

**“KEEPE IN THY SKIN THIS TESTAMENT OF ME:”
READING GENDER AND RACE IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISHWOMEN’S TREE-
WRITING**

by

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Abstract

My thesis investigates how early modern women authors Aemilia Lanyer and Lady Mary Wroth cultivate an alliance with trees to empower themselves as writers entering a heretofore male-dominated literary tradition. Yet it simultaneously explores the shortcomings of an idealized ecofeminist approach to women's relationships with oaks, ashes, beeches, and willows, for Lanyer's and Wroth's representations of arboreal shelter in "The Description of Cooke-ham" and *Urania* raise concerns about the anthropocentrism and violence underlying the female writer's intensely affective connection to the natural landscape. Trees also mark a significant intersection of gender and race in Lanyer's country-house poem and Wroth's prose romance and an intersectional reading of their work, which recognizes the importance of analyzing gender alongside race, illuminates how women writers enlist trees in the protection and valorization of fair female complexions. Lanyer and Wroth rely on the forest canopy to shelter women from sexual violence, bodily injury, sunburn, and black skin—dangers they perceived as inextricably linked. According to the contemporary humoral understanding of the body, moreover, the woman writer's own melancholic disposition jeopardizes her paleness, a threat once again neutralized by her strategic use of the woods. In both Lanyer and Wroth, the female poet composes verse on or about trees which ensures that her inner blackness manifests not on her own skin, but on the epidermis of the tree, its bark. The darkened trees stand as proof of the cruelty and destruction inherent in her sympathetic connection to nature and ultimately perpetuate a false assumption that black flesh visually signifies mistreatment of the body—whether human or arboreal. The vilification of black skin as evidence of deformation and damage exalts the figure of the fair female writer to the exclusion of her darker sisters.

Lay Summary

Focusing on Aemilia Lanyer's poem "The Description of Cooke-ham" and Lady Mary Wroth's romance *Urania*, my thesis considers how early modern English women writers use arboreal spaces to empower female literary creativity, but equally emphasizes the environmental degradation and racial harm entangled in their depictions of trees. The alliances women forge with the forest convey ecological anxieties about the potential for cruelty in the transfer of human emotion to the landscape and condemn black skin as evidence of physical harm inflicted upon the body. By relying on the landscape to grapple with bodily difference among humans, Lanyer and Wroth illuminate the gendered, racial, and ecological implications of tree-writing and ultimately mobilize the natural environment to glorify the imperilled figure of the fair-faced woman writer.

Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, and independent work by the author, K. Hoelscher.

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To Andreas

1. Introduction

Several major works of early modern English literature depict the inscription of language on a tree. The engraving of words into the wood transforms the tree into text, the bark into a book, and attests to the writer's singular power to blend the artificial with the natural. Female authors Aemilia Lanyer and Lady Mary Wroth grapple with the connection between trees and writing to contend with their own positions as women writers in the early seventeenth century. Lanyer's "Description of Cooke-ham" from *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* specifically links the space under an oak tree on Margaret Clifford's estate to women's safety and literary productivity. Contrasting Lanyer's text with other seventeenth century poems involving trees reveals that her oak demarcates a secluded, idealized, and feminized location associated with a group of women reading, writing, and socializing. Lanyer's country-house poem, in accordance with the genre, directly addresses Cookham's mistress, the Countess of Cumberland, and openly communicates her frustration as a lower-class woman in the English hierarchy who must seek patronage from an aristocratic one to produce poetry.

In line with Ann Baynes Coiro's resistance to the notion of an "idealized sisterhood" (358) between early women writers, which discounts categories of differences like race and class, it is essential to note that as a noblewoman, Lady Mary Wroth shares the same social status not as Lanyer herself, but as her patron. She therefore does not face the same practical constraints upon her writing and has no need to write a laudatory country-house poem praising a prospective patron. Her romance *Urania*, whose great length and labyrinthine prose ostensibly epitomize unchecked literary freedom, nevertheless portrays women grappling with their potential to become writers. Critics like Bernadette Andrea, Jeff Masten, and Mary Trull have all emphasized the gendering of the arboreal spaces in Wroth's romance as places of refuge for

creative women impervious to male intrusion. *Urania* also responds to previous scenes of tree-writing within the genre by authors like Philip Sidney and notably changes the literary space under the tree from one occupied by young lovers to one reserved for women. Although the class difference between Lanyer and Wroth may have informed their choice of genre, the country-house poem and prose romance both portray the space under a tree as a place where women become poets.

To claim legitimacy and authority as female writers in seventeenth century England, Lanyer and Wroth draw upon an ancient creative alliance between trees and poets dating to classical antiquity. The allusions to the myth of Daphne and Apollo from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, as well as their engagement with Petrarch's famous reimagining of the tale in his *Canzoniere*, depict trees as sanctuaries which defend against violence and allow these women to foster their literary talents. The very first line of Virgil's first eclogue asserts that literary creation takes place in the shade cast by a tree. Tityrus lies under a beech tree and uses it as "wide (...) cover" (1) from direct sunlight. Petrarch repeatedly deploys the Virgilian image of the poet under a tree in his *Canzoniere* and thus further associates arboreal shade with literary inspiration and creativity. In "Canzone 54," the speaker explicitly imitates Tityrus by seeking "shade beneath a handsome beech" (7).¹ In other poems, he takes shelter under a laurel tree, a species which, like the beech, Petrarch strongly associates with literary creation. In "Canzone 148," the speaker writes "high and happy thoughts" (114) under the "sweet shade" (13) of a "fair laurel" (12). In "Canzone 60," he credits the arboreal cover with nursing his poetic talents, claiming that the tree's "fair branches (...) / brought all [his] weak talent into bloom / within its

¹ All translations of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* are by Mark Musa and published by Indiana University Press in 1999. Although some early modern English writers, like Thomas Wyatt, translated and adapted several of Petrarch's works, no early modern translations of the poems I discuss are currently available.

shade” (2-4). By repeatedly positioning his speaker under beech and laurel trees, Petrarch expands upon Virgil to portray the shade of a tree as an artistically significant location where poets cultivate their talents. When they write on and about trees, Lanyer and Wroth interact intertextually with authors like Virgil, Ovid, and Petrarch and use arboreal shade, the birthing ground of the male poet, as an empowering space where women can safely nurture their own literary creativity and assert their own belonging as female writers to a longstanding literary tradition spanning across centuries and continents.

An ecocritical approach to Lanyer’s poem and Wroth’s romance, however, recognizes the fundamental link between the women’s poetic aspirations and the degradation of the natural environment. Despite their attempts to foster safety and security in the woods by allying themselves with the trees, the female poets in “The Description of Cooke-ham” and *Urania* ultimately perpetrate violence against the forest itself through their own literary activity. Vin Nardizzi and Miriam Jacobson’s claim that Pamphilia’s carvings on the ash in *Urania* illuminates her “troubling relation to the natural world” (176) considers the damage sustained to trees and the agony they suffer due to acts of literary production. Wroth continually emphasizes Pamphilia’s abusive treatment of her natural surroundings and frames her engraving of poetry onto tree bark as particularly cruel. Amy Greenstadt, moreover, describes Lanyer’s use of the pathetic fallacy in her poem as the “coercive imposition of the poet’s will on a helpless landscape” (85) and so highlights the harm inherent in the speaker’s deployment of this poetic device to project her own interiority onto her environment. In Lanyer and Wroth, the transference of feeling from human to the environment through literary creation is forceful and exploitative. Both Lanyer’s poem and Wroth’s romance then raise ecological concerns about the writer’s relationship to the landscape and emphasize the perils of imposing human affect on

vegetative life and rendering nature sympathetic to the plight of those who shelter themselves within it.

Lanyer and Wroth represent writing as that which merges human emotion with natural objects and as a process which forges connections between humanity and nature at once synergetic and symbolic. In Gail Kern Paster's work on affect, embodiment, and environment in the early modern period, she alleges that many writers of the time understood emotion as a "feature of the natural world (...) fully shared between animate and inanimate objects within that world. (...) To report on an emotion—whether an emotion as witnessed in another person or experienced in oneself—was to describe an event occurring in nature and understandable in natural terms" (139). Paster therefore accentuates the possibility for humans to cultivate a correlative sympathy between themselves and the natural world, one that is symbiotic and reciprocal rather than forceful and exploitative. Sylvia Lorraine Bowerbank similarly asserts that viewing natural objects as "separate and inert entities" (35) denies the possibility of an interconnected and empathetic world, while Todd A. Borlik states that the pathetic fallacy, a poetic device which attributes human emotion to natural objects, is "no fallacy at all but a vital means of endowing nature" with "dignity and honorary subjectivity" (94).

Emotion for Wroth and Lanyer, however, originates in the human being and is imposed on nature through the process of poetic composition. Their versions of the sympathetic relationship between the writer and the natural environment are not mutually beneficial. The projection of a writer's interior landscape onto an exterior one for these two authors is a deeply anthropomorphic move which imagines the trees not as inherently sensitive and feeling beings, but as hollow vessels humans can imbue with their own emotions and sensations.² Significantly,

² I would like to briefly acknowledge that the depiction of writing on trees as inherently forceful and violent is specific to Renaissance English literature and stems partly from its indebtedness to canonical Western writers like

their representations of poets in nature coincides with the historical emergence of the Baconian view that nature underlies humanity's knowledge production and scientific endeavours. As ecocritical scholar Elizabeth Gruber indicates, the English natural philosopher Francis Bacon legitimized a "relentlessly utilitarian ethics of domination and mastery" (135) over the natural world. While the growing fields of science and philosophy in early modern England increasingly demanded the subordination of nature to humanity, the fraught relationship between women writers and trees in the work of Lanyer and Wroth shows the simultaneous rising belief that nature also serves artistic and literary innovation.

Although scholars have long recognized that the retreat of female writers to the shade under trees genders the landscape, the accompanying racialization of these natural spaces has not received sustained critical consideration. Kimberle Crenshaw's development of an intersectional approach to race and sex in feminist theory recognizes the impossibility of separating one from the other. Building on Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, Ania Loomba and Melissa E. Sanchez recognize that race and skin colour are "essential parts of, not mere adjuncts or additions to, any feminist endeavor" (1) in early modern literary criticism. Although Bernadette Andrea has argued that Wroth's access to whiteness was marred by scandals in her personal life which "blackened" her "reputation" ("Black Skin" 251) at court, her status as an English noblewoman suggests that her proximity to an idealized pale complexion differs significantly from Lanyer's as a non-aristocratic woman of Jewish and Italian descent. Significantly, Barbara Bowen stipulates that the "emerging discourse of race" in early modern England condemned both Jewishness and Italianness as "potentially marked by darkness" (290). But although

Ovid and Petrarch. I by no means intend to engage in a universalized ecocritical critique which utterly condemns the engraving of symbols into trees as necessarily harmful and destructive. Dendroglyphs or arborglyphs, which are artistic carvings on trees created by Indigenous Peoples, illustrate the importance of recognizing the alternative ways in which diverse cultures and communities have interacted and continue to interact with trees.

Lanyer's and Wroth's racial and class differences impacted perceptions of their own colours and complexions in complex and mostly untraceable ways, their writing consistently demonstrates a resolute interest in defending and privileging the whiteness of female figures.

An intersectional reading of the woods in Lanyer's poem and Wroth's romance must then acknowledge the racial dynamics at work when women take shelter under trees. Drawing on a classical etiological myth made most popular by Ovid which attributes black skin to sunburn, the women in "The Description of Cooke-ham" and *Urania* place themselves under trees to shield their skin from sunlight. Kim F. Hall comments that human racial identities in Renaissance literature were continually negotiated through one's relationship to the sun and discusses the sunburn as a trope "usually evoked as a threat specifically to female fairness" (*Things of Darkness* 93). The idealization of fair skin, as well as the perception of whiteness as that which must be defended, develops specifically in opposition to the sun, a celestial body often anthropomorphized in Western literature as Phoebus Apollo. The personification of the sun in Jonson's *Masque of Blackness* emphasizes the common association of burnt skin with sexual violence committed against women, one which assumes that black skin visually signifies physical injury imposed upon the female body. Viewing black skin as a wound inflicted upon the body, the women writers in Lanyer's and Wroth's texts explicitly use the forest canopy to protect themselves from the sun and preserve their fair complexions.

Although the female poets in Lanyer and Wroth rely on woodlands to shelter their fair skin from sunburn, their own acts of literary creation in the forest are also imagined as violent and blackening. They equate blackness with melancholy and use poetry to transform trees into blackened versions of themselves which outwardly express their sorrows. Their writing thus displaces their inner emotional blackness onto the very trees they use to preserve their whiteness.

