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Revival, Romance, and Empire in Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania*

Mathilde Alazraki

1 Lady Mary Wroth (1587-1653), a niece of Sir Philip Sidney, followed in the path of her uncle's *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* when she became the first woman to write a prose romance in the English language with *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*. The first volume of the romance was published in 1621, while the second volume remained an unfinished manuscript during Wroth's lifetime. Wroth's story, with its sprawling plot, and hundreds of characters evolving inside a world of spirits, giants and magic, is directly inspired by the contemporary romances of her time, such as Sidney's *Arcadia* (1593), Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590), or Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1516), which were present in her family's extensive library (Spiller 154). However, Wroth's romance stands out by the cross-cultural couple at the centre of her story. The first of this pair of star-crossed lovers is Pamphilia, the "easterne starr" (Wroth 2.132), initially princess of Morea in the first volume, and who later becomes queen of an eponymous kingdom on the westernmost border of Asia, part of present-day Turkey. The second protagonist is Amphilanthus, her first cousin and forbidden love, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and bearer of the title of "Light of the Western World" (2.132). While the first part of the *Urania* focuses on the impossible love stories between several kings, queens, princes and princesses of Europe, the second part of the story is defined by a strong swing to the East, first when Pamphilia inherits an Eastern kingdom from her uncle, and then when all the characters must go to war to rescue a Persian-Tartarian princess, Lindafillia, the "True Sophie of Persia" from the tyranny of her incestuous uncle, the "Usurping Sophy" of Persia, who stole the throne from her (2.568).

2 The swing to the East driving the plot of the second part of Wroth's *Urania* has at its centre a complex process of revival and renaissance. This is first a literary revival, since the manuscript of the second part embraces the tradition of medieval Crusader romance to bring it to seventeenth-century England. While the main plot of the second part does not focus on the fight for the Holy Land, as did most traditional stories of the Crusades, it is about an alliance of Christian princes taking back the throne of an

Eastern empire from a Muslim ruler and integrating it into a unified Christendom. Yet, this process of unification, at the heart of the manuscript continuation, can only be achieved through a proto-imperialist fantasy based on the assimilation – and, it might be argued, eventual erasure – of the Eastern characters of the second part.

The revival of the Crusader romance

3 If we follow Benedict Robinson's definition of the genre, Wroth's *Urania* is easily recognizable as a romance by "its multiple, sprawling plots, its exoticism, its love of long journeys to exotic places," (3) – especially in the second part where the characters journey to Persia – and its motifs of chivalric heroism and illicit love, such as that between Amphilanthus and Pamphilia, who are first cousins (Cooper 15). The main characters of the *Urania* fit the pastoral theme of the romance by their apparent one-dimensionality, with the protagonists and antagonists easily identified, either by their "chivalric ideals" and "heroic virtue," like the dashing emperor Amphilanthus, or at the opposite end of the spectrum, the villainous Sultan (Brown 431).

4 However, as the story shifts from the European setting of the first part to the Crusader romance of the second, the representation of Eastern characters and their interactions with the European noblemen of the first part come to the fore in Wroth's manuscript. Indeed, ever since the Crusades, romance had been one of the preferred genres to write about interactions with the East. Its far-reaching geographical scope, its nostalgic longing for chivalric prowess and its use of allegories made it the perfect genre to depict the much commented-on figure of the Eastern "Other" (Campbell 3) in a "space of counter and encounter" (Robinson 5). Wroth was not the first in the early modern period to revive the genre of the Crusader romance. Spenser's epic romance, *The Faerie Queene*, similarly brings back the traditional struggle between Christian knights and Eastern Saracens by adding a new national and proto-imperialist dimension to the Crusader romance plot (Vitkus 35-6). England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was not concerned with the Crusades but with increasing diplomatic and commercial contacts with Muslim empires and, as such, its treatment of the Eastern Other could not be the same as in medieval romances. As Robinson puts it, starting from the sixteenth century onward, the romance started to acknowledge these "new contacts and complicities" (Robinson 6) by focusing on love plots between Eastern and Western characters, such as the marriage between the Christian Bradamante and the Saracen knight Ruggiero (himself the son of a Christian knight and an African princess) in Ariosto's epic poem *Orlando Furioso* or, at the same time of publication as Wroth's first volume, the courtship between the Muslim princess Quisara and the Portuguese Armusia in John Fletcher's play *The Island Princess* (1621). As such, the main love story between Pamphilia the "easterne starr" and Amphilanthus the "Light of the Western World" appears as a direct call to these cross-cultural couples. But more than the struggle of the star-crossed lovers, caught between East and West, the main plot of the second part revolves around taking back the throne from the "Usurping Sophy" in order "to rescue the distressed princess, rightful Sophie of Persia," his niece Lindafillia (Wroth 2.115).

