Merve. "The Moral Failure of the Women in John Ford's *Love's Sacrifice*." *Journal of History Culture and Art Research - English Studies Special Issue* 2.2 (2013): 41-48. DOI: 10.7596/taksad.v2i2.225

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11. Aydoğdu, Merve. "Christian Egalitarianism: *The Book of the City of Ladies* Versus *the Bible.*" *İDİL Journal of Art and Language* 1.1 (2011): 87-102. DOI: 10.7816/idil-01-01-06

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

1. Aydoğdu Çelik, Merve. "Mimic Identity and Its Strategical Use in George Orwell's *Burmese Days.*" *The 3rd International Language, Culture & Literature Symposium. Book of Proceedings.* Ed. Arda Ankan. Antalya, 2017. 172-180. ISBN: 978-605-84052-4-0
2. Aydoğdu, Merve. "Lady Mary Wroth's *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus.* A Female Voice in the Male Tradition." *1st International Conference on English Language & Literature. Book of Proceedings.* Ed. Ilda Poshi and Mahmut Terci. Tirana, 2016. 143-149. ISBN: 978-9928-4345-0-0
3. Aydoğdu, Merve. "A Story of Self-Fulfilment: Xiaolu Guo's *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers* as A Modern *Bildungsroman.*" *13th International Language, Literature and Stylistics Symposium: Simple Style. Book of Proceedings Vol 1.* Kars, 2013. 459-471. ISBN: 978-975-00350-4-3
4. Aydoğdu, Merve. "The Reflections of Platonic Love on Yukio Mishima's 'The Priest of Shiga Temple and His Love.'" *12th International Language, Literature and Stylistics Symposium. Book of Proceedings Vol 1.* Edirne, 2012. 97-100. ISBN: 978-975-374-161-3
5. Aydoğdu, Merve. "Double Image of the Woman as Reflected in Wilde's *Salomé.*" *4th International Women as a Category of Science: Women's Symposium on Literature, Language, Culture, Art, Landscape and Design Studies. İnönü University Journal of Art and Design Special Edition Vol 2.* Ed. Latif Gürkan Kaya. Malatya, 2011. 926-931. ISSN: 1309-9876

CONFERENCE PAPERS

1. Aydoğdu Çelik, Merve. "Female Agency in Lady Mary Wroth's *Love's Victory.*" *The 12th International IDEA Conference: Studies in English.* Akdeniz University, Antalya/Turkey. 18-20 April 2018.

2. Aydoğdu Çelik, Merve. "The Woman Question & Dissidence: Laura Cereta and Christine de Pizan." *The 11th International IDEA Conference: Studies in English*. Çankaya University, Ankara/Turkey. 12-14 April 2017.
3. Aydoğdu Çelik, Merve. "Mimic Identity and Its Strategic Use in George Orwell's *Burmese Days*." *The 3^d International Language, Culture and Literature Symposium: Identities*. Akdeniz University, Antalya/Turkey. 15-16 June 2017.
4. Aydoğdu, Merve. "Lady Mary Wroth's *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*: A Female Voice in the Male Tradition." *1st ICELL International Conference on English Language and Literature*. Hëna e Plotë "Bedër" University, Tirana/Albania. 20-21 November 2015.
5. Aydoğdu, Merve. "The Merger of Histories: Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa*." *The 3^d International BAKEA Western Cultural and Literary Studies Symposium*. Gaziantep University, Gaziantep/Turkey. 9-11 October 2013.
6. Aydoğdu, Merve. "A Story of Self-Fulfilment: Xiaolu Guo's *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers* as A Modern *Bildungsroman*." *13th International Language, Literature and Stylistics Symposium: Simple Style*. Kafkas University, Kars/Turkey. 26-28 September 2013.
7. Aydoğdu, Merve. "The Moral Failure of the Women in John Ford's *Love's Sacrifice*." *1st International Week on English Studies*. Karabük University, Karabük/Turkey. 27-31 May 2013.
8. Aydoğdu, Merve. "The Reflections of Platonic Love on Yukio Mishima's 'The Priest of Shiga Temple and His Love.'" *12th International Language, Literature and Stylistics Symposium*. Trakya University, Edirne/Turkey. 18-20 October 2012.
9. Aydoğdu, Merve. "Is There a Way Out: The Inhuman Politics of Noboru and His Gang in Yukio Mishima's *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea*." *Post-Graduate Student Conference on English Literature and Translation Studies*. Çankaya University, Ankara/Turkey. 17-18 May 2012.
10. Aydoğdu, Merve. "Double Image of the Woman as Reflected in Wilde's *Salomé*." *4th International Women as a Category of Science: Women's Symposium on Literature, Language, Culture, Art, Landscape and Design Studies*. İnönü University, Malatya/Turkey. 4-6 May 2011.

ADMINISTRATIONAL & ORGANISATIONAL DUTIES

1. 2011 – 2018: *Erasmus+ Programmes Assistant* to the Departmental Coordinator.
2. 13-14 December 2018 – *Member of the Organising Committee*. METU British Novelists International Conference: Julian Barnes and His Work. METU, Ankara/Turkey.
3. 16 March 2017 – *Member of the Organising Committee*. The 23rd METU British Novelists Conference: Agatha Christie and Her Work. METU, Ankara/Turkey.
4. 26-27 March 2015 – *Member of the Organising Committee*. The 22nd METU British Novelists Conference: Zadie Smith and Her Work. METU, Ankara/Turkey.
5. 12-13 December 2013 – *Member of the Organising Committee*. The 21st METU British Novelists Conference: The Brontë Sisters and Their Work. METU, Ankara/Turkey.
6. 13-14 December 2012 – *Member of the Organising Committee*. The 20th METU British Novelists Conference: Salman Rushdie and His Work. METU, Ankara/Turkey.

EDITORIAL DUTIES

1. Nil Korkut-Naykî, Şafak Altunsoy, Merve Aydoğdu eds. *The Book of Proceedings* of the 21st METU British Novelists Conference: The Brontë Sisters and Their Work. British Novelists Series. Ankara: Kardelen, 2015. ISBN: 978-605-030-952-2

ERASMUS+ EXCHANGE

Year	Place
Sept 2015 – Feb 2016	Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici, Università degli studi di Pavia, Italy

B. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın konusunu İngiliz ve İtalyan erken modern dönem yazarlarından Lady Mary Wroth'un *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, Anna Weamys'in *A Continuation of Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia*, Moderata Fonte'nin *Thirteen Songs of Floridoro* ve Giulia Bigolina'nın *Urania: The Story of a Young Woman's Love* isimli edebi eserleri oluşturur. Seçilen eserler, tarihsel bir bağlamda kadının güçlenmesine odaklanılarak irdelenmiştir. Yeni Tarihselcilik ve Kültürel Materyalizm edebi eserleri yazıldıkları dönem çerçevesinde ele alır. Bu sebeple, bu çalışmanın benimsediği kuramsal dayanak Yeni Tarihselcilik ve Kültürel Materyalizmin bileşimidir. Bu çalışma, tarihsel bağlam kapsamında her bir eseri yazıldığı dönem çerçevesinde ele alması bakımından Yeni Tarihselcilik kuramını temel almakla birlikte, esas dayanağı Kültürel Materyalizmdir çünkü her iki yaklaşım da edebi eserlerin bağlamsal değerlendirilmesini vurgulamasına rağmen, muhalefet prensibi ve kültürdeki çoksesliliğe dayanan Kültürel Materyalizm, sistemdeki susturulmuş ve ötekileştirilmiş sesleri kuvvetlendirmek amacıyla baskın ideolojideki çatlamları dikkate almaktadır. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma kadını sessizleştiren ve romans türünü yasaklayan erken dönem ataerkil toplum düzenini dikkate alarak bu kültürün ikincil unsurunu ön plana çıkarmayı amaçlar. Muhalif bir tür olarak romansın, yazma eylemleri sayesinde kadın yazarların ve eserlerindeki ataerkil öğretileri çeşitli maceralarla reddeden kadın karakterlerin eylemlerini ortaya koymak, kadının sesini yükseltmek ve kadın deneyimini vurgulamak hedefiyle cinsiyetçi hiyerarşik yapıya, ataerkil söyleme, ataerkil kadınlık kurgusuna ve erken dönemin taraflı ataerkil kurumlarına meydan okuduğunu savunur.

Bu çalışmanın hedefi sosyal ve ideolojik baskı ve sınırlandırmalara rağmen kadınların romans türü aracılığıyla sesini duyurabildikleri ve ataerkil toplum düzenine karşı muhalif bir görüş ortaya koyabildiklerini göstermektir. Çalışmaya konu edilen eserlerin tarihsel düzlemini oluşturan ve onaltıncı yüzyılın ikinci yarısı ile onyedinci yüzyılın ilk çeyreğini kapsayan zaman diliminde romans türüne karşı takınılan ikircikli tutum çalışmada bahsi geçen türün tartışılmasına kaynaklık etmiştir. Öyle ki, edebi bir tür olan romans bir taraftan din adamları ve eğitimciler tarafından genç kızları ve evli hanımları yoldan çıkaracağı ve böylece ailelerin onurunu zedeleyeceği gerekçesiyle hedef tahtası haline getirilmiş ve kadınlar tarafından okunması yasaklanmıştır. Diğer bir taraftan ise, erkekler tarafından

yazılan romansların çeşitli bilinçli sebeplerle kadınlara ve kadın okuyuculara ithaf edilmesi ve başlıklarında kadın karakterlerin isimlerinin kullanılması romans türünün zaman içinde kadına ait bir tür olarak algılanmaya başlamasına sebep olmuştur. Romans türünün barındırdığı bu çelişki ve ataerkil toplumda kadına tanınmayan söz söyleme ve gerektiğinde kendini ve haklarını savunma hakkı bu çalışmanın ortaya çıkmasında dayanak noktaları teşkil etmektedir.

Edebiyat yaratıldığı döneme ışık tutan ve kimi zaman da yazıldığı dönemin baskın düşüncesini destekleyen bir tavır içinde bulunabilir. Benzer şekilde, Rönesans döneminde de egemen ataerkil ideolojiyi güçlendirmek adına eserler yazılmıştır. Fakat edebi metinlerin yalnızca dönemlerinin hâkim fikirlerini savunduğuna kanaat getirmek doğru değildir. Zira çağın baskın düşünce ortamını reddeden veya sorgulayan fikirler de edebi eserlere konu edilmiş olabilir. Kültürel Materyalizm yaklaşımı bir dönemde üretilen eserlerdeki karşıt fikirlerin ve seslerin gün yüzüne çıkarılması gerektiğini savunarak edebi eserlerde ötekileştirilmiş ve susturulmuş seslerin incelenmesine odaklanır. Bu bağlamda, Rönesans olarak adlandırdığımız dönemi kapsayan yıllarda hüküm süren ataerkil kültürde susturulmuş kısım olan kadınlara, kadın hikâyelerine, kadın karakterlere, kadın düşüncesine, eylemine ve tecrübesine odaklanmanın ve onların kendilerini yüzyıllar boyunca tarafı ve önyargılı bir şekilde yorumlamış kadın düşmanı düşüncenin yok edilmesi için harcadıkları çabanın ortaya konmasını sağlamanın Kültürel Materyalizm çerçevesinde sahiplenilen gayeler olduğunu düşünmek yanlış olmaz. Çünkü bahsi geçen metot her türlü politik, sosyal ve sınıfsal baskıya karşı başkaldırma, mevcut düzeni alt üst etme, muhalefet ve direniş prensiplerini temel alır. Bahsi geçen yüzyıllarda yoz bir tür olarak addedilen romans Alan Sinfield'ın erken modern dönemdeki cinsiyet, ırk, devlet ve din kurumlarına bir meydan okuma olarak tanımladığı muhalefet [dissidence] kavramının adeta vücuda gelmiş hali olarak yorumlanabilir. Bu eksende, İngiltere'den Wroth ve Weamys ve o dönemde şehir devletlerinden oluşan İtalya'dan Venedikli Fonte ve Padova'lı Bigolina'nın bu teze konu edilmelerinin amacı hem bahsedilen türde ilk örnekleri vermiş olmaları hem de eserlerinde genel-geçer ataerkil kadınlık kurgusuna yani dönemin hâkim ataerkil düşüncesine karşı çıkmalarından dolayıdır. Konu edilen yazarlar, baskın kültürün dayatmaya çalıştığı aksine, bir toplumda daima aykırı ve başkaldıran sesler olduğunu göstermeleri açısından Kültürel Materyalizm prensipleri çerçevesinde incelenebilir.