By having language inscribed on their bark, the trees effectively become external manifestations of the woman writer's own darkened interiority without ever threatening her own fair skin. For both Lanyer and Wroth, the production of poetry harms the trees and demands the blackening of their bark, portrayed as the epidermal surface of the arboreal body. The blackness of the trees, achieved through the violent process of poetic creativity, exemplifies the deeply racist early modern English assumption that black skin is the result of injury, and reinforces the Ovidian worldview that black bodies are exclusively created through violence. The harm underlying the women's literary enterprises under trees thus not only demonstrates the female writer's abusive connection to the natural landscape, but also the implicit violence inherent in the poetic production of blackness by early modern English writers.

The vital intersection of feminist, ecocritical, and race studies when reading Lanyer and Wroth ultimately intervenes in a critical tradition which has primarily focused on gender when addressing early modern women. Shedding light on the environmental degradation and racial prejudice underpinning their literary projects interrogates the extent to which this particular staging of their own births as female writers attempting to enter a male-dominated canon perpetuates the mistreatment of the natural landscape and the denigration of racialized others. Lanyer's and Wroth's emergence as woman writers, in other words, readily participates in emergent conceptions of nature as inferior to humanity and whiteness as superior to blackness. My aim, however, is not simply censure or condemn these two writers for their reliance on harmful hierarchies in their constructions of female authorhood, but simply to confront head on what Sanchez has called the "blind spots" (16) of past feminist criticism. By reading troubling early modern English conceptions of gender and race on the bark of a tree, I intend not to undermine the feminist project of recovering and reading women's work, but to strengthen it.

2. Projecting the Human onto the Natural: Women Writers and the Poetic

(Mis)treatment of Trees

2.1. Lanyer's Poetic Ambitions and Cookham's Tallest Tree

In Lanyer's "Description of Cooke-ham," trees feature prominently in the lives and relationships of the three women residing in the country-house: the Countess of Cumberland Margaret Clifford, her daughter Lady Anne Clifford, and Lanyer herself. Lanyer uses bark to mediate human relationships and satisfy desires otherwise unattainable, but she also employs arboreal imagery to stage her aspirations as a poet seeking to establish herself as heir to a longstanding literary tradition. When bidding farewell to the Countess, Lanyer merges her poetic persona with an oak tree, an arboreal transformation which alludes to the Ovidian figure of Daphne, a nymph turned laurel tree. The country-house poem draws on not only arboreal, but avian female characters from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to depict Cookham as a refuge for the female artist where she enjoys the freedom and safety to nurture her talents. Lanyer's poem also ponders the extent to which trees as poetic objects demand the subservience of nature to humanity. The trees in her verse attest to a coalition between herself, a woman writer, and the landscape—an alliance which disregards the wellbeing of the natural world and functions solely for Lanyer's benefit as a poet.

As noted by Louise Noble, Lanyer's "Description of Cooke-ham" dedicates little space—a mere four lines—to the description of the actual house and focuses primarily on "the natural world—the estate's gardens, grounds, and surrounding landscape" (102). The most notable feature of Cookham's scenery is a grand oak tree which demarcates a secluded natural location Lanyer ties to a homosocial circle of women consisting of herself and her two noble companions, Margaret and Anne Clifford. Under the forest canopy, these three women navigate all kinds of

social bonds, whether amorous, amical, or familial. The oak, for instance, features prominently in the relationship between mother and daughter. The speaker indicates that Clifford frequently “take[s] the air” (159) with her daughter, “noble Dorset” (160), and visits the oak, a location she ties to their literary activity by describing it as the place “Where many a learned book was read and scanned” (161). The tree is thus a site profoundly linked to women’s reading and education, an association which Lanyer reinforces later in the poem by indicating that, before Clifford reads her Bible, she actually places “his holy Writ in some fair tree / To meditate what [she] therein did see” (83-84). The Countess not only reads her Bible surrounded by nature, but actually embeds it in Cookham’s landscape; the “holy Writ” is not simply “read and scanned” under a tree, but within it. Lanyer’s grafting of the religious book with the bark connects trees with texts and implies that the trees are codex-like objects read by women. Arboreal spaces then crucially appear in Lanyer’s country-house poem as gendered sites for both female homosocial socialization and literary productivity.

Cookham’s oak tree also intercedes in the relationship between Lanyer’s speaker and Clifford. Toward the end of the poem, the Countess leads the speaker by the hand to the oak to bid her farewell:

To this fair tree, taking me by the hand,
You did repeat the pleasures which had passed,
Seeming to grieve they could no longer last.
And with a chaste, yet loving kiss took leave,
Of which sweet kiss I did it soon bereave (162-166).

Clifford’s repetition of the “pleasures which had passed” under the tree represents it as a place where they forged an intimate bond through delightful dialogue. The Countess then takes leave with a kiss, but, as Amy Greenstadt points out, Lanyer’s verse only reveals “retrospectively that Clifford has (...) lavished her affections upon a tree” (69). The oak, instead of the speaker,

receives her “chaste, yet loving kiss.” The speaker then bereaves the tree of the “sweet kiss” by in turn embracing its bark. The displacement of physical affection between women onto the tree as a natural surface which allows their lips to meet simultaneously enacts the fulfillment and frustration of homoerotic desire.

The elaborate episode of arboreal leave-taking within Lanyer’s larger valedictory poem also importantly hints at the interchangeability of the speaker and the tree. Christine Coch comments that the Countess’ kissing of the oak equates “garden and poet” (110); in other words, the embrace blurs the boundary between Lanyer’s poetic persona and the tree by demonstrating the ease with which one can be mistaken for the other. The deliberately misleading and abstruse verse in this section of the poem, as underscored by Greendstadt, also generates ambiguity about the intended recipient of Clifford’s kiss and thus encourages readers to confuse the speaker with the tree.

As demonstrated by Anna Beskin, moreover, Lanyer associates her “narrative voice” (525) not only with Cookham’s oak tree, but also its birds. She affiliates herself with one mythical bird in particular: Philomela, whose story haunts the early modern imagination through translations of Ovid. According to Colin Burrow, Ovid was the “most imitated and influential classical author in the Renaissance” (*Re-embodiment* 301) and a source of inspiration for male and female authors alike. At the beginning of “The Description of Cooke-ham,” Lanyer introduces Philomela as a songbird whose melodies laud Cookham and its mistress. Addressing the Countess, Lanyer’s speaker reveals that “Philomela with her sundry lays, / Both you and that delightful place did praise” (31-32). Just like the avian song, Lanyer’s own country-house poem celebrates both Clifford and her estate. By making the birdsong a version of the poem contained within it, Lanyer links her poetic voice to Philomela. Just like Lanyer, moreover, Philomela

laments the departure of the Countess from Cookham and stops singing altogether just as Lanyer's own poem comes to a close: "Fair Philomela leaves her mournful ditty" (189). The simultaneous silencing of Lanyer's verse and Philomela's ditty when Clifford leaves Cookham further ties the poet to the songbird and demonstrates how both their songs rely on the Countess for survival. Lanyer likens herself to Philomela as a mythical songbird to grapple with the artistic constraints she faces as a lower-class female poet desperate to earn Clifford's favour and financial support.

Lanyer also uses the figure of Philomela to portray Cookham's woods as a sanctuary for artistic women. Philomela was not always a bird; according to the Ovidian myth, she was first a woman. In Book 6 of his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid portrays her as the victim of sexual violence at the hands of her captor Tereus, who cuts out her tongue to prevent her from revealing his crimes. Burrow comments that she loses her *lingua*, for the "same word is used in Latin of tongue and of language" (*Shakespeare* 108). The loss of her tongue removes her from the realm of verbal expression, but her ultimate transformation into a bird, who in George English Sandys' translation, flees Thrace and "sings / In woods" (215), gives her a new voice—one that Lanyer aligns with her own poetry. Philomela's presence on Cookham's grounds denotes her escape from a dangerous male world where she was brutalized and silenced. By linking her own poetic identity with Philomela, Lanyer makes the forest a refuge for a community of creative women to inhabit and a place where they can freely foster their artistic voices. Their ultimate departure from the countryside at the poem's end coincides with the silencing of both the songbird and poet, who can only safely express themselves in Cookham's woods.

The country-house poem also draws on the Ovidian myth of Apollo and Daphne from Book 1 of the *Metamorphoses* to depict the tall oak tree as a sanctuary for women. When

Clifford visits the tree, it creates a protective refuge for her: by indicating that the “fair green leaves much like a comely veil, / Defended Phoebus when he would assail” (64-65), Lanyer’s speaker specifically ascribes the tree’s leaves a defensive function. Greenstadt calls attention to the Ovidian subtext underlying Lanyer’s reference to Phoebus and claims that it “invites a comparison between [the oak] tree and the laurel that protected Daphne” (84). Daphne’s transformation into a tree allows her to avoid rape and Arthur Golding’s English translation describes her metamorphosis in careful detail: “hir sinewes waxed starke, / And therewithall about hir breast did grow a tender barke. / Hir haire was turned into leaves, hir armes in boughes did growe” (10). The protective arms Lanyer assigns her anthropomorphized oak, as it spreads its “arms abroad, / Desirous that [Clifford] there should make abode” (61-62), parallel the transformation of Daphne’s arms into boughs which shield her from Apollo. Lanyer’s reference to Phoebus evokes the threat of male incursion into an all-female world, but the oak’s successful sheltering of Clifford from her assailant demonstrates the tree’s ability to delimit a safe space for women in the landscape.³

In the original myth, however, Apollo claims possession of the laurel by declaring to the newly transformed Daphne that “from this tyme forth yet thou shalt be my tree” (Golding 10). Hence Cora Fox notes that the tale concludes with Daphne’s “violent subjection to Apollo” (14) and urges that the sudden “loss of access to her thoughts, emotions, and will” implies she is no longer present as a “bounded self” (139) in the narrative. Lanyer’s allusion to Daphne elides the loss of the self in the Ovidian metamorphosis and instead grants a tree the power to create a

³ Jessica L. Malay’s historicized reading of Lanyer’s *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* stresses that her representation of Cookham as a feminized estate inhabited by the Clifford women reflects their participation in decades-long legal disputes over Anne’s inheritance of her father’s estates. Malay argues that “The Description of Cooke-ham,” alongside the rest of Lanyer’s verse collection, supports “Anne Clifford’s claim to the Clifford inheritance” (262) and serves a wish-fulfilling function by imagining the lengthy legal battle as having a successful outcome, which, of course, it did not: in 1617, Anne lost her rights to the Clifford lands to the male heirs of her uncle, Francis Clifford.

natural sanctuary which successfully protects the Countess from harm. Lanyer's oak also surpasses Ovid's laurel insofar as it not only successfully defends women against violence, but empowers them as artists. The depiction of Cookham's oak, a tree intimately associated with Lanyer's own poetic birth, as a literary descendent of Daphne's laurel, establishes an arboreal lineage which involves trees in the safe production of poetry by women like Lanyer herself. By invoking the figures of Philomela and Daphne, she calls attention to her use of the natural landscape to promote female literary creativity and positions herself as female heir to an Ovidian line of poetic greatness.

Just like her connection to Philomela, Lanyer's association with Cookham's oak tree stems partly from her status as a lower-class poet dependent on patronage from the Countess to pursue her chosen craft. Su Fang Ng suggests that Lanyer "imagines herself occupying a position not too unlike that of the tree (...) that the Countess so loves. Like the landscape, she too tends to the will of the Countess" (445). As two beloved objects favoured by Clifford and willing to serve her, Lanyer binds herself to the tree. Her representation of herself as akin to the oak tree, a living part of Cookham's grounds reigned over by the Countess, reflects her lower rank in the English social hierarchy.

Lanyer's prose dedication to the Countess at the beginning the *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* mentions another tree—namely, the Tree of Life from Christian scripture—which she also connects to her social standing. She writes that the "beautifull tree of Life," is "so super-excellent, that it giveth grace to the meanest & most unworthy hand that will undertake to write" (e). The two adjectives she chooses to describe her hand—mean and unworthy—underscore her position as a lower-class writer. She suggests that her poetic authority comes from the biblical Tree of Life which sanctions her writing despite her humble background. By tying her literary

aspirations to a tree at the opening of her volume of poems, she cultivates an arboreal poetics which depends on these natural objects to establish her authority as a writer. The oak tree in “The Description of Cooke-ham,” which comes at the very end of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, thus does not solely function to communicate Lanyer’s subordination to the Countess, but actually represents another empowering source of poetic authority she can tap into.

In fact, Lanyer portrays the oak tree as a symbol of her great aspirations as an author. When introducing the oak, her speaker begins a new sentence with the adverbial time marker “now” to signal a shift in the poem’s focus and to stress the tree’s significance: “Now let me come unto that stately tree” (53). And though she briefly mentions Cookham’s numerous arbors, banks, and seats, Lanyer lingers on the description of the oak tree and distinguishes it as a significant location worthy of her poetic consideration:

That oak that did in height his fellows pass,
As much as lofty trees, low growing grass,
Much like a comely cedar straight and tall,
Whose beauteous stature far exceeded all (55-58).