5 The first part of Wroth's ground-breaking romance gives an unprecedented place to female characters of aristocratic descent in Europe, and the second part follows in the same direction by putting an Eastern queen at the centre of the plot. Lindafillia, a

Persian-Tartarian princess, appears as the rightful heir to the throne of the Persian Empire and as an impressive female Eastern ruler worthy of following in the footsteps of classical figures such as Dido or Cleopatra. During one episode, she appears in full regalia, sitting "in a throne of pure Golde," "[a] Crowne upon her head of the most matchless stones" and dressed in an "apparel of the Asian fashion" (2.168), demonstrating her power to all. However, the *Urania* being a romance, it is her heavenly beauty – repeatedly compared to an "Orient pearle" (2.76) or "the purest pearle the Orient cowld afforde" (2.168) – which strikes her Western admirers, emphasizing both her mysterious otherness and her exceptional purity. But in spite of this visual display of power, Lindafillia fits more into the mould of the helpless heroine of romance than a powerful Eastern queen when her villainous uncle threatens her with rape and an incestuous marriage: "This beast wee last spake of [...] who lately hath an intent to marry her, beeing his naturall neece, which is as hatefull to her to think on as his lyfe is to all true and harty Christians" (2.156). While rescuing a distressed damsel from the claws of a sexual predator is a well-known trope of the romance, religion is put at the forefront of the plot when Lindafillia calls for "the aid of all Christian princes (I being a Christian my self) to assist me and deliver me out of the hands of such wickedness and treachery" (2.170). Through both of these quotes, Lindafillia's identity as a Christian is underlined to bridge the symbolic gap between this exotic "Orient pearle" and the European princes that she calls for help. Her villainous uncle, however, is singled out explicitly as an irreconcilable Eastern Other and as a non-Christian, most notably when he calls Amphilanthus and all the other Princes "Christian Villaines" (2.200), appearing thus not only as a threat to her, but to all of Christendom. Furthermore, this "usurping Sophy," unlike the many other characters of the *Urania*, is never referred to by his name, but only as "Sultan," "Soldaine," "Souldan" or "Soldan," highlighting his one-dimensional role as the generic villain of the Crusader romance, while other Eastern characters such as Pamphilia or Lindafillia are literally christened by being given a name and are repeatedly – if not insistently – labelled as Christians.

6 Furthermore, the name "Usurping Sophy" holds in its very essence the corrupted nature of the antagonist, at a time when Persia was described by Wroth's contemporaries as an enlightened and flourishing place, where "armes, artes, and sciences doe wonderfully prosper, and are very highly esteemed" (Cartwright 67). This contrast between the early modern English perception of the Persian Empire and the villainous character of the Usurping Sophy heightens the stakes of the plot in the manuscript continuation: to have this imposter removed from the throne of Persia, so that the more legitimate Lindafillia – a true Sophy – can take her rightful place. Thus, the war against the usurping Sophy closely resembles the war against the generic Muslim ruler of the literature of the Crusades, such as the character of Sultan Laban in the anonymous fifteenth-century romance *The Sowdone of Babylone*, and this legacy is especially visible through episodes of religious violence on both sides. For example, when Amphilanthus' soldiers win a battle against some of the Sophy's forces, Wroth justifies the desecration of their bodies by their non-Christian religion: "Ther durty bodys slaine (...) [are] to bee caried in the bace Court and throwne to the dogs, nott fitt for Christian burial" (2.255). The violence displayed here appears shocking when coming from Amphilanthus, the supposed embodiment of chivalrous ideals, but it is justified by the characters' desire to claim the Persian throne in the name of Lindafillia, its rightful Christian ruler.