Bu aşamada Rönesans olarak adlandırdığımız döneme göz atmak yerinde olacaktır. Kelime anlamı olarak yeniden doğuş anlamına gelen Rönesans kabaca 1300 ve 1700 yılları arasına tekabül eden, İtalya'nın Floransa kentinde başlayıp tüm Avrupa'ya yayılan bir aydınlanma, ilerleme ve keşif dönemi veya hareketidir. Burckhardt İtalyan Rönesansı'nı incelediği eserinde bu dönemde yetişen insanların modern Avrupa'nın ataları olduğunu dile getirir. Rönesans ile birlikte ortaya çıkan ve insanın arzu ettiği takdirde yüksek ilim ve irfan seviyesine ulaşabileceğini savunan hümanizma düşüncesi "çok yönlü insan" tanımını doğurmuştur. Kendini tüm alanlarda geliştirmeyi ilke edinmiş bu karakter aynı zamanda sürü psikolojisinden sıyrılmış bir bireydir. Zira Rönesans'ın en belirgin özelliği insanı belirli bir kategori içinde tanımlamadan bireysel ve entelektüel özelliklerini ön plana çıkarması ve ölüm sonrası hayatı değil yaşanan dünyayı temel almasıdır. Bu bağlamda Rönesans yalnızca antik Yunan ve Roma dönemi kültürünün yeniden keşfedilmesi değil bireyin de kendi potansiyelini keşfetmesi anlamına gelmektedir. Leon Battista Alberti, Marsilio Ficino ve Pico della Mirandola gibi hümanistler bireyin özerkliğini ve arzuladığı takdirde sınırsızca kendini geliştirme potansiyelini dile getirmişler, onu yeryüzünde Tanrı'nın bir sureti olarak görmüşlerdir. Ne var ki bu dönemde yeşeren bireysellik ve kendini gerçekleştirme düşüncesi yalnızca erkeklere özgüymüş gibi görünmektedir. Bu hususa dikkat çeken Joan Kelly-Gadol da aynı düşünceye sahiptir. Kendisi, Burckhardt'ın dile getirdiğinin aksine, birikmiş bilginin kadınların erişimine açık olmadığını, kadınların eğitim olanaklarından ve hümanizma düşüncesinden faydalanamadığını, kadınların bireyselliklerini ortaya koymalarına izin verilmediğini ve imkân tanınmadığını ve Rönesans'ın sosyokültürel atmosferinin kadınları sessizleştirdiğini ve bağımlı dekoratif birer nesne haline getirdiğini savunur. Kısacası, Kelly-Gadol kadınların Rönesans'ı erkekler gibi tecrübe edip etmediği sorusuna olumsuz yanıt verir. Her ne kadar onun nihai yargısına göre kadınların Rönesans'ı olmadığını savunmak bu çalışma çerçevesinde mübalağa olarak değerlendirilse de, Kelly-Gadol'ın düşüncesinde tamamen haksız olduğuna da kanaat getirmemek gerekir. Çünkü bahsedilen yüzyıllarda ataerkilliğin yaygın ideoloji olduğu su götürmez bir gerçektir. Bununla birlikte, bu tezin amacı, her ne kadar kadınları ikincil pozisyondan kurtarmaya yetmemiş olsa da, romansın ve romans yazan kadınların kendilerini bu sayede görünür kıldıklarını ve seslerini yükseltebildiklerini ve azınlık da olsa Rönesans ruhunun kadınlara da sirayet ederek onları harekete geçirdiğini kanıtlamaktır.

Bu noktada, kadınların mücadele vermek zorunda kaldıkları yüzyıllar boyunca çeşitli söylemlerle yerleşik hale getirilmiş ataerkil düşünceden bahsetmek eylemlerinin önemini kavramak açısından yerinde olacaktır. Erkeğin biyolojik ve sosyal üstünlüğüne dayanan ataerkillik kavramının temeli antik Yunanlı felsefeci Aristoteles'e kadar dayanır. Kadını deforme olmuş erkek olarak tanımlayan düşünür onu doğadaki bir bozukluk olarak görmekte ve doğuştan gelen özelliklerinden ötürü erkeğin güçlü ve daha akıllı kadınınsa güçsüz ve yetersiz olduğunu düşünmektedir. Ona göre, kadın doğayı erkek ise akıllı ve kültürü temsil eder. Bu ikili zıtlıkta kadın yönetilen erkek ise yöneten konumda olmalıdır. Kadına düşen görev evde kalmak ve çocuk doğurmak iken erkek politika ve diğer kültürel uğraşlarla ilgilenmekle mükelleftir. Roma döneminde de kadına olan bakış Aristoteles'inkinden farklı değildir. Roma aile kültüründe ailenin başı daima erkektir ve kadın evlenmeden önce babasına evlendikten sonra da kocasına tabidir. Kadın yasal haklardan yoksundur ve kendi kendine yetemeyen bir cins olarak görüldüğünden mahkemelerde vasileri tarafından temsil edilmektedir. Hristiyanlık da Yunan ve Roma kültürünü perçinlemiştir. Yaratılış inancına göre Havva'nın Âdem'in kaburgasından yaratılması onun ikinci planda değerlendirilmesine yetmektedir. Havva'nın Şeytan tarafından baştan çıkarılarak yasak elmayı yemesi ve sonrasında ikilinin Cennet Bahçesi'nden kovulması kadınların bundan böyle itham edilecekleri baştan çıkarıcılık ve günahkârlık suçlamalarına ve erkeklerin kadınları susturma ve itaate zorlamalarına bir dayanak oluşturur. Bu çerçevede İncil'in çeşitli bölümleri kadınların toplum içine çıkmamalarını, erkeklere adeta Tanrı'yımsıncasına koşulsuz şartsız boyun eğmelerini ve sessizce kendilerine erkeklerce izin verilenleri öğrenmelerini salık vermektedir.

Kısaca özetlendiği gibi kadın tasviri son derece olumsuzdur ve kadınlar tamamen susturulmuşlardır. Bununla birlikte, bu dönem sosyal, politik, dini ve edebi açıdan güçlü kadınlar barındırmaktadır. Leon Battista Alberti'nin insanın arzu ettiği takdirde gerçekleştiremeyeceği şey olmadığına dair inancı kadınlar için de geçerli olmuştur. Hümanizmanın etkileri kadınları erkek egemen ve kadın düşmanı söylemin hükmünü çürütmeleri açısından teşvik etmiştir. Avrupa'nın çeşitli uluslarından, bugün feminist uyanışın bayrak taşıyıcıları olarak nitelendirebileceğimiz birçok kadın yazar kadının doğası, ataerkil kadınlık kurgusu, kadının eğitimi ve sahip olması gereken diğer haklar üzerine kalem oynatmış ve erkek hegemonyası altında bastırılmış seslerini duyurmaya çalışarak buldukları toplumu eleştirmişlerdir. Böylece Avrupa'daki entelektüel gelişimin de bütüncül bir şekilde yürütülmesini

sağlamışlardır. Bu noktada Christine de Pisan'ın ismini zikretmeden olmaz çünkü kendisi 1405 yılında kaleme aldığı eseriyle kadın düşmanı düşüncelere karşı adeta bir savaş başlatmıştır. Her ne kadar feminizm politik bir felsefe olarak ancak 18. yüzyıl sonlarından itibaren Mary Wallstonecraft ile şekillenmeye başlasa da, Pisan kadın ve cinsiyet çalışmalarının öncüsü ve Rönesans feminizmi olarak adlandırabileceğimiz kavramının ilk savunucusu olmasından dolayı oldukça önemli bir figürdür. Diğer bir ifadeyle, Rönesans ataerkil toplumu her ne kadar baskıcı ve kadınları ötekileştiren bir anlayışa sahipse de, o dönemde okuma-yazma oranının da çok düşük olduğu gerçeği unutulmadan, sınırlı sayıdaki kadın yazarların çeşitli eserler üretebilmiş ve günümüze dek ulaşabilmiş olmaları dikkat çekicidir. Yazma eylemleri sayesinde kadınlar her alanda olduğu gibi edebiyatta da var olan erkek tekeli kırılmaya çalışmışlardır. Bu amaçla işlevsellik kazanan türlerden biri de romanıdır.