The tree is most certainly a distinctive feature of Cookham’s picturesque landscape, but Lanyer’s sustained attention to the oak marks it as an important feature of her poem’s own topography.

The rhyming couplets emphasize the oak’s tallness and differentiate it from all the other vegetation on the estate. Lanyer stresses the tree’s extraordinary height three times within only four lines: it passes its “fellows” (55) in height, stands “tall” (57), and has a “stature” which “far exceeded all” (58). Her repeated emphasis on the oak’s tallness expresses her own poetic desire to attain greater heights and rise above all the rest.

Though Cookham’s oak represents the strivings of a female poet and delimits a space on Cookham’s grounds where three women continually choose to gather and interact, the tree itself is interestingly gendered as male. Critics often overlook this prominent male presence in the

estate's woods and read the landscape as an entirely feminized Edenic garden inhabited solely by women. Jennifer Munroe, for instance, suggests the "swelling Bankes" that "deliver'd" (Lanyer 43) offer a compelling image of "female generativity" embedded in the land itself which emulates the "natural reproductive authority of the women who dwell there together" (Munroe 91). To exclusively feminize Cookham's land, however, ignores the blatant masculinization of the oak tree. Lanyer's first description of the tree in her poem twice assigns it male pronouns: the oak passes "*his* fellows" (55, my emphasis) in height and spreads "*his* arms abroad" (61, my emphasis) to protect the Countess from the sun. Though Lanyer genders the tall oak tree as male, she consistently ties it to her own poetic persona throughout the poem and thus aligns the oak with her own identity as a lower-class female poet aspiring to enter a male-dominated literary tradition.

2.2. Lanyer and her Contemporaries: An Early Modern Family Tree

Like Lanyer, Ben Jonson relies on arboreal imagery in his own country-house poem "To Penshurst," which appeared in print five years after "The Description of Cooke-ham," to position himself as new growth on an expansive poetic family tree joining writers both ancient and recent. Appearing later in the seventeenth century, Katherine Philip's "Upon the engraving. K:P: on a Tree in the short walke at Barn-Elms" and Andrew Marvell's "The Garden" also belong to this arboreal literary lineage. Their verse depicts trees as poetically significant natural objects and investigate the varying and complex interhuman and ecological implications of carving verse on a tree. Together, the works of Jonson, Philips, and Marvell form an early modern arbour of poetic trees which all draw some of their roots from Lanyer's trees in "The Description of Cooke-ham." While Jonson uses a grand oak tree to grapples with his literary inheritance and

proWess, Philips considers how bark can mediate the writer's emotions, desires, and social relationships, and Marvell warns of the danger of appropriating nature for artistic benefit by pondering the potential for harm and cruelty underlying human interactions with trees as textual surfaces. Paying particular attention to the various early modern poets who write on and about trees in their verse illuminates a shared belief that the process of poetic composition seizes the natural landscape for the writer's own gain.

In "To Penshurst," Jonson quickly asserts that the estate derives its exceptional beauty not from the building, which the speaker briefly and underwhelmingly describes as an "ancient pile" (5), but rather from the natural environment. Apostrophizing Penshurst itself, his speaker declares that its fairness stems from its "soil," "air" (7), wood," and "water" (8). The pre-eminence given to the natural world in Jonson's poem invites further consideration of the specific elements of the landscape foregrounded by his verse. His speaker praises Penshurst's "Mount" (10) and "walks" (9) before quickly turning his attention to its trees. After mentioning the "broad beech" and "chestnut shade" (12) as ideal locations for outdoor feasts, he describes a particular tree which, like Lanyer's oak, is loftier than the rest: "That taller tree, which of a nut was set / At his great birth where all the Muses met" (13-14). The birth which coincides with the planting of the tree is Philip Sidney's; Todd A. Borlik notes that his "parents, like many aristocratic families in the period, had planted it to commemorate their son's birth" (81). The meeting of the muses at Sidney's birth underlines his talent; Jonson's poem thus pays tribute to his illustrious predecessor. By representing the birth of the tree and of a poet as simultaneous, Jonson also implies that they are versions of one another. The tree's magnificent height, as it towers above the rest, exalts Sidney's poetic prowess and perhaps conveys Jonson's own anxieties as a poet who must wrestle with the greatness of previous ones. The tree's ability to

outlive Sidney himself, who died prematurely in a battle on the continent, also means that it stands as a testament to his genius, one which endures far beyond the bounds of human mortality.

As further evidence of the tree's ability to reach across time, Jonson tacitly connects it to the massively influential Roman poet Virgil. According to David Bevington, *et al.*, Jonson's speaker links Sidney's tree to the one which springs up at Virgil's birth in Aelius Donatus' *Vita Vergili*. In Thomas Phaer's sixteenth century English translation "The Life of Virgil," the poet's mother delivers him in a "ditch," whereafter a "Poplar tree "grew up" which was "matched in bignesse by many great Poplar trees, that were set there long before" and "was afterward consecrated, and called by the name of Virgils Tree" (4). Jonson's insistence that Sidney's birth, like Virgil's, coincides with the sprouting of a tree implies that the birth of an important poet co-occurs with that of a magnificent tree, whose unmatched size symbolizes the poet's talent and fame. By using a tree on Penshurst's grounds to pay homage explicitly to Sidney and implicitly to Virgil, Jonson creates a male line of poetic descent spanning from ancient Rome to early modern England. The arboreal connection he forges between a revered Roman poet and a contemporary English one shows that trees function symbolically in the formation of literary lineages that join writers of the past and present. By using a tall tree to symbolically stage her own ambitions as a poet in "The Description of Cooke-ham," Lanyer also possibly alludes to Virgil's tree in the *Vita Vergili*. The aforementioned masculinization of Cookham's oak onto which Lanyer projects her own poetic identity simultaneously represents the overwhelmingly male-authored literary tradition with which she is in conversation. Linking herself to the tall oak tree, which she genders as male but also makes emblematic of her aspirations as a female poet,

thus successfully grafts her into the male-dominated tradition and, in true Virgilian fashion, announces her birth as a poet.

Penshurst's oak tree, moreover, differs from Cookham's insofar as it explicitly becomes a textual object by having letters directly engraved into its bark. Jonson's speaker indicates that "There, in the writhèd bark are cut the names / Of many a silvan, taken with his flames" (15-16). Bevington, *et al.*, take "his flames" (16) to have a dual meaning, signifying both "the love Sidney described" in his works, most notably in his sonnet sequence *Astrophil and Stella*, as well as a "love for Sidney" (211). By carving their own names onto his tree, the forest spirits identify themselves as lovers of Sidney, which hints at possible homoerotic bonds between the poet and his admirers, one of which Jonson himself may have imagined himself being. Yet, as underlined by Bevington *et al.*, the embroidered names on the tree equally gesture toward the heterosexual love celebrated by Sidney's writing. In the following lines, Jonson divulges that, after gathering under Sidney's tree, "the ruddy satyrs oft provoke / The lighter fauns to reach thy Lady's Oak" (17-18). Borlik's edition of the poem cites a family tradition which reports that Robert Sidney's wife, Barbara Gamage, "went into labour underneath a tree" that was "subsequently known as the 'Lady's Oak'" (223). Both fauns and satyrs are conventionally gendered as male, but that their relations under Sidney's tree "provokes" (17) them to travel to the Lady's Oak, a second significant tree on Penshurst's grounds specifically linked to women giving birth, implies that procreative heterosexual couplings take place under the poet's tree. Jonson therefore juxtaposes the sylvans' homoerotic devotion to Sidney, which he himself shares, with his depiction of the tree as a literary space where relationships between the sexes are celebrated and consummated.

Composed later in the seventeenth century, Katherine Philips' "Upon the engraving. K:P: on a Tree in the short walke at Barn-Elms" shares several similarities with "To Penshurst." Like

Jonson's poem, it features the inscription of a name upon bark and involves trees in the formation of relationships among and between men and women. The short poem's long title reveals that it is the author's own initials, K.P., carved into the tree. By bearing Philips' name, it stands in as a vegetative version of the woman herself. Furthermore, when describing her acts of writing on the bark, Philips repeatedly uses plural pronouns: "we" (1), "us" (3), and "our" (6). Her use of the plural over the singular situates her within in a larger group of women, all of whom she imagines inscribing their initials onto trees. According to Penelope Anderson, Philips' body of work subverts the longstanding emphasis on male friendship by depicting "women themselves as friends" (77). Though not as central to "Upon the engraving. K:P: on a Tree" as, for instance, her many poems addressed to Lucasia, the theme of women's friendship still appears in this short poem's representation of a community of like-minded women writing on trees.

Philips' movement from herself as an individual woman to womankind as a universal collective also sets up an overarching binary between the sexes which allows her, in the final four lines of the poem, to compare trees not to one man, but to men in general:

say how much then
Trees are more generous then Men;
Who, by a Nobleness so pure,
Can first oblige, and then endure (7-10).

Philips depicts the trees as figurative substitutes for men, yet they are more "generous" (8) and noble than men because the markings women make on them cannot be erased. The trees become idealized external manifestations of men's interiorities, paragons of fidelity and endurance which Philips uses to reprimand the opposite sex for their inconstancy and fickleness. Insofar as the tree on which she engraves her name stands in for both herself and a loyal version of her beloved, the tree also performs a wish-fulfilling function by successfully enacting a lasting union between

them. The poem implies that the inscription of language on trees satisfies the writer's yearning for a coupling which does not actually materialize beyond the surface of the bark. Although Philips implicates trees in a relationship between the sexes rather than between two women, her poem recalls Lanyer's insofar as the bark becomes the sole location where the speaker's desired union can take place.

The trees in Marvell's "The Garden" do not mediate the speaker's relationship to other human beings, as they do in Philips' poem. On the contrary, the trees themselves are the only companions the speaker desires: he much prefers the "lovely green" (18) of the natural scenery to the "white [and] red" (17) of an Englishwoman's complexion. He also condemns the "Fond lovers" (19) who cut "their mistress' name" in the "trees" (20) and denounces them as "cruel" (19). For him, their cruelty stems less from the harm they inflict by cutting into the tree's bark, and more from the fact that they carve the wrong names. Instead of composing the name of a beloved mistress, or even his own name like the lovestruck sylvans in Jonson's "To Penshurst" and Philips' persona in her poem, Marvell's speaker records the names of the trees themselves. Addressing the surrounding trees, he declares that "wheres'e'er your barks I wound, / No name shall but your own be found" (23-24). He espouses the belief that a tree should bear its own name over that of a human—that to carve any other name but its own callously denies the tree its autonomy as a natural, inanimate, and non-human object. Nonetheless, engraving a tree's name into its bark simply marks it with an arbitrary word assigned to it by humans, one which has no inherent connection to the tree itself. Marvell's speaker thus fails to recognize that even his carving of alphabetic script on a tree forcefully overlays the human onto the natural. And although the speaker eschews the cruelty of cutting a woman's name on a tree, he still imagines his own act of writing the tree's name on its bark as wounding the arboreal body and therefore

exposes the violence underlying the use of bark as a writing surface. By exemplifying the detrimental exploitation of the natural world for literary purposes, Marvell illuminates the harm at the core of Lanyer's poetic seizure of Cookham's landscape to undergird her own aims and desires both as a lover and a writer.

2.3. Wroth's Literary Roots: Women Writing in *Urania*

The powerful, though troubling, link Lanyer forges between women, poetic authority, and the natural world notably reappears in the work of one of her female contemporaries, Lady Mary Wroth. Her romance *Urania* is full of what Sylvia Lorraine Bowerbank calls the "melancholic interminglings and indwellings of women in nature" (33) which attest to the closeness between the female body and the landscape. Several female characters continuously express their woes outdoors; they lie on the earth or roots of trees and let their tears mingle with rivers and fountains. Antissia's first appearance in *Urania* underscores her body's interchangeability with various topographical features of the landscape:

This Lady lay along, her head upon her hand, her teares ranne in as great abundance, as if they meant to preserve themselves in making some pretty brooke of truest tears, meant to her breath she tooke rather in sighes and sobs, then quiet breathing, yet did not this alter the colour, or feature of her heavenly beauty: but resembling the excellent workmanship of some delicately proportion'd fountaine, which lets the drop fall without hurting it selfe; or like a showre in Aprill (1.37-38)

Antissia's body consistently becomes water: her tears first form a "brook," then a "fountain," and last of all, a "showre." Wroth's figurative language repeatedly transforms the princess into bodies of water, metaphorical metamorphoses which recall the many transformations of women in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* into water: Arethusa and Cyane each dissolve into pools in Book 5, while Egeria retreats to the woods and becomes "a fountaine cleere" (Golding 195) after her husband's death in Book 15. Like Antissia, the dissolutions of Cyane and Egeria into liquid

occur in response to their extreme sorrow. In the manuscript continuation of Wroth's romance, Amphilanthus seeks a place of his own to weep and spies a "most delicate fountaine, which represented the shape of a most delicate, sweet, but most afflicted lady, from whose eyes ceaselessly weeping (...) made the streames whereby this fountaine was fedd" (2.295). Wroth's suggestion that the fountain itself was once a weeping woman ultimately anticipates Lentissia's complete transformation into a fountain toward the end of the second part. The embedding of women's bodies in the landscape in *Urania* exemplifies the "porousness" of the "early modern body that takes the environment into itself or spills out of its own bounds" (2) as outlined by Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garret A. Sullivan. Wroth's fascination in her lengthy romance with women who mourn in nature, and sometimes become nature, insists on the ease with which sorrow joins the female body with the land.