7 Commenting on this aspect, Nandini Das points out the influence of James I's son, Prince Henry, in the "martial" and "militant Protestant revivalism" at play in the *Urania*, which could explain these episodes of religious violence (Das 165). However, James I's own influence can be felt in the romance through its fantasy of a united Christendom, strong enough to hold its own against the Eastern threat, and which directly echoes James I's attempts at mending England's relations with Europe through a policy of "religious reconciliation" (Patterson 1). So, while Wroth's idealized Holy Roman Empire is almost omnipotent in the narrative, its historical counterpart was struggling to hold its place among competing national interests in Europe at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Thus, Wroth does not simply revive the nostalgic genre of the Crusader romance; but she also uses processes of erasure and reactivation to deliver a powerful fantasy of a united Christendom taking over the East through the heavily symbolic Persian throne.

Wishful historical rewriting in the *Urania*

8 In her scholarly edition of the manuscript, Josephine Roberts states that "[a]t the heart of the *Urania* lies one of the most powerful political fantasies of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe – the revival of the Holy Roman Empire in the West" (xxxix). During the early modern period, the Holy Roman Empire had been severely weakened by the German, Dutch and English Reformations which undermined the authority of the Pope and of the Emperor who were supposed to rule in God's name. However, in Wroth's romance, there are no religious divisions in the West and, instead, all are united against the stereotypical enemy of the Crusades, the generic Muslim "Sultan." But such unity is achieved through several instances of historical erasure and wishful rewriting in the narrative. In a notable episode of the first part of the *Urania*, a scene of mass conversion takes place on the island of Cyprus, where Amphilanthus and several other princes are stranded "in a strange Country, among barbarous people, [...] at the mercy of unchristened creatures" (Wroth 1.38). Historically, most of the people of Cyprus were Orthodox Christians, though the island had been an Ottoman stronghold since 1571. However, Wroth's romance completely erases the Muslim empire's rule over Cyprus and instead presents it as a *tabula rasa*, inhabited by faithless but ultimately harmless people who could be easily brought into the light of Christendom, not unlike the contemporary fantasies of the Northern American territories that were being colonized by the Virginia Company at the time of publication of the first volume. Thanks to the help of Pamphilia, the Eastern Christian princess, Amphilanthus manages to convert the whole island and to incorporate it into his empire: "to Pamphilia's tent they came, where most sumptuously shee entertain'd them: then did all the great Princes feast each other, the last being made by the King of Cyprus, who out of love to the Christian Faith, which before he contemned, [...] desired to receive it, which Amphilanthus infinitly rejoicing at, and all the rest, Christened him [...], and so became the whole Island Christians" (1.142). By a process of wishful rewriting, an Ottoman stronghold suddenly becomes part of a fantasized Holy Roman Empire without any internal division between Orthodox, Protestants or Catholics – terms which Wroth never uses in her work, preferring instead the unifying banner of "Christians". Through the revival of the Crusader romance, Wroth thus brings back to life the medieval myth of the *res publica Christiana* that incorporates East and West

under one rule, even as it effaces the reality of contemporaneous Islamic empires and their rule over territories such as Cyprus (Andrea, "English Women's Writing and Islamic Empires" 289).

