

## Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke

The text of Mary Sidney's translation of Petrarch's *Triumphus Mortis* is extant in a single manuscript (London, Inner Temple, Petyt MS 538.43). It is part of a large codex in a nineteenth-century binding, with the Inner Temple Library ex-libris on the guardsheet and the Library dry stamp in gold on the cover. The codex is a miscellany of late-sixteenth- or early-seventeenth-century material: a list of contents is pasted on the third guardsheet. Section 14 is described as 'Copies in a small neat hand, of various poetical pieces, etc.', and this item as 'Versions of Psalms 51, 104, and 137, by Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke, and "The Triumph of Death," a poem translated by the same out of Italian'. The Petrarch translation appears as item 14.i (fols 284r–289v); item 14.xii (fol. 303v) contains a presentation letter to Lucy Countess of Bedford, from Sir John Harington, sending her the Countess of Pembroke's Psalms and his own epigrams, dated 29 December 1600. The spelling is remarkably consistent and highlights the rhyme scheme; the punctuation is also quite accurate, often using question marks and brackets. The text was first edited in 1912 by Frances Berkeley Young, in an accurate, diplomatic transcription, which unfortunately omitted twenty-four lines of text (i. 11–41).<sup>1</sup> More recent editions were undertaken by Gary Waller, Gavin Alexander, Margaret Hannay and Danielle Clarke.<sup>2</sup> This text is based on the manuscript; in the footnotes, I have noted significant editorial variants.

### fol. 286r

The Triumph of death translated out of Italian. by the Countesse of Pembroke. the first chapter.

<sup>1</sup> Frances Berkeley Young, *Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke* (London: David Nutt, 1912). Henceforth Young.

<sup>2</sup> *The Triumph of Death and other Unpublished and Uncollected Poems by Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke (1561-1621)*, ed. by Gary F. Waller (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik Universität Salzburg, 1977), henceforth Waller; Gavin Alexander, 'The Triumph of Death: A Critical Edition in Modern Spelling of the Countess of Pembroke's Translation of Petrarch's Trionfo della Morte', *Sidney Journal*, 17 (1999), 2–18, henceforth Alexander; *The Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke. Volume I. Poems, Translations, and Correspondence*, ed. by Margaret P. Hannay et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), henceforth Hannay; *Isabella Whitney, Mary Sidney and Aemilia Lanyer: Renaissance Women Poets*, ed. by Danielle Clarke (London: Penguin, 2000), henceforth Clarke.

That gallant Ladie, gloriouslie bright,

The statelie piller once of worthinesse,

And now, a little dust, a naked spright:

Turn'd from hir warres a ioyefull Conqueresse:

Hir warres, where she had foyl'd the mightie foe, 5

Whose wylie stratagemes the world distresse.

And foyl'd him, not with sword, with speare or bowe,

But with chaste heart, faire visage, upright thought,

Wise speache, which did with honor linked goe:

And loue's new plight to see<sup>3</sup> strange wonders wrought 10

With shiuered bowe, chaste arrowes, quenched flame,

While, here som slaine, and there laye others caught.

She, and the rest, who in the glorious fame

Of the exploit, hir chosen mates, did share,

All in one squadronet close ranged came. 15

A few, for nature make's<sup>4</sup> true glorie rare,

But eache alone (so eache alone did shine)

Claym'd whole Historians, whole Poete's care

Borne in greene field, a snowie Ermiline

Colored with topaces,<sup>5</sup> sett in fine golde 20

Was this faire companies<sup>6</sup> unfoyled signe.

No earthlie march, but heauenly, did they hould;

Their speaches holie were, and happie those,

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<sup>3</sup> Alexander inserts a comma after 'And' and 'see'.

<sup>4</sup> Alexander and Clarke: 'makes'.

<sup>5</sup> Young: 'topacee'.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander: 'company's'.