Importantly, the women in Wroth's romance long to merge not only with water, but also with wood. In the first part of the romance, the poet Pamphilia, while wandering through a forest, briefly attempts to initiate her own Ovidian metamorphosis into a willow tree. She retreats to a grove, where "sitting downe under a Willow," she pulls "off those branches" and "sometimes put[s] them on her head" (1.93). And although Daphne does not initiate her own transformation into a laurel tree, Pamphilia's interactions with the willow tree certainly recall Ovid's nymph, whose head actually consists of branches. Wroth even connects Pamphilia's behaviour with Daphne's loss of self during her transformation, for Pamphilia "quickly" throws aside the branches when she "[remembers] her selfe" (1.93). Later in the romance, Antissia carves "a seat big enough for her selfe to sit in" in the trunk of a weeping willow and lets the tree's "armes, and branches [incompass] her" (1.328). The encompassing of her body in wood also emulates Daphne's metamorphosis, but like Pamphilia's, her near transformation into a tree is self-

precipitated rather than accomplished through divine intervention. By framing Pamphilia and Antissia as Daphne-like figures who actively seek to merge with the land, Wroth draws on the association in Lanyer's poem between arboreal cover and female spaces of shelter while also recognizing the potential loss of a woman's selfhood should she actually become a tree.

In addition to imagining themselves as trees in the forest, the women in *Urania* also continually read and write beneath them. Pamphilia wanders through a "fine wood" (1.90) with a "Booke in her hand" (1.91) before settling under an ash tree, a scene which parallels a later one where she brings a "booke" into a "delicate thicke wood (...) wherin she read a while" (1.317). That she repeatedly brings a book into the forest with her suggests that it is an appropriate place for a woman to read, just as it is for Clifford and her daughter in "The Description of Cookeham." Pamphilia, however, is not only a reader, but a writer, and she lays her book aside to compose poetry not only underneath the ash, but onto it: "Then taking a knife, shee finished a Sonnet, which at other times shee had begunne to ingrave in the barke of those fayre and straight Ashes" (1.92). After finishing her poem on the tree's bark, she carves accompanying quatrain into its roots. Together, the two poems communicate her "Torments" (1.92) as the unrequited lover of Amphilanthus. Pamphilia creatively transforms her inner anguish into verse which she indelibly ties to a tree in the surrounding landscape.

At this point it is also worth considering the sheer variety of trees which appear in early modern texts and the significance of the individual species which authors like Lanyer and Wroth choose to include in their work. The presence of a beech tree, like the one Urania sits under at the opening of Wroth's romance, surely alludes to Virgil. But why do Antissia and Pamphilia want to become willow trees? And why does Pamphilia choose to write her sonnet on the bark of an ash tree? Edmund Spenser's tree catalogue from Book 1 of the *Faerie Queene*, which itself

grows from such lists in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Parlement of Foules* (176-182) and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (10.90-105), shows that authors imbue each kind of tree with distinctive virtues and uses. Spenser declares that the "Oake" is the "sole king of forrests all" (I.i.8); its pre-eminence makes it fitting for Jonson and Lanyer in their poetic considerations of literary authority and succession. The laurel, a symbol of poetry, is of course the "meed" of "Poets sage" (I.i.9) in Spenser's catalogue, while the willow is the refuge of "forlorne Paramours" (I.i.9) like Antissia and Pamphilia. The symbolic overlaying of human meaning onto different types of trees means that the writer's choice of species provides insight into their internal affective landscapes and sheds light on a range of emotions and desires, from their woes as disappointed lovers to their hopes as aspiring artists.

As for the ash tree in *Urania*, Wroth pushes against previous descriptions of this species by authors of the past. Chaucer calls the ash "hardy" (176), while Ovid praises its wood as excellent for crafting the "shafts of speares" (Golding 125). Instead of turning the tree into a weapon, however, Pamphilia wields her own weapon, a "knife" (1.92), to carve poetry into its bark, apparently without much difficulty in spite the alleged toughness of its bark. For his part, Spenser claims that ash tree is "for nothing ill" (I.i.9), suggesting that it cannot be used for anything bad or wicked. Wroth, however, does not depict Pamphilia's transformation of the ash tree into a writing surface as good nor commendable. As will be further discussed, Wroth's poet uses the ash tree very ill indeed.

Pamphilia's act of engraving poetry on the ash tree looks back not only to tree catalogues, but also to a past scene of tree-writing from Wroth's uncle Philip Sidney's *Old Arcadia*, a text long viewed as one the greatest influences on *Urania*. In Sidney's romance, Pamela carves her and her beloved's names in trees: "Pamela had much more pleasure to walk under those trees,

making in their barks pretty knots which tied together the names of Musidorus and Pamela” (198). She then composes a sonnet on the bark of a pine tree, and a couplet on the roots. Pamphilia’s poetic compositions upon the ash tree in *Urania* clearly mimic Pamela’s in Sidney’s *Old Arcadia*. Musidorus, reading Pamela’s poetry upon the trees, decides to engrave his own eighteen-line “song” (199) onto the pines. Similarly, in Ludovico Ariosto’s chivalric romance *Orlando Furioso*, the lovers Angelica and Medoro both engrave language onto trees. Translated into English for early modern audiences by John Harrington, the couple proclaim their love by writing “their names with bodkin, knife, or pin” on every “shady tree” (175). In Sidney’s and Ariosto’s romances, young heterosexual couples engage in collaborative acts of literary creation under trees and transform them into enduring testaments of their mutual love.

By contrast, Wroth reserves the shady space under trees in her romance exclusively for women. After Pamphilia finishes composing her poems upon the bark and roots of the ash tree, Amphilanthus does not respond in kind—he is not with her in the forest as Musidorus is with Pamela. In fact, as in the Countess’ grounds in Lanyer’s poem, no men are present in Pamphilia’s bower; Jeff Masten appropriately deems it a “private female space” (76). The wooded refuge, however, is not entirely private. As Vin Nardizzi and Miriam Jacobson point out, the “garden may be safe from the advances of unwanted (or uninvited) male suitors, but it nonetheless remains open to other aristocratic women” (185). Pamphilia’s rival for Amphilanthus’ love, Antissia, enters the forest and, like Pamphilia before her, composes a sonnet under the ash tree. Wroth indicates that she sits “under the same Ashe, wherein the other affectionate afflicted Princesse had written the Sonnet” and is “invited, either by her owne passion, or the imitation of that excellent Lady, to put some of her thoughts in some kind of measure” (1.114). Antissia’s occupation of the same arboreal space of poetic production as

Pamphilia further feminizes the landscape. By having Antissia visit the ash and write verse, which stems either from her own passion as a lover or from her desire to imitate Pamphilia, Wroth repeatedly depicts the shade under the ash tree as a location where women go to become poets. Antissia, moreover, embroiders the willow tree “with characters of her sorrow” (1.328) before carving a space in its trunk for her to reside in. By persistently representing women engraving language into trees, Wroth portrays arboreal spaces as natural refuges where they can nurture their poetic talents and safely record their feelings.

Like Lanyer, Wroth also uses the forest as a space where women form and maintain social bonds with one another. After they finish writing poetry beneath the trees, Pamphilia and Antissia meet in the woods and begin to converse. Twice declaring herself to be Pamphilia’s “friend” (1.94), Antissia asks her why she wanders the forest making “grievous complaints” (1.94). She conceals her actual intentions; she does not wish to comfort Pamphilia as her friend, only to discover who she pines for. Their love for same man, Amphilanthus, provokes Pamphilia to hide her true feelings from Antissia. Their rivalry ostensibly precludes their friendship, but Pamphilia later meets another woman in the woods, the nymph Silviana, with whom she successfully develops an intimate amicable bond. The two women first meet in a “grove” (1.481) where they write on the trees. After Silviana leaves the forest to get married, Pamphilia walks “Among the trees and bushes” and sees “inscriptions in the barke” and “letters intertwined” left by her friend, “and under them left some of hers, to witness her distresse” (1.482). Whereas Pamela and Musidorus use the trees to compose a poetic duet in Sidney’s *Old Arcadia*, Pamphilia’s and Silviana’s writing on trees traces a dialogue between two women who care deeply for one another in *Urania*. Like Lanyer, Wroth depicts the forest as a space occupied by a community of writing women who use the trees to navigate their complex relationships to one

another, and ultimately to confront their sorrow at the inevitability of their parting when one is forced to leave the forest. Pamphilia and Silviana, however, do not simply engage in dialogue under the trees, but record their conversation on the trees themselves, permanently embedding their friendship through acts of literary production in the natural landscape forevermore.

Therefore, while Lanyer's poetic connection to Cookham's oak remains symbolic, Pamphilia, Antissia, and Silviana all develop an artistic relationship with trees which is intensely material, as they repeatedly and painstakingly hew letters into hard bark and transform the trees into textual objects.

Wroth's introduction of her titular character in the very first paragraph of her romance relies on a tree specifically as a Virgilian symbol, one she uses to self-consciously stage her own emergence as a woman writer. She locates Urania in the woods, and specifically places her under a tree:

she, whose sad thoughts led her to another manner of spending her time, made her soone leave [her flocks], and follow her late begun custome; which was (while they delighted themselves) to sit under some shade, bewailing her misfortune; while they fed, to feed upon her owne sorrow and teares, which at this time she began againe to summon, sitting downe under the shade of a well-spread Beech; the ground (then blest) and the tree with full, and fine leaved branches, growing proud to beare, and shadow such perfections (1.1).

The shepherdess does not directly write on the tree, as Pamphilia, Antissia, and Silviana later do, but simply sits under it while bemoaning her misfortunes aloud. Though she does not write, her placement under a tree nevertheless intervenes in a Virgilian poetic tradition which locates the male writer in the forest. The opening lines of the first eclogue famously position the shepherd in the shade of a tree: Tityrus lies "back beneath wide beechen cover" (1) to compose poetry.

Tityrus also specifically lounges beneath a beech tree—the same kind of tree under which Urania sits. At first, Wroth only vaguely discloses that Urania regularly laments her grief "under some

shade,” but then specifies that she rests in particular under the “shade of a well-spread Beech,” whose “full” and “fine-leaved branches” cast their shadows on her. Wroth begins her romance by substituting Virgil’s male poet for a female one, a switch which signals her own entrance as a woman writer in the overwhelmingly male-authored tradition. To stage her advent as a writer keenly aware of her classical heritage, she uses a beech tree to bind Urania to Tityrus, and herself to Virgil, and positions herself heir to a longstanding literary lineage. Wroth represents the areas under trees as idealized spaces in nature which, like those in “The Description of Cooke-ham,” protect women from external threats and allow them to safely practice their creativity.

The women in Lanyer’s poem and Wroth’s romance thus develop intimate relationships with the trees in several ways: they seek refuge and read under them, symbolically and materially transform themselves into them, and write directly onto their bark. All these interactions with various oaks, willows, and beeches create an arboreal poetics which seeks to construct safe spaces in the natural world for women to become writers. An ecofeminist reading of these varied relations between the human and the natural world foregrounds the alliance between women and the environment, both of which suffer under the dominion of patriarchal masculinity.