9 Here, Wroth's *Urania* offers the fantasy of a united Europe without any internal division and powerful enough to annihilate its true enemy – the Muslim Eastern Other – by obtaining the Persian throne. This prominent place given to Persia in the romance is no doubt linked to the unprecedented contacts established between the West and the Persian Empire in Wroth's lifetime. Indeed, at the time of publication of the *Urania*'s first volume, Persia was ruled by Shah Abbas I, who had been repeatedly advertised in the West for his tolerance of Christian missionaries in his territories and his willingness to trade with Europe (Ferrier 75). Most famously, one year after the publication of the first volume – and while Wroth was writing the second part of her manuscript – the fleet of the English East India Company (EIC) helped Shah Abbas dislodge the Portuguese from their fortress in Hormuz. In doing so, the EIC secured good terms and trading privileges with the Persian Empire. Thus, by using the image of a Christian Persian princess to be rescued from the hands of a Muslim "Sultan," Wroth appears to align herself with the popular fantasy at the time that Persia could be won over and integrated into Christendom, and she uses the real-life figure of the cross-cultural couple Robert and Teresa Sherley as inspiration for her romance.

10 Teresa Sampsonia Sherley (1589-1668) was a Christian Circassian raised in Persia under the reign of Shah Abbas I, before she became the wife of the famous English adventurer Robert Sherley (c. 1581-1628) during his time as a political hostage in Isfahan in late 1607. Thanks to her influence at court, Teresa helped her English husband secure the position of Persian ambassador to Europe, and together they travelled back and forth between European courts and Persia from 1608 to 1628 (Nocentelli, "Teresa Sampsonia Sherley" 85). Teresa Sampsonia appeared during her lifetime in several productions commissioned by her husband and the Sherley family, all of them emphasizing – sometimes exaggeratedly – her link to the Persian court, such as Day, Wilkins and Rowley's play *The Travels of the Three English Brothers* (1607), where she appears as the niece of Shah Abbas. Lady Mary Wroth would have heard of Robert Sherley and his Eastern wife through her family connections: first, through her father, Robert Sidney, who hosted Anthony and Robert Sherley on their way to Persia in Flushing (Parry, *New and Large Discourse* 5), then through Thomas Herbert, a relative of Wroth's aunt Mary Sidney, who accompanied Robert and Teresa back to Persia as part of the English ambassador's retinue in 1627 and published his travel account of the journey. During their ambassadorial stay in England, the couple advocated for a commercial and military alliance between England and Persia, which never came to be for several reasons: first because, at the time when Wroth was writing, England had much closer ties with the Ottoman Empire through the Levant Company in Constantinople, but also because, ever since the EIC had helped Shah Abbas retake the fortress of Hormuz from the Portuguese, they wanted to secure their own foothold in the Persian court, without any interference from a free agent like Sherley. The hostility of the joint-stock company toward Robert Sherley and the threat he represented to their trading monopoly are made clear in the minutes of the EIC board of Directors: "wether Embassador or not, it concernes not the Company who have noe need of Sir Robert Sherley's helpe, neither desire to have anything to doe with him" (*Calendar of State Papers, Colonial* 6.72-3). Though Robert Sherley's embassy in London was a failure, his

Christian Persian wife made a lasting impression and it is not difficult to see her as an inspiration for Lindafillia, the "True Sophy of Persia" and niece of the Sophy (the same affiliation given to her in the play *The Travels of the Three English Brothers)*, or even, in a lesser measure, for Pamphilia the "easterne starr" who, through her union with Amphilanthus, bridged the gap between East and West, much like the Sherley couple. So, while Pamphilia has been repeatedly studied by scholars as a fictional avatar for Wroth herself (Spiller 153), the swing to the East of the manuscript continuation also allows us to take Teresa Sherley as a new lens through which to consider Pamphilia. Indeed, using Teresa Sherley's avatars in her work serves a crucial purpose for Wroth: it allows her to show a peaceful conquest of the East by Europe that is built on love and a cross-cultural union instead of violent takeovers, such as the one used to unseat the "Usurping Sophy" from his throne. In effect, behind the courteous ideals of the romance lies a proto-imperialist fantasy of assimilating the East into a white, unified Christian empire.