Who so are borne, to be with them enroll'd.  
 Cleare starr's they send,<sup>7</sup> which did a Sunne unclose. 25  
 Who hyding none, yett all did beautifie  
 With Coronets deckt with violet and rose:  
 And as gain'd honor, filled with iollitie  
 Eache gentle heart, so made they merrie cheere,  
 When loe, an ensigne sad I might descrie, 30  
 Black, and in black, a woman did appeere,  
 Furie with hir, such as I scarcelie knowe  
 If lyke at Phlegra with the Giants were.  
 Thow Dame, quoth she, that doeth so proudlie goe,  
 Standing upon thy youth, and beauties state, 35  
 And of thy life, the limits doest not knowe.  
 Loe, I am shee, so fierce, importunate,  
 And deafe, and blinde, entytled oft by yow,  
 Yow, whom with night ere euening I amate.<sup>8</sup>  
 I, to their end, the Greekish nation drewe, 40  
 The Troian first, the Romane afterward,  
 With edge and point of this my blade I slewe.

**fol. 286v**

And no Barbarian my blowe could warde,  
 Who stealing-on with unexpected wound,  
 Of idle thoughts haue manie thousand marr'd. 45  
 And now no lesse to yow-ward am I bound,  
 While life is dearest, ere to cause yow moane.

<sup>7</sup> Hannay and Alexander: 'seem'd'.

<sup>8</sup> Young, Waller and Clarke: 'awate'.

Fortune som bitter with your sweetes compound.

To this, thow right or interrest hast none,

Little to me, but onelie to this spoile, 50

Replide then she, who in the world was one.

This charge of woe on others will recoyle,

I knowe, whose safetie on my life depends;

For me, I thank who shall me hence assoile.

As one whose eyes some noueltie attend, 55

And what it mark't not first, it spyde at last,

New wonders with it-self, now comprehends.

So far'd the cruell, deepelie ouer-gast<sup>9</sup>

With doubt awhile, then spake, I knowe them now.

I now remember when my teethe they past. 60

Than with lesse frowning, and lesse darkned browe,

But thow that lead'st this goodlie companie,

Didst neuer yett unto my scepter bowe.

But on my counsell if thow wilt relie,

Who maie inforce thee; better is by farre 65

From age and ages lothsomnesse to flye.

More honored by me, then others are

Thow shalt thee finde; and neither feare nor paine

The passage shall of thy departure barre.

As lykes that Lord, who in the heau'n doth raigne, 70

And thence, this All, doeth moderatelie guide;

As others doe, I shall thee entertaine.

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<sup>9</sup> Young: 'ouer-cast'. Alexander: 'ouer-ghast'.

So answered she, and I with-all descryde

Of dead appeere a neuer-numbred summe,

Pestring the plaine, from one to th'other side. 75

From India, Spaine, Gattay,<sup>10</sup> Marocco, coome,

So manie Ages did together falle,

That worlds were fill'd, and yett they wanted roome.

There sawe I, whom their times did happie calle,

Popes, Emperors, and kings, but strangelie growen, 80

All naked now, all needie, beggars all.

Where is that wealth? Where are those honors gone?

Scepters, and crounes, and roabes, and purple dye?

And costlie myters, sett with pearle and stone?

O wretch, who doest in mortall things affye; 85

(Yett who but doeth) and if in end they dye

Them-selue's beguil'd, they finde but right, saie I.

What meane's this toyle? Oh blinde, oh more then blinde;

Yow all returne, to your greate Mother, olde,

And hardlie leaue your verie names behinde. 90

Bring me, who doeth your studies well behoulde,

And of your cares not manifestlie vaine,

One lett him tell me, when he all hath tolde.

So manie Lands to winne, what bootes the payne?

And on strange land's,<sup>11</sup> tributes to impose, 95

With hearts still griedie, their owne losse to gaine.

**fol. 287r**

<sup>10</sup> Hannay: 'Cattay'.

<sup>11</sup> Alexander: 'peoples'. Clarke: 'lands'.

After all these, wherein yow winning loose

Treasure's and territories deere bought with blood;

Water, and bread hath a farre sweeter close.