Ecofeminism, in the words of Victoria Davion, stresses the “important link between the domination of women and the domination of nature” (8) which undergirds the utilitarian ethics of Baconian scientific discourse as well as the brutal colonial practices of seventeenth century England. John Donne’s famous poem “The Sun Rising” equates the female body with colonized land; referring to the East and West Indies in which England occupied a colonial presence, the speaker likens his lover to “both the Indias of spice and mine” (17). His proclamation in the final stanza of the poem that “She’is all States, and all Princes, I” (21) solidifies the woman’s figurative position as the passive landscape which he conquers and inhabits. The connection

between women and the land then appears at first glance to be fundamentally disempowering for the latter, for it demands their subjection and imagines them as inherently superable. Jennifer Munroe and Rebecca Laroche, however, point out that ecofeminist scholarship attends the ways in which this link actually affords “women outlets for reimagining potential alternative avenues to power” (5). Allying their female speakers and characters to trees which offer them refuge and facilitate their writing, Lanyer and Wroth subvert the assumed disempowerment in women’s association with nature and instead draw on it to nurture their literary productivity and empower themselves as budding writers. For both Lanyer and Wroth, women’s alliance with trees continually offers them a secure site where they can engage with the poets of antiquity as well as their male contemporaries to ultimately carve out spaces for themselves as authors in their own right.

2.4. Harming Trees: Petrarch’s Laurel and the Pathetic Fallacy

However, to foreground an ecofeminist approach to Lanyer and Wroth and glorify the alliance they forge between women and the landscape as empowering perhaps too easily disregards the capacity women themselves have to mistreat the natural world, especially as writers. The self-conscious link between writing and violence against nature appears most notably in the works of Petrarch, whose monumental influence English writers continually confront in the early modern period. Like male authors of the time, Lanyer and Wroth participate in the flourishing of English Petrarchism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. When they write about women and trees, therefore, they look back not only to Ovid’s version of the Apollo and Daphne myth, but also to Petrarch’s massively influential inflections of the tale in his *Canzoniere*. As Nancy J. Vickers points out, Petrarch and Laura in the *Canzoniere* do not simply

map onto Apollo and Daphne; rather, Petrarch alternates the “male/female roles” in Ovid’s myth, so that Laura is at once “Apollo to his Daphne, Daphne to his Apollo” (275). In “Canzone 23,” Petrarch himself therefore performs what Danila Sokolov calls “*imitatio Daphnae*” (12) and assumes an arboreal form: his hair turns “into leaves” (43), his feet into “two roots” (47), and his arms into “two branches” (49). His gradual metamorphosis from a “living man” to a “green laurel” (39) mirrors the nymph’s transformation in the *Metamorphoses*.

Petrarch, however, also often identifies with Apollo and likens Laura, whose name derives from the laurel tree, to Daphne. In “Canzone 22,” he deliberately conflates his mistress with Ovid’s nymph: Laura transforms into “green wood / escaping from [his] arms as on the day / Apollo had pursued her” (34-36). By calling Petrarch a “second Apollo” (15), Lynn Enterline highlights the extent to which his poetry equates Laura with the fleeing nymph and himself with the passionate god. Even in “Canzone 23,” he discloses that his hair turns into the leaves he “once had hoped to make into [his] crown” (44). In the Ovidian myth, Apollo makes a crown from Daphne’s leaves and declares to the laurel, “Thou shalt adorne my golden lockes” (Golding 10). Ian Frederick Moulton remarks that after Daphne’s arboreal metamorphosis, the laurel tree “becomes sacred to Apollo and an emblem of poetic glory. Apollo’s pursuit of Daphne thus becomes the pursuit of poetry—as Petrarch recognized in naming his emblematic beloved ‘Laura,’ or laurel” (113). Petrarch intricately intertwines Laura with a laurel tree to imply that Apollo’s desire for Daphne, and his own longing for Laura, morphs into an ardent devotion to poetry. That Petrarch transforms Apollo’s wish to violate Daphne into a yearning for poetic renown suggests that violence, which is redirected from the female body to the arboreal one, necessarily underlies literary production.

The female poets in Lanyer's and Wroth's texts emulate Petrarch's ambivalent resemblances to both Daphne and Apollo. As previously demonstrated, the women writers in "The Description of Cooke-ham" and *Urania* engage in *imitatio Daphnae*; Lanyer's speaker conflates herself with an oak, while Pamphilia and Antissia both momentarily desire to become willows. Yet these women also strikingly resemble Apollo in their treatment of the trees. Commenting on Lanyer's poem, Greenstadt calls the speaker's kissing of the oak tree an "act of arboreal coercion" (84) and violation which echoes the god's own embrace of the laurel: "in his armes embracing fast hir boughes and braunches lythe, / He proferde kisses too the tree" (Golding 10). In Wroth's romance, Pamphilia's adornment of her own body with willow branches mimics Apollo tearing off the laurel leaves to wear on his head. Wroth, moreover, strongly associates Antissia with an arboreal crown: she specifies that Antissia cuts a hole in the tree's "crowne" and describes her as wearing "the Crowne of Willow" (1.328) when she enters it. This scene in her romance thus undoubtedly alludes to Apollo's crowning of his own head with laurel branches. By likening their female poets to Apollo, Lanyer and Wroth build upon Petrarch's recognition that their own poetic aspirations inexorably liken them to the forceful male god. Their interpretations of Petrarch's own appropriation of the Ovidian myth lead them to acknowledge that their own creativity implicitly entails violence. Arboreal spaces then simultaneously allow Lanyer and Wroth to generate sanctuaries for creative women in the natural landscape but also to negotiate the harm their own poetic creativity inflicts upon the natural world around them.

The victimization of the trees in Lanyer's and Wroth's works takes places chiefly through their use of the pathetic fallacy. The term 'pathetic fallacy' was coined by Victorian literary critic John Ruskin, who defined it a "false" and "morbid" (206) attribution of human emotions to the

inanimate and non-human. This literary device has thus carried negative connotations since its inception. A prominent instance of the pathetic fallacy in the Elizabethan era appears in Sidney's *Old Arcadia*. In the first eclogue, a courtier retreats to the forest to create a lengthy poetic catalogue of the various trees he encounters and imagines how each reflects his internal landscape. The "high" pines, for instance, match his own high "hope" (87) as a lover. He also compares his "noble thoughts," which to him are "fruitless," to the "great and green" fir trees which are "fixed on a high hill but a barren" (86). Borlik proposes that Sidney's tree catalogue "dissolves the irksome barrier between human and non-human nature" (79). The dissolution of the boundary between human and nature, however, only takes place through the anthropomorphic imposition of the human onto the latter through the process of composing poetry—an affective colonization of nature effected by literary creation. By overlaying his own inner state onto the landscape, Sidney's courtier reduces the trees to a canvas on which humans paint their interiorities and transform into external versions of themselves.

When depicting the inscription of language on trees, many early modern English writers openly admit, if not actively accentuate, the suffering their writing causes. Jonson's "writhèd bark" (15) in "To Penshurst" suggests that the tree writhes in pain when the sylvans cut their names into it. In "Upon the engraving. K:P: on a Tree in the short walke at Barn-Elms," Philips carves her own name into the tree and proclaims that it does not deserve "to be wounded" (4) by her "ingratefull injuries" (6). As discussed above, Marvell stresses that the engraving of any word into bark, be it the name of a human or of the tree itself, injures the tree in "The Garden." Sidney similarly demonstrates his awareness that embedding human feelings into the natural landscape by carving letters into the trees hurts them. The first lines of Pamela's sonnet in *The Old Arcadia* directly address the pine on which she composes verse and demonstrates that

inscription of her thoughts on the bark explicitly wounds the tree: “Do not disdain, O straight upraised pine, / That wounding thee, my thoughts in thee I grave” (198). By expressing her “inward hurt” on the pine’s “outward rine” (198), she intentionally ensures that the tree’s suffering matches her own. The collective harm sustained by the trees in these various texts attests to the prevalent cultural assumption that the transference of human emotions onto the landscape through literary composition injures the natural environment.

Wroth evidently models the character of Pamphilia in her romance on Sidney’s Pamela, whose interactions with the forest in *The Old Arcadia* clearly anticipate Pamphilia’s in *Urania*. Like Pamela, Pamphilia seeks to recreate her inner state in her wooded surroundings. She first entreats the landscape to sympathize with her plight as a lover: she apostrophizes the “Sweet Land” and implores it to “heare [her], and commiserate her woe” (1.92). She enacts a kind of affective mimesis wherein she beseeches nature to sympathize with her predicament. Her plea for sympathy, however, quickly turns violent when she lays down on grass and declares: “And now poore grasse (...) thou shalt suffer for my paine, my love-smarting body pressing thee” (1.92). She recognizes that she causes the grass pain, but also emphasizes that she deliberately does so. When she begins composing poetry on the bark of ash trees, she similarly discloses that she actually intends to wound the trees: “I will make others in part taste my paine, and make them dumbe partakers of my grieffe” (1.92). As aforementioned, Pamphilia uses a knife to engrave her sonnet into the tree. Leah Knight observes that Renaissance writing instruments, whether applied trees or other inscriptive surfaces, “necessarily included a knife for the initial cutting and frequent sharpening of the quill, which itself thus came to resemble a pointed blade” (468). Pamphilia’s knife thus reflects Wroth’s recognition that every early modern writer wields a weapon which, when used on living wood, inevitably inflicts pain. Her poet’s “unkindnesse”

also provokes “sapp to accompany her teares for love” (92); the tree cries alongside Pamphilia herself. The contents of her sonnet itself also accentuate the sap as material evidence of the tree’s distress as she cuts into it: she addresses the tree and admits that “Thy sap weepingly doth bewray thy paine” (93). Another of her declarations to the ash, “Pitiles I doe wound thee” (93), once again openly acknowledges her responsibility for the tree’s injuries. Wroth continually emphasizes the havoc her female poet wreaks on nature as she uses the forest to outwardly convey her emotional distress. Pamphilia’s repeated and purposeful abuse of the natural landscape stresses the violence inherent in her own process of poetic composition.

Similarly, Lanyer’s use of the pathetic fallacy in “The Description of Cooke-ham” means that her interest in the natural world extends only insofar as it reproduces her own internal reality. Nature thrives at the beginning of the poem to reflect the speaker’s happiness at coming to Cookham, and withers and decays at the end to communicate her sorrow at her inevitable departure. When the Countess visits the tall oak tree on Cookham’s grounds, Lanyer twice uses the word ‘joy’ to describe the tree’s feelings: it is first “joyful in receiving [Clifford]” (60) and then “Joy[s] his happiness when [she was] there” (66). The oak also mourns alongside “all the rest” (177) of nature and participates in “sorrow’s harmony” (178) when the women leave. The oak tree to which Lanyer ties her poetic identity then consistently reflects her own emotional state throughout the poem. However, she briefly distances herself from the oak after the Countess kisses its bark. Envious of the tree for receiving so “rare a favor, so great happiness” (168), she berates it as “a senseless creature” (167) and “ungrateful creature” (171). She momentarily depicts the oak tree as insensate—utterly devoid of emotion. The fleeting separation of her own emotions from the oak tree exposes her belief that the tree has no feelings

other than the ones assigned to it by Lanyer herself—that the oak is an empty vessel the poet fills with her own passions and sensations.

The literary projects of the women writers in both Lanyer and Wroth therefore fundamentally depend on the heedless mistreatment of trees as well as the harmful foisting of the human onto the natural and traces back to the Petrarchan recognition that poetic pursuits inevitably entail an Apollonian desire to harm the landscape. An ecofeminist reading of Lanyer's and Wroth's works may mistakenly absolve women from responsibility for harming nature by emphasizing their alliance with it. Idealizing the link between women and the land runs the risk of overlooking the violence they themselves are capable of perpetrating against the natural environment as they become writers. Though the female authors in Lanyer's "Description of Cooke-ham" and Wroth's *Urania* use the land to ensure their own safety and nurture their creativity, they likewise highlight how their own poetic undertakings profoundly hurt the natural world around them, a mistreatment of the land which hinges on the assumption that nature serves human artistry to its own detriment.

3. Racialized Arbours: Avoiding Blackness in Early Modern Literary

Landscapes

An intersectional approach to early modern arboreal poetics, which views gender and race as inextricably linked, must attend not only to the gendering of trees as natural objects which empower women's literary activity, but also the accompanying racialization of their shade as spaces which shelter skin from the darkening effects of sunburn. The link between black skin and sunburn traces back to classical antiquity, with the myth of Phoebus' son Phaethon from Book 2 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, who ruinously attempts to fly his father's chariot across the sky. Phaethon steers the sun too close to the earth and thus inadvertently burns the Ethiopian people, who, in Allen Mandelbaum's recent verse translation, "became black" as "blood rushed to their skins" (45). Although Dennis Austin Britton recognizes "the importance of skin color in early modern constructions of race" (5), he equally stresses the significance of other key factors like "geographical effects on the humoral body, lineage, language, and the practices of print culture and reading" (6). Ovid's explanation for blackness clearly positions skin colour as the primary distinguisher of the Ethiopian people as a 'race,' but their epidermal difference also depends on climatological conditions and their impact on the body's humours, for as Mandelbaum's translation makes clear, black skin results from the sunlight's interference with bodily fluids. Ovid's etiological tale therefore postulates that black skin and racial difference arise from influences both internal and external to the human body.