Proto-imperialist tropes and the Crusader romance legacy

11 Carmen Nocentelli explains how the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' "penchant for cross-racial couples" embodied the period's idea of empire "as a marriage between European metropole and non-European periphery," where the Western male character stands for Europe while the foreign female character stands for her native region (*Empires of Love* 116). Building on this theory, Nocentelli describes a pattern in the early modern treatment of cross-cultural couples, where foreign countries come to be incorporated into a European empire through the female submission that results from a marital bond: "[i]n a setting more or less remote, a European man and a non-European woman meet and fall in love; the latter willingly renounces her background in order to embrace his; and the tale ends with the happy pair either betrothed or married" (117). This idea of a marriage resulting in the absorption of one kingdom by another is evident in Wroth's story. Through her constant love and devotion for Amphilanthus, Pamphilia integrates her Christianized Eastern kingdom to the Holy Roman Empire and – in another instance of wishful historical rewriting – incorporates back the Eastern territories lost to Ottoman conquest in the fifteenth century. But in spite of this political union, Amphilanthus and Pamphilia are never officially married in Wroth's manuscript and are only bound by a secret ceremony that Amphilanthus later seems to break (Wroth 2.45-6). Indeed, the Holy Roman Emperor marries the princess of Slavonia so that "hee may inlarge his Empire [and] bring his dominions into the Easte" (133). In her study of early modern imperialist writings, Kim Hall aptly points to a gendered inequality that lies at the very heart of the romance and that can be found at the core of the *Urania*: "men desire conquest, whereas women desire men" (189). Thus, the conquest of the East appears once more at the forefront of the second part of the *Urania*, but it can be traced back within a larger tradition of English literature of imperial conquest in the early modern period. Indeed, it is interesting to consider the discrepancy between the reality of England's imperial project in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (which was mainly centred around a budding westward expansion in the Atlantic) and the fiction of proto-imperialist fantasies that extended all over the globe, generated by England's victory over the Spanish Armada in 1588 and

which seemed to confirm England's legitimate status as a Protestant empire. This interest in travel literature depicting English interactions with foreign and sometimes antagonist empires like the Spanish, Portuguese, French or Ottoman ones has been described by Gerald MacLean as part of an "imperial envy" that "produced both emulation and disavowal" (MacLean 94).

12 This tension between a desire for emulation and disavowal is especially interesting in the context of Wroth's romance when comparing the two main figures of imperial ambitions in the second part: Amphilanthus and the Usurping Sophy. While Amphilanthus' bigamy is never formally condemned in the manuscript continuation, the Sultan's villainy is repeatedly associated with the crimes of sexual coercion, incest and polygamy. Indeed, after trying to impose his incestuous advances onto his niece, Lindafillia, the Sultan writes a letter to Pamphilia "demaunding such a princess for wife by way of threatning and force" (Wroth 2.108). Considering the liminal position of Pamphilia's kingdom in modern-day Turkey, it is not surprising to see the two opposing empires of the romance fighting for her hand and thus her territories. But while Amphilanthus' bigamy is justified as a righteous struggle between his forbidden love for his cousin and his duty to his empire, the Usurping Sophy's desire to have both Lindafillia and Pamphilia stands as an early instance of what will later fully develop in the eighteenth century as the Orientalist trope of the Muslim harem as a place of sexual tyranny with "[o]rgiastic sex [becoming] a metaphor for power corrupted" (Peirce 3). While this proto-Orientalist staging of a Muslim man as sexually oppressive and coercive toward a Christian Eastern lady in need of rescuing fits with the Crusader romance legacy of the *Urania*, it can also be traced back to the description of Teresa Sherley made by Wroth's own kin, Thomas Herbert. Indeed, in his travel account, Herbert retells how, after Robert Sherley's failed embassies and his subsequent death in 1628, Teresa was stranded in Persia as a widow without financial support and supposedly at the mercy of Persian courtiers who wished to marry her and force her to convert to Islam. This sensational though unlikely narrative paints Teresa as an "amazed Lady" with "feeble hands" and "pathetique vertue," trapped in "those uncharitable Regions, where women are made slaves to libidinous Pagans" (Herbert, *Relation* 204). Therefore, the romance plot of the *Urania*, centred around different Christian Eastern women sexually oppressed by a Muslim antagonist and in need of rescuing by Christian forces, can be traced back to its real-life inspiration, Teresa Sherley, who ultimately left Persia and spent her remaining years in a Carmelite convent in Rome.