And golde, and gemme giues place to glasse and wood: 100

But leaste I should too-long degression make

To turne to my first talke<sup>12</sup> I think it good.

Now that short-glorious life hir leaue to take

Did neere unto the uttmost instant goe,

And doubtfull stepp, at which the world doeth quake. 105

An other number than themselues did showe

Of Ladies, such as bodies yett did lade.

If Death could pitious be, they faine would knowe.

And deepe they did in contemplacion wade

Of that colde end, presented there to view, 110

Which must be once, and must but once be made.

All friends and neighbors were this carefull crue,

But death with ruthlesse hand on golden haire

Chosen from-out those amber-tresses drewe.

So cropt the flower, of all this world most faire, 115

To shewe upon the excellentest thing

Hir supream force, And for no hate she bare.

How manie dropps did flowe from brynie spring

In who there sawe those sightfull fountaines drye,

For whom this heart so long did burne and spring.<sup>13</sup> 120

For hir in midst of moane and miserie,

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<sup>12</sup> Young, Waller, Hannay and Alexander: 'taske'.

<sup>13</sup> Hannay and Alexander: 'sing'.

Now reaping once what vertues life did sowe,  
 With ioye she sate retired silentlie.

In peace cryde they, right mortall Goddesses goe,

And so she was, but that in noe degree 125

Could death entreate, hir comming to forslowe.

What confidence for others? if that she

Could frye and freese in few nights changing cheere:

Oh humane hopes, how fond and false yow bee.

And for this gentle soule, if manie a teare 130

By pittie shed, did bathe the ground and grasse,

Who sawe, doeth knowe; think thow, that doest but heare.

The sixt of Aprill, one a clock it was

That tyde<sup>14</sup> me once, and did me now untie,

Changing hir copie; Thus doeth fortune passe. 135

None so his thralle, as I my libertye;

None so his death, as I my life doe rue,

Staying with me, who faine from it would flye.

Due to the world, and to my yeares was due,

That I, as first I came, should first be gonne, 140

Not hir leafe quail'd, as yett but freshlie newe.

Now for my woe, guesse not by't, what is showne,

For I dare scarce once cast a thought there-too,

So farre I am of, in words to make it knowne.

Vertue is dead; and dead is beawtie too, 145

And dead is curtesie, in mournefull plight,

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<sup>14</sup> Alexander: 'tied'.

The ladies saide; And now, what shall we doe?

**fol. 287v**

Never againe such grace shall blesse our sight;

Never lyke witt, shall we from woman heare,

And voice, repleate with Angell-lyke<sup>15</sup> delight. 150

The soule now prest to leaue that bosome deare,

Hir vertues all uniting now in one,

There, where it past did make the heauens cleare.

And of the enemies so hardlie none

That once before hir shew'd his face obscure 155

With hir assault, till death had thorough gone.

Past plaint and feare when first they could endure

To hould their eyes on that faire visage bent,

And that dispaire had made them now secure.

Not as greate fyers violently spent, 160

But in them-selues consuming, so hir flight

Tooke that sweete spright, and past in peace content.

Right lyke unto som Lamp of cleerest light,

Little and little wanting nutriture,

Houlding to and<sup>16</sup> a neuer-changing plight. 165

Pale? no, but whitelie; and more whitelie pure,

Than snowe on wyndless hill, that flaking falls:

As one, whom labor did to rest allure.

And whan that heauenlie guest those mortall walles

Had leaft; it nought but sweetelie sleeping was 170

<sup>15</sup> Alexander: 'angelic'.

<sup>16</sup> Young, Waller, Hannay, Alexander and Clarke: 'end'.



In hir faire eyes; what follie dying calles

Death faire did seeme to be in hir faire face.

Marie Sidney Coun: of Pem:

The Second Chapter of the Triumph of death.

That night, which did the dreadfull happ ensue,

That quite eclipst; Naie, rather did replace

The Sunne in skyes, and me bereaue of view.