The fall of Phaethon massively influences literary treatments of black skin in the English Renaissance by implying that Ethiopian people are not inherently black—their skin was once white—and that their current dark complexions are the product of sunburn. As Kim F. Hall posits, the "popularity of the idea that sun caused 'black' skin color may have lasted [until the

Renaissance] because the very name ‘Aethiope’ signified burnt or ‘torrid’ skin” (*Things of Darkness* 95). Renaissance writers, however, often used sunburn to describe the complexions not only of the Ethiopian people, but also of Egyptian, Mediterranean, Tartarian, and Indigenous populations, among others. Hall also notes that early modern speculation “on the sources of complexion” is “always written as a search for the origins of blackness” (95). Ovid’s etiology for black skin appeals to early modern constructions of racial hierarchies by inaccurately glorifying whiteness as the original skin colour that is eventually darkened by varying degrees. The *Metamorphoses* therefore generates the erroneous view of blackness as a mistake and defect, an imperfection imposed upon the body by a cosmic accident.⁴ Crucially, the English also viewed themselves as susceptible to sunburn and feared that, like the dark and foreign others they increasingly encountered in their imperial journeys across the globe, overexposure to solar heat would cost them their pale complexions. That great care was then perceived as necessary to preserve whiteness during the English Renaissance feeds into the belief that blackness originated with human error and physical injury.

Jonson, an avid reader of Ovid, combines Apollo from Book 1 of the *Metamorphoses* and Phoebus from Book 2 to depict the sun as an amorous attacker who darkens the skin of his female beloved in his *Masque of Blackness*. The women in Lanyer’s “Description of Cookeham” and Wroth’s *Urania* hence depend on arboreal cover to protect themselves from the intersecting dangers of assault, bodily harm, black skin, and racial transformation. Like sunlight, melancholy represents yet another threat to women’s whiteness, one which originates not in

⁴ The biblical story of Ham is another popular myth in the early modern era which attributes blackness to human error. David M. Whitford explains that, in the book of Genesis, Noah curses his son Ham, who, as the “founding father of Africa” (2), passes on his curse to his descendants. Sixteenth-century French cosmographer Guillaume Postel, among others, argued that Noah’s curse actually turned Ham and his descendants black and that their dark complexions outwardly signified their “cursed nature” (Whitford 102).

Roman myth, but in the contemporary humoral theory which hypothesized that a surplus of black bile within the body darkened the skin. To maintain their despondent temperaments without compromising their fair complexions, Lanyer's speaker and Wroth's poet Pamphilia write verse which blackens trees to externalize the blackness of their inner torment. Whether confronting threats to whiteness from without (the sun) or within (melancholy), trees remain vital to Lanyer and Wroth's efforts to preserve women's pale skin and privilege the figure of the fair female author.

3.1. Ovidian Sunburns and the Sun as a Violent Lover

A comparison of two English translations of Ovid's myth, one by Golding in 1567 and the other by George Sandys in 1632, anticipates how early modern English writers create an etiology of skin-colour by beginning to depict the sun not as a remote celestial body, but as a personified forceful lover who injures the bodies of those he desires. Sandys' seventeenth-century translation closely resembles the original Latin: "Men say, the Aethiopians then grew swart; / Their blood exhaled to the outward part" (46). Golding's version, by contrast, expands Ovid's version from two lines to three: "The Ethiopians at that time (as men for truth uphold), / The blood by force of that same heat drawn to the outer part, / And there adust from that forth, became so black and swart" (2.299-301). While Sandys describes an exhalation of the blood to the surface of the skin, Golding attributes a forcefulness to the sun's heat and emphasizes its darkening effects by describing the skin of the Ethiopians not only as "swart," but also as "adust" and "black." His translation of Ovid's myth emphasizes the sun's use of force to scorch human skin; in other words, he represents the sun as an aggressor whose assault produces epidermal harm and discoloration.

Depictions of dark-skinned figures by writers like Jonson build on the forceful and aggressive sun of Golding's Ovidian translation and represent the sun as a hazard specifically for women, which aligns with Hall's emphasis on the "seeming vulnerability of female bodies" to epidermal change in the early modern period (*Things of Darkness* 12). Arthur L. Little similarly stresses the prevailing cultural belief during the Renaissance "that men are racially less susceptible to change than women" (163). In the *Masque of Blackness*, Jonson explicitly engages with the Ovidian etiology for black skin and briefly summarizes the myth of "Phaethon, that fired the world" (137): he writes that "before his heedless flames were hurled / About the globe, the Ethiops were as fair / As other dames; now black, with black despair" (138-140). Jonson's indication that the women are not simply black-skinned, but "black with despair" suggests that their outward physiognomy fittingly matches the darkness of their inward sorrows. Interestingly, he initially appears to discredit Ovid's tale by introducing it as a "strange error" (153) and the fiction of a "Poor brainsick" poet (132). He conveys in this moment a metatextual anxiety surrounding the fact that his own poetic fictions perhaps erroneously blacken the skin of the royal ladies performing as Niger's daughters, English noblewomen who should rightfully possess the idealized red and white complexion exemplified by Marcus Gheeraerts II's portrait of the English noblewoman Mary Rogers, Lady Harington, who has a pale skin, blushing cheeks, and rosy lips (Figure 1). Jonson's masque, however, ultimately validates the Ovidian explanation for black skin by referring to the women's beauties as "scorched" (234) and their blackness as a "veil the sun hath cast / Above [their] blood" (299-300). His retelling of the myth also constructs a clear gender distinction absent from the original version, for the darkening of the skin caused by the sun's rays specifically threatens the beauty of the Ethiopian "dames" (114). Jonson's revision of the Ovidian climatic explanation for black skin in his masque specifically focuses on

the female body and instantiates Hall's and Little's claims that sunburn was chiefly perceived as a threat to women's fairness in the early modern imagination.



Figure 1. Marcus Gheeraerts II's Portrait of Mary Rogers, Lady Harington, 1592, Collection Tate, Photo © Tate, image released under Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND (3.0 Unported), <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/gheeraerts-portrait-of-mary-rogers-lady-harington-t01872>

Jonson's *Masque of Blackness* also repeatedly imagines the relationship between the sun and the daughters of Niger in terms of a loving, though far from consensual, embrace. He writes that the sun "draws / Signs of his fervent'st love" (118-119) in the women's "firm hues" (118), an interaction which suggests that the sun shines on their skin out of love for them. Mary Floyd-

Wilson comments that the “outward movement implied by the verb ‘draws’ corresponds with contemporary climatic-humoral theory” which dictates that the “sun does not simply burn the skin, but concocts the body’s humors to produce black bile” (205) and external darkness. The masculinized sun interferes with the balance of the humors within the women’s bodies and marks them with sunburned skin to visually demonstrate his desire for them. The penetration of the sun’s rays into the women’s bodies suggests an unwelcome intrusion akin to rape. Jonson also later indicates that the sun “shone / On their scorch’d cheeks with such intemperate fires” (150-151). The personified sun’s “fervent’st love” and “intemperate fires” as he burns the women’s skin depicts him as a lover akin to Apollo, whose own fervor and intemperance in his desire for Daphne threatens physical harm. The sun as a lover burns with fierce passion for the daughters of Niger and so literally burns his objects of desire. Upon learning the origin of their dark complexions in the masque, the daughters weep “ceaseless tears” (146) which overflow the shores of the Niger river. Their experience of overwhelming distress and grief conveys their sense of bodily deformation and violation. Jonson depicts the sun as an amorous assailant whose unrestrained desires damage and discolor the faces of Ethiopian women. His representation of the sun as a sexual predator genders the Ovidian connection between darker complexions and epidermal injury by construing a woman’s black skin not as valid and healthy, but as a visible sign of the violent mistreatment of her body.

3.2. Escaping Phoebus: The Safety of Arboreal Shade in Lanyer and Wroth

The hundredth poem in Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* insists that Laura’s “fair body [is] ever / covered in shade” (7-8). Her fairness seemingly stems directly from her perpetual position in the shade; her skin is never darkened by direct contact with the sun. Hall underlines “how significant

whiteness is to Petrarchan beauty” (“Beauty and the Beast of Whiteness” 466), and Nancy J. Vickers shows how the scattered glimpses of Laura’s body provided by Petrarch, like her “ivory hand” and “marble foot,” all continually evince her undeniable “whiteness” (266). Petrarch thus constructs a racialized standard for feminine beauty which values pale skin tones over darker ones. Like Petrarch, Lanyer exalts the fair-skinned female figure in “The Description of Cooke-ham” by sheltering her from sunlight. In contrast to other parts of the *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum* which, as Melissa E. Sanchez has demonstrated, openly and repeatedly denigrate “racial, ethnic, religious and sexual others” (16), the country-house poem valorizes women’s whiteness primarily through the treatment of the sun as a hazard. Lanyer specifies that the forest actively works to prevent sunlight from touching the Countess when she walks through it:

The trees with leaves, with fruits, with flowers clad,
Embraced each other, seeming to be glad,
Turning themselves to beauteous Canopies,
To shade the bright sun from your brighter eyes (23-26).

The trees use all at their disposal—leaves, fruits, and flowers—to form shady canopies which protect the Countess’ face from sunlight and preserve her fairness. Lanyer’s positioning of Clifford under protective trees thus explicitly coincides with a desire to conceal her pale skin from the sun to prevent a darkening sunburn. “The Description of Cooke-ham” also personifies the sun as a male god attacking a woman; the tall oak tree on defends against “Phoebus when he would assail” (64). The Countess therefore relies on the woods to protect her from an attacker who intends her harm. Like Jonson’s masque, Lanyer’s poem suggests that the dangers of blackened skin and bodily harm are interrelated; one implies the other. Depicting the sun as an anthropomorphized male aggressor thus draws the same the link between sunburn and sexual violence found in the *Masque of Blackness* and espouses women’s particular vulnerability to epidermal transformation by exposure to sunlight.

Lanyer also continually uses the adjective “fair” to describe her two female companions; she compliments Clifford’s “fair hand” (51) and “fair bosoms” (139) and describes her daughter as a “virgin fair” (160). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term ‘fair’ as “Beautiful to the eye; of attractive appearance” (A.I.1), but also as “light as opposed to dark in colour” when used in relation to “hair or complexion” (A.IV.17). Hall dates the first use of “fair” in the *OED* as “term of complexion” to the mid sixteenth century, a time which saw the “development of race prejudice” in England (*Things of Darkness* 3). Thus, when Lanyer calls the noblewomen fair, she uses the term as a descriptor of both beauty and race. By collapsing both definitions into one, Lanyer reinforces how beauty and whiteness entailed one another in the English imagination. Crucially, her speaker also persistently accentuates the fairness of Cookham’s trees throughout her poem. She describes the oak as a “fair tree” (59, 157, 162) three times and compliments its “fair green leaves” (63). The tree which contains Clifford’s Bible is also “fair” (83). The fairness of Cookham’s trees highlights the landscape’s exceptional beauty which mirrors that of the Clifford women, but Lanyer does not presumably call the trees pale. Still, their fairness mirrors Lanyer’s description of the women who seek shelter beneath them and hints at the forest’s ability to preserve their pale complexions.

Several of Wroth’s works also demonstrate that the woods shield women from the sun. Jennifer Munroe points out, for instance, that Pamphilia continually seeks “respite” in shady spaces in the sonnet sequence *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* (“Needlework, Gardens, And Writing” 111). The poet positions herself in the “Sweet shades” (17.1) and the “blessed shades” (30.1) in the first lines of two different sonnets. Pamphilia’s desire in the sonnet sequence for “Sweet” and “blessed” shade in which to express her turmoil as a lover parallels Urania’s retreat to the shadows under a beech to voice her complaints at the very beginning of the prose romance.

When Pamphilia enters the forest later in *Urania*, Wroth highlights the dense canopy overhead which blocks out the sun's rays:

shee went into the thickest part of [the wood], being such, as if Phoebus durst not there shew his face, for feare of offending the sadd Princesse; but a little glimmeringly, as desirous to see, and fearing to be seene, stole heere, and there a little sight of that all-deserving Lady (...) The tops of the trees joyning so close, as if in love with each other, could not but affectionately embrace (1.91).

As in Lanyer's poem, the trees embrace one another to produce a shadowy shelter for the woman below. Pamphilia purposefully heads toward to "thickest part" of the forest, where Phoebus' reluctance to show his face implies that he does not pose a threat to her skin; the trees successfully keep him at bay. Eventually Pamphilia's walk through the forest culminates with her arrival at the ash tree which, like Lanyer's oak, Wroth describes as "fayre" (92). As in "The Description of Cooke-ham," the fairness of the ash gestures toward its own protective power to defend Pamphilia's fair complexion.