13 It is thus interesting to see that, even though England's earliest imperial ambitions were concentrated on the westward enterprise of the Atlantic, the "swing to the East" of proto-imperialist fantasies had started under the pen of English writers as early as the beginning of the seventeenth century. Wroth, however, takes these proto-imperialist fantasies one step further by bringing the Holy Roman Empire beyond the boundaries of Eastern Europe and into the Far East, past Persia and through Tartaria. The key to this gigantic territorial leap is none other than Pamphilia, the Eastern star. Indeed, upon learning of Amphilanthus' betrayal, and his marriage to the Slavonian Princess, Pamphilia resolves to marry Rodomandro, King of Tartaria and brother to Lindafillia. Tartaria was described by Wroth's contemporaries as stretching from "the vtmost bounds of Asia to Armenia, and from Bengala to Volga, ye[t] their incursions pierced e[v]en to Nilus and Danubius. The Macedonian and Roman Empires were

ne[v]er so large" (Botero 102). This alliance between Pamphilia and Rodomandro – and by extension his sister Lindafillia, the true Sophy of Persia – might at first appear as a dangerous counterpart to Amphilanthus' empire, and an even more threatening rival than the Usurping Sophy, since the three Eastern protagonists of the romance would have access between them to an unprecedented stretch of land from Turkey to Central Asia. However, the threat is soon resolved when Rodomandro appears as a perfect opposite to the villainous Sultan: he is described as "an exquisite man in all things," "a Christian," and is "intimate in frendship with the Emperour [Amphilanthus], who esteem'd him above all forraine Princes" (Wroth 2.46). In fact, Rodomandro is such a staunch ally to Amphilanthus that he encourages him to invade Persia in order to unseat the Usurping Sophy and take back the land for himself, without acknowledging the claim of the rightful Sophy, Lindafillia: "[w]ee think it fitter to meete the tirant, then to let him come into these parts to waste and spoyle this Christnd world, and soe vanquishing him abroad, wee may fall upon his unprovided country and happily may have a good conquest of that which is his" (2.115). By the end of the romance, Pamphilia and Amphilanthus have forgiven each other and the manuscript suggests the fantasy of East and West united through the happy triangle of Pamphilia, Rodomandro and Amphilanthus. But none of this would have been possible without the "easterne starr" and her strategic kingdom in Turkey, which lies at the very limit between the Orient and the Occident.