Romansı edebi bir tür olarak tanımlamak pek kolay değildir. 12. yüzyılda ortaya çıkmış olan bu tür günümüze dek çeşitli değişimlere uğrayarak varlığını sürdürebilmiştir. Etimolojik olarak romans sözcüğü Roma İmparatorluğu'nun resmi dili olan Latince'den türeyen dilleri nitelemek için kullanılsa da sonraları aşk ve kahramanlık öyküleri içeren şiirler anlamına gelmeye başlamıştır. Romansı belli kalıplar içine sokmak mümkün olmasa da bu türün de belirleyici özellikleri bulunmaktadır. Bu çalışmada benimsenen tanıma göre romans, ana temasını aşk ve kahramanlığın oluşturduğu, tarihsel olarak günümüzden uzak olayları işleyen, coğrafi olarak bilinmeyen diyarlarda geçen, şiir veya nesir şeklinde yazılabilen, karakterlerin gerek olağan gerekse olağanüstü çeşitli maceralar ve yaratıklarla karşılaşabildikleri sarmal olaylardan oluşan, yüksek zümreye mensup karakterleri barındıran ve genellikle mutlu son ile biten eserleri kapsamaktadır.

Bu çalışma savını tarihsel bir bağlam üzerinden oluşturduğundan kuramsal dayanak olarak Yeni Tarihselcilik ve Kültürel Materyalizm kuramlarını benimsemiştir. Marksizm, ideoloji ve hegemonya kavramları Kültürel Materyalizmin temelini oluşturur. Antonio Gramsci ve Louis Althusser'in hegemonya ve ideoloji tanımları bir toplumda meydana gelebilecek çatışmalara ışık tutarken, bireylerin içinde bulunduğu toplum tarafından şekillendirildiğini ve bireyin düşünceni bulunduğu toplumun parametrelerine göre yapılandırıldığını ifade eder. Her iki kuramcıya göre de bir toplumda erki elinde bulunduran kısım o toplumun değerlerini, inanışlarını ve kurallarını yönlendirmede etkilidir. Çeşitli resmi kurumlar da bireyin bilincini baskın

kesimin istekleri yönünde şekillendirir. İdeoloji ve hegemonya rıza üzerine çalışır. Bireyler davranış ve inanışlarını özgürce gerçekleştirdiklerine inandıklarından onları kontrol altında tutmak kolaylaşmaktadır çünkü esasen dayatılan düşünceler kasıtlı olarak olağan ve genelgeçer gerçekler haline getirilmiştir. Ne var ki Gramsci'ye göre hegemonya kavramı kaygan bir zemindedir ve erki elinde tutanların statülerini korumaları için sürekli kuvvetlendirilmelidir. Althusser'in ifadesine göre ise baskın ideolojiye karşı çıkmak pek mümkün görünmemektedir çünkü bireyler daima kendi özgür iradeleriyle hareket ettiklerini düşünürler. Sinfield Althusser'in bu görüşüne karşı çıkmaktadır. Zira onun yargısı doğruysa bir toplumda hiçbir başkaldırı hareketi olmamalıdır.

Stephen Greenblatt'ın *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980) yılına tarihlenen Yeni Tarihselcilik kuramı da benzer bir felsefeyi temel almıştır. Bir toplumda üretilen eserlerin içinde bulunduğu kültürün sosyal, dini ve ekonomik özelliklerinden etkilendiğini belirten, bireyin yetiştiği kültür ve toplumunun bir parçası olduğunu iddia eden ve dolayısıyla edebi eserlerin kültürden izole olarak değil bağlamsal bir çerçevede değerlendirilmesini salık veren bu kurama göre de gerçek bir başkaldırı mümkün değildir. Buna göre, Greenblatt "Invisible Bullets" adlı makalesinde, bir edebi metinde her ne kadar isyan unsuru varmış ve alt kültür bu isyan ile gücü eline alacakmış gibi görünse de temelde bu isyan yalnızca baskın grubun emellerine alet eder, demektedir. Diğer bir ifadeyle, baskın kültürü alt üst etmek mümkün değildir çünkü suni olarak başlatılan bir isyan esasen yalnızca baskın grubun mevcut gücünü ve konumunu arttırmaya hizmet eder. Greenblatt sonraları yanlış anlaşıldığını ve özerkliğin neredeyse kaçınılmaz olduğunu ifade etmişse de Sinfield onun yargısını eleştirir ve Yeni Tarihselcilik kuramını ideolojinin tutsaklık modeli [the entrapment model of ideology] olarak değerlendirir.

Yeni Tarihselcilik aykırı bireylerin ve alt kültürlerin baskın kültürü yıkmalarının mümkün olmadığını söylemesi açısından olumsuz ve kötümser bir tutum takınır. Buna karşılık Kültürel Materyalizm, her ne kadar baskın kültürün tamamen yıkılmasının mümkün olmadığı gerçeğini kabul etse de, bireylerin ve alt kültürlerin seslerini duyurmalarının ve baskın kültüre karşı koymalarının mümkün olduğunu ileri sürer. Alan Sinfield ve Jonathan Dollimore Kültürel Materyalizmin isim babası ve ilk kuramcısı diyebileceğimiz Raymond Williams'tan etkilenmişlerdir. Williams da edebiyatın kültürden bağımsız düşünülemeyeceğini ve edebiyatın belirli bir