Attending to the simultaneous gendering and racialization of the arboreal spaces in Lanyer's and Wroth's writing demonstrates that the shadows cast by trees do not solely demarcate a feminized space in the natural landscape where women become writers, but a profoundly racialized one where women protect their complexions from blackness resulting from cosmic harm or sexual violence. Focusing on the way women use trees to empower themselves as writers in early modern England must then also recognize how they rely on the forest canopy to protect their racial status as fair-skinned. The Ovidian link between sunburn and black skin apparent in Lanyer's and Wroth's representations of women in the woods also perpetuates the assumption that a dark complexion inevitably results from harm. Their use of trees as refuge from the sun reinforces the belief that pale skin requires protection from malicious external forces that would darken it. Instead of viewing blackness as a natural and valid skin tone, these

two women writers of the early seventeenth century view it as condemning evidence of the mistreatment of the female body. The perceived susceptibility of white skin to change implies that a pale complexion demands a constant and concerted effort to upkeep, lest it slip into a dark one, and constructs a racial binary which illuminates the anxiety underpinning early modern English encounters with difference.

3.3. White Skin, Black Bark: Writing Melancholy on Trees

In the first sonnet of Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*, his speaker's assertion that he seeks "words to paint the blackest face of woe" (5) insinuates that his anguish as a lover blackens his complexion. The internal affective landscapes of Lanyer's and Wroth's female writers in "The Description of Cooke-ham" and *Urania* are similarly dominated by melancholy, an emotion tied to the colour black and often explicitly associated with black skin, as exemplified by Sidney. However, unlike *Astrophil*, the complexions of the woeful women in Lanyer and Wroth are not darkened by their overwhelming sadness. To prevent the blackening influence of melancholy, they depend once again on trees, not for the provision of shade, but as organic bodies they can imbue with their own emotions through the composition of poetry. The transfer of affect enabled by verse blackens bark and transforms trees into external testaments of the women's inner darkness.

Lanyer's and Wroth's depictions of sorrowful women participate in the popular trope of the melancholic genius, a figure who appears in such renowned works as Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and John Milton's "Il Penseroso." Erin Sullivan calls the Renaissance the "golden age of melancholy" and notes that this "gloomy physiological condition" was conventionally associated with "intellectual, social, and emotional superiority" (88). Critics like Juliana Schiesari and Carol

Thomas Neely have shown that the celebrated figure of the melancholic genius was overwhelmingly imagined as male, both long before and after the English Renaissance. Lesel Dawson, however, points out that the “androcentric discourse of melancholy was readily appropriated by early modern women eager to enjoy the positive social and cultural connotations that attached to melancholic display” (96). Dawson cites Wroth as one such example, claiming that her romance “appropriates a discourse of heroic melancholy usually thought to be male” and uses it as a “as a means of legitimating [her] entry into print” (97). Elizabeth Hodgson similarly shows how Lanyer and Wroth make melancholy “the precipitating and proximate cause for poesis” (71); they both use the power of “sanctifying and ennobling grief” (56) to claim for themselves “the social benefits of being a mourner” (56) and strengthen their poetic voices. Lanyer’s grief-stricken speaker in her poem and Wroth’s woeful poet Pamphilia—both of whom stand in for the author herself—successfully appropriate the figure of the melancholic genius to depict the female writer as thoughtful, dignified, and talented.

Marjory E. Lange explains that “melancholy characterized the person in whom” the fluid of melancholy, black bile, “was naturally dominant” (74) and that “melancholic individuals” tended to be “dark visaged” (75). According to Elizabeth Spiller, Wroth “imagines the character of Pamphilia in terms of a racially and geographically marked form of ‘black’ melancholy” (163) which assumes a connection between black bile and black skin. Spiller highlights that several classical and medieval writers, like Rufus of Ephesus and Albertus Magnus, insistently characterize dark-skinned peoples as melancholic and promote the belief that a surplus of black bile darkens skin. In her romance, Wroth emphasizes “the melancholy which abound[s] in the Princesse” (1.63) and refers to her as “this melancholy Lady” (1.91). Before carving her sonnet into the tree, Pamphilia bewails that she is full of “broken joyes, blacke despaires” (1.62), a

declaration which echoes the “black despair” (140) of Niger’s daughters in Jonson’s masque. But Pamphilia’s despair, which signals an excess of black bile, is not reflected in her skin like it is in that of the Ethiopian women: she remains fair-skinned. When Pamphilia enters the woods, the narrator indicates that the forest is “delicate without, as shee was faire, and darke within, as her sorrowes” (1.91). Like the woods she wanders in, she is dark within and fair without; the forest itself underlines the disjunction between the poet’s pale exterior and her black interior.

Later in the romance, Pamphilia laments her status as Amphilanthus’ unrequited lover and proclaims: “I am forsaken and despised, why dye I not?” (465). Her question contains the conventional Petrarchan wish for death as a liberation from the torments of love, but Hall also calls attention to the second meaning of “dye” as “the wish and the punning desire to ‘dye’ or change color” (“Beauty, Race, and Rank” 192). Pamphilia effectively asks why her skin colour does not correspond with her darkened interiority and calls for a physical alteration to her complexion to match her black heart. Wroth stresses the inconsistency between the poet’s dark heart and her fair appearance. Her representation of Pamphilia as female lover whose skin does not become black despite her inner sorrows possibly responds to her uncle’s male lover Astrophil, whose represents himself in “Sonnet 1” as having a “the blackest face of woe” (5). Drawing on the geo-humoral conception of blackness, Astrophil readily admits that his melancholic emotional state darkens his skin. Unlike him, Pamphilia insists that her skin never matches her internal sorrow, but stays ever fair. Wroth goes to great lengths to demonstrate that although Pamphilia experiences all the throes of black melancholy, her skin never reflects her inner suffering.

Wroth's "Like to the Indians scorched with the Sunne" from her sonnet sequence

Pamphilia to Amphilanthus similarly centers on the externalization of Pamphilia's black inward turmoil.

Like to the Indians scorched with the Sunne,
The Sunne which they doe as their God adore:
So am I us'd by Love, for evermore
I worship him, lesse favours have I wonne.

Better are they who thus to blacknesse run,
And so can onely whitenesse want deplore:
Then I who pale and white am with griefes store,
Nor can have hope, but to see hopes undone.

Besides their sacrifice receiv'd in sight,
Of their chose Saint, mine hid as worthlesse rite,
Grant me to see where I my offerings give.

Then let me weare the marke of *Cupids* might,
In heart, as they in skin of *Phoebus* light,
Not ceasing offerings to Love while I live (1-14).

Pamphilia develops a tension between her darkened interiority and her physical appearance by comparing herself to the "Indians scorched with the Sunne" (1), a people who, like the Ethiopians and Egyptians, were conventionally depicted as sunburnt by English writers during the Renaissance. She writes that just as the "Indians" worship the sun, she adores the personified figure of "Love" (3). While the sun scorches the skin of the Indigenous peoples, the speaker describes herself as "us'd by Love" (3); both she and the "Indians" are victims of bodily harm due to their masochistic acts of worship. The sun produces an external process of blackening by burning their cheeks, whereas Love darkens the sonneteer's heart, but notably leaves her complexion "pale and white" (7). Pamphilia uses the sun's burning of human skin to grapple with her own interiorized blackness as a forsaken lover. She underlines that the "sacrifice" of the Indigenous peoples is "receiv'd in sight" (9)—and so visibly manifests on their bodies—whereas

hers is “hid as worthlesse rite” (10) inside herself. By emphasizing Pamphilia’s internal darkness as opposed that of the “Indians,” Wroth insists that her blackness remains intangible and invisible; it does not affect her skin colour. She wears the “marke of *Cupids* might, / In heart” (12-13) just as the “Indians” bear the scars of “*Phoebus* light” in their “skin” (13). Wroth’s sonnet once again emphasizes the lack of correspondence between Pamphilia’s darkened interior and her fair outer complexion. Wroth’s interest in blackness only extends insofar as it characterizes her female poet’s emotional landscape, not her skin colour. By repeatedly emphasizing the disparity between Pamphilia’s outer whiteness and inner blackness, she reveals a keen desire to eschew the perceived racial risk of a melancholic disposition.

Unlike Pamphilia, Wroth herself had firsthand experience with dyed skin: she, alongside the other ladies of the English court, performed in blackface in Jonson’s *Masque of Blackness* in 1605 as one of the daughters of Niger. Dudley Carleton, a spectator of the performance, criticizes the women’s appearances in the masque: “Their Apparell was rich, but too light and Curtizan-like for such great ones. Instead of Vizzards, their Faces, and Arms up to the Elbows, were painted black, which was Disguise sufficient, for they were hard to be known; *but it became them nothing so well as their red and white, and you cannot imagine a more ugly Sight, then a Troop of lean-cheek’d Moors* (quoted in Floyd-Wilson 195). He contrasts red and white, the ideal English complexion, with black skin and clearly valorizes a paler complexion over a darker one. He also indicates that the performing women painted themselves black instead of wearing “Vizzards,” In Phillip Stubbes’ 1583 *Anatomie of Abuses*, he writes that when women “use to ride abroade, thei have visors made of Velvet (...) wherewith thei cover all their faces” (43). Stubbes’ account portrays the vizard as a standard part of upper-class female attire and one such face covering was discovered in a sixteenth century building in the town of Daventry in

Northamptonshire (Figure 2). Randle Holme's *Academy of Armory*, published in the latter half of the seventeenth century, remarks that these masks are "generally made of Black Velvet" and are used by women "to put over their Faces when they travel to keep them from Sun burning" (3.1.13). Holme reveals that vizards were worn with the intention of shielding the female wearer's pale skin from the sun. English women in the early modern period habitually adorned black masks expressly to preserve their white skin.



Figure 2. "A Post Medieval Mask" found in Daventry, Northamptonshire, Photo © Northamptonshire County Council, image released under Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/402520>.

In "The Description of Cooke-ham," the Countess foregoes the kind of velvet mask described by Stubbes and Holme when she wanders outdoors; instead, she relies on the trees themselves as cover from the sun. Lanyer writes that the oak tree uses its leaves to form a

“comely veil” (63) that defends the Countess from the sun god Phoebus’ attacks. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “veil” as a piece of “fabric worn, especially by women, as a covering for the head or face” (2.a.), as exemplified by John Florio’s 1598 English and Italian dictionary *Worlde of Wordes*. Florio notably ascribes veils the function of blocking sunlight by defining them as articles of clothing “women use to weare on their foreheads for the sunne” (441). Lanyer’s simile likens the tree’s leaves to a veil which deflects dangerous solar rays and safeguards the Countess’ pale complexion. Much like the mask found in Northamptonshire, the oak tree in Lanyer’s country-house poem acts as a barrier which effectively protects white female skin from sunburn.

Carleton’s comment about the courtly women’s costumes in Jonson’s masque implies that vizards were not exclusively used as standard elements of female apparel to prevent sunburn, but also to perform on stage in blackface. Holme notes that actors characteristically put on vizards “in Interludes and Plays to make Mens Faces appear to what they act” (3.1.13). Carleton reveals that such masks, however, were not worn by the ladies of the English court to perform as the Ethiopian women in Jonson’s masque. Sujata Iyengar’s comment that the women of the court “eschewed the customary theatrical masks” (84) implies that they disregarded conventional costuming expectations by painting their faces black, a use of cosmetics which, as Kimberly Poitevin indicates, “encouraged the English to connect racial difference with skin tone” (82). The application of black makeup to their faces and arms does not simply conceal the paler skin underneath, as a mask would do, but dyes it. Carleton clearly disdains the epidermal dyeing involved in their costuming and views it as the corruption of their idealized red and white complexions. For him, masks maintain a comfortable degree of separation between the English ladies and the Ethiopian women they play, but the dyeing of their skin makes them too closely

resemble an actual “*Troop of lean-cheek’d Moors*” (quoted in Floyd-Wilson 195). Pamphilia’s question in *Urania*, “why dye I not?” (1.465), emphasizes that her skin remains fair and demonstrates that, unlike Wroth herself during her performance in Jonson’s masque, she successfully evades the racial connotations of her melancholic disposition and unfalteringly retains the ideal red and white English complexion.

To avoid darkening her own skin, Pamphilia projects her inner blackness into her natural surroundings through poetic composition. Her poetry, in other words, makes the external landscape match her darkened interior one. Todd A. Borlik claims that Pamphilia understands the forest as a “place of psychic release” (97), a location which allows her to externalize her own melancholy via writing and thereby generate an affective correspondence between the environment and her own feelings. Hodgson thus aptly views the sonnet she carves on the bark of an ash as a “concretization of [Pamphilia’s] grief” (87), or, as Vin Nardizzi and Miriam Jacobson put it, “a living emblem of her pain” (186). Her sonnet begins with a commanding quatrain which represents the tree as an imitation of her heart:

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 (1.92).