Whiteness and Eastern characters in the *Urania*

14 Though Wroth's proto-imperialist writing is centred around a unified Christian empire encompassing Turks, Persians and Tartarians, without any religious difference among them, it is not devoid of racial differences that imply her desire to ultimately make this empire a white one. Indeed, what we might call ethnic differences today were very much thought of as irrepressible racial hierarchies in the medieval and early modern periods (Friedman 1). It is thus not surprising that two of the main Eastern characters of the romance, Lindafillia and her brother Rodomandro, are characterized by a trope that Kim Hall summarizes as "black but beautiful" (Hall 108). Though the true Sophy of Persia and the King of Tartaria are considered Christian allies, worthy of praise and admiration, their respective physical appearances are still depicted in "a language of contradiction" (207). Rodomandro's skin is defined by paradoxes of colours: though his face is described as "sunn-burnt" (Wroth 2.21), his hands are said to be "soe white as wowld have become a great Lady" (2.13). This splash of white apparently allows the King to show that he is more than a "tawny Tartar" (2.21) and that he is worthy of marrying a white queen like Pamphilia. Rodomandro's white hands thus legitimize his marriage to Pamphilia without upsetting (too much) English colour canons in the seventeenth century. Similarly, Lindafillia's outstanding beauty is built on a contradictory blazon emphasizing the contrast of her white skin and darker hair: "[h]er heair [...] as gold upon black [...], for a dainty light Browne itt was. [...] But thorough that – O what? The milky way was durt to that! The snowe on the Mountaine topes, the black sea to itt! What was itt, then? The perfect figure of the most immaculate soule, shining in her skinn" (2.168). As Bernadette Andrea points out, Wroth may have once again based her paradoxical description of Lindafillia on eye-witness accounts of Teresa Sherley (*The Lives of Girls and Women*, 63), who was similarly portrayed in a language of contradiction: "[s]he had more of *ebony* than *ivory* in her complexion; *yet* amiable

enough, and very valiant, a quality considerable in that sex in those countries" (Fuller, *Historie* 6.255). This rhetoric of contrast and paradox reveals that foreign characters like Lindafillia and Rodomandro are not integrated into the Holy Roman Empire simply because they are Christians, but because they are white enough not to challenge a white idea of Christianity.

15 On the other side of the coin that is the "black but beautiful" trope we find the more worrying counterpart "beautiful but black." Indeed, Lindafillia and Pamphilia are not the only instances of Persian princesses in the *Urania*. Another avatar appears at the very beginning of the second part, before Lindafillia herself, and opens the romance on an ominous note when the chivalrous Selarinus, Pamphilia's brother-in-law and husband to her sister Philistella, encounters on a journey a nameless lady who introduces herself as "daughter to the King of Tartaria; my mother was a Persian" (Wroth, 2.7). Selarinus, seduced, is almost led astray from his rightful wife by the Eastern lady's dark eyes whose "bright blacknes threatned to [kill] aspiring harts, if nott such as were to bee obliged by them" (2.7). As is made repeatedly clear throughout the *Urania*, Wroth's use of colours is always careful and deliberate, whether it is to describe characters' clothes or their physical appearances (Spiller 176). The attention given to this dark lady's black eyes soon appears as foreshadowing her true nature: she is one of the "vaine spirits [...] who delight in our selves onely in abusing mortalls" (Wroth 2.10) and in killing her suitors "all turnd idolaters to two black eyes" (2.7) should they refuse to obey her. Thus, before Lindafillia "the purest pearle" can appear, a dark double opens the narrative and cautions the reader against the sexual threat that Eastern women can pose to Western men.

16 This tension in the representation of Eastern women – and here more specifically Persian women – as both white damsels in need of rescuing and as dark demons needing to be defeated permeates the proto-imperialist dynamic at play in Wroth's romance. While Rodomandro is characterized by the spots of white that stand out against his dark skin as a token of his good Christian soul, first symbolically through the white arrow on the dark fur of the stag that precedes his arrival at court (2.43), then literally with his white and feminine hands, Lindafillia's dark hair and her malevolent double's dark eyes seem to act as counterpoints to her unblemished skin. As Kim Hall points out, this type of liminal characterization, between black and white, between foreign and familiar, serves the dual purpose of allowing English authors "to praise 'fair' European women while simultaneously reminding their audience of the disguised, potentially unruly sexuality and destructiveness of these potentially 'dark' women" (114). While Lindafillia's white skin and Christian religion allow her to side herself with Amphilanthus' forces, spots of darkness still remain to advertise her persistent foreignness and foreshadow her eventual erasure from the narrative. The "black but beautiful" trope that permeates Wroth's treatment of Eastern characters thus highlights the limits of her all-encompassing Christian empire and shows that, even though there are no Christian dissensions in the *Urania*, racial hierarchies are still at work and actively play in favour of the white characters such as Pamphilia and Amphilanthus. So, in spite of the hopeful – but unfinished – ending of the manuscript continuation, which hints at a peaceful cooperation between the dark Rodomandro and the fair Pamphilia, their union appears to ultimately rest on a fantasy of the incorporation and eventual dissolution of the East into a Western empire, just as

Rodomandro's tawny skin, the visual symbol of his otherness, can be overlooked thanks to his white, lady-like hands, so well-suited to Pamphilia's own complexion.