ideolojinin ürünü olduğunu dile getirir. Williams'a göre kültür baskın, geçmişten gelen ve yeni gelişmekte olan [dominant, residual, emergent] olmak üzere üç öğeden meydana gelmektedir. Buna göre, belirli bir dönemde hüküm süren baskın kültürün varlığından bahsetmek mümkünse de kültürün hiçbir zaman tek sesli ve homojen olmadığı, daima baskın kültüre aykırı sesler de barındırdığının da bilinmesi gerekir. Keza onun duygu yapısı [structure of feeling] kavramı da yeni ortaya çıkmış ve gelişmekte olan fikirleri kastedir. Kısacası, Raymond Williams'a göre kültür dinamik ve değişken bir olgudur ve birbirine zıt ve baskın kültürü alt etmeye çabalayan öğelerden meydana gelir. Bahsi geçen üç öğenin örtük bir güç savaşı içinde bulunması, mevcut gücün kendini pekiştirme çabasına karşın buna bir başkaldırı veyahut zıt kültürlerin uzlaşması gibi eylemler doğurur. Sinfield ve Dollimore'un Kültürel Materyalizm anlayışı da Williams'inkiyle aynı doğrultudadır. Onlara göre, bir metin içinde bulunduğu bağlamdan etkilenir ve onunla birlikte yeniden şekillenip yorumlanabilir. Bu sebeple edebi eserlerin ait oldukları tarihsel bağlamdan bağımsız düşünülmemesi gerektiğini salık verirler zira bir eserin topluma muhalif veya toplumla paralel nitelikte olup olmadığını belirlemek ancak bağlamsal bir okuma ile mümkündür. Sinfield'a göre baskın kültür gücünü arttırmak için uğraşırken zaman zaman kendisiyle çelişebilir [faultline] ve böyle anlarda muhalif kültürün gün yüzüne çıkması mümkün kılınabilir. Baskın güç kırılmaz veya aşılmaz gibi görünse de aykırı kültürel öğeler daima seslerini duyurabilecekleri olanaklara sahiptirler. Burada dikkat edilmesi gereken husus, Sinfield'ın baskın kültürün tamamen yok edilebileceğini iddia etmemesidir. Bu sebeple alt üst etme, yıkma [subversion] yerine özellikle muhalefet [dissidence] kavramını kullanmıştır çünkü aykırı seslere karşın genellikle ne hükümet düşer ne de ataerkillik parçalanabilir. Bu bakımdan muhalefet, baskın kültürü reddetmek manasında kullanılmaktadır. Bu çerçevede, seçilen romansların ait oldukları döneme baktığımızda romansın o zaman mevcut olan bağlam içerisinde muhalif bir unsur oluşturduğunu söylemek yanlış olmaz. Öyle ki hem kadınların sessiz kalmasını dikte eden hem de romansı şehvete yol açabilecek zararlı bir tür addeden dönemin ataerkil düşüncesine göre geleneklere ve toplum kurallarına uymaz. İngiltere ve İtalya'da kadının sessiz ve uysal durması gerektiğini salık veren ve özelliklere kadınlara hitaben yazılmış eserler bütününden [conduct literature] kadınların yükümlü olduğu görevleri ve davranış biçimlerini öğrenmek mümkündür. Her iki ülkenin kültüründe de kadının namusu sessizliğiyle ve erkek sözü dinlemesiyle ilişkilendirilmiştir ve kadının birincil görevi kocasını mutlu etmek, ona hizmet etmek

ve Hristiyanlık inancına kendini adamaktır. Romansa karşı başlayan olumsuz tavır Dante Alighieri'nin *İlahi Komedya* eserine kadar uzanır çünkü eserdeki bir bölümde romans okuyan bir kadın ve erkek yasak aşkın pençesine düşer. Dante'den sonra da birçok eğitimci, din ve devlet adamı ve yazar -hatta bazı kadınlar- romansa çeşitli olumsuz anlamlar yükleyerek kadınların bu türle ilgilenmesini yasaklamışlardır. Dolayısıyla kadınlar için romans bir muhalefet unsuru statüsüne bürünmüş ve onların kendi varlıklarını ortaya koyabilecekleri bir fonksiyona evrilmiştir. Kadınlar yalnızca romansları okuyarak bile baskın kültüre karşı gelmiş, eserlerdeki güçlü kadın karakterlerle özdeşleşerek günlük hayatta kendilerinden esirgenen bağımsızlığı romans uzamında yaşayabilmiş ve onlar vasıtasıyla kadın düşmanı kültürün dayattığının aksine kendi potansiyellerinin farkına varabilmişlerdir. İşte bu açıdan erkekler kadınların eline romans değil iğne-iplik verilmesini ve kadınların romanstan uzak tutulması gerektiğini söyler. Bunun altında yatan esas neden zayıf kadın-güçlü erkek zıtlığı üzerine kurulmuş ataerkil ideoloji ve kültürün zedelenmesini engellemektir. Bununla birlikte, kadına romansı yasaklayan fakat yine de kadın okuyucuya seslenen ikircikli durumu fark eden Margaret Tyler ve kadınların güçlerini romans aracılığıyla ortaya koyabileceğini söyleyen Laura Terracina sayesinde kadınlara hem romans okumak hem de yazabilmek için bir kapı aralanmıştır. Romans ataerkil kadınlık kurgusuna karşı gelmesi, kadınların isteklerini gerçekleştirebilmesi, baskın kültürü eleştirebilmesi, cinsiyet rolleri ve kadına uygulanan baskıya karşı çıkması ve karşıt bir benlik oluşturması açısından kadınlar için son derece işlevsel ve Kültürel Materyalizm çerçevesinde değerlendirilebilecek bir türdür. Bu tür, her ne kadar var olan baskın kültürü yıkamasa da, kadının görünürlüğüne arttırması ve muhalefeti mümkün kılmasından dolayı bahsi geçen dönemde kadınlar açısından büyük anlam ve önem taşımaktadır. Nitekim Wroth, Weamys, Fonte ve Bigolina da bu durumun farkına vararak romanstan kadının varlığını, bağımsızlığını ve gücünü ortaya koyan bir tür olarak faydalanmışlardır.

Döneminin önde gelen ailelerinden Sidney ailesine mensup Lady Mary Wroth ünlü saray mensubu ve edebiyatçı Sir Philip Sidney'in yeğenidir. Babası Robert Sidney ve halası Mary Sidney Herbert da edebiyatla ilgilenen kişilerdir. Wroth'un edebi kişiliğinin şekillenmesinde halasının rolü büyükse de, kendisi onun gibi dini çeviriler yapmak yerine amcasıyla halasından edindiği birikimi çağına karşı gelen ve çağını eleştiren bir amaca hizmet ettirir. Hem tek romansı olan *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, hem sone dizi *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* hem de tek oyunu

Love's Victory kadınların gücünü, bağımsızlığını ve görünürlüğünü ön plana çıkaran eserlerdir. Wroth nüfuzlu bir aileye mensup olduğundan kuzeniyle olan evlilik dışı ilişkisinden dolayı -saray çevrelerinden zaman içinde soyutlansa bile- toplumda tamamen lanetlenmemiştir fakat ailesinde ataerkillik hüküm sürer. Örneğin babası oğlunu kendisi eğitmek ister; kızının eğitimini annesine devreder. Aynı şekilde, ülkenin yönetiminde mutlakiyet ve sert bir ataerkil düşünce hakimdir. Wroth'un eserlerini ürettiği dönemde kadın düşmanlığı ve kadınları hor görmesi ile bilinen Kral James hükümdardır. Kral'ın kadınları bir meta olarak gören tutumu konuşmalarından ve kaleme aldığı eserlerden görülebilir. Bununla birlikte, Wroth kadınlara dikte ettirilen sessizlik ve uysallık kurallarını reddeder ve içinde bulunduğu toplumun bir üyesi olarak toplumun aksayan yönlerini ve kadınlara uyguladığı haksızlıkları romansında konu edinir. Amacı toplumun kadının bireyselliğine zarar verdiğini göstermek ve kadının yerini iyileştirmektir. Öyle ki bir saraylının attığı iftiralar bile onu yıldırılmaz. Onunla kalem savaşı vererek özerkliğini ortaya koyar. Bir süre sonra basılan romansı piyasadan toplatmak zorunda kalsa da romansın ikinci kısmını yazmaktan geri durmaz.

