

Shortly after the publication of the first part of the *Urania* in 1621, a violent quarrel erupted between Edward Denny, Baron of Waltham, and Lady Mary Wroth. Denny charged that he and his family had been maliciously slandered in the work and that his personal affairs had been thinly disguised in the episode of Seraljus and his father-in-law.⁷⁷ Although Lady Mary claimed her innocence in satirizing Denny, she had presented an account that closely followed the known facts of his life.

Lord Denny's only daughter, Honora, was married in 1607 to James Hay, Viscount Doncaster, later created first Earl of Carlisle, a Scottish courtier who held the favor of King James. As Lady Mary records, the marriage was celebrated at the king's palace, "where great triumphs were, Masques, and banquets, and such Court delights" (IV. iv. p. 438); *Campion's Masque for Lord*

⁷⁷ John J. O'Connor, "James Hay and the *Countess of Montgomery's Urania*," *N&Q*, CC, 150-52. See also Paul Salzman, "Contemporary References in Mary Wroth's *Urania*," *RES*, XXIX, 178-81.

Hay's marriage has in fact survived.⁷⁸ Lord Hay had a reputation for extravagance and proud display, as Osborne notes: he was famous for entertaining guests with an "ante-supper," in which the table was covered with rich dishes that were then thrown away before the actual meal was served.⁷⁹ Lady Mary describes the subsequent trials of Lord Hay's marriage, including his wife's adultery and the intervention of his father-in-law, Lord Denny, who threatened the life of his only daughter. Later she died, and Lord Hay became engaged to Lucy Percy, the younger daughter of the Earl of Northumberland. As contemporary letters show, the Percy family opposed the marriage, but the ceremony eventually took place in 1617.⁸⁰

In retelling the episodes, Lady Mary spares no pains in exposing the violent behavior of both Lord Denny and James Hay. She omits mention, however, of another instance of Denny's brutality: he once tried to evict a petitioner and his family by besieging their home with twenty armed men in order to starve them into submission. His son-in-law, Lord Hay, was also frequently involved in violent disagreements and nearly fought a duel in 1613.⁸¹ Lord Hay later quarreled with Lady Mary Wroth's younger brother, Robert, and their dispute resulted in an undignified brawl. Among the Sidney papers is a long, first-person account of the quarrel, in which Robert explains that despite his efforts, he was never able to discover the cause of Hay's rage (Collins, I, 121–27). Perhaps this final episode in 1620 had some influence on Lady Mary's decision to expose the volatile characters of Hay and his father-in-law in her book.

In two heated letters addressed to her, Lord Denny attacked the work and wrote a bitter poem in revenge. Once presumed lost, his verses are here reproduced from a contemporary manuscript:⁸²

To Pamphilia from the father-in-law of Seralius

Hermophradite 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

⁷⁸Nichols (ed.), *Progresses of James I*, II, 105–21.

⁷⁹Osborne, *Memoirs*, 533. See also G. P. V. Akrigg, *Jacobean Pageant* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 163.

⁸⁰McClure (ed.), *Letters of John Chamberlain*, II, 58, 114.

⁸¹HMC, Salisbury (Cecil), XXIII (Addenda, 1562–1605), 210; Akrigg, *Jacobean Pageant*, 255.

⁸²HMC, Series 55, pt. 7: Manuscripts of Sir Hervey Juckes Lloyd Bruce, Preserved at Clifton Hall, Nottingham (1914), item 124. These manuscripts are now on deposit at the University of Nottingham Library, item Cl LM 85/1–5. See Josephine A. Roberts, "An Unpublished Literary Quarrel Concerning the Suppression of Mary Wroth's *Urania* (1621)," *N&Q*, CCXXII, 532–35. I wish to thank Margaret A. Witten-Hannah for offering several corrections in the transcription of the manuscripts.

5 Wherein thou strikes at some mans noble blood
Of kinne to thine if thine be counted good
Whose vaine comparison for want of witt
Takes up the oystershell to play with it
Yet common oysters such as thine gape wide
10 And take in pearles or worse at every tide
Both frind and foe to thee are even alike
Thy witt runns madd not caring who it strike
These slanderous flying f[l]ames rise from the pott
For potted witts inflamd are raging hott
15 How easy wer't to pay thee with thine owne
Returning that which thou thy self hast throwne
And write a thousand lies of thee at least
And by thy lines describe a drunken beast
This were no more to thee then thou hast donne
20 A Thrid but of thine owne which thou hast spunn
By which thou plainly seest in thine owne glass
How easy tis to bring a ly to pass
Thus hast thou made thy self a lying wonder
Fooles and their Bables seldome part asunder
25 Work o th' Workes leave idle bookes alone
For wise and worthyer women have writte none.