Did sweetelie sprinkle<sup>17</sup> through the ayrie space

The Summers frost, which with Tithon's<sup>18</sup> bryde

5

Cleereth of dreame the darke-confused face.

When loe, a Ladie, lyke unto the tyde

With orient iewells crown'd, from thousands moe

Crowned as she; to me, I comming spyde:

And first hir hand, sometime desyred so

10

Reaching to me; at-once she syght and spake;

Whence endless ioyes yett in my heart doe growe.

And know'st thow hir, who made thee first forsake

The vulgar path, and ordinarie trade?

While hir, their marke, thy youthfull thoughts did make?

15

Then downe she sate, and me sitt-doune she made,

Thought, Wisedome, Meekenesse in one grace did striue,

Unpleasing<sup>19</sup> bank in bay, and beechess shade.

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<sup>17</sup> Hannay and Clarke: 'sprinkle'.

<sup>18</sup> Alexander: 'Tithonus'.

<sup>19</sup> Waller, Hannay and Alexander: 'on pleasing'.

My Goddesse, who me did, and doeth reuiue,  
     Can I but knowe? (I sobbing answered) 20  
     But art thou dead? Ah speake, or yett aliue?  
 Aliue am I: And thou as yett art dead,  
     And as thou art shalt so continue still  
     Till by thy ending hower, thou hence be led.  
 Short is our time to liue, and long our will: 25  
     Then lett with heede, thy deedes, and speeches goe,  
     Ere that approaching terme his course fulfill.

**fol. 288r**

Quoth I, when this our light to end doeth growe,  
     Which we calle life (for thou by prooffe hast tryde)  
     Is it such payne to dye? That, make me knowe. 30  
 While thou (quoth she) the vulgar make thy guide,  
     And on their iudgements (all obscurelie blynde)  
     Doest yett relie; no blisse can thee betyde.  
 Of lothsom prison to eache gentle mynde  
     Death is the end; And onelie who employe 35  
     Their cares on mudd, therin displeasure finde.  
 Euen this my death, which yiealds thee such annoye  
     Would make in thee farre greater gladnesse ryse,  
     Couldst thou but taste least portion of my ioye.  
 So spake she with devoutlie-fixed eyes 40  
     Upon the Heauens; then did in silence fouled<sup>20</sup>  
     Those rosie lips, attending there replyes;

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<sup>20</sup> Young, Waller, Hannay and Clarke: 'foulde'. Alexander: 'fold'.

Torments, inuented by the Tyrrants olde;

Diseases, which eache parte torment and tosse,

Causes, that death we most bitter houlde. 45

I not denye (quoth she) but that the crosse

Preceeding death, extreemelic martireth,

And more the feare of that eternall losse.

But when the panting soule in God take's breath;

And wearie heart affecteth heauenlie rest, 50

An unrepented syghe, not els, is death.

With bodie, but with spirit readie prest,

Now at the furthest of my liuing wayes,

There sadlie uttered sounds my eare possest.

Oh happless he; who counting times and dayes 55

Thinks eache a thousand yeares, and liues in vayne

No more to meete hir while on earth he stayes.

And on the water now, now on the Maine

Onelic on hir doeth think, doeth speake, doeth write,

And in all times one manner still retaine. 60

Heere-with, I thither cast my failing-sight,

And soon<sup>21</sup> espyde, presented to my view,

Who oft did thee restraining, me encyte.

Well, I hir face, and well hir voice I knewe,

Which often did my heart reconsolate; 65

Now wiselic graue, then beawtifulie true.

And sure, when I was in my fairest state,

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<sup>21</sup> Young: 'so one'.

My yeares most greene, my self to thee most deare,

Whence manie much did think, and much debate.

That life's best ioye, was all most bitter cheere, 70

Compared to that death, most myldelie sweete,

Which coms to men, but coms not euerie-where.

For I, that iournie past with gladder feete,

Then he from hard exile, that homeward goes,

(But onelie ruth of thee) without regreete. 75

For that faith's sake, time once enough did shewe,

Yett now to thee more manifestlie plaine,

In face of him, who all doeth see and knowe.