Wroth'un kadınları görünür kılma gayesi romansın başlığından da görülür. Esere isim veren Urania karakteri hiçbir zaman sözünü esirgemeyen, fikirlerini ve isteklerini açık yüreklilikle ifade edebilen, kadın veya erkek fark etmeksizin arkadaşlarına öğütler veren, onları harekete geçiren ve böylece cinsiyet rollerinin genel-geçerliğini reddeden, gerektiğinde onları fiziki olarak da kollayan, evlendiği zaman dahi oğlu üzerinde söz hakkına sahip kendi kendine yetebilen bir bireydir. Bu manada Wroth'un hayal ettiği kadının vücuda gelmiş halidir. Kahin Melissea karakteri de Urania gibi saygı duyulan ve tavsiyeleri dikkate alınan bir karakterdir. Melissea'nın bekar olması kadınların evlenmek dışında yaşayabileceği hayatı göstermesi açısından manidardır. Romansın ana karakteri Pamphilia da son derece güçlü bir karakterdir. Kraliçe olmasının yanı sıra iş ve özel hayatını birbirine karıştırmaz. Özel hayatında ne kadar mutsuzsa da tebaasına karşı sorumluluklarını yerine getirir ve aşk acısını dindirmek için aşk şiirleri yazar. İffetle de bilinen Pamphilia böylece din dışı eserler üretmenin namusluluk ile bağdaştırılmadığı fikir yapısını çürütmüş olur. Aynı zamanda son derece cesaretli de olan Pamphilia kadınlara yüklenen korkaklık ve pasiflik gibi özellikleri de alt üst eder ve kadınların da erkekler kadar başarılı birer yönetici olabileceklerini gösterir.

Zorla evlendirilmiş olmaktan muzdarip olan Wroth eserinde ayarlanmış evlilik teması üzerinde de bolca durur ve anlattığı çeşitli hikayelerle kadınların bu durumdan ne derece acı çektiğini gözler önüne serer. Evlilik konusunda fikirleri sorulmayan, hissettikleri konusunda empati yapılmayan ve adeta aile büyükleri ile evlendirilecekleri adam arasında bir nesne ve gelir sağlama aracına dönüştürülen kadınların sorunlarını dile getirir. Yine de yalnızca kadınların kurbanlaştırılmasına odaklanmaz ve çeşitli stratejiler ile bu ataerkil uygulamayı reddeden veya yıkmaya çalışan kadınların özerkliklerini sağlama çabalarına da okuyucuyu şahit eder. Dolaylı olarak da benzer durumlara maruz kalmış kadınlara önderlik ederek onları zorla dayatılanlara karşı gelmeye teşvik eder. Bu husus hem romansın muhalefete hizmet etmesi hem de kadınlara gerçek potansiyellerini göstermesi açısından önem arz eder. Wroth ve romansı bu sayede mevcut ataerkil kuralları, düşünceyi ve hiyerarşik yapılanmayı reddeder. Bununla birlikte aile onayı ve çiftlerin karşılıklı sevgisine dayanan birçok çiftten de örnekler vererek olması gerekeni gözler önüne serer. Keza Pamphilia örneğinde de karakter eninde sonunda sevdiği adam harici biriyle evlenmek zorunda kalır -yani ataerkil uygulama tamamen yıkılamaz- fakat erkeğin eşinin kişisel gelişimine ve edebi aktivitelerine karışmayacağını taahhüt etmesi ve ona kendi otonom bölgesini sağlaması ideal evlilik kurumunun nasıl olması gerektiğine bir örnek teşkil eder.

Kadınların ataerkil kültürün hüküm sürdüğü çevrelerden uzaklaşarak doğada bir araya gelmesi da önemli bir ayrıntıdır. Doğa kadınların birbirleriyle özgürce dertleşebildikleri, fikir alışverişi yapabildikleri ve dayanışma kurabildikleri bir uzam olarak resmedilir. Erkek egemen kurallardan arındırılmış bu alan kadınların izin verildiği ve uygun koşullara sahip olduğu sürece kendi özerkliklerini ortaya koymada doğuştan gelen bir eksiklikleri olmadıklarını ortaya koyar. Aynı zamanda kadınların metin içindeki kurgusal dayanışması yazarın da okuyucu ile bütünleşmesini teşvik etmektedir.

Wroth eseri ile ataerkil kültürü ve onun uygulamalarını eleştirerek baskın kültür altında ezilen kadınların arzularını kurgusal olarak gerçekleştirebilmiştir. Romans yalnızca kadının bir kurban haline dönüşmesinden ziyade kadınların ataerkil düzen içerisinde adeta kendilerine nasıl yer edinebileceğini ve isteklerini nasıl gerçekleştirebileceğini öğretmeye çalışır. Böylece eser ataerkil kadınlık kurgusuna ve taraflı ataerkil kurumlara meydan okur. Bu başkaldırı ise ataerkil düzenin temelini kökünden sarsabilecek niteliktedir. Wroth her ne kadar ataerkil düzeni

yıkmayı başarabilecek derecede etkin bir hareketin öncüsü olamasa da eseri kadın-erkek çatışmasına ışık tutarak toplumunu eleştirir ve baskın kültürün etkisini kırmaya çalışır. Bu bağlamda Kültürel Materyalizmin ilkelerinden muhalefet prensibi doğrultusunda değerlendirilebilir.

Lady Mary Wroth'un eserine gelen tepkiler ve eserin toplatılmasının ardından İngiltere'de tarih sahnesinde yerini alacak ve bir kadın tarafından yazılmış olacak ikinci romans için 1651 yılına kadar beklemek gerekecektir. Wroth kadar güçlü ve soylu bir aileye mensup olmayan Anna Weamys *A Continuation of Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia* başlıklı romansını yazarak türe karşı olan önyargıya rağmen sesini duyurmaya çalışmıştır. Eser Sir Philip Sidney'in kendi romansında tamamlamadığı hikayeleri tamamlaması açısından son derece önemlidir çünkü böylece hem bir kadın Sidney ile adeta boy ölçüşme cesaretini göstererek kadının bu alandaki yeterliliğini ortaya koymuş olur hem de kadının sesini ve varlığını ön plana çıkarır. Öyle ki Weamys'in romansta Sidney'i temsil eden Philisides karakterine yer vermesi ve hatta onu yalnızca öldürmek için anlatının içine yerleştirdiği hissi kendisinin yazarlık pozisyonunu güçlendirmesini anlatması açısından ilginç bir ayrıntıdır. Sidney'in eserini devam ettirecek kişilere seslenirken yalnızca erkekleri hesaba katması ve o dönemde romansının kadınlar için hala sakıncalı addedilmesi Weamys'in aykırı tutumunu göstermesi açısından dikkate değerdir. Weamys konusunda iki hususa dikkat çekmek gerekir. Kendisi romansı yalnızca kadınlara uygulanan baskıyı ve ataerkil toplumu eleştirmek için kullanmamıştır; aynı zamanda o dönemde romansın politik bir araç işlevine bürünmesi de Weamys'in amaçlarına hizmet etmiştir.

