I would like to start by suggesting that our readings of Wroth have not yet done justice to the idiosyncratic and even perverse unfolding of her sonnets. “Moving means, meaning moves,” as poet-critic Heather McHugh observes. Moving through the little maze of the sonnet, Wroth takes her readers to rather unexpected places; to appreciate her lyrical tangents and her teasing recursivity we need to map her utterances fully, from their first to their last words. Through an accident of history, this has not seemed a particularly attractive approach to her work. The exciting efflorescence of Wroth scholarship took place after the displacement of primarily formalist approaches to literary texts by alternative methodologies (such as gender studies, psychoanalytic criticism, New Historicism, and cultural materialism). Her sonnets did not enjoy those prefatory decades of formalist attention that canonical male authors received—the critical labor that worried away at textual ambiguity and interpretive cruxes and produced, for example, article upon article analyzing tricky poems like Shakespeare’s Sonnet 94. As a consequence, many rich discussions of the poems’ biographical, social, and political contexts, of their gendered revision of available genres (most notably Petrarchism), and of their enactment of both female agency and “transgressive” female authorship rarely confront a preexisting history of interpretive wrangling at the level of the individual poem and tend not to offer complete readings of complete poems. Sampling the poems to support larger arguments, Wroth’s critics have often worked at the level of the sound byte, offering interpretations that imply a poem under discussion is reasonably transparent.

This last is particularly surprising, since there is a fair amount of critical consensus that Wroth’s poetry, especially in *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, is both difficult and hermetic. In an influential essay on the sequence’s gender politics, Jeff Masten speaks of the sonnets’ “almost inscrutable private language”; elsewhere, Kim Walker notes their “aporetic ambiguity.”
of reference." It may be that Josephine Roberts’s 1983 pathbreaking edition of Wroth’s poems, which offers very few glosses or discussions of interpretive difficulty in its critical apparatus, has encouraged our over-confidence. This has begun to be remedied by Paul Salzman’s thoughtful introduction to the poems in his online edition; furthermore, Ilona Bell and Steven May are currently producing a new edition of the Folger MS of *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, which will offer a full commentary upon the text. In the interim, fully aware that Wroth criticism is a lively work in progress, I would like to attend very vigorously to the unfolding of some poems in *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* (without, it should be said, completely forgetting about their larger historical and intellectual contexts). It is my contention that Wroth’s volta-heavy poetry repeatedly “turns” us to read again; provokes us to remap the relationships between her poems, her prose fiction, and her own fraught history; and obliges us to confront a poetic practice that is at once labyrinthine and open-ended.

I begin with a poem whose peculiarities have already attracted the attention of a skilled reader of Wroth’s lyrics:

It is nott love which you poore fooles do deeme
That doth apeare by fond, and outward showes
Of kissing, toying, or by swearings glose,
O noe thes are farr off from loves esteeme;
Alas they ar nott such that can redeeme
Love lost, or wining keepe those chosen blowes
Though oft with face, and lookes love overthrowse
Yett soe slight conquest doth nott him beseeme,
'T'is nott a showe of sighes, or teares can prove
Who loves indeed which blasts of fained love
Increase, or dy as favors from them slide;
Butt in the soule true love in safety lies
Guarded by faith which to desart still hies,
And yett kinde lookes doe many blessings hide.

Discussing the poem’s rejection of self-dramatizing displays of love and its quiet affirmation of the virtues of a private and interior faith, Heather Dubrow observes that P46’s unsettling last line marks “Wroth’s characteristic obscurity.” Does the speaker ultimately succumb to a wistful desire for the public displays of affection she has decried? And what should we make of that unexpected final verb “hide”—surely “kinde lookes” do not hide but rather reveal “blessings”? I would like to press these observations harder. At first glance, the rhetorical shift of the ending recalls those dramatic, last-minute reversals offered by certain of Philip Sidney’s sonnets—“But ah, desire still cries, give me some food!” exclaims Astrophil, after 13 lines explaining Stella’s power to guide the beholder’s love into virtuous paths. “True, and yet true that I do Stella