Saie Ladie, did yow euer entrataine

Motion or thought more louinglie to rue<sup>22</sup> 80

(Not louing<sup>23</sup> honor's-height) my tedious paine?

**fol. 288v**

For those sweete wrath's, those sweete disdaine's in yow,

In those sweete peaces written in your eye,

Diuerslie manie yeares my fanzies drewe.

Scarce had I spoken, but in lightning wise 85

Beaming, I sawe that gentle smile appeare,

Somtimes the Sunne of my woe-darkned skyes.

Then sighing, thus she answered: Neuer were

Our hearts but one, nor neuer two shall be:

Onelie thy flame I tempred with my cheere; 90

This onelie waye could saue both thee and me;

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<sup>22</sup> Young and Waller: 'me'.

<sup>23</sup> Hannay: 'leuing'. Alexander: 'leaving'.

Our tender fame did this supporte require,

The mother hath a rodd, yett kinde is she.

How oft this saide<sup>24</sup> my thoughts: In loue, naie fire

Is he: Now to prouide must I beginne, 95

And ill prouiders are feare and desire.

Tho sawe'st what was without, not what within.

And as the brake the wanton steede doeth tame,

So this did thee from thy disorders winne.

A thousand times wrath in my face did flame, 100

My heart meane-while with loue did inlie burne,

But neuer will; my reason ouercame:

For, if woe-vanquisht once, I saw thee mourne;

Thy life, or<sup>25</sup> honor, ioyntlie to preserue,

Myne eyes to thee sweetelie did I turne. 105

But if thy passion did from reason swarue,

Feare in my word's, and sorrowe in my face

Did then to thee for salutation serue.

Theis arte's I us'd with thee; thow ran'st this race

With kinde acceptance; now sharp<sup>26</sup> disdaine, 110

Thou know'st, and hast it sung in manie a place.

Sometimes thine eyes pregnant with tearie rayne

I sawe, and at the sight; Behould he dyes;

But if I help, saide I, the signes are plaine.

Vertue for ayde, did then with loue aduise: 115

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<sup>24</sup> Young: 'said this'.

<sup>25</sup> Alexander: 'our'.

<sup>26</sup> Alexander: 'now, now sharp'.

If spurr'd by loue, thow took'st som running toye,

So soft a bitt (quoth I) will not suffice.

Thus glad, and sad, in pleasure, and annoye;

Whot<sup>27</sup> red, colde pale; thus farre I have thee brought

Wearie, but safe, to my no little ioye. 120

Then I with teares, and trembling; What it sought

My faith hath found, whose more then equall meede<sup>28</sup>

Were this; if this, for truth could passe my thought.

Of little faith (quoth she) should this proceed,

If false it were, or if unknowne from me; 125

The flames withall seem'd in hir face to breede.

If lyking in myne eyes the world did see

I say not, now, of this, right faine I am,

Those chaine's that tyde my heart well lyked me.

And well me lyke's (if true it be) my flame,<sup>29</sup> 130

Which farre and neere by thee related goes,

Nor in thy loue could ought but measure blame,

That onelie fail'd; and while in acted woes

Thow neede's wouldst shewe, what I could not but see,

Thow didst thy heart to all the world disclose. 135

**fol. 289r**

Hence sprang my zeale, which yett distempreth thee,

Our concord such in euerie thing beside,

As when united loue and vertue be.

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<sup>27</sup> Young, Waller and Hannay: 'What'. Alexander: 'Hot'.

<sup>28</sup> Young: 'neede'.

<sup>29</sup> Hannay and Alexander: 'fame'.

In equale flames our louing hearts were tryde,  
     At leaste when once thy loue had notice gott, 140  
     But one to shewe, the other sought to hyde.

Thou didst for mercie calle with wearie throte  
     In feare and shame, I did in silence goe,  
     So much desire became of little note.

But not the lesse becoms concealed woe, 145  
     Nor greater growe's it uttered then before,  
     Through fiction, Truth will neither ebbe nor flowe.