Weamys eserini yayınladığında Oliver Cromwell yönetiminde cumhuriyetçi rejim hüküm sürmekteydi ve 1659 yılında Charles I başı kesilmek suretiyle idam edilmişti. Tarihe Interregnum dönemi olarak geçen bu süreç kral yanlıları ile cumhuriyetçiler arasındaki çekişmelere sahne olmuştur. Weamys işte böyle hararetli bir politik ortamda romansını kraliyet yanlısı bir ailenin kızlarına ithaf ederek tarafını belli etmiştir. Nostaljik bir anlatımla huzurlu kraliyet yönetiminde geçen ayrıntılar Weamys'in romansı bir kral yanlısı propaganda aracı olarak kullandığı sonucuna varmamıza sebep olmaktadır. Bu bağlamda yazarın döneminin politik ve sosyal baskın kültürünün karşısında durduğu ve kendince -bir kadın olarak- politik meselelere karışarak bir çözüm sunduğu söylenebilir. İdeal monarşik sisteme

eserinde yer veren Weamys bu böylece hem bir yazar olarak hem de bir vatandaş olarak görünürlüğüne sağlamıştır.

Weamys romansı yalnızca politik sorunlara bir çözüm aracı olarak kullanmamıştır. Eser aynı zamanda bu tezin esas dayanağını oluşturan kadın eylemini ortaya koymak için de bir araçtır. Bu noktada en dikkati çeken karakter daha önce Sidney'nin yaratmış olduğu fakat anlatıda yalnızca ufak bir yere sahip olan ve yalnızca bir güldürü veya alay unsuru olarak yer alan Mopsa karakteridir. Mopsa bir hizmetçidir. O dönemde hizmetçilere verilen değer basit bir eşyaya biçilen değer ile eş tutulabilir. Mopsa'nın hem düşük bir sınıfa ait olması hem de kadın olması onu daha da alt bir konuma iter. Kadın hizmetçi figürü de toplumun sessiz ve görünmeyen bir üyesidir. Weamys ise onun sesini, isteklerini ve eylemini ortaya koyarak adeta çığır açıcı bir hamlede bulunmuş ve ezilenin, ötekileştirilenin sesi olmuştur. Mopsa'nın hem prenseslerden birinin elbisesine talip olması hem de prensler arasında hikayesini anlatmakta diretmesi onun sınıfsal ve cinsiyet açısından kendisine dikte edilenlere boyun eğmeyeceğini gösterir. Keza hikayesinde de özgürce hareket eden ve ataerkil toplumca dayatılanın aksine gayet güçlü bir genç kızı anlatarak mevcut öğretilere ve kadınlık kurgusuna karşı çıkar. Ataerkilliğin dayatmalarına karşı çıkan bir diğer isim ise Urania karakteridir. Urania her ne kadar evlenmeyi hiç istemese de öncelikle aile baskısıyla karşı karşıya kalır. Ailesi öldükten sonra özgürlüğüne kavuşsa da erkekler onu rahat bırakmaz ve yalnızca kendisini korumak için evlenmeye karar verir. Bu manada Weamys kadınların özgür olmaya çabalasalar da ataerkil kültürde bunun her zaman mümkün olmadığı mesajını verir ve örtük bir şekilde hem bu toplum baskısını hem de evlilik dayatmasını eleştirir. Bu eserde Urania Wroth ve Sidney'nin karakterlerinin bir karışımıdır. Wroth'unki kadar otonom veya Sidney'inki kadar sessiz değildir. Bulunduğu durumdan en az zarar ile sıyrılmaya çalışan bir karakterdir. Weamys'in Sidney'nin tamamlamadığı hikayeleri bir kadın olarak ve kadınların lehine olacak şekilde tamamlamış olması ait olduğu ataerkil kültürde varlığını ortaya koymuş olması açısından oldukça önemli bir adımdır.

Venedikli Moderata Fonte'nin *Thirteen Songs of Floridoro* isimli eserinde Ludovico Ariosto'nun kadınları cesaretlendirmesinden esinlendiği düşünülebilir. Ne var ki Ariosto'nun kadınlara karşı tutumu kimi zaman ataerkil öğretileri destekler gibi görünmektedir. Buna karşın Fonte'nin eseri -başlığındaki zayıf erkek karakterin aksine- güçlü bir kadın savaştıcıyı konu eder. Fonte yaşlıları kadınlardan şanslıdır

çünkü yetiştiği aileler onun eğitimini destekler, eşi yazmasına karşı çıkmaz ve kendisi Venedik'in soylu sınıfına mensuptur. Bununla birlikte Fonte kadınların başa çıkmak zorunda kaldığı zorluklara göz yummaz ve konumunun ayrıcalıklarını kadınların dertlerini iletme için kullanır. Fonte oldukça önemli bir diğer eserinde de kadınların maruz kaldıkları olumsuzlukları dile getirir. Bu manada ataerkil toplumun bir üyesi olsa da baskın kültürü eleştirerek kadınların özgürleşmesine katkıda bulunduğu sonucuna varmak yanlış olmaz.