Two additional copies of Lord Denny's poem, bearing a different title, "To the Lady Mary Wroth for writeing the Countes of Montgomeryes Urania," appear in seventeenth-century commonplace books.⁸³ Lord Denny's stinging rebuke outraged at least one later woman writer, Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of

⁸³The Huntington MS HM 198 consists of two manuscripts bound in one volume with consecutively numbered leaves. Sir Edward Denny's poem to Lady Mary Wroth appears on f. 164. Lord Denny's poem is also included in British Library Addit. 22603, ff. 64^v–65. The following substantive variants are found in these copies:

- l. 4 doth] did HM
 - l. 5 strikes] kick'st HM, BL some mans] some mens HM; sometimes BL
 - l. 6 thine] the HM, BL
 - l. 7 whose] where HM, BL comparison] comparisons HM, BL
 - l. 8 the] an HM, BL
 - l. 10 in] up HM, BL
 - l. 12 not caring who] and cares not whom HM, BL
 - l. 13 fames] flames HM, BL
 - l. 17 lies] lines HM, BL
 - l. 20 thine] thy BL
 - l. 21 thine] thy BL
 - l. 25 Work o th' Workes leave] Worke Lady woorke, lett HM, BL
 - l. 26 For wise and worthyer women have writte] for wisest woomen sure have written HM, BL
- Signed: by the L:D HM; By the Ld Denny BL

Newcastle, who scornfully quoted the final couplet in her 1664 preface to *Sociable Letters*.⁸⁴

At the end of one of his bitter messages to Lady Mary Wroth, Denny insisted that she should “repent of so many ill spent years of so vain a book” and pompously recommended that she should “redeem the time with writing as large a volume of heavenly lays and holy love as you have of lascivious tales and amorous toys; that at the last you may follow the example of your virtuous and learned aunt,” the Countess of Pembroke.⁸⁵ Yet Lady Mary Wroth was not intimidated by Denny’s power, influence, or insults. She responded by turning the verses back against him, and her rhymes match his, word for word:

Railing Rimes Returned upon the Author
by Mistress Mary Wrothe

Hirmophradite 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
5 Men truly noble fear no touch of blood
Nor question make of others much more good
Can such comparisons seme the want of witt
When oysters have enflamd your blood with it
But it appeares your guiltiness gapt wide
10 And filld with Dirty doubt your brains swolne tide
Both frind and foe in deed you use alike
And your mad witt in sherry aequall strike
These slaundersous flying flames raisd from the pott
You know are false and raging makes you hott
15 How easily now do you receive your owne
Turnd on your self from whence the squibb was throwne
When these few lines not thousands writt at least
Mainly thus prove your self the drunken beast
This is far less to you then you have donne
20 A T[h]rid but of your owne all wordes worse spunn
By which you lively see in your owne glasse
How hard it is for you to ly and pass
Thus you have made your self a lying wonder
Fooles and their pastimes should not part asunder

⁸⁴Margaret Cavendish, *Sociable Letters* (Menston: Scolar Press, 1969), sig. b: “It may be said to me, as one said to a Lady, *Work Lady*, Work let writing Books alone, for surely Wisser Women n’er writ one.”

⁸⁵*HMC*, Salisbury (Cecil), XXII, 161. The closing couplet of Denny’s poem echoes his claim that Lady Mary should devote herself to works of biblical inspiration, rather than secular controversy.

25 Take this then now lett railing rimes alone
For wise and worthier men have written none

Despite Lady Mary Wroth’s show of courage, she was obliged to send letters to her friends for help. She wrote to William Feilding, first Earl of Denbigh, enclosing copies of the correspondence with Denny and the poems, in hopes that through his influence with James I he “might make all well with his Majesty” (*HMC*, Denbigh, V, 3).

Lady Mary even wrote to the Duke of Buckingham, the powerful friend of James I, to assure him that she never meant her book to offend and that she had already stopped the sale of it. Despite Lady Mary Wroth’s request for “the king’s warrant” to retrieve the copies of the *Urania*, there is no evidence in the records of the Stationers’ Company that any official action was ever taken concerning the controversial volume. Her letter to Buckingham is especially interesting because she states that the books “were solde against my minde I never purposing to have had them published” (see the full text of the letter in the Appendix). An earlier critic of the *Urania*, Bridget MacCarthy, has suggested that Lady Mary composed the romance in an effort to raise money to pay her substantial debts, but in the early seventeenth century an author could expect very little financial return from publication: Milton, for example, was initially paid only £5 for *Paradise Lost*.⁸⁶ In fact, the letter to Buckingham suggests that Lady Mary was willing to suffer further financial setbacks to purchase the copies of the book, rather than allow them to remain in circulation where they might cause further embarrassment.

⁸⁶Bridget G. MacCarthy claimed “this literary venture was a financial speculation”; *Women Writers: Their Contribution to the English Novel, 1621–1744* (Dublin: Cork University Press, 1946), 55. For a discussion of the financial rewards of Renaissance authors and the example of Milton, see Philip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 183.

⁸⁷Edward Le Comte called attention to the *Urania*’s portrayal of Frances Howard: *The*