But clear'd I not the darkest mists of yore?  
     When I thy words alone did entrataine  
     Singing for thee? my loue dares speake no more. 150

With thee my heart, to me I did restraine  
     Myne eyes; and thow thy share canst hardlie brooke  
     Leasing by me the lesse, the more to gayne.

Not thinking if a thousand times I tooke  
     Myne eyes from thee, I manie thousands cast 155  
     Myne eyes on thee; and still with pittying looke.

Whose shine no clowd had ever ouer-cast:  
     Had I not fear'd in thee those coles to fyres<sup>30</sup>  
     I thought would burne too-dangerouslie fast.

But to content thee more, ere I retyre 160  
     For end of this, I somthing will thee tell,  
     Perchance agreable to thy desire:

In all things fullie blest, and pleased well,

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<sup>30</sup> Waller, Hannay, Alexander and Clarke: 'fyre'.

Onelie in this I did my-self displease;  
 Borne in too-base a tounne for me to dwell:<sup>31</sup> 165  
 And much I griued, that for thy greater ease,  
 At leaste, it stood not neere thy flowrie nest.  
 Els farre-enough, from whence I did thee please.  
 So might the heart on which I onelie rest  
 Not knowing me, have fitt it-self elsewhere, 170  
 And I lesse name, lesse<sup>32</sup> notice haue possesst.  
 Oh no (quoth I) for me, the heauens third spheare  
 To so high loue aduanc't by speciall grace.  
 Changelesse to me, though chang'd thy dwelling were.  
 Be as it will, yett my greate Honor was, 175  
 And is as yett (she saide) but thy delight  
 Make's thee not mark how fast the howers doe passe.  
 Shee<sup>33</sup> from hir golden bed Aurora bright  
 To mortall eyes returning Sunne and daye  
 Breast-high aboue the ocean bare to sight. 180  
 Shee to my sorrowe, calle's me hence, awaie.  
 Therefore thy words in times short limits binde,  
 And saye in-brief, if more thow haue<sup>34</sup> to saie.  
 Ladie (quoth I) your words most sweetelie kinde  
 Haue easie made, what euer erst I bare. 185  
 But what is left of yow to liue behinde.  
 Therefore to knowe this, my onelie care,

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<sup>31</sup> Waller: 'swell'.

<sup>32</sup> Waller inserts 'I' before 'lesse'.

<sup>33</sup> Hannay, Alexander and Clarke: 'See'.

<sup>34</sup> Alexander: 'hast'.



If sloe or swift shall com our meeting-daye.

Shee parting saide, As my coniectures are,

Thow without me long time on earth shalt staie.

190

Marie Sidney Countesse of Pembroke.

**fol. 303v**

To the trulie Noble and right virtuous Ladie. Lucie Countess of Bedford.

Right Honorable, and my most honoured good Ladie, I haue sent yow heere the deuine, and trulie deuine translation of three of Davids psalmes, donne by that Excellent Countesse, and in Poesie the mirrois of our Age; whom, as yow are neere unto in blood, of lyke degree in Honor; not unlike in fauore; so I suppose, none coms more neere hir, then your self in those, now rare, and admirable guizes<sup>35</sup> of the mynde, that clothe Nobilitie with vertue.

I haue presumed to fill-up the emptie paper with som shallowe meditations of myne owne; not to conioyne theis with them; for that were to piece sattin with sack-cloth, or patch leade upon golde; much lesse to compare them; that are but as foyle to a dyamond; but as it were to attend them. So as being bothe of meaner matter, and lighter manner, yet maie serue to waite, as a wanton page is admitted to beare a torche to a chaste matrone. But as your cleare-sighted iudgement shall accept or praise them, I shall hereafter be embouldned to present more of them, and to entytle som of them to your Honorable name, unto which I vowe to rest an euer much deuoted seruant

Ihon Haryngton

29 December 1600

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<sup>35</sup> Young and Waller: 'guifts'.