Eserdeki ikiz kardeşler ile Fonte toplumdaki kadınlar hakkındaki ön yargılara ve fırsat eşitsizliğine dikkat çeker. Aynı anne-babadan doğmuş ikiz kız kardeşlerden birisi korunmaya ve savunulmaya muhtaç bir kadın olarak -yine de tamamen bir nesne halinde resmedilmemiştir- ataerkil kadınlık kurgusunu temsil etmektedir. Küçük yaşta ailesinden ayrılan diğer kız kardeş ise aldığı eğitim ve ataerkil baskılardan uzak olması sayesinde son derece bağımsız ve güçlü bir kadın haline gelmiştir. Bu karşıt karakter özellikleriyle Fonte'nin vermek istediği mesaj kadınların hiçbir hususta erkeklerden geride olmadıkları yalnızca kendilerinden kendilerini geliştirebilecekleri olanakların esirgenmiş olduğu gerçeğidir. Fonte kız ve oğlanların birbirlerinden farklı olarak yetiştirilmiş olmalarına karşı çıkmaktadır. Fonte bu savını androjen karakterler yaratarak da desteklemiştir. Hem kadına hem de erkeğe atfedilen özellikleri bünyesinde bulunduran kadın ve erkek kahramanlar ataerkil düzeni dinamitlemekte, kadın ile erkek arasındaki kesin ayrımı reddetmekte ve ataerkilliğin öğretilerini yıkmaktadırlar. Çeşitli olumsuz özelliklerle resmedilen erkek savaşılar ve şövalyeler de ataerkil söylemin empoze etmeye çalıştığı genelgeçer doğruları sorgulamaktadırlar. Benzer şekilde, ataerkil söylemin kadınları gerçeklikten uzak temsil ettiği hususundaki kısım da dikkat çekicidir. Her durumda Fonte ataerkil kadınlık anlayışını veya toplumca kadınlara dayatılanları olduğu gibi kabul etmemek gerektiğini ve bunları daima bir sorgulamaya tabi tutmak gerektiğini ifade eder. Ayrıca yarattığı iki zıt karakter Fonte'nin mevcut miras sistemini de eleştirmesine yardım eder. Bununla da yetinmeyen Fonte, çiftlerin zorla evlendirilmelerini eleştirmiştir. Bu sayede kadınların bu duruma karşı bir dayanışma içine girmelerini öğütler. Bu husustaki ilginç bir nokta yalnızca zorla evlendirilen kadının hissettiklerine değil bu duruma maruz kalan bir erkeğin de düşüncelerine ve üzüntüsüne yer vermiş olmasıdır. Fonte'nin romanı kadınların da erkekler kadar güçlü ve akıllı olduğunu göstermesi açısından, genelgeçer yargıların sorgulanması gerektiğini salık vermesi açısından, kadınların erkeklere boyun eğmeyerek onlar tarafından yapılmış yanlışları düzeltmek için harekete geçmelerini

öğütlemesi açısından ve kadın dayanışmasının önemini vurgulaması açısından baskın ataerkil kültür içerisinde filizlenmiş bir muhalefet unsuru olarak değerlendirilebilir.

Giulia Bigolina kadın eyleminin önemini vurgulayan bu çalışmada olmazsa olmaz bir figürdür. Kendisi kadın sorununa katkıda bulunmuş ve İtalya'da kadınların lehine ilk eseri kaleme almış bir kadın yazar olması açısından son derece önemlidir. Yazdığı romansı *Urania: The Story of a Young Woman's Love* ile de aynı temaları işlemiş ve edebiyatı kadınların meşgul olmaları gereken, onların bağımsızlık ve özerkliğini ortaya koyabilecekleri bir tür olarak resmetmiştir. Bigolina eserindeki birbirine zıt iki karakter ile kadınların erkeklerin birer nesnesi haline gelmemesi gerektiğini savunmuştur. Zira ilkin okuyucunun umut bağladığı fakat sonrasında edilgenliği ve fiziki güzelliğine fazla önem vermesinden dolayı yenilgiye ve ölüme mahkum olan genç bir kadın karakter de adeta kadınlara karşı bir uyarı niteliğindedir. Hatta bu durum döneminin resim sanatı kurallarını bile reddetmesine sebep olur. Mevzu bahis karakterin aksine, Urania karakteri Bigolina'nın hayal ettiği kadınlık kurgusunun vücuda gelmiş halidir. Oldukça erdemli ve aynı zamanda bilgili olan bu karakter güzelliğinin tek bir cümle ile bile tasvir edilmemesi yani hiçbir şekilde bir arzu nesnesi haline getirilmemesi açısından diğer romans kahramanlarından ayrılmaktadır. Urania edebiyatla ilgilidir ve şiirler yazar, evi ise edebi toplantılara ev sahipliği yapar. Son derece akıllı ve bilge olan bu karakter Rönesans ruhunu bedeninde taşır ve kadınların edilgen nesnelere olmak yerine üreten bireyler olmaları gerektiğini ima eder. Bu bağlamda Bigolina kadınlara edebiyat ile haşır neşir olmalarını tavsiye eder. Urania yalnızca zeki bir kadın değil aynı zamanda cesurdur da. Kendisini daha güzel bir kadın uğruna terk eden sevgilisini kurtarmak için kılık değiştirir. Çaresiz ve tutsak sevdiğini kurtararak kurgulanmış cinsiyet rollerine meydan okur ve bunları alt üst eder. Kılık değiştirerek yolculuğa çıkması da Urania'nın özerkliğini belli etmesi açısından önemlidir. Çünkü bu sayede kendisini iyileştirebilmiştir ve erkek kılığında olması onu ataerkil söylemi eleştiren ve öğütler veren bir otorite figürü haline getirmiştir. Bigolina'nın romansı türdeşlerine göre oldukça kısa olsa da vermek istediği mesaj kadınlar açısından önem taşımaktadır. Zira kendisi kadınların edilgenlikten uzak, kendi değerinin farkında, özgüvenleri yüksek ve üretken bireyler olmalarını istemektedir.

Bahsi geçen dört yazar ve eserlerinde konu edindikleri karakterler yazıldıkları dönemde var olan ataerkil öğretileri ve kadınlık kurgusunu reddetmektedirler. Bu

yargıdan hareketle bu eserlerin ve yazarların döneminin baskın ataerkil kültürü ele alındığında Kültürel Materyalizmin varsaydığı baskın kültürün tamamen yok edilemese de çeşitli yöntemlerle delinebileceği ve eleştirilebileceği varsayımını doğrularlar. Zira kadın yazarlar ve karakterler erkek egemen edilgenlikten uzaklaşarak kendi özerkliklerini ve görünürlüklerini ortaya koymayı başarırlar. Bahsi geçen eserler Kültürel Materyalist düşünürlerin kültürün homojen bir yapıya sahip olmadığı, birbirine zıt öğeler de barındırdığı ve bu öğelerin sürekli bir çatışma halinde olduğu şeklinde dile getirdiklerini düşüncelerini desteklemektedir. Bu açıdan baskın kültür mevcut konumunu koruyabilmek için sürekli tetikte olmalıdır çünkü statüsü her zaman sarsılabilir ve kırılgandır. Zira kadın karakterler de baskın ataerkil kültürün sorgulandığında kolaylıkla zedelenebileceğini gösterirler. Baskın ataerkil kültürün öğretilerini kabul etmeyen kadın romans yazarları ve onların romansı kendi fikirlerini iletmek için işlevsel bir tür haline getirmiş olmaları bu türün yeni bir düşünsel çerçeveyi biçimlendirmiş olduğunun birer işaretidir. Romans Rönesans kültüründe kadının sesini duyuran muhalif bir unsur olarak değerlendirilmelidir. Konu edilen kadınlar ataerkil kültürden kurtulamamışlarsa da kendilerine bir yer edinmeyi başarabilmişler ve kadınları feminist hedefler doğrultusunda yöreklendirmişlerdir.

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