The tree stands as a “testament” of her by becoming palpable evidence of her inner “Torments.” Just as Love has painfully cut into her heart, she carves markings into the “unresisting part” (1.92) of the ash. Pamphilia’s rhyming of “Tree” with “me” underscores her efforts to transform the ash into a version of herself, one which she imagines will outlive her to “testify [her] woes” (1.93). The tree’s generation of sap, evidence of its agony caused by her cutting into its bark, emulates not only the visible tears on her cheeks, but the invisible “heart-blood drops” (1.93) which exude from within and strengthen the resemblance between the tree and the poet. Nardizzi

and Jacobson stress that with “the edge of her knife” she produces “sympathy across the species barrier” (176). The very acts of literary creation which manifest Pamphilia’s emotional distress in the landscape hurt the tree. Pamphilia’s poetic engraving on ash tree therefore purposefully enacts a violent process of blackening as she explicitly intends to transform the ash tree into an external version of her own black heart.

Like Pamphilia, Lanyer’s speaker in “The Description of Cooke-ham” turns to the natural world to share in her sorrow. To communicate her woe at the Countess’ departure from Cookham, the speaker projects her feelings into the natural world. The flowers which grew in abundance now creep “into the ground” (180), the grass “weeps for woe” (180), the brooks that once “ran so fair and clear” (183) now appear wrinkled “With grief and trouble” (184), and the birds sing with “dismay” (198). Notably, Cookham’s trees also participate in nature’s mourning:

The trees that were so glorious in our view,
Forsook both flowers and fruit, when once they knew
Of your depart, their very leaves did wither,
Changing their colors as they grew together.
But when they saw this had no power to stay you,
They often wept, though, speechless, could not pray you;
Letting their tears in your fair bosoms fall,
As if they said, “Why will ye leave us all?”
This being vain, they cast their leaves away,
Hoping that pity would have made you stay (133-142).

Lanyer personifies the trees, claiming that they decide to cast away their flowers, fruit, and leaves they once used to protect the Countess from the sun, and begin to weep with the aim of convincing her to stay in the country. The anthropomorphization of the trees continues when, despite calling them “speechless” (138), Lanyer imagines what they would say to Clifford if they could speak: “Why will ye leave us all?” (140). By highlighting her artistic ability to act “As if” (140) trees could speak, Lanyer demonstrates her power as a poet to give voice to natural objects who would otherwise remain silent. She does not, however, speak for the trees as sensitive

creatures potentially capable of possessing their own emotions, but merely to reflect her own subjective feelings towards the Countess' departure from her countryside estate.

At the end of the country-house poem, Lanyer draws on the geo-humoral conception of blackness which presumes that a body's exterior will change to reflect their internal sorrow. Lanyer claims that "A swarthy rivelled ryne" (145) spreads over the "dying bodies" (146) of Cookham's trees, their blackened exteriors visually communicating their grief at the Countess' removal from her estate. The trees are therefore no longer fair at the poem's end, but blighted and blackened. The newfound darkness of their bark mirrors the blackness of Lanyer's melancholic internal landscape as she grieves her departure from Cookham. For Lanyer, moreover, swarthinness is synonymous with death and decay. The swarthy rind which overtakes the trees' bark visually conveys their liminal status as "half alive, half dead" (146). The pathetic fallacy, which darkens the trees to reflect the poetic persona's sadness, thus ultimately necessitates the destruction of the natural world. The deteriorating condition of the swarthy trees at the poem's end shows that the imposition of human affect onto the woods through the composition of poetry is not only non-consensual and cruel, as discussed in the first chapter, but fundamentally blackening.

For Lanyer and Wroth, the woman writer's literary creativity generates a sympathetic affective connection between herself and the natural landscape which blackens trees to spare her fragile fair complexion. Several early modern English authors conceptualized the act of writing itself as one which intrinsically entailed a process of epidermal blackening. Ink is black and the writing surface is white; the blackness of ink makes the writing process one that inherently blackens what is fair. When Jonson writes that the sun "draws / Signs of his fervent'st love" (118-119) on the daughter of Niger's skin in his *Masque of Blackness*, his choice of the word

“draw” refers not only to the climatic-humoral understanding of black skin, but also denotes an act of writing or inscription: “To produce (a line or shape) on a surface with a pencil, pen, or other implement” (*OED* 85.a). The sun’s act of drawing on the skin of the Ethiopian women mirrors Jonson’s—and Ovid’s—own acts of inscribing blackness onto the Ethiopian people through the composition of their poetry. By arguing that “Jonson figures black skin as the product of a permanent, overlaid ink” (194), Miles P. Grier also imagines blackness as written onto the skin of Niger’s daughters. In Sidney’s “Sonnet 93,” Astrophil asks “What inke is blacke inough to paint [his] wo?” (3). His emphasis on the blackness of the ink required to reflect his melancholy emphasizes that writing is a process which applies black ink onto a lighter surface. Jonson’s use of his pen to darken the Ethiopian women’s skin—and by extension, the fair skin of the English women performing in blackface—mirrors the actual blackening of the page on which he composed his masque. Grier further notes that in the early modern era the “most expensive writing surface, parchment” is the “skin” of an animal (195). Thus, for Renaissance writers with access to parchment, writing with ink literally involved the darkening of an epidermal surface.

The arboreal poetics developed by Wroth and Lanyer clearly conceives of bark as the flesh of the tree. When Pamphilia engraves a sonnet into an ash tree in *Urania*, her poem imperatively commands the tree to “Keepe in thy skin this testament of me” (1.92). Her composition thus ensures that the tree’s skin, rather than her own, externally testifies to her heart’s darkness; the tree wears on its bark the blackness she effectively conceals within. By representing tree bark as an epidermal surface which Pamphilia darkens by writing upon it, Wroth evokes the blackness of ink applied to paper. The “swarthy rivelled ryne” (145) which envelops the trees at the end of “The Description of Cooke-ham” similarly likens tree bark to human skin. Although Lanyer undoubtedly uses rind to mean “The bark of a tree or plant” (*OED*

1), the word was also used to signify the “skin of a person” (*OED* 4.a) since at least the Middle Ages. For both Lanyer and Wroth, literary creativity externalizes inner the woman writer’s melancholy and, instead of compromising the colour of their own skin, blackens the flesh of the trees. Although they link the female poet’s interiority to the melancholic excess of black bile that plagues great thinkers and authors of the time, they persistently distance themselves from the racialized kind of melancholic blackness which affects human skin.

Lanyer and Wroth depict trees as outward mirrors of the woman writer’s affective state while simultaneously imagining that her own exterior remains ‘fair:’ both white and beautiful encompassed in one key term. And while the previous chapter acknowledges the inherent harm in the female writer’s projection of human affect into the natural world, this one demonstrates how the externalization of emotion onto a tree specifically involves the destructive darkening of its bark. The Ovid-inspired conception of blackness as a visual signifier of physical injury in the early modern period means that harm becomes legible on the surface of the body—whether human or arboreal—and represents writing in Lanyer’s poem and Wroth’s romance as a violent and penetrative act which wounds arboreal skin. The affective appropriation of the landscape inherent in the women’s poetic pursuits therefore all hinge upon a deleterious conception of black skin as visual confirmation of physical injury and cruel mistreatment. The dark trees in Lanyer’s “Description of Cooke-ham” and Wroth’s *Urania* epitomize the harm underlying the overlaying of human interiorities onto the natural landscape. That female writers gladly damage and darken arboreal flesh to safeguard their own pale skin shows how readily they conscript the natural landscape as an ally in their self-serving efforts to make space for white women in the Western literary tradition.

4. Conclusion

In her study on silvicultural novels in nineteenth century England, Anna Burton shows that trees continually provide “sanctuary” (103) and “shelter” (170) for Elizabeth Gaskell’s emotionally distressed heroines. In *Ruth*, the titular female protagonist sits down to cry “by the roots of an old hawthorn-tree” (77) and sheds tears behind an “ash-tree” (246) later in the novel. *Wives and Daughters*, moreover, includes an illustration which shows Molly weeping “surrounded by the drooping leaves of a weeping-ash” (111, Figure 3). Ruth’s and Molly’s escape to arboreal cover to express their sorrows is undoubtedly reminiscent of Urania’s and Pamphilia’s behaviour in Wroth’s romance. Gaskell’s feminized natural refuges in her novels possibly stem from Lanyer’s and Wroth’s efforts to make trees safe spaces in the natural world for women to gather, grieve, and write. Lanyer and Wroth appropriate existing arboreal images of literary activity from authors like Virgil, Petrarch, and their English contemporaries to represent themselves as new branches on the vast tree that is the Western literary canon and create opportunities for future writers like Gaskell to blossom and grow.



Figure 3. George du Maurier's illustration for Chapter 10 "A Crisis" from Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*, 1866. From *Project Gutenberg*, <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/4274/pg4274-images.html#chap10>.

Ruth's and Molly's lamentations under trees in Gaskell's novels also gesture toward the intensely affective connection between women and the landscape in "The Description of Cookeham" and *Urania*. While Pamphilia in Wroth's romance carves her woes onto the tree bark, the pathetic fallacy deployed by Lanyer's speaker persistently attributes her feelings to the grass, birds, and trees. And although critics like Sylvia Lorraine Bowerbank, Todd A. Borlik, and Gail Kern Paster argue that the sympathetic connection between humans and nature can be symbiotic and mutually beneficial, Lanyer and Wroth underline the potential for violence and cruelty in the

author's projection of emotion into the landscape by means of literary creation. Rising alongside the emerging Baconian view that nature exists to serve humanity's scientific endeavours was the belief, made apparent by Lanyer and Wroth, that it also undergirds artistic innovation. Although they both communicate the woman writer's desire for a unified and empathetic world in which feelings are shared amongst humans and vegetation, their work raises concerns about reducing the non-human to a mere mirror of the human and the extent to which rendering emotions legible in the land contributes to environmental decay.

The abject violence involved in the creation of black arboreal bodies by Lanyer's speaker and Pamphilia also exposes not only the unsettling assumption that blackness necessarily coincides with physical harm, but also that poetry itself inflicts such harm. The violence of tree-writing in Lanyer's poem and Wroth's romance reflects the damage inflicted by their portrayals of blackness as an injury and defect and serves as a reminder that the feminist recovery of women's voices from the Renaissance must acknowledge intersecting forms of oppression. The simultaneous gendering and racialization of trees in their texts also invites further investigation into such intersections in other pieces of literature. It makes room, for instance, for inquiry into the "giant horse-chestnut" (245) tree which shades the eponymous heroine of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. This tree does not directly reflect Jane's emotions, but is nonetheless reduced to an anthropocentric symbol which prophetically warns Jane of her unlawful engagement to Rochester when it gets struck by lightning and becomes "black and riven" (273).

In addition to being female English writers, Brontë and Gaskell of course share with Lanyer and Wroth their pale complexions. And although Lanyer and Wroth go to great lengths to ensure that the skin of the female writers in their texts remain ever pale by deflecting the blackening effects of sunburn and melancholy onto trees, their own skin does not appear so

resistant to epidermal change. Wroth's skin is clearly mutable: her performance in the *Masque of Blackness*, which dyed her face and arms black, proves that. Dudley Carleton's suggestion that the English women in blackface "were hard to be known" (quoted in Floyd-Wilson 195) suggests that Wroth's darkened skin rendered almost unrecognizable and attests to the ease with which her whiteness was wholly erased. Wroth's temporary epidermal conversion for the purpose of courtly entertainment, however, differs significantly from the more fundamental threats to Lanyer's complexion, owing to what Ann Baynes Coiro calls her "marginal" and "unusual" position as a "woman artist making a living as a fringe member" of the English court (362). Did Lanyer's class status prevent her from achieving the idealized red and white complexion more easily attained by English noblewomen like Margaret Clifford and Mary Wroth? "The Description of Cooke-ham" indeed suggests that Lanyer is more readily concerned with her patroness' ability to claim and maintain a fair complexion than her own, for while the trees in her "The Description of Cooke-ham" go out of their way to shade the Countess from sunburn, they only implicitly protect her speaker's skin. Though her whiteness appears secondary to Clifford's in her poem, Lanyer still joins Wroth in constructing the figure of the immutably white female writer who blackens arboreal flesh rather than her own skin, an authorial fabrication which reflects their own insecurities as women authors grappling with the vilification of blackness and the particular vulnerability of their fragile complexions to epidermal mutation. The trees in "The Description of Cooke-ham" and *Urania* thus bolster the literary authority and legitimacy of female writers, but only the ones with pale faces (like Gaskell and Brontë) to the marked exclusion of women with darker complexions, and glorify the figure of the fair female author whose unalterable whiteness not even Lanyer and Wroth themselves could presumably match.

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