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17 As Robinson aptly puts it, in the early modern period, "romance continues to be read as the literary form in which fantasy remakes the world according to its own demands" (2-3). At the time of Wroth's writing, Britain was experiencing unprecedented commercial, cultural and diplomatic contacts with the East, and more specifically with the Ottoman and Persian Empires, while European rulers were at war amongst themselves. And yet, the *Urania* displays a ground-breaking expansionist literary imagination to create an all-encompassing, white, unified *res publica Christiana* able to stretch far beyond the borders of Europe and into the Far East, through strategic alliances between cross-cultural couples. However, the peaceful and romantic integration of the East into Wroth's imagined Holy Roman Empire is somewhat undermined by the ultimate erasure of the most strategic Eastern character of the second part: Lindafillia. Indeed, in order for Wroth's imagined Christendom to secure its hold over the East, the contested throne of Persia does not go either to the "Usurping Sophy" or even to the rightful Sophy, but to a Western ruler. At the end of the manuscript, after her villainous uncle has been defeated by the united armies of Amphilanthus and her brother Rodomandro, Lindafillia is whisked away by an enchantress, leaving her country unsupervised, though not for very long. A Persian delegation soon comes to Pamphilia's kingdom in Turkey and asks her to "please send uss one of your deere blood to governe uss" (Wroth 2.273). This is how Lindafillia the Eastern princess comes to be replaced by Pamphilia's brother Rosindy, King of Macedon, who becomes governor of Persia until Lindafillia's return. While in real life, the English East India Company was only temporarily hired by Shah Abbas to dislodge the Portuguese from Hormuz, in Wroth's romance, the Anglo-Persian cooperation is transformed into a fantasy of the Persian Empire willingly seeking and giving itself over to the protection of a Western ruler. Thus, the Eastern world of Wroth's *Urania* inevitably falls into the hands of the West, either through the gallant unions between Western kings and Eastern princesses, or through the more subversive process of presenting Eastern lands such as Persia as unable and unwilling to rule themselves.

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ABSTRACTS

This article focuses on the second volume of Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania* and sheds light on Wroth's appropriation of the medieval mode of the Crusader romance to acknowledge increasing contacts with the East at the time of her writing, while reviving the nostalgic ideal of a united Christian empire. This article demonstrates how Wroth drew inspiration from real-life Anglo-Eastern unions, such as the one between Robert Sherley and his wife Teresa Sampsonia, to sustain her imperialist fantasy of the Persian Empire being incorporated into a white, unified Christendom, mainly through courtly marriages between Eastern princesses and Western knights.

Cet article se concentre sur la deuxième partie de l'*Uranie* de Lady Mary Wroth et explore la façon dont Wroth se réapproprie le genre médiéval de la romance des croisades afin d'intégrer les nouveaux contacts entre l'Orient et l'Angleterre qui se multipliaient en son temps, tout en faisant renaître le fantasme nostalgique d'un empire chrétien unifié en Europe. Cet article explique comment Wroth s'inspire d'authentiques couples anglo-orientaux, tels que celui de l'ambassadeur Robert Sherley et la Circassienne Teresa Sampsonia, afin d'imaginer un empire chrétien blanc et universel qui s'étendrait jusqu'à la Perse et l'Asie centrale, à travers les unions courtoises de princesses orientales et de chevaliers occidentaux.

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Mots-clés: Mary Wroth, Perse, impérialisme, Orient